

EDITED BY
WILLIAM P.
BROWN



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
THE PSALMS

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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WILLIAM P. BROWN

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PREFACE

RARE it is among reference works in biblical studies that one finds the likes of St. Jerome and Chuck Norris featured in the same volume. But so it is in this “handbook” to the Psalms, a volume whose variety of offerings aptly addresses the Psalter’s own diversity. Over the years, indeed over centuries, the book of Psalms has accommodated itself to a bewildering variety of interpretations, uses, translations, and approaches. Its interpretive challenges are many: the poetic subtleties, the diversity of genres and theological perspectives, the Psalter’s shape and structure (or lack thereof), the identities of the speakers (and their enemies), the composers and editors of the Psalms, the variety of social contexts, the range of usage, and the ancient Near Eastern backgrounds and parallels. The list goes on. This volume aims to touch upon, rather than cover, the myriad bases of Psalms study and interpretation, both past and present. Some reflect longstanding precedence and practice; others are novel and just emerging. Yet countless gaps remain. The volume, containing over forty essays, is a modest sampling of what is under way in Psalms studies and perhaps a glimpse of what is in store.

This volume is designed for both scholar and student. It is structured so that readers can readily locate where their own interests are addressed and where they might want to venture beyond them. The volume opens with essays exploring the rich extra-biblical backgrounds and parallels of the Psalms, primarily Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Canaanite. From background traditions and forms to the particular language of the biblical psalms, the volume addresses the nature of poetry in the Psalms and, conversely, the use of Psalms in poetry. The language and rhetoric specific to particular genres, from lament to praise, are also explored. Of course, no handbook to the Psalms would be “complete” without reference to ancient translations of the Psalter, specifically Aramaic, Greek, and Latin.

From matters of language the volume moves to issues of composition and compilation. One essay explores those responsible for setting and organizing the various psalms within their respective collections, whose growth and arrangement ultimately yielded a Psalter. Comparing the canonical Psalter of the Masoretic tradition to the Psalms scrolls of Qumran yields fruitful speculation on the evolution of Psalms as a book.

From the Psalter’s editing to its interpretation, three chapters in this volume are devoted to certain trajectories of interpretation and reception, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic. One essay explores the vast reception history of one particular psalm, spanning its earliest contexts to the present. Regarding interpretive approaches, the volume addresses both traditional and emerging methods of interpretation: form critical and literary approaches, as well as iconographic, rhetorical, narrational, psychological,

feminist, and socio-literary approaches. In addition, a separate but far too meager section is devoted to explicitly cultural interpretations of the Psalms, specifically African American, Asian American, and Latin American, as samples of how widespread the Psalms have been interpreted and appropriated by various communities.

Two sections are devoted to issues of theology and anthropology, the former providing a point/counterpoint dialogue between Christian and Jewish approaches and the latter offering two ways of addressing human identity in the Psalms. And, finally, a number of essays explore the use of psalms in Christian practice, from homiletics and hymnody to pastoral and ecological practice. Although the delineations and placements of these essays may seem artificial (and they are!), the volume's overarching movement is clear: from *Sitze im Leben* to *Sitze in unserem Leben*, from ancient to contemporary contexts and settings of the Psalms in all their rich variety.

While some essays navigate the continuing debates over particular issues, surveying various opinions and approaches, others chart a way forward by offering heuristic paradigms and new methods for consideration in the study and use of the Psalms. The hope is that there is something for everyone in this volume. A greater hope is that students of Psalms will come to appreciate a variety of approaches and their potential for mutual enrichment.

This volume would be nothing without the concerted efforts of its many contributors. My thanks to them for their willingness to contribute a sampling of their own work. Thanks also to Elisabeth Nelson of Oxford University Press for initially conceiving this project and her help and encouragement throughout. Finally, thanks to Columbia Theological Seminary, whose generous sabbatical policy gave me the time to see this monumental project to its fruitful end.

And a final note (and warning) to the reader: the verse citations featured in these essays, unless otherwise noted, correspond to Hebrew (MT) versification, which frequently does not match English verse numbers. In many essays, the corresponding English citation is set in brackets.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADFUW	Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Uruk-Warka
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syren-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
ANES	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Theological Commentary
ATSAT	Arbeiten zum Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BaghFor	Baghdader Forschungen
BagM	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeological Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCP	Book of Common Prayer
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1983
<i>Bib Interp</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibetOr	Biblica et orientalia
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BO	<i>Bibliotheca orientalis</i>
BQ	Biblia Qumranica
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CD	Karl Barth. <i>Church Dogmatics</i> . Edited by Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F Torrance <i>et al.</i> 31 vols. New York: T & T Clark, 1936–2009
CEB	Common English Bible

CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CTA	<i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939</i> . Edited by A. Herdner. Mission de Ras Shamra 10. Paris, 1963
CThM	Calwer theologische Monographien
DCH	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by David J. A. Clines. 8 vols. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by Karel van der Toorn et al. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
EJ	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> . 16 vols. New York: Macmillan. 1972
ET	English Translation
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FC	Fathers of the Church. Washington, DC, 1947–
fc	forthcoming
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
GBAO	Göttinger Beiträge zum Alten Orient
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GHAT	Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited and Translated by M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUS	<i>Handbook of Ugaritic Studies</i> . Edited by Wilfred G. E. Watson and Nicholas Wyatt. HdO I/39. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1999
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBHS	B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Interp	<i>Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JA EI	<i>Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections</i>

JBR	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
JBTh	<i>Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Edited by Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1966–1969
KTU	<i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras ibn Hani, and other Places</i> . Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. ALASP 8. Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995 (second enlarged edition of <i>KTU: Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSS	Leipziger semitistische studien
LW	Martin Luther. <i>Luther's Works</i> . 69 vols. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan et al. 1955–2009. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House
LXX	Septuagint
MLBS	Mercer Library of Biblical Studies
MT	Masoretic Text
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDB	<i>New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NLH	<i>New Literary History</i>
NMES	Near and Middle East Series
NPEPP	<i>The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics</i> . Edited by A. Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1993

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> . Edited by J. A. Simpson, E. S. C. Weiner. 20 vols. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989
OG	Old Greek (version)
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OT	Old Testament
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983
Pesh	Peshitta
PIBA	Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RIBLA	<i>Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana</i>
RLA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAC	Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith. <i>Stories from Ancient Canaan</i> . 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBEC	Studies in Bible and early Christianity
SBLANEM	Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Near Eastern Monographs
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StP.SM	Studia Pohl: Series Maior
TB	Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert
TgPs	Targum of Psalms
ThSt	Theologische Studien

ThT	<i>Theology Today</i>
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . Edited by G. Krause and G. Müller. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–
TUAT	<i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments</i> . Edited by Otto Kaiser. Gütersloh: Mohn, 1984–
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZASA	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

THE PSALMS

CHAPTER 1

THE PSALMS: AN OVERVIEW

WILLIAM P. BROWN

As the longest book of the Bible, Psalms is also the Bible's most complex. Nowhere else throughout the Hebrew Scriptures is found such a varied collection of religious poetry, specifically a collection of collections containing 150 psalms in the MT, 151 in the Septuagint (LXX). The product of centuries upon centuries of compositional and editorial work, from its oral roots to its Masoretic arrangement, the Psalter features a wide variety of genres and a rich diversity of perspectives. The book of Psalms strikes nearly every theological chord that resounds throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, from covenant and history to creation and wisdom.

Yet the psalms of the Psalter, for all their variety, share at least one thing in common: they consist primarily of human words either uttered to God, whether in petition or praise, or proclaimed about God for worship and instruction. With some notable exceptions, the words of the psalms come from below rather than from on high.¹ The book of Psalms, moreover, is unique for its "moodiness": some psalms are filled with heart-wrenching anguish, some burst with exuberant joy, and others strike a stern didactic tone. In addition, psalms accommodate a range of uses. With its vivid yet stereotyped language, psalmic poetry is applicable to diverse contexts and settings. Having stood the test of time, the book of Psalms stands ever user-ready.

As powerful testimony to its perennial appeal, the Psalter is by far the most transcribed and translated book of the Hebrew Bible. It was the most represented corpus in the Qumran community. It was the first book of the Bible to enjoy wide dissemination through the technological marvel of the printing press. As the Bible came to be cast in the vernacular throughout Europe, the Psalter was the most widely translated biblical book in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Even today, fresh translations of the Psalms continue to stock the shelves.² On the scholarly front, while the book of Psalms found its own methodological niche with the help of Hermann Gunkel in the early twentieth century (see below), a number of other approaches have emerged since then, shedding ever new light on this ancient corpus. The Psalms, it could be said, has been a magnet for methods.

This introductory essay provides a general orientation to the Psalms by highlighting the book's main features, sampling its history of interpretation, and identifying certain prominent issues in Psalms research, both old and new. Upon reading this chapter, the reader should feel sufficiently equipped to venture into the subsequent essays, each one specializing in a particular aspect of research and interpretation of the Psalms.

PSALMS AS POETRY

If anything, psalms are poetic, and as poetry they arouse emotion and stir the imagination. Poetry, by nature, is a much more compact style of discourse than prose; rich in imagery and metaphor, it is also more evocative. Other than that, poetry is difficult to define, and Hebrew poetry in particular does not typically exhibit rhyme or fixed meter.

Nevertheless, Hebrew poetry does bear certain distinctive features, particularly a relative balance of syntactical segments (or cola) constituting a discrete line, a linguistic phenomenon commonly called parallelism. A typical Hebrew line consists of two or three discrete segments, although more elaborate patterns are also evidenced. In a poetic couplet, the second segment can intensify, modify, or in some other fashion complete the thought of the first. Furthermore, the semantic relationships between cola may not always be obvious or even parallel. Yet the regular conjoining of syntactical segments in Hebrew poetry conveys a sense of lyrical elegance, if not symmetry. In addition, various devices such as alliteration, paraonomasia (wordplay), chiasmus, inclusio, and ellipsis abound in the poetry of the Psalms. And, like all poetry, Hebrew poetry features an abundance of imagery and metaphor (Brown 2002). To treat the Psalms first and foremost as poetry is to acknowledge that the Psalms are not systematic reflections or second-order language. Poetry rather than treatise, performance rather than doctrine, lies at the heart of psalmic rhetoric.

THE PSALTER AS COLLECTION AND BOOK

Canonically, the book of Psalms is found in the third part of the Hebrew canon, the Writings (*kētûbîm*). This last grouping covers the nonprophetic poetic books of the Bible (with the possible exception of Daniel, considered prophetic in the Christian canon), including the wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes), the Song of Songs, and Psalms, which assumes pride of place as the first book of this final part of the Hebrew canon. According to Jewish tradition, the first letter of each of the first three books of the Writings (Psalms, Job, and Proverbs) together spell out the Hebrew word for truth (*ēmet*). Providing the final letter of this acronym, Psalms (*tēhillîm*) constitutes one of the Books of Truth.

Internally, the 150 psalms that constitute the MT Psalter come from various collections, groupings, and clusters. At first glance, the book of Psalms seems to lack any formal arrangement or organization—more a hodgepodge than an arranged sequence. Frustrating modern readers, the psalms of the Psalter are not systematically organized according to genre or theme. Nevertheless, there are indications, in varying degrees, of deliberate attempts at arrangement within the various clusters. On the smallest of scales, many psalms exhibit literary and thematic connections with their most immediate neighbors. One psalm, it could be said, invariably nuances its neighbor in sequence. Psalms, in other words, “talk” to each other. Pressing the metaphor of dialogue further, one psalm will occasionally shout across several psalms to find a kindred spirit, as it were, thereby establishing a literary envelope that demarcates a cluster (e.g., Psalms 15 and 24). Some psalms that may have been originally paired were split apart by other psalms for various reasons (e.g., Psalms 85 and 87; Psalms 138 and 145).

On the largest of scales, the Psalter moves generally from lament to praise, albeit in fits and starts. Hence, in the last thirty psalms at least, the Psalter’s center of gravity shifts in favor of communal praise, providing precedence for the Jewish title of the Psalms: Hymns or Praises (*tēhillim*). The Psalter, moreover, divides itself into five major sections or books, as suggested by the four doxologies that conclude each one (41:14[13]; 72:18–20a; 89:53[52]; 106:48).

Book I: Psalms 1–41

Book II: Psalms 42–72

Book III: Psalms 73–89

Book IV: Psalms 90–106

Book V: Psalms 107–150

According to rabbinic tradition, specifically in the *Midrash Tehillim*, the Psalter’s five-fold structure corresponds to the five books of Moses. With its pentateuchal form, the Psalms was viewed as the Davidic Torah of the Bible. Together, the Mosaic Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy) and the Davidic Psalms came to be seen as the two essential poles of ancient Israel’s faith: the word of God from on high and Israel’s response in prayer, praise, and instruction.

In the MT Psalter, David’s name appears in seventy-two superscriptions or titles,³ attributing thus nearly half of the psalms of the Psalter to Israel’s most well-known king. Later versions such as the Greek and Syriac (Peshitta) feature David’s name even more frequently, leading ultimately to the assumption that David authored the entire Psalter. The Greek translation (Septuagint; LXX), for example, ascribes fourteen more psalms to David. The Psalms scroll from Cave 11 at Qumran describes David as having composed a grand total of 4,050 psalms, which “he spoke through (the spirit of) prophecy given to him from before the Most High” (11QPs^a col. 17, line 11).

David’s presence in the Psalms looms even larger with the Septuagint’s inclusion of Psalm 151. In certain Greek codices, this psalm is placed in an appendix with the superscription, “This psalm is ascribed to David as his own composition, though it is outside

the number.” In Codex Sinaiticus, however, the psalm is presented as canonical within “The 151 Psalms of David.” The Hebrew version is attested in the Qumran Psalms scroll 11QPs^a (dated between 30 and 50 CE) and is preserved as two separate psalms: 151A and the fragmentary 151B (Saunders 1967: 93–95).

The Septuagint superscription situates Psalm 151 “after [David] fought in single combat with Goliath.” (11QPs^a has only “A Hallelujah of David the Son of Jesse.”) Written in the first person and drawn from 1 Samuel 16–17, the Greek psalm features David speaking of shepherding his father’s flocks (v. 1) and of his expertise with the lyre/psaltery (v. 2). David then recounts his selection by God and being anointed as king amid his brothers (vv. 4–5). The final two verses recount David’s victory over Goliath. The inclusion of Psalm 151 would seem to claim the Psalter as Israel’s “battle book” (Hossfeld and Zenger 2011: 668–69).

Within the Psalter’s fivefold division are various collections, some of which are marked by superscriptions designating personal attribution (e.g., David, Asaph, “the sons of Korah”) and others by superscriptions possibly designating common function (e.g., “Songs of Ascents” [*šir hamma’ālôt* in Psalms 120–34] and “Hallelujah” [Psalms 111–18; 135; 146–50]). Other psalms are grouped together by common language, theme, and function (e.g., enthronement hymns [Psalms 93; 95–99(100)] and the Elohistic collection [Psalms 42–83]⁴). Most prominent are the major Davidic collections (Psalms 3–41; 51–72; 138–45).

Some psalms, however, lie outside these various collections. Psalms 1 and 2, for example, lack superscriptions and hence lie outside the Davidic collection proper that follows. As many have surmised, these two psalms serve as a dual introduction to the Psalter.⁵ In addition, several psalms ascribed to David (e.g., Psalms 86; 101–3; 108–110) were either not included in the major collections or were split off to “mingle,” one might say, with other psalms. Other superscribed personages such as “Ethan the Ezrahite” (Psalm 89), Moses (Psalm 90), and Solomon (Psalm 127) are relative outliers.⁶

Any reconstruction of the Psalter’s growth involves speculation. It seems that many superscriptions served in part to place particular psalms in certain collections. In addition to the previously mentioned collections, Psalms 52–55 bear the title *maskil* (“wisdom song”?). The superscription of Psalms 56–59 contains the word *miktām* (“inscription”?). More broadly, Psalms 2–89 seem to form a corpus that presents an earthly (i.e., Davidic) view of kingship (i.e., Books I–III), in contrast to Books IV–V (Psalms 90–150), which develop the theme of divine kingship.

In light of evidence from Qumran, it appears that Books I–III were stabilized before Books IV and V. That is, Psalms 1–89 were established in their current order prior to the subsequent psalms. The thematic (and dramatic) shift from earthly to divine kingship is facilitated by Psalm 89, which recounts God’s “eternal” promise to David and his dynasty in verses 2–38[1–37] (cf. 2 Sam. 7) but then in a blistering counter testimony charges God with abandoning the earthly monarchy and thereby breaching covenant (vv. 39–52[38–51]). Psalm 89, consequently, paves the way for the subsequent psalms that laud God’s exclusive kingship over Israel, the nations, and the cosmos. This movement is also paralleled to some degree with the decreasing number of psalms attributed to David in the Psalter’s overall arrangement.

FUNCTIONS OF PSALMS

Consonant with its title, the Psalter has been described as the hymn book of the Second Temple. Some psalms, however, were likely composed before the Second Temple (520 BCE)⁷ and later preserved as messianic for the envisioned reestablishment of the Davidic monarchy. The traumatic experience of exile, moreover, inspired the composition of some psalms (e.g., Psalms 89; 137). But regardless of compositional dating, many psalms have the Temple as their setting. Several psalms present the Jerusalem Temple as the destination of pilgrimage, the object of desire and religious fervor (e.g., 23:6; 27:4; 84:2–8[1–7]; 122:1–9). As festivals were celebrated on an annual basis, the community bore witness to God’s presence in the Temple (17:15; 27:4; 42:3[2], 5[4]; 63:3[2]). Some psalms feature actual Temple liturgy; others were presumably composed for dispersed Jews who oriented themselves toward the Temple from distant places (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:35; Dan. 6:10; 1 Esd. 4:58). The Temple was considered God’s earthly abode.

Many psalms, however, bear little explicit connection to centralized liturgy. Certain individual prayers of lament, for example, do not presuppose a background of corporate worship. They are prayers to be heard by God, not by others. The presence of an officiating priest is not explicit, and the community’s presence is sometimes more of a problem than a source of support. Moreover, other psalms, instead of presupposing worship, suggest a distinctly didactic usage. Psalm 1 commends the study of YHWH’s “law” or “instruction” (*tôrâ*). Other psalms could include Psalms 32 and 34, each of which refers to the importance of teaching (32:8–9; 34:12[11]). Such psalms are sometimes referred to as “wisdom psalms,” although they should not be considered sapiential in the sense of Proverbs (Brown 2005: 85–102). These psalms, together with those that reference divine instruction (1:2; 19:8–11[7–10]; 119:1–176), claim the Psalter, in part at least, as a book of instruction or devotion—a “textbook” of sorts—in addition to being a book of prayer and praise. Hymnbook, prayer book, textbook: such are the three major dimensions of the Psalter. The Psalms rendered in 3D represents a convergence of complementary interests and functions. Who might have been responsible for bringing these various dimensions together remains an open question.

INTERPRETATION AND USAGE OF PSALMS: A SAMPLING

The performative, oral roots of many biblical psalms can be inferred from the dynamic language of psalmic rhetoric⁸ and from ritual literature found throughout the ancient Near East, which has greatly expanded our understanding of the possible use and setting

of psalms in ancient Israel. The scribal editing and codification of the Psalms, as well as the various translations of the Psalter, reflect significant interpretive moves. The following discussion represents a sampling of interpretive developments prior to the rise of critical research.

Qumran

Around 150 BCE a group of disaffected Jews founded a community in the inhospitable desert near the Dead Sea, setting themselves apart from the beliefs and practices of the Jerusalem-based priesthood, represented by the “Wicked Priest,”⁹ to live a life based on uncompromised piety. Led by the “Teacher of Righteousness,” the members of the community at Qumran (the Arabic name for the site) produced and preserved a vast library of religious literature, including most of what is now known as the Hebrew Bible. Among these Dead Sea Scrolls, the Psalms is more widely represented than any other book of the Bible (with Deuteronomy being a close second): forty-one manuscripts containing fragments of 115 biblical psalms. Among these is the Great Psalms Scroll from Cave 11, dated to 30–50 CE. While it contains all or parts of thirty-nine canonical psalms, beginning with Psalm 93 and extending into what was later to be Book V of the MT Psalter, the overall sequence is markedly different from what is found in the Hebrew canon. Intermixed with the biblical psalms are other pieces of biblical poetry and extra biblical psalms. Other Psalms scrolls seem to confirm this ordering. Given the evidence from Qumran, it appears that the last third of the Psalter (Books IV and V) was still very much in flux (Flint 1997).

In addition to the scrolls, four commentaries were found in fragmentary form at Qumran focusing on particular psalms. The members of the Qumran sect understood the psalms and much of the Hebrew Scriptures within their own turbulent context and interpreted them apocalyptically. Some were applied specifically to the “Teacher of Righteousness,” the presumed speaker of certain psalms. The psalms also influenced the composition of twenty-five “Thanksgiving Hymns” (*Hodayot*) contained in a single scroll from Cave 1. The hymns drew heavily from biblical psalms, including Psalms 22, 41, and 69. In short, Psalms was the most influential biblical “book” for this Jewish sect as it developed its identity apart from the Judaism of Jerusalem, reading and applying the psalms to its own socio-historical context.

New Testament

Of all the books regarded as scripture in the New Testament, the Psalms is the most widely cited. Of the 150 canonical psalms, 129 make their appearance in some form in the New Testament. Many of the cited psalms were understood as prophetic texts fulfilled by Jesus. In these cases, the figure of David was understood as a seer who foretold what Jesus said or did (e.g., Acts 2:25–28 and Ps. 16:8–11). In other cases, the psalmist’s

voice became identified with the voice of Jesus, thereby identifying the prophetic David with Jesus, particularly in John's Gospel. Many psalmic texts were incorporated or echoed in Jesus' own sayings and teachings (e.g., Ps. 37:29 in Matt. 5:5; Ps. 147:9a in Luke 12:24). Fundamentally, as the royal psalms informed Jesus' messianic lordship through the figure of King David (e.g., Psalms 2; 110), so the lament psalms in particular helped to elucidate the suffering and death of God's messiah (Ahearne-Kroll 2007; Daly-Denton 2000).

It is no surprise, then, that a high density of psalmic citations and allusions is found in the narratives of the last week of Jesus' ministry. The account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem draws from Psalm 118 (Mark 11:9–10 [Ps. 118:26a]). According to Mark, Jesus cites verses 22–23 of the psalm to close the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12:10–11 (see also Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7). Psalm 110, likely composed for a royal coronation ceremony, is also cited for its first verse. Acts 2:34–35 and Hebrews 1:13 read the first verse as David addressing Jesus, thereby authenticating Jesus' lordship. (See the more cryptic use of the verse in Mark 12:35–37.) Most well-known is the citation of Ps. 22:2[1] in Jesus' cry from the cross (Mark 15:4; Matt. 27:46). While the verse alone conveys utter dereliction, it also evokes the lament in its entirety, which concludes in ecstatic praise. This lament of laments is also echoed in Mark 15:24 and John 19:24 (Ps. 22:19[18]), as well as in Matt. 27:43 (Ps. 22:9[8]). Outside of the gospel accounts, the Epistle to the Hebrews draws heavily from the psalms (eleven psalms in total, all from the LXX) to demonstrate, *inter alia*, Christ's divinity and superiority over the angels.

Like the Qumran community, the early church applied many psalms to its own socio-historical context and theological convictions. Psalm 8:6[5], for example, which refers to humanity made “a little lower than divinity (*’ēlōhīm*),” was applied specifically to Christ (1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:6–9). In addition, psalmic references originally to God were applied to Christ (John 6:31 [Ps. 78:24]; Heb. 1:10–12 [Ps. 102:26–28(25–27)]). For New Testament communities, both Jewish and Gentile, various psalms provided important lenses for recounting and interpreting the story of Jesus' passion and death, as well as his incarnation and exaltation.

Early Christian Interpretation

The exegetical license practiced by the New Testament authors was carried forward by subsequent Christian interpreters. The Epistle of Barnabas (c. 130 CE), for example, regards Psalm 22 as predicting the suffering of Christ (5.13; 6.6). In similar fashion, Justin Martyr treated the whole of Psalm 22 as anticipating not only Christ's sufferings but also his glorious resurrection. Psalm 2, accordingly, tells of the conspiracy against Christ. Psalm 96 reveals how Christ is to rule after his ascension, and Psalm 110:1 refers to Christ, not an earthly king, as “Lord.”¹⁰

One reason why early Christian commentary on the Psalms, from homilies to scholarly commentaries, was more voluminous than on any other biblical book was because the psalms were used widely in public worship and personal devotion (Daley 2003: 189).

They were chanted and sung on a regular basis by the early third century CE. The dramatic rise of monasticism in the fourth century, moreover, gave the Psalms additional attention: ascetics recited and chanted the psalms as daily prayer not only for personal guidance but also for spiritual warfare against demons. Much of early Christian exegesis was, in fact, aimed at enabling the clergy, particularly monks, to sing and recite the psalms with understanding, that is, to “facilitate the *internalization* of these biblical prayers-in-verse . . . as divinely inspired poetry” (Daley 2003: 192; emphasis in original).

On the scholarly front, while many early Christian interpreters viewed the psalms Christologically, they split over whether to interpret the psalms allegorically or literally, as illustrated by the opposing schools of Alexandria and Antioch, respectively. Like the body and the soul, Scripture was considered to have both a plain and a deeper, if not mystical, sense. Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–254 CE) championed the latter approach. The hanging of lyres on the willows in Psalm 137:2, for example, represented the soul in a state of “shadow and ignorance.” By contrast, Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428 CE), a strong representative of the school of Antioch, stressed a literal, more historically attuned understanding, even to the point of denying that any psalm points to Christ. Whereas Origen and Jerome understood Psalm 72 as referring to Christ, Theodore identified Solomon as the one whose peaceful reign “shall continue as long as the sun” (72:5; cf. v. 1).

The debate between literal and allegorical readings of psalms, however, did not govern all exegetical work among early Christians. In his letter to Marcellinus, Athanasius (c. 296–373 CE), Patriarch of Alexandria, claimed that the Psalter yields an especially eclectic treasure: if each book of the Bible is “like a garden which grows one special kind of fruit,” the Psalter is one that grows “some of those of all the rest” (Athanasius 2003: 98). The Psalter, in other words, contains various themes featured throughout much of Scripture, from creation and exodus to priesthood, prophets, and moral instruction and anticipates Christ’s incarnation, passion, and resurrection. But what is particularly unique about the psalms, according to Athanasius, is that they portray “in all their great variety the movements of the human soul” (p. 103). Put differently, the Psalter’s words are intended to be the reader’s words. Athanasius likened the Psalter to a “mirror” whereby the reader sees himself or herself as one is and as one ought to be; the Psalms provide a “model for the amendment of our lives” (p. 106). Athanasius, moreover, delineates various literary forms of biblical psalms (e.g., narrative, hortatory, prophetic, prayers, confessions, thanksgiving, and praise) and identifies certain occasions for their use (p. 107–14). Ancient interpreters such as Athanasius were fully aware of the literary and functional variety that constituted the Psalms.

By contrast, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo Regius (354–430 CE), read the psalms not for their literary worth, historical importance, or personal appropriation but primarily in relationship to Christ. Even at the very outset, Augustine’s exegetical observations on the Psalm are thoroughly Christological: “Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked” (Ps. 1:1) refers directly to Jesus Christ. For Augustine, the Psalms “represent[ed] the unifying of the divine and the human voice in Christ” (Williams 2004: 18). In his reflections contained in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (“Expositions of

the Psalms”), Augustine gives scarce reference to the historical David. Rather, through the voice of the psalmist, Christ speaks to the church.

Early Jewish Usage and Interpretation

According to the Mishnah (a compilation of traditional judgments on Jewish law produced at the end of the 2nd century CE), daily morning worship in the Jerusalem Temple involved the singing of a particular psalm on a given day by the Levites: Psalm 24 on Sunday, Psalm 48 on Monday, Psalm 82 on Tuesday, Psalm 94 on Wednesday, Psalm 81 on Thursday, Psalm 93 on Friday, and Psalm 92 on Saturday (*Tamid* 7.4; see Trudinger 2004). The Mishnah also prescribes the corporate recitation of four psalms (120, 121, 130, and 102), all individual psalms, in the event of a prolonged drought (*Taanith*). During the three great annual festivals and Hanukkah, the Hallel, or “praise” (Psalms 113–118), is recited in their canonical order. During the Passover Seder, Psalms 113–114 are cited before the Seder meal, and Psalms 115–118 are recited afterward. Every Jewish blessing begins with the words “Blessed art Thou, O Lord,” drawn from Psalm 119:12a.¹¹

In addition to the Targumic or Aramaic translation of the Psalms and the Talmud (i.e., commentary on the Mishnah), the richest presentation of early medieval Jewish interpretation is found in the *Midrash Tehillim*, which preserves a storehouse of scriptural exposition through the association of verses across the biblical canon. The commentary on Psalm 23:1, for example, discusses not only passages that share pastoral imagery (e.g., Ps. 80:2[1]; Ezek. 34:31) but also those that cast Israel’s relationship with God in covenantal (Exod. 20:2), paternal (Jer. 31:9; Exod. 4:22), fraternal (Songs 5:2), and erotic imagery (Songs 2:16). Midrash mines both the plain sense and the hidden meanings of the text, even enlisting numerology, whereby numerical values are assigned to certain words or phrases.

Medieval Jewish interpreters debated whether the psalms were of divine or human origin. The philologist Saadia Gaon (c. 882–942 CE) viewed the Psalter with its fivefold division as a second Torah, a repository of divine instruction for David. Although he recognized the Psalms as speech addressed primarily to or about God, Saadia Gaon nevertheless considered them to be of divine origin given for the reader’s instruction. By contrast, the Karaites (“Biblicists”), a Jewish sect of the eighth century CE that rejected rabbinic teaching in the oral law and Talmud, considered the Psalter to be a book of prayers specifically written under prophetic inspiration by David and prophets such as Moses (see Psalm 90).

Later Jewish interpreters such as Moses ibn Gikatilah (11th century) approached the Psalms with greater historical sensitivity: the psalms were not prophecies of David but rather prayers and poems from different authors reflecting their historical contexts. The anonymity of many of the psalms was proof that David was not their author. Ibn Gikatilah regarded the Asaphite psalms as having been written in Babylon, much later than the time of David. With Abraham ibn Ezra (1092–1167 CE), however, the pendulum

swung back toward reading psalmic poetry as prophetically inspired (for details, see Simon 1991).

Jewish commentators on the Psalms include Solomon ben Isaac, otherwise known as Rashi (1040–1105 CE), and David Qimhi (or Kimhi, 1160–1235 CE). Their attention to philology and historical context helped uncover the “plain sense” (*pešat*), in distinction from *deraš*, the text’s deeper meaning.

Protestant Reformation

With the development of the movable type in the fifteenth century, the Psalter was the first book of the Bible to appear in print (1477). Protestant reformers Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) spent much of their exegetical energy on the Psalms, producing significant reflections in the form of commentaries, lectures, and sermons. Luther’s first lectures at Wittenberg dealt with the Psalms (1513–1515), and he expounded them throughout his later years, charting a dramatic hermeneutical shift (Preus 1969: 153–75). Early on, Luther considered, for example, Psalm 1:1 to refer to Christ alone. He regarded Psalm 6, moreover, as a prayer of Christ himself (p. 167). Later, however, the medieval exegete treated the first verse of Psalm 1 to refer to “all men” (Holladay 1993: 193). The shift is telling: Luther came to hear in the Psalms the voice of the “faithful synagogue,” as in Psalm 142 (Preus 1969: 172). His perspective turned toward the historical context of ancient Israel’s struggles and hopes. In his ongoing study, Luther moved from “Christ and the Church as the subject and speaker [of the Psalms] to the actual Old Testament, pre-advent situation” (p. 173). The Psalms enabled Luther to give the Old Testament its full exegetical due apart from, as well as in relation to, the New.

Overall, Luther’s interpretations of the Psalms comprise a mixture of personal, devotional, exegetical, and polemical reflections, indicating something of the religious tumult of his time. For Luther the Psalms demonstrated God’s justification of sinful human beings through faith, made explicit in the New Testament. Not unlike Athanasius, Luther regarded the Psalter as *die kleine Biblia* (the little Bible), the grand, unfolding drama of God’s salvific work encapsulated in poetry (LW 35: 254). The Psalter was a book for all seasons and for every reader. For this reason, Luther insisted on congregational appropriation of the entire Psalter, not just select passages, in worship (Holladay 1993: 195).

John Calvin, the second giant of the Reformation, produced in 1557 a detailed commentary on the Psalms marked by exegetical rigor unprecedented for his day. Equipped with a competent knowledge of Hebrew, Calvin was resolutely focused upon the “literal sense,” by which he refrained from positing an immediate Christological or spiritual sense to the ancient Hebrew text. Psalm 8:6[5], for example, does not refer foremost to Christ but to humanity in general. When it is cited in Hebrews 2:7, Paul applies it to Jesus “by way of accommodation” (Calvin 1843–1955: 1.103–105). With careful

exegesis, Calvin produced an eminently practical, if not personal, exposition of the Psalms, matching his theological acuity with profound psychological insight. Nested *within* the “literal sense” of the text, Calvin also discerned deep spiritual meaning. The historical figure of David, for example, was typologically related to Christ; David’s kingdom was a foreshadow of Christ’s. Moreover, while leading the church in Geneva, Calvin found in David’s troubles as portrayed in the Psalms a reflection of his own personal struggles (Eire 2003: 285–92).

In the preface to his commentary, Calvin refers to the Psalter as “an anatomy of all parts of the soul . . . for which there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror,” reminiscent of Athanasius (1843–1955: 1.xxxvii). In the Psalms, Calvin saw quite vividly the struggle between “flesh manifesting its infirmity” and “faith putting forth its power” (p. 1.xxxvii).

THE RISE OF HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EXEGESIS

With the onset of the Enlightenment in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, the study of the Bible became increasingly driven by rational, “scientific” inquiry. Philological, historical, and literary analyses flourished, leaving an indelible mark on modern biblical studies. In 1753, for example, Robert Lowth, professor of poetry at Oxford and the most influential Old Testament scholar of his day in the English-speaking world, published his *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum*, which explored the aesthetic dimensions of Hebrew poetry and identified what would be considered its most defining feature, *parallelismus membrorum*:¹² the divisibility or segmentation of a line of Hebrew verse typically into two or three parts that are either synonymous, antithetical, or synthetic in relation (see Brown 2010: 7–12).¹³

In a less technical manner, interest in Hebrew poetry in the eighteenth century culminated in the work of J. G. Herder, whose influential *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie* (1782–1783) was an attempt to retrieve empathetically the “spirit” of Hebrew poetry from the perspective of the ancient poet. In a more detached spirit, other scholars interpreted biblical psalms historically by attempting to fit them into the larger schema of ancient Israel’s developing religious history. The results, however, lacked consensus: identical psalms were dated as late as the Maccabean period and as early as the Davidic monarchy.

It was time for a paradigm shift. Psalms studies changed dramatically with the rise of form criticism, an alternative, more transhistorical form of inquiry set against the fact-based historical study of the Psalms prevalent the nineteenth century (Buss 1999: 209–11). Developed by Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), form-critical research specializes in identifying types of literature based on genre (*Gattung*), consisting of common content, linguistic form, and life setting or *Sitz im Leben*. Gunkel’s basic presupposition was that any given psalm is best understood in relation to psalms of similar

form, style, and theme, all yielding evidence of a common genre or a mixture of genres. In his formal introduction to the Psalms, completed by his student Joachim Begrich in 1933, Gunkel observed that “literary material should be arranged primarily according to its own regulations” (Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 6). Those “regulations,” evinced in the history of literature, are the characteristics that constitute a genre. It was Gunkel’s conviction that the psalmists adapted preexisting genres in the compositions of particular psalms. By furnishing texts their shape and structure, genres were thought to exist prior to particular texts (Buss 1999: 246–47).

Gunkel (with Begrich) identified five major psalmic genres: hymn, communal complaint song, royal psalm, individual complaint song, and individual thanksgiving song (Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 22–221). Minor genres include the enthronement songs (as an “appendix to the hymn”), pilgrimage songs, victory songs, Israel’s (or communal) thanksgiving songs (pp. 220–50). Each type, Gunkel argued, is characterized by shared thought structure and conventional speech patterns. Gunkel’s classification of psalms was nothing new; the variety of literary forms had been long recognized, as noted by Athanasius and many others since him (see above). Gunkel’s own typology resembled that of Wilhelm de Wette in his 1811 Psalms commentary; his innovation, however, lay in introducing the notion of “life setting” (Buss 1999: 245–46). Rather than denoting the actual context of a particular text’s composition or usage, the *Sitz im Leben* indicated the general “seat” or “home” of a genre, that is, its common institutional or social setting, its residence in life. Psalms arose “in the *real life of persons and have their setting therein*” (Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 7; emphasis in original).

For Gunkel the “original setting” of most psalms was Israel’s worship, not the “outpouring of the most personal piety” (Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 7). Indeed, their origination in worship, according to Gunkel, explains why the psalms “speak so generally” (p. 7). Over time, however, these types became detached from their original settings. For Gunkel, most psalms preserved in the Psalter are actually “spiritualized” imitations of old, now lost, cultic poetry. Through his genre analysis, Gunkel advocated a typology in which psalms could be dated relatively within an historical continuum from early pure, brief oral forms to later mixed forms and from cultic setting to individual pious expression: “noncultic piety... could only appear at a later stage” (p. 13). Deviations from set patterns indicate “a particularly high religious and poetic power which elevates itself beyond the pattern. We only gain the means for measuring the individual poet’s independence and the singularity of the poet’s creation when we have first recognized the dominant norm in the poet’s time” (p. 8). In other words: patterns first, exceptions later.

Scholars have been reframing and refining Gunkel’s classifications ever since. The first to do so was one of Gunkel’s own students. In his magisterial treatment of the Psalms, Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel (1884–1965) pressed the “historical” into Gunkel’s form-critical understanding of psalmic poetry. The historical for Mowinckel (and for Gunkel) did not concern the psalmists’ own historical or personal contexts. The psalmists were by profession anonymous figures, ever hidden behind their evocative poetry. They wrote not for themselves but for the pray-er: “The psalm has been

composed and put into the mouth of the one who has to use it” (Mowinckel 2004 [1962]: 2.133). “What ‘the psalmist’ does is to lend his word and his art to the praying, praising, or thanking congregation or individual” (p. 2.136). In other words, the individual speaker of the psalm, the “I,” is not the voice of the psalmist but that of the intended user of the psalm (see also Brown 2007: 26–44).

Mowinckel’s focus, thus, was on the psalm’s actual usage, particularly in worship, that is, in the psalm’s “cultic situation” with its attendant “ideological and liturgical complexity” (Mowinckel 2004 [1962]: 1.106). It was Mowinckel’s aim “to reconstruct the precise cultic occasion which has produced [the psalms]” (p. 1.36), to mine the sociological function of psalmic poetry. For Mowinckel, the cult designated “the socially established and regulated holy acts and words in which the encounter and communion of the Deity with the congregation is established, developed, and brought to its ultimate goal” (p. 1.15). More tersely, cult is “a relation in which a religion becomes a vitalizing function as a communion of God and congregation” (p. 1.15). The simple act of prayer and invocation, consequently, is said to have originated outside the cult (p. 1.22). For Mowinckel, thus, the cultic was public in its most expansive sense, and anything less was consigned to the worshipper’s “closet,” as it were, including all forms of familial and “popular” piety unrelated to the Temple. Mowinckel insisted that the majority of the psalms must be read in “the midst of the Great Assembly,” as if cultic practice were exercised exclusively within the largest and most centralized of sacred contexts (p. 1.8).

Whereas Gunkel’s approach launched a broad-based form-critical study of the Psalms, Mowinckel advocated a singular “cult-functional” approach. Mowinckel’s monumental work was originally published in English in 1962 as a revision of his 1951 study, *Offersang og Sangoffer* (Offering Song and Song Offering), itself a summary of his earlier prolific work on the psalms, including his six-volume *Psalmestudier* (1921–24). By building on Gunkel’s work, Mowinckel turned his teacher’s developmental approach on its head: the Norwegian exegete saw cultic formulation as the culmination, rather than as the beginning point, of the psalm’s evolution in biblical Israel. In addition, Mowinckel was not convinced that the older instances of psalmic poetry were characteristically more pure. To the contrary, “mixed types” indicated greater antiquity, whereas differentiation into “pure types” was the mark of later development, a “law of evolution” (Mowinckel 2004 [1962]: 1.89, 96–97; 2.157).

Mowinckel’s cult-functional approach was informed, if not inspired, by the anthropological work of his day, particularly that of V. Grønbech and A. van Gennep. From them, Mowinckel came to discern the dramatic, emotive dimensions of ancient ritual—what could be called the *pathos* of the cult—and in so doing was able to put the personal dimension of religious practice back into public liturgy. With masterful flair and substantive argumentation, Mowinckel successfully countered a prevailing prejudice of this day, one that deemed liturgical compositions to be of a “certain inferiority” (2004 [1962]: 1.5, 12).

In addition to his clarion call for a cult-centered hermeneutic, Mowinckel is well known for his nearly singular focus on the autumnal New Year’s festival as the paradigmatic setting for psalmic poetry. This central festival served as the occasion not just for

the enthronement psalms (Psalms 47; 93; 95–100), whose festal shout Mowinckel translated in a particularly dramatic way (see below), but for most of the Psalter. He lodged this reconstructed enthronement festival, the festival of YHWH's epiphany, within the autumnal Feast of Tabernacles (1.118–29). And it is safe to say that no study has yet made a convincing argument that the enthronement psalms were merely post-exilic products of the eschatological imagination influenced by Isaiah 40–66, as Gunkel had claimed (Roberts 2005: 97–115). For Mowinckel, such psalms lived and breathed most fully under the monarchy and in the Temple's setting (2004 [1962]: 1.35).

Mowinckel's translation of *YHWH mlk* or *mlk YHWH* ("Yahweh has become king"), such as in the opening lines of Psalms 93 and 97 (cf. 47:9[8]), suggests that the deity assumes royal sovereignty in the enthronement ritual itself (2004 [1962]: 1.107–116). Although such a translation has come under criticism, Mowinckel's explanation of the festal proclamation remains sufficiently nuanced: the formula in no way implies that YHWH's rule is *not* eternal, much less that Israel's God must be counted among the dying and rising deities of the ancient Near East (1.111–116). Rather, the enthronement festival reenacted a defining experience of YHWH's rule for the present. The work of liturgy, Mowinckel contended, is more than the exercise of the worshipper's imagination; perceived reality is itself (re)shaped in the liturgical act.

In sum, Mowinckel treated the psalms somewhat as puzzle pieces that, when fitted together, reveal the rich choreography of movement, sound, and sight of First Temple worship (2004 [1962]). He found the psalms to be thoroughly performative and recovered the corporate significance of many psalms. For Mowinckel, the "I" of the psalms was, more often than not, no private, isolated individual but a representative of the community, often the king. Most "I-psalms" were "congregational psalms" (p. 2.18–19). Nevertheless, Mowinckel did concede that certain "psalms of sickness" indicated a more individualized context, the personal work of the poet (2.1–2).

Another significant exception are the "wisdom psalms." Mowinckel coined the label "learned psalmography" to refer to Gunkel's classification of "wisdom poetry" in the psalms (2004 [1962]: 2.104–106). Noncultic in origin, the products of late psalm-writing represent a disintegration of psalmic composition. Nevertheless, the "learned psalmographers," while leaving their own stamp on the Psalter with their inferior, cult-free didactic psalms, were also the "guardians of the spiritual and literary traditions of the Temple," making possible the collections that eventually constituted the Psalms (p. 2.114). Without these scribal "guardians," there would be no Psalter.

Much has advanced in Psalms research during the last several decades. Mention must be made of Claus Westermann, who dispensed with the form-critical category of "thanksgiving psalms" altogether. Such psalms, Westermann argued, have so much in common with the psalms of praise that they are best considered a type of praise psalm. Westermann, thus, distinguished between two kinds of praise psalms or hymns: the psalm of "declarative praise," which highlights what God has done, and the psalm of "descriptive praise," which focuses on what God does or is (1981: 34).

Regarding the issue of cultic function, the works of Martin Buss and Erhard Gerstenberger have reframed the discussion significantly. Historically and culturally, the act of worship in the ancient Near East was by no means confined to the centralized festivals of the monarchy, like the Babylonian New Year festival, as Mowinckel assumed. The religious life of ancient cultures also pulsed within smaller institutions and social groups. In addition to the centralized Temple assembly, the family, too, constituted a bona fide cultic community (van der Toorn 1996). Gerstenberger refers to “small-group rituals,” as in the case of the individual lament or thanksgiving psalm, whereby a service of supplication or thanksgiving was conducted under the guidance of a “ritual expert” (1988: 7–8, 14). According to Gerstenberger, such ceremonies are best understood as “‘spontaneous’ rituals”: a momentous event, whether calamitous or joyous, provokes a “sudden desire to approach God in a cultic service.” Here, “the necessity of the moment governs liturgical procedure,” which is by nature “ad hoc” (p. 9). In short, the scope of worship cannot be limited to the largest of social settings, such as the three national festivals that took place in the Temple’s precincts. Israel’s cultic life thrived also within the family apart from official sanctuaries.

Similar to Gerstenberger, Martin Buss has argued for a notion of cult that moves beyond Mowinckel’s focus on the centralized “congregation.” Buss considers cult as a complex and varied set of expressions or “concrete operations” denoting a symbolic whole that can include everything from the “messy” major festivals at the sanctuary to ritualized activity in the home to an individual passing by a sacred spot (1964: 320–22). “If...cult is not a separate sphere within religion, then there is little sense in speaking of ‘non-cultic’ prayer, as Mowinckel had” (Buss 1999: 385; cf. Mowinckel 2004 [1962]: 2.109). In short, the term *cult* covers any form of religious practice or a practice that claims interaction with the deity.

Very influential in recent years has been Walter Brueggemann’s generative approach to “cult” in the Psalms. While acknowledging his debt to Mowinckel, Brueggemann has widened the concept of “function” and “cult” in ways that make psalms accessible to modern readers. For Brueggemann, the cult is a world-creating drama irrespective of its ancient ceremonial practice (as reconstructed by scholars). Broadening the domain of psalms interpretation, Brueggemann offers a new approach by classifying psalms in three broad functional categories: psalms of orientation, psalms of disorientation, and psalms of reorientation or new orientation (1984). The first category includes the psalms of descriptive praise (à la Westermann); the second includes the lament psalms; and the third comprises psalms of declarative praise (or “thanksgiving”). With these three categories, Brueggemann suggests a typology of movement in the life of faith involving struggle, pain, and protest. For Bernd Janowski and his anthropological approach, the Psalms features two major movements: from life to death and from death to life (Janowski 2003).

THE QUESTION OF GENRE

As form-critical research since Gunkel's foundational work indicates, the task of genre identification ranges from attempts as specific as reconstructing the ceremonial choreography of ancient worship to discerning the universal life settings of suffering and joy. The notion of genre, thus, remains a focal point, if not a flash point, in Psalms study. While genres have traditionally been viewed taxonomically, as a means of classifying texts—of placing texts into well-defined categories—recent studies tend to view genres more flexibly as “tools for communication and meaning making” (Zahn 2012: 276). Genologist Alastair Fowler famously stated, “In reality genre is much less of a pigeonhole than a pigeon, and genre theory has a different use altogether, being concerned with communication and interpretation” (1982: 37; cf. Zahn 2012: 277). Texts, with their irreducible particularity, do not so much *belong* to genres as they *participate* in them (Newsom 2005: 439). Genres are “contracts between writers and readers, laying out common expectations for what the text in question is intended to do and what means it is likely to use” (Newsom 2010: 199; cf. Culler 1975: 139). Genres, in fact, lack well-defined boundaries, and a text's participation in one genre by no means precludes participation in another. They are “probabilistic complexes, not hypothetically pure structures that lie behind the text” (Buss 1999: 255). Moreover, genres can be dialogically related. Newsom states, “Every instance of a genre can be understood as a reply to other instances of that genre and as a reply to other genres” (1996: 447). And the text's “reply” does not go unheard at the more abstract level of genre description. Indeed, one reason why genres do not exist in pure form is that they themselves interact with each other (Buss 1999: 256).

Thus, while classifying texts remains an important form-critical task, it must be recognized that genres themselves are more flexible and dynamic than categories. Genres change over time and can account for the considerable variety of texts (i.e., mixed forms). They are akin to fuzzy sets in mathematics, in which the delineation of types are far from crisp. They can only be drawn approximately, allowing for overlapping features. Put simply, the quest for a genre, somewhat like identifying a species, attempts to establish family resemblances among psalms, whether they are distant cousins or twin siblings. Genres are genetic prototypes, as it were, in a sea of mutations.¹⁴

Identifying the genre of a psalm, thus, must be done with caution. It was typically thought that the form of a particular psalm directly reflected its setting in life or *Sitz im Leben*, that is, its institutional context of usage (e.g., cultic setting, educational setting, family setting, etc.). Recent scholarship, however, has shown no tight correspondence between a psalm's form and its alleged setting (e.g., Nasuti 1999). Psalms of similar structure and common language can reflect different contexts of usage, from public worship to individual devotion. A psalm's functional setting, in other words, is a moving target. Take Psalm 30, for example, which presents itself as an individual thanksgiving psalm. The superscription, however, suggests that it was used for the dedication of the Temple, an eminently communal event. This striking example demonstrates that, in principle

at least, no psalm can be tied to a particular setting. The notion of *Sitz im Leben* is not locked and final. Whether in light of ancient Israel's varied use of psalms or as evidenced in contemporary communities of faith that adopt and adapt the psalms in worship and devotion, psalms lack copyright restrictions.

Another liability in genre studies is the temptation to overlook what makes a particular psalm distinctive or unique. Genre analysis by itself can make psalms appear, well, generic. Still, such study is quite useful. A genre conveys a set of expectations that helps the reader to identify and even to anticipate how a particular psalm moves rhetorically from beginning to end, or how it *could* have moved (without claiming how it *should* have moved!). Serving as a sort of flexible template, a genre can reveal how a particular psalm subverts, revises, or tweaks a prototypical pattern, thereby highlighting its distinctiveness within the family of psalms with which it shares certain features (see Newsom 2005: 442–43). In the task of genre analysis, identity and difference are inseparably connected.

READING THE PSALMS AS “BOOK”

It is one thing to study the Psalms as evocative poetry or as various liturgical forms functioning within certain reconstructed settings. It is quite another to read the Psalms as a coherent collection in sequence—in effect a book—as some have done. An analogous case would be the book of Proverbs, with its various aphorisms and admonitions (particularly in Proverbs 10–28), all brought together under a single collection of collections. Paroemiologist Wolfgang Mieder famously stated, “The proverb in a collection is dead” (cited in Fontaine 1982: 54). That is, a proverb that has been taken from its originating, performative setting (e.g., a situation of social conflict) and placed in a collection is rendered lifeless, like a chloroformed specimen displayed in a glass case. Recent scholarship, however, has answered vigorously in the negative. Individual proverbs take on added significance, indeed new life, when incorporated within a collection regardless of how they functioned originally in real, oral situations. The same could be said of psalms in the Psalter. The mere fact that individual psalms are collected in a particular sequence suggests some kind of literary and theological interaction, whether intended by the editors of the Psalter. Words, whether ancient or modern, inevitably take on a life of their own when set with other words.

Recent research on the Psalms has drawn attention to the literary contours of the book as a whole, and varied attempts have been made to explain how the Psalter received its final shape. Here, the move is from *Sitz im Leben* to *Sitz im Buch*, from setting in life to setting in the Psalter. Scholars have discerned linguistic links and motifs between adjacent psalms and have identified the strategic positions of certain psalms in the Psalter, particularly at the seams or boundaries between the five Books of the Psalms (e.g., Wilson 1985; Mays 1987; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 1–7; 2011: 1–7). More broadly, attempts have been made to trace overarching movements of themes across the Psalter.

Inspired by the foundational work of Gerald Wilson (1985), some discern a retelling of Israel's history through the crucible of exile in the meta-narrative of the Psalter as a whole (deClaissé-Walford 1997; Parrish 2003). Others find a pilgrimage theme or more generally a dramatic movement toward praise (Smith 1987; Brueggemann 1991: 63–92). Still others trace the interwoven themes of instruction and worship, suggesting that the Psalter in its final form bears a two-fold purpose: study and performance, meditation and worship (Brown 2010: 112–33).

THE PSALTER'S COHERENCE?

Among the various psalms, one can identify repeated themes and perspectives that for many interpreters constitute the Psalter's coherence and relevance. Because the psalms are as personally introspective as they are theologically assertive, their alleged coherence can be addressed under two interrelated frames of reference, namely, the anthropological and the theological.

Theological

Can one speak of a theological coherence or a theological core for the Psalter? Attempts to identify a “center” (*Mitte*) may reveal more about how the interpreter treats the Psalms in relation to his or her theological convictions than about how the Psalter is itself shaped within its wide variety. But this need not be a liability. Several suggestive proposals have been recently offered. James L. Mays identifies divine kingship (“The Lord reigns”) as the Psalter’s “root metaphor” (1994). Taking his cue from Wilson, Mays locates the theological center of the Psalter in Book IV, specifically in the enthronement psalms. Taking into account both the divine and human sides of psalmic language, Jerome Creach identifies “refuge” as the Psalter’s central metaphor. The sovereign God provides refuge; individuals and communities seek refuge in situations of distress (Creach 1996).

Proportionally lacking in both proposals are the instructional dimensions of many psalms, as reflected in the Torah and didactic or “wisdom” psalms. Here and elsewhere the metaphor of pathway plays a significant role, presenting another root metaphor. Both “refuge” and “pathway” are, for example, entwined in the first two psalms (Pss. 1:1, 6; 2:12), and they wend their way throughout the Psalter’s variegated landscape. William Brown proposes, thus, a dual axis to the Psalter, one that imbues the life of psalmic faith with both movement and a sense of destination and discerns the God of the Psalms as both sovereign provider and pedagogue (2002: 15–53). From a compatible perspective, Creach has more recently identified the “destiny of the righteous” as the core feature of the Psalms (2008). On the theocentric side, Rolf Jacobson identifies *hesed*,

God's "loving faithfulness," as the fundamental feature of God's character in the Psalms (2011: 111–38).

Discerning coherence among the psalms in the Psalter also has much to say about how one treats the Psalms as a whole: is it a "hymnbook/prayer book," or is it a "catechism" (McCann 1992)? Or does the Psalter, in light of its great diversity of form and theological content, lack coherence, much less a center? To be sure, the search for coherence inevitably involves privileging certain psalms and texts over others within the Psalter. Nevertheless, theological engagement with the Psalms will always thrive within the dialogical exchange between, on the one hand, the Psalms' prominent themes and broad movements, which necessarily involves the constructive work of the reader, and the Psalter's irreducible diversity, on the other.

Anthropological

Equally complex and generative is the matter of human identity. Because most of the Psalter is cast as human speech embedded within a variety of settings, the question "What does it mean to be human?" is an appropriate one to pose. Or, put more generally, how is the self constructed in the Psalms? Invariably, the psalmist casts the question theologically: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (8:5[4]). The answer in Psalm 8 lies in God's creating humankind "a little lower" than the divine realm, "crowned with glory and honor" (v. 6[5]). Profiled in royal terminology, human beings are invested with God-given dignity and power, with the earth as their charge (cf. 115:16; Gen. 1:27–28).

The question of human identity in Psalm 8, however, is repeated in variant form in Ps. 144:3, and the answer given could not be more different: human beings "are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow" (v. 4). Psalmic testimony of the human condition, thus, covers the extremes: human beings are both powerful and fragile, filled with dignity and fraught with affliction. They are at once endowed with nearly divine capacities and beset with profound debilitations. Pain and death, the psalms testify, constitute an essential part of life but also dignity and "happiness" (*ʾašrê*) before God (Brown 2012: 95–115). Community is both a blessing when peace reigns (e.g., Psalm 133) and a bane when alienation and persecution are the norm (e.g., Psalms 22; 42; 55).

The anthropological dissonance between humanity's elevation and lowly estate invites, as Mays suggests, an eschatological orientation: human beings exist somewhere in between the now and the not-yet of their readiness to live into God's image (2006: 51–68). In the meantime, they long for communion with God and with others. The psalms regard God as the ultimate object of human desire and human beings as fully dependent upon God. Most broadly, human life is characterized in the Psalms by the ultimacy of life and death. Psalm 22, the Psalter's most well-known lament, is paradigmatic of the journey from life to death to new life (Janowski 2003).

NOTES

1. Exceptions featuring divine discourse include 2:7–9; 50:5, 7–15, 16–23; 60:8b–10[6b–8]=108:8b–10[7b–9]; 75:3–6[2–5]; 81:7–15[6–14], 17[16]; 82:2–4, 6–7; 89:20b–38[19b–37]; 95:8–11; 110:1b, 4; 132:14–18.
2. For example, Mitchell 1993; Alter 2007; Greenberg 2010; Nyland 2010; Pietersma 2000.
3. A psalm's superscription does not formally belong to the body of the psalm; it was likely added only after the psalm's composition as part of the Psalter's compilation.
4. The defining feature of the so-called Elohist Psalter is a distinct, albeit inconsistent, preference for *ʾēlōhīm* ("God") over *Yhwh* ("LORD" in NRSV) in reference to the deity. For detailed discussions, see Hossfeld and Zenger 2003: 355–52; Burnett 2007: 95–113.
5. A notable exception is Beat Weber, who proposes that the first three psalms, including the first Davidic psalm, constitute the Psalter's "triple overture" (2010: 50–54).
6. To be sure, Psalm 127 is part of the "Songs of Ascents" collection. Psalm 72 is also attributed to Solomon but is part of the Davidic collection, given the "genetic" connection and its strategic location (see 72:20).
7. Psalm 29 is frequently singled out as having a pre-monarchic, even pre-Israelite origin.
8. "Sing" (*zmr* and *šyr*), for example, is the most common command in the Psalms.
9. Perhaps the Maccabean leader Jonathan, who assumed the high priesthood in 152 BCE.
10. For a more detailed overview of Christian interpretation of the Psalms, see Holladay 1993: 161–90, from which this section draws.
11. This brief review of early Jewish interpretation is drawn from Holladay 1993: 134–60 and Buss 1999: 69–79.
12. Lowth's "discovery" was not entirely new. Erasmus (1523) and Immanuel Frances (1677) had already observed parallelism in Hebrew poetry (Buss 1999: 94, 112).
13. For more precise and comprehensive treatment of poetic parallelism, see Kugel 1981; Berlin 2008.
14. Carol Newsom, for example, proposes a "prototype" theory of genre by which "there is a distinction between central or privileged properties and those that are more peripheral" (2005: 443). Fowler refers to genres as "types" rather than as "classes" (1982: 37–38).

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PART I

ANCIENT
NEAR EASTERN
BACKGROUNDS

CHAPTER 2

MESOPOTAMIAN PARALLELS TO THE PSALMS

ANNA ELISE ZERNECKE

EVER since the publication of the first translations and editions of Akkadian prayer texts at the end of the nineteenth century, parallels between Mesopotamian prayers' and the biblical psalms have been explored in various ways. Moreover, because the deciphering of these prayer texts coincided with the development of the form-critical method in biblical studies, these prayers provide prime test cases for comparative genre research of the Psalms.

Several basic issues have been raised by this comparative work of the last century. Given the similar poetic structures of these texts, the possibility of direct dependence of the biblical texts on the Mesopotamian texts was much discussed (e.g., Stummer 1922; Widengren 1937). But because direct influence cannot be proven, it is best to speak of parallels rather than dependencies. Form-critical studies have focused on the structure of prayers as whole texts to establish and compare genres of prayer (e.g., Stummer 1922; Begrich 1928; Westermann 1954). Mesopotamian prayers are often transmitted as part of a ritual consisting of *agenda* and the prayer as *dicenda*. Based on these ritual settings, hypotheses have been developed concerning the primary *Sitz im Leben* of the biblical psalms, whose collection in the book of Psalms under various superscriptions is most probably secondary (Gerstenberger 1980; Achenbach 2004; Zerneck 2011a).

The relation between the deity and the praying person has been another main point of comparison between prayers from both corpora (e.g., Begrich 1928; Castellino 1940; Albertz 1978; Lenzi 2010; Zerneck 2011a, 2011d). Many motifs in the texts are known in both cultures, again underlining the close proximity in matter of style and content (e.g., Janowski 1989; Tawil 2009). Another issue in the history of comparative research has been the classification of the Mesopotamian texts as either "religious" or "magical." Already the first edition of Mesopotamian "prayers of the lifting of the hand" by Leonard W. King in 1896 indicates the ambiguity in the editor's choice of title, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery: Being "The Prayers of the Lifting of the Hand"* (King 1896). The opinion of the individual researchers and their sometimes implicit concept of "magic" have greatly

influenced the outcome of comparative studies. As the notion of magic is not helpful for describing these Mesopotamian texts, regardless of its definition, this problem is not discussed here but must be kept in mind while reading especially the earlier studies.²

SOURCES

A wealth of hymns and prayers is attested in Mesopotamian written sources. For an overview, see the articles by Falkenstein (1957–1971) and von Soden (1957–1971) in *RIA*, Abusch (2004), and the classification by Foster (2007: 73–91). Representative collections of texts in translation are given in Falkenstein and von Soden (1953), Pritchard (1969), Seux (1976), Hecker (1986–1991), Römer (1986–1991), Foster (2005), and Lenzi (2011c). Previously unknown texts continue to be published; thus, the corpus of Mesopotamian prayers and hymns known to contemporary scholarship continues to grow. The Akkadian prayers from the first millennium are most relevant as parallels to the biblical psalms, as they are closest in time and content, even though earlier textual witnesses are also attested (Zgoll 2003b: 41, 55–67, 107–26; Frechette 2012: 160–63). This essay concentrates on these particular Akkadian texts (for hymns, see the articles in Burkert and Stolz 1994).

POETIC STRUCTURE AND STOCK-PHRASES

The most basic characteristic common to both Akkadian prayers and Psalms is the parallel organization of the poetic line mostly in bicola, often governed by *parallelismus membrorum*.³ The following example is taken from a section of petitions from a “prayer of the lifting of the hand”:

Look at me, my Lady, and accept my supplication!
Look faithfully upon me and listen to my prayer!

(Ištar 2:43–44)⁴

Compare the following petition for help from a psalm of individual lament:

Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your might.
Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.

(Ps. 54:3–4 [1–2])⁵

The elements of parallelism are often recurring stock-phrases that can be found in multiple instances and in different texts. The petition “let your feelings be reconciled to me” (*kabattaki lippašra*) is such a stock-phrase: it occurs three times in a single—though very long—prayer (Ištar 2:45, 52, 96). It is often combined with the petition “let your heart be at rest with respect to me” (Ištar 2:51; Mayer 1976: 241). Werner Mayer (1976) has analyzed these repeated formulations in Akkadian prayers and gives an

inventory of the phrases and recurrent combinations. In the Psalms the same phenomenon can be observed: many formulations are conventional and stereotypical (Culley 1967; Aejmelaeus 1986). The recurring phrases present no argument against the poetic character of the prayers from both cultures: although their single parts are often stereotypical, every prayer as a whole can be analyzed as a meaningfully structured poetic unit (Zgoll 2003b:13–14).⁶

GENRES

Mesopotamian texts in which a human addresses a deity have served as a model example of comparative genre analyses for biblical scholars. Biblical exegesis and ancient Near Eastern studies have influenced each other mutually in establishing and comparing genres.

As for form-critical study of the Psalms, Hermann Gunkel's definition of genre is of paramount importance (Gunkel and Begrich 1933).⁷ His three criteria for establishing a genre are vaguely formulated;⁸ they have been understood to reflect a correlation of form, content, and *Sitz im Leben*. With this definition, Gunkel identified several genres, especially the individual and the communal lament, hymns, and thanksgiving songs (Gunkel and Begrich 1933: 27; cf. Gerstenberger 1988: 9–21). Such genres are established through the work of critical scholarship; they are *critical* genres.

Mesopotamian prayers are usually transmitted as part of a ritual. They are classified by superscriptions and subscriptions. These classifications may depend on different factors, such as prayer gestures, specific content, and types of ritual, which are not necessarily understood by modern scholarship. These classifications are best described as *ethnic* genres (Ben-Amos 1981). Both types of genres need to be distinguished in comparative research (Zernecke 2011a: 303–307).⁹

The genre “incantation-prayer” or *Gebetsbeschwörung* (Kunstmann 1932; Mayer 1976; Abusch 2004; Foster 2007) is a critical genre, established according to the formal characteristics of exemplars of the ethnic genre “prayers of the lifting of the hand”—prayers with the subscription KA.INIM.MA ŠU.IL₂.LA₂ dX.KAM (abbreviated as “šu-ila prayers” in this chapter)—and more texts from several other ethnic genres with a similar outline but having different addressees, *Sitze im Leben*, and purposes. Exemplars of the genre “incantation-prayer” were sometimes also labeled šu-ila, independent of their actual subscription and further contextual information. The ensuing terminological confusion has yet to be solved.¹⁰ At the current state of research, it is prudent to avoid the term “incantation-prayer” and instead to look at the Akkadian classes of rituals independently. Their characteristics and purposes continue to be studied and are seen more clearly now.¹¹ The comparison with psalms and other biblical texts may be fruitful for texts from different ethnic genres. The remainder of this chapter focuses primarily on šu-ila prayers that were transmitted independently, that is, not as part of a longer ritual.

Due to similar form and content, biblical individual laments can be compared to šu-ila prayers, but their difference in genre (i.e., the šu-ila prayer as an ethnic genre, the psalmic individual lament as a critical genre) has to be kept in mind. Despite their disparity in length, Psalm 6 (eleven verses) and Ištar 10¹² (43 lines) shall serve as examples. After their respective superscriptions, both prayers begin with an invocation: Psalm 6 with the divine name only (“Yahweh!”) and Ištar 10 with an elaborate praise of the deity (lines 1–6). This structural difference is, in fact, quite typical: Mesopotamian prayers usually begin with hymnic praise and biblical psalms of lament with a short invocation. In both texts, a petition follows (Ps. 6:2–3[1–2]; Ištar 10:7–8),¹³ then a complaint proper (Ps. 6:4[3]; Ištar 10:9–18), and then another petition (Ps. 6:5–6[4–5]; Ištar 10:25–38).

The complaint in Ištar 10 begins with a self-introduction of the praying person: “I am N.N., son of N.N., whose god is Marduk, whose goddess is Zarpanitu” (Ištar 10:9).¹⁴ As a typical element in Akkadian prayers, the self-introduction could be adapted for various persons in different situations by naming the supplicant in the execution of the ritual. It has, however, no direct parallel in the biblical psalms.¹⁵ Whereas Psalm 6 has a second complaint (vv. 7–8[6–7]), Ištar 10:19–24 features a confession of confidence. Both texts end with a challenge and imprecation of the enemies, as well as a confession of confidence in Yahweh (Ps. 6:9–11[8–10]) and a concluding praise (Ištar 10:39–42), respectively. Ritual instructions follow in the latter (Ištar 10:43–45).

Both prayers begin with an invocation naming the addressed deity. In the middle of each prayer, petitions, complaints, and confessions of confidence follow without fixed order. Both prayers end with an element of trust in the saving activity of the deity, in Ištar 10 as concluding praise and in Psalm 6 as imprecation against the enemies. In other psalms of individual lament, confessions of trust (e.g., 13:6[5]) and promises to praise (e.g., 7:18[7]; 13:6[5]) that may even lead to hymns of thanksgiving (e.g., 22:23–27[22–26]) can be found at the end of the text.

In their general outline and constitutive elements, both texts have much in common. In this respect, both are typical. The main difference in form is found at the beginning of each text. Whereas Psalm 6:2[1] has only the vocative “Yahweh!”, the hymnic introduction of Ištar 10 reads:

TEXT TO BE RECITED: Ištar of the stars, goddess of the morning!
 Lady of ladies, most high of goddesses!
 Bright one of the Igigû, light of the lands!
 Most high of gods, lightening [. . .]
 Brilliant star, bright torch, who [in the distance]
 becomes bright, you lighten the mo[untains!] (Ištar 10:1–6)

This opening praise section is rather short in comparison to other Akkadian prayers. The hymnic introduction can, in fact, be quite long, covering more than the half of the whole recitation in some prayers, and may highlight especially those characteristics of the deity deemed important for the supplicant's case. The fact that there is only a vocative in the biblical psalms in place of a hymn in the šu-ila prayers has been extensively discussed.¹⁶ It coincides with a second typical difference in the way the deity is addressed: in the psalms

of individual lament Yahweh is usually addressed by name and with epithets that carry the possessive suffix of the first singular (e.g. “my help” [22:20], “my rock” [31:4], “my fortress” [31:4], “my refuge” [31:5], “my God” [13:4; 22:2, 3, 11; 31:15; 38:16]).¹⁷ Thus, Yahweh seems to be much closer to the supplicant than Ištar in the Akkadian prayer discussed above and in many other šu-ila prayers. This difference need not to be interpreted as mixture of genres or as being the result of the generally greater distance between humans and deities in Mesopotamia. There are Mesopotamian prayers—albeit only a few—that also have those characteristics in which biblical psalms of individual lament differ from šu-ila prayers: no hymnic introduction but divine designations with the possessive suffix of the first person singular (“my X”). Prominent is the beginning with *ilī*, “my god.” Most of these prayers bear the subscription “Formula word-for-word to loosen the knotted heart of the god.”¹⁸ Apparently, they were directed to the supplicant’s personal protective deity. As a šu-ila prayer, Ištar 10 is addressed to one of the high gods, to Ištar. In fact, the addressee in the “prayers of the lifting of the hand” is usually one of the high deities in the pantheon and not the personal protective deity of the supplicant. This is very clear in a self-introduction in which the supplicant names his personal gods, as in Ištar 10. The high deity may even be asked to interfere with the angry personal god, whose face is averted from the speaker. The character of the relationship between the deity invoked and the addressee can explain the formal difference between both types of prayers. The psalms of individual lament are in their overall structure and in the way the deity is invoked much closer to the prayers addressed to the personal protective deities, the dingiršadabba prayers (Lenzi 2010; 2011a: 442–43; 2011b: 40–43; Zernecke 2011a: 329–35; 2011d).

In another aspect of form and genre, many šu-ila prayers show a similarity to one of the characteristic features of many psalms of individual lament: a concluding praise or promise to praise. This “sudden change of mood” in biblical individual laments has been much discussed, particularly because the primary *Sitz im Leben* of the individual lament psalms remains unknown. One interpretation reconstructs a salvation oracle spoken by a priest to the sufferer between the petitions and the concluding praise. The text of these psalms was interpreted as only one part in a “piece for several voices,” whose “score” was considered to be lost but could be supplemented by salvation oracles found in other contexts, especially in Deutero-Isaiah (Begrich 1934).¹⁹ An alternative theory explains the sudden change of mood as a psychological phenomenon, as an accumulation of hope in the process of praying (Janowski 2006: 75–84). The šu-ila prayers show that it is not necessary to presuppose the intervention of a cultic institution. Texts such as Ištar 10 end with a praise of the deity, and they were never transmitted without information regarding their cultic setting, as shown below.

Ištar, you are (the) Lady, most valiant of the gods, you are the merciful.

Towards your path, I sprinkle ointment.

Where your two feet tread [...]

Your *aḫulap*,²⁰ Lady of the lands, is yours, [Ištar]!

(Ištar 10:39–42 [concluding praise])

ITS RITUAL: In front of Ištar, you pour an incense burner with juniper on charcoal of acacia, you libate *mihhu*-beer, you sprinkle good oil on the ground, this recitation you re[cite] three times [...]

With the oil which you sprinkled on the ground, you anoint [x], you prostrate yourself, [your] prayer [will be heard]

(Ištar 10:43–45 [ritual instruction])

This and many other ritual instructions show that there was no salvation oracle spoken by a priest. Because of the great similarity between the petitions in the biblical psalms and the *šu-ila* prayers and between complaints in both corpora, in addition to the general structural similarity of the prayers ending in praise, the Akkadian *šu-ila* prayers preclude the need to suppose a “priestly voice” speaking a salvation oracle in the original setting of the psalms of individual lament (Zerneck 2011a: 322–29).

Sitz im Leben and History of Use

Because the biblical psalms were transmitted in a collection (the Psalter), their original *Sitz im Leben* can only be hypothetically reconstructed, if at all. In this respect, the Mesopotamian texts provide crucial parallels, especially petitionary prayers like the *šu-ila* prayers discussed above. Sometimes several contexts can be considered for a single text (Zerneck 2011a: 336–43). First, there is the archaeological record, which can give information about the last use and storage of the cuneiform tablet, perhaps in the library of a temple, a palace, or in the house of a ritual specialist (Pedersén 1998; Maul 2010). Second, the prayer in question might perhaps not be the only text on the tablet. It might be one of several ritual texts or one part of a larger ritual. Third, the *šu-ila* prayers were usually part of a ritual whose detailed instructions followed the text to be recited. Finally, the cuneiform tablet can have a colophon that gives information, for example, about the scribe of the tablet, its *Vorlage*, the time of writing, the purpose for which it was copied, or the larger collection of which it was to be part (Hunger 1968).

The ritual instruction is addressed to a second person singular (“you”). The addressee is not the supplicant but the ritual expert (*āšipu*), who performed the hand-lifting ritual for and with the supplicant. In Neo-Assyrian times, an *āšipu* was a specialist for different rituals, for medicine or ritual cleansing, but also for philological questions regarding the texts of his competence. In addition, the *āšipu* had esoteric knowledge but did not belong to a special cult. Some such experts worked as advisors to Neo-Assyrian kings. They were thought to be competent for keeping away and warding off evil forces.²¹ The *šu-ila* rituals are comparatively simple with regards to material investment and time (Zgoll 2003c). Therefore, it was probably not only the king and his court but also the urban elite who could afford such ritual means in times of personal crises (Schwemer 2007: 245–46; but cf. Jean 2006: 183–84). These rituals, as well as the existence and office of a ritual expert, have led to the hypothesis that there were similar institutions in ancient Israel (Gerstenberger 1980). Although this cannot be proven, texts such as

Isaiah 38, where the prophet acts like a ritual expert in the case of the king's illness,²² reinforce this hypothesis.

An alternative hypothesis that interprets the psalms of individual lament as votive offerings to the temple (Seybold 1996: 18) can also claim Mesopotamian parallels: although the *šu-ila* prayer in *Ištar 2* is followed by ritual instructions on the cuneiform tablet BM 26187, the colophon makes it clear that this copy of the text was written as a votive offering and was never intended to be used for performing the ritual: "A copy from Borsippa. According to its original. Nergal-balassu-iqbi, son of Atamar-KAL.ME, ritual expert (*āšipu*), has written (it) for his life, checked (it) through and permanently deposited (it) in Esagila" (lines 112–13). The colophon shows that the use of the text had changed: it was now a document of the personal piety of a member of the group responsible for the tradition and execution of this type of prayer.²³ The Old Babylonian letter-prayers also functioned as votive offerings (van der Toorn 1996: 130; Lenzi 2011b: 53–55).

RELATION BETWEEN THE PRAYING PERSON AND THE DEITY

As discussed above, the generic form of the prayers is dependent on the relation, whether expressed or presupposed, between the praying person and the deity (e.g., *šu-ila* prayers and *dingiršadabba* prayers). The long hymnic introduction and the names and titles, which make no reference to the supplicant, indicate the immense distance between the deity and the human being in the *šu-ila* prayers. Annette Zgoll demonstrated that the *šu-ila* rituals follow the structure of a secular audience at a ruler's court (2003a: 190–97). She observes that the supplicant is introduced by the gatekeeper at the court, just as the ritual expert introduces him and guides the ritual. Then the supplicant enters into the presence of the ruler—whether the throne room on earth or the astral manifestation of the deity addressed in the *šu-ila* rituals, which were usually performed at night or in the early morning on the roof of a house in view of the stars. The supplicant then approaches the ruler or deity, respectively, with a gift, which may be luxurious in the secular context and in the religious ritual usually includes incense materials, food, and drink. After gestures of salutation, the greeting of the supplicant follows as benedictions in human courts and as an introductory hymn in the *šu-ila* rituals. Whereas the ruler now asks for the supplicant's request, the ritual does not stage this part. The supplicant then formulates his petitions and describes his afflictions rather briefly and in a way to move the ruler to comply with his request. The ruler's reaction is not staged in the ritual, but the supplicant's expression of gratitude follows in both contexts in the form of benedictions, blessings, praise, or anticipation of praise. The audience finishes again with gestures, in *šu-ila* rituals usually with the supplicant's prostration on the ground (*proskynesis*).

This similarity shows the distance between deity and human and underlines how the structure of the ritual aims at engaging the deity to act on the supplicant's request. Behind the audience at court and before the deity stands a conception of reciprocity that commits the high persona to act on the supplicant's behalf after the acceptance of the gift. This logic of reciprocity also enables the supplicant to praise the deity at the end of the ritual, even if his situation has not immediately changed (Zgoll 2003a: 197–99).

The dingiršadabba prayers, on the other hand, do not presuppose a formal approach of the supplicant to the deity, for the addressee is the personal god who has a close relationship to the supplicant (Lenzi 2010; Zernecke 2011a: 331–35; 2011d). The personal protective deity or divine couple is usually found among the lesser deities and regarded as the creator of the individual. The deity's relationship is often described parentally or in terms of master/servant. The personal deity protects the family and is responsible for health, offspring, and success (Albertz 1978; 2008; van der Toorn 1996; Löhnert and Zgoll 2009).

In several biblical psalms of individual lament, Yahweh is addressed in a way similar to the personal protective deities in the dingiršadabba prayers (see above). But it is not clear whether this relation is the same for all psalms of that genre. A conception of audience is also manifest in certain biblical texts (Hartenstein 2008).

Other Mesopotamian rituals function as a process before a divine council, with especially Šamaš, the sun god and god of justice, as judge. Old Babylonian prayers from extispicy rituals conceptualize the outcome of the divination as judgment. Namburbi rituals from the first millennium also take the form of a process to obtain a revision of a divine judgment that became apparent in signs of evil portent. Some anti-witchcraft rituals were also structured as court procedures.²⁴ The prayers that were recited in these rituals are permeated with legal terminology. Terms from the realm of justice and legal procedures are also important in several biblical psalms of individual lament. This phenomenon has been discussed with recourse to Mesopotamian prayers (Loretz 2002: 131–70; Janowski 2003; 2006: 134–73).

LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

For many psalms, a complex literary development is reconstructed. As this is in most cases hypothetical, documentable literary change in the transmission of Mesopotamian prayer texts provide an important parallel for studying the ways texts evolved. Not many aspects of this field have been studied thus far. Several copies of a single prayer, for example, can be compared and their differences can be studied. Well-attested, for example, is a certain formula that was introduced into some prayers for the special case of a lunar eclipse. As some of the prayers in which this formula is found are known in several copies, not all of which include this formula, its nature as introduction is obvious.²⁵

In the case of Ištar 10, the five copies vary particularly in the writing of Ištar's names and titles, in the formulation of the supplicant's self-presentation in line 9, and in the question of the cause of his suffering in line 11. There is one copy from the second millennium preserved in which the end of the prayer is different (Zgoll 2003b: 107–26; Zernecke 2011a: 56–76). The other šu-ila prayer addressed to Ištar already known from a second millennium copy (Ištar 2) has undergone an even greater textual development: the older version is much shorter and the general disposition shows a change in the conventions concerning how to address the deity. In Ištar 2, the development of a prayer text can be studied in detail (Zernecke 2011a: 150–92 [esp. 162–68]; 2012).

Very interesting in this context is a letter to Ashurbanipal in which a ritual expert advises the king to guard himself by rituals against a threat. Because the ritual texts should be adapted to the situation by the insertion of formulas, it was necessary to copy them anew for the ritual's execution (SAA 10 No. 381, p. 313). In some colophons, other texts are quoted and thereby set in relation to the text on the tablet, perhaps referring to conventions in the way these prayers were collected (Hunger 1968: 1).²⁶

MOTIFS AND PARALLEL FORMULATIONS

An abundance of motifs, metaphors, and formulaic language is attested both in Mesopotamian and in biblical prayers. An overview of this vast field is impossible; only certain examples can be given here.

1. Several times in biblical prayers, the motif of the cessation of praise in death is featured (see Janowski 2006: 243–50, especially 246–48). Its function is an *argumentum ad deum*: it would be against Yahweh's own interest if the supplicant were dying, as then there would be one less worshipper and witness of Yahweh's greatness. The motive is twice attested in individual laments (Pss. 6:6[5]; 88:11[10]), twice in individual thanksgiving psalms (Ps. 30:10[9]; Isa. 38:18–19), in Ps. 115:17–18, and in Sirach 17:27–28. Two examples will suffice:

For in death there is no remembrance of you;	
in Sheol who can give you praise?	(Ps. 6:6[5])
What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit?	
Will the dust praise you?	
Will it tell of your faithfulness?	(Ps. 30:10[9])

In both cases, the motif appears in the form of rhetorical questions. An appeal to the deity to save the supplicant by promising praise is well-known in Mesopotamian prayers.²⁷ It may appear in the form of rhetorical questions and in formulations that

are very close to the biblical wording. The following example comes from a prayer to Marduk and might be compared especially to Psalm 30:10 [9]:

Do not destroy the servant who is your handiwork,
What is the profit of one who has turned [into] cl[ay]?
It is a liv[ing] servant who reveres his master,
What benefit is dead dust to a god? (Literary Prayer to Marduk lines 66–69)²⁸

2. A related similarity shared by Mesopotamian and biblical prayers is the use of rhetorical questions for the duration of the supplicant's suffering or the deity's wrath or aversion. Compare:

How long, my Lady, will my enemies look malevolently at me,
(and) with lies and untruths plan evil against me?
How long, my Lady, will the idiot (and) cripple overtake me?
(Ištar 2:6, 59, complaint)
How long, my Lady, will you be angry and your face be averted?
How long, my Lady, will you rage and your feelings be infuriated?
(Ištar 2:93–94, second petition)²⁹
How long, Yahweh? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (Ps. 13:2–3[1–2])³⁰

3. A motif only rarely mentioned in biblical texts is the equation of (the sound of) complaint to (the voice of) a dove. In the biblical prayers of an individual, the motif can be found only in the thanksgiving song in Isaiah 38, as part of the quotation of the prayer of lament from the past situation of affliction: "Like a swallow or a crane I clamor, / I moan like a dove" (Isa. 38:14a; cf. 59:11; Nah. 2:8). Compare this to Ištar 2:64 and Ištar 10:17: "I moan like a dove day and night" (see Mayer 1976: 83 for further parallels).

The study of motifs and linguistic parallels, of similarities and slight variants in the respective traditions of prayers from Mesopotamia and the Bible promises many interesting findings and becomes easier with the increasing accessibility of Mesopotamian texts. A wealth of material can be found in the respective sections "comparative suggestions" in the treatment of the prayers in Lenzi (2011c) and in Tawil (2009). In various ways, Mesopotamian hymns and prayers show many similarities to biblical psalms. The language of individual lament in particular is quite similar in both traditions. Comparative research has access to a rich abundance of material for further study.

NOTES

1. I use “prayer” (*Gebet*) to refer to both laments and hymns.
2. For an overview of the history of scholarship, see Zernecke 2011a: 3–17; 2011c.
3. Concerning *parallelismus membrorum*, see Watson 2007. For various aspects of the phenomenon, see collection in Wagner 2007, which includes one contribution on Akkadian (Old Babylonian) hymns (Streck 2007).
4. First edition: King 1902: 222–37, pl. lxxv–lxxxiv; edition and study: Zgoll 2003b: 41–95; selected translations: *ANET* 383–85; Foster 2005: 599–605; Zernecke 2011a: 77–192 (translation and study); 2011b. Translation taken from Zernecke 2011b: 283.
5. Translations of biblical texts are taken from NRSV unless otherwise indicated; the versification, however, follows *BHS*.
6. Cf. the analyses of single Mesopotamian prayers in Abusch 1983, Zgoll 2003b, Lenzi 2011c, and Zernecke 2011a. For the biblical psalms, the individual character of each text is not disputed.
7. Some of Gunkel’s premises are no longer shared by most scholars working on Psalms, especially concerning psalms in oral tradition, oral transmission, and the notion of “pure” genres being original.
8. “1. ein[...] bestimmte[r] Schatz von Gedanken und Stimmungen, 2. eine deutliche Formensprache, in der diese sich äußern, 3. ein[...] Sitz im Leben, aus dem Inhalt und Form erst verstanden werden können” (Gunkel 1925: 109).
9. For the discussion about genre in premodern literature, see Roest and Vanstiphout 1999.
10. For a critique of the critical genre “incantation-prayer,” see Zernecke 2011a: 303–16; Frechette 2011: 24–30; 2012.
11. For the šu-ila-prayers, see King 1896, Ebeling 1953, Zgoll 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Frechette 2011, 2012; and Zernecke 2011a, 2011d. For namburbi rituals, see Maul 1994. For eršahunga prayers, see Maul 1988. For dingiršadabba prayers, see Lambert 1974. For a concise overview of prayers from the ritual classes namburbi, dingiršadabba, eršahunga, ikribu, and tamitu, followed by a discussion of letter-prayers, royal prayers, and hymns that bear no common subscription, see Lenzi 2011b: 36–60. Prayers of different kinds were also part of longer rituals (Frechette 2012: 165–224).
12. Text A; von Weiher 1988: 88–90, 288 (first edition of the only textual witness of this prayer that is not broken); Zgoll 2003b: 107–147 (edition and study of all textual witnesses); Zernecke 2011a: 33–76 (study). Five exemplars of Ištar 10 are known. It is called a šu-ila prayer here, although this designation is lacking in Text A. Text D is fragmentary but very close to A. The ritual instructions are also similar. As D features the rest of the characteristic subscription [KA.I]NIM.MA ŠU.I[L₂.LA₂...] (Ištar 10:43D), the designation of A as a šu-ila prayer can be justified.
13. In the case of Psalm 6, the petition is mixed with elements of complaint.
14. Text D has also wildcard characters for the names of the supplicant’s deities: “I am N.N., son of N.N., whose god is N.N., whose goddess is N.N.”
15. Ps. 22:7 can be interpreted as metaphorical self-introduction (Zernecke 2011a: 286).
16. Since Begrich 1928, this difference has become a textbook model for the comparison of genres; cf. Koch 1989: 219–21.
17. Begrich 1928; Albertz 1978; Lenzi 2010; Zernecke 2011a: 356–59.
18. KA-inim-ma diğir-ša₃-dab₍₅₎-ba gur-ru-da-kam (“Formel Wort für Wort, um das ‘verknottete Herz’ des Gottes zu lösen” [Jaques 2011: 6]). Edition: Lambert 1974. Selected

- texts and translations: Foster 2005: 721–22, 724–25; Lenzi 2011a: 431–45. In this chapter, I refer to these prayers as dingiršadabba prayers.
19. Isa. 41:8–13, 14–16; 43:1–3a, 5 (44:2–5); 48:17–19; 49:7, 14–15; 51:7–8; 54:4–8; Jer. 30:10–11; 46:27–28; Ps. 35:3; and Lam. 3:57 were discussed as oracles of salvation (Begrich 1934: 217). The hypothesis was originally developed by Küchler 1918.
 20. *aḥulap*: “an exclamation used to express or to seek compassion” (CAD 1/1 1964: 213).
 21. Scurlock 1999; Jean 2006; Maul 2010. For the translation “ritual specialist,” see Mayer 1976: 59; Zgoll 2003b: 25–26; and Zernecke 2011a: 339–40. The “traditional” English translation is “exorcist” (CAD 1/2 1968: 431–35); cf. also Jean 2006: 52–53. In Dan. 1:20; 2:2, 10, 27; 4:4; 5:7, 11, 15, *šp* appears as a loanword in Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic to designate Mesopotamian “conjurers.”
 22. Cooley 2011: 415–16 compares the scene to the logic of a namburbi-ritual (a ritual for release from the evil that has been announced by omina; see Maul 1994) and Isaiah to an *āšipu*.
 23. See note 4. For discussion of this colophon, see Zernecke 2011a: 341–42; 2011b: 281.
 24. On namburbis, see Wilcke 2007: 239–41; Maul 1994: 60–71; and Lenzi 2011b: 36–40. On namburbi rituals, see Schwemer 2007: 205–208.
 25. Kunstmann 1932: 21–24; Mayer 1976: 100–102.
 26. See also the investigation into the history of use of Mesopotamian prayer texts in Achenbach 2004: 373–78.
 27. See, e.g., Ištar 2:100–105 (see note 4); Zgoll 2009: 123–24.
 28. Foster 2005: 613. For the prayer as a whole, see Lambert 1959–1960; Seux 1976: 172–81; and Foster 2005: 611–16. The oldest copy is Old Babylonian; see Sommerfeld 1982: 129–34. For the reading “dust,” see Seux 1976: 175–76 n.28, which also quotes Ps. 30:10; Zgoll 2009: 123.
 29. See note 4. Translation by Zernecke 2011b: 283–84. Such questions are also mentioned in the prayer Šamaš 88, Mayer 1976: 92–93.
 30. See also Pss. 6:4; 74:10; 80:5; 90:13; 94:3; Hab. 1:2.

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CHAPTER 3

CANAANITE BACKGROUNDS TO THE PSALMS

MARK S. SMITH

UNTIL the 1930s, the Canaanite backgrounds of the Psalms were hardly a topic of biblical research. This changed dramatically with the discovery of texts beginning in 1929 from the site of Late Bronze Age Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra),¹ located on the coast of modern-day Syria. Scholars recognized that the Ugaritic texts, as they came to be known, furnish rich parallels to the Hebrew Bible, including the Psalms. For example, the monstrous figure of the Leviathan, attested in Psalms 74:14 and 104:26 (DDD 511–15),² is matched by the Ugaritic figure of Litan, one of Baal’s divine opponents (KTU 1.5 I 1; see SAC 139).³ From the 1930s through the 1960s, the Ugaritic texts played a critical role in research on the Psalms. By the 1970s, it appeared that this line of research was spent. This perception seemed confirmed by the three-volume commentary on the Psalms by Mitchell J. Dahood (1966, 1968, 1970). Dahood’s free-ranging comparison of the Ugaritic texts and the Psalms was strongly criticized for its speculative method and dubious findings (Smith 2001: 159–69). Moreover, by the early 1970s the field of biblical studies was moving into research less concerned with “backgrounds.”

Despite these developments, important research into the Canaanite backgrounds of the Psalms has continued. The Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible share so many features that many scholars have come to believe that these corpora belonged to the same larger cultural milieu.⁴ As a result, the Bible’s insistence on the foreignness of the Canaanites and other peoples, such as the Amorites and the Hittites (e.g., Judg. 3:5), seems to be a polemic not against a foreign culture or society but against Israelites who fail to conform to monotheistic worship of Yahweh. Israel’s Canaanite heritage was recognized on the biblical side in Ezekiel’s condemnation of Israel’s background: “Your origin and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite” (Ezek. 16:3). On the Ugaritic side, this seems to be indicated by the apparent attestation of the personal name of Israel in Ugaritic (KTU 4.623.3). To be sure, not all Israelite traditions in the Psalms are Canaanite, such as the figure of Yahweh

and his march from the land south of what was traditionally considered Canaan (Ps. 68:8–9[7–8]; cf. Judg. 5:45). Similarly, the tradition of the exodus from Egypt known from the Psalter (e.g., Psalms 78, 80, 81, 105, 106) has no known Canaanite background (Smith 2002: 5–9, 19–31). The Psalms also show a number of further developments not reflected in either Canaanite antecedents or contemporary Canaanite (or Phoenician) contexts.

Before discussing the Psalms' Canaanite backgrounds as represented in large measure by the Ugaritic texts, it is important to clarify the relationship between Ugarit and Canaan. Scholars have often used the term "Canaanite" to label the society and culture of Ugarit. However, the kingdom of Ugarit lay just to the north of Canaan, and it is evident that it did not consider itself part of Canaan (Pardee 2001: 151–68; Pitard 2009: 255–311), as indicated by personal names followed by a word denoting their ethnicity (KTU 4.96.6–7): for example, Y'l "the Canaanite" (evidently the same name as "Yael" in Judg. 4:17 and 5:24; see Rainey 1963: 43–45; 1964: 101; 1996: 1–15). At the same time, people from outside of Ugarit sometimes included it in the same context as Canaan: e.g., "all the lands from Gubla (Byblos) to Ugarit" in El Amarna letter 98 (Moran 1992: 171).

The Ugaritic texts are not the only ancient material available for the Psalms' Canaanite backgrounds. The Psalms have benefitted from comparisons of other sources from the region of Canaan, such as the El Amarna letters of the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age West Semitic inscriptions (especially texts from the region of Phoenicia, in modern-day Lebanon), and later Greco-Roman works (such as Philo of Byblos' *Phoenician History*).⁵ By comparing these sources with the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible, it is possible to pinpoint the larger fund of traditions that they shared.

At the same time, it is important to note that Canaanite sites show considerable temporal and geographical differences as well as variation in their attested literatures. Indeed, old Canaanite texts such as the Ugaritic texts are not necessarily direct precursors to their biblical counterparts (Parker 1989: 3–4; cf. Greenstein 2010: 53). Ugaritic literature consists largely of narrative poems, while Israel's great narratives are largely confined to prose material. The Ugaritic corpus is largely lacking in the sort of self-standing psalms or prayers that constitute the Psalms. (The two exceptions are the prayer in KTU 1.119.26–36 and the hymn in Ras ibn Hani 98/02, both discussed below.) Unlike the Bible (or Akkadian literature), the Ugaritic texts do not include historical narratives, law codes, or wisdom collections (Smith 2007b: 189–207). However, the Ugaritic texts include hundreds of administrative texts often consisting of lists of names; these are largely missing from the Hebrew Bible (see the lists of Num. 13:4–16 and 1 Kgs. 4:1–19). Both Ugaritic literature and the Bible contain ritual texts with notable shared terminology, although the Ugaritic exemplars are mostly freestanding, whereas those of the Bible are embedded in the narrative context of the Pentateuch (see Pardee 2002: 223–41).

The following survey of Canaanite backgrounds to the Psalms begins with some observations about poetic style, various literary types or genres, and type-scenes. Each of these also shows considerable content shared by the Ugaritic texts and the Psalms.

POETIC PARALLELISM

The Canaanite background of the Psalms may be recognized in their poetic style.⁶ As in biblical poetry, the chief formal characteristic of Canaanite verse is the use of parallelism, a characteristic not lost in translation. In parallelistic verse, a single idea is expressed in units of two or three lines (a bicolon or a tricolon) by repetition, synonyms, or sometimes antonyms, as seen in the following lines from the Ugaritic Baal Cycle (KTU 1.2 IV 7–10; SAC 114):

Let me tell you, Prince Baal,
let me repeat, Rider on the Clouds:
Now, your enemy, Baal,
now you will kill your enemy,
now you will annihilate your foe.
You will take your eternal kingship,
your dominion forever and ever.

These units consist of a tricolon framed by two bicola; each unit has one thought developed by repetitive and synonymous parallelism. Not only the lines' poetic technique but also their content are familiar from the Psalms:

For your enemies, O LORD,
for your enemies shall perish,
all evildoers shall be scattered. (92:10[9])

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations. (145:13)

As these two verses suggest, parallelism is broadly shared by the poetry of the Ugaritic texts and the Psalms. In addition, the Psalms bear the freight of old traditional motifs that are also at home in Ugaritic literature: divine victory over enemies and divine kingship. In the case of Psalm 92: [10] 9, this traditional image has been applied to "evil-doers" and not simply to enemy combatants.

GENRES

The literary types of the Psalms may be divided into two basic categories: (i) prayer (involving a request made of God), which includes basic prayer, psalms of trust, and laments; and (ii) praise (extolling God in general or glorifying God for what God has provided), expressed most notably in hymns but also in psalms of thanksgiving and psalms of instruction.⁷ The Ugaritic texts contain one clear self-standing example of prayer, KTU 1.119.26–36.⁸ This prayer asks for the help of the god Baal, in this case for protection against an enemy that might attack the city walls. Enemies are often

a concern in laments in the Psalms. A genre of the Psalms related to prayer, namely psalms of trust, includes one example that envisions the sort of concern envisioned in KTU 1.119.26–36. The expression of confidence in Psalm 27 describes Yahweh as a source of confidence against enemies that encamp against the speaker (v. 3). Similarly, hymns focusing on the city of Jerusalem praise Yahweh for protection of the city against enemies (Pss. 46:6[5]; 48:4[3]). KTU 1.119.26–36 also vows an offering to the god in the form of sacrifices (cf. vows sometimes expressed in conjunction with offerings: Pss. 22:26[25]; 50:14; 56:13[12], 61:6[5]; 9[8], 65:2[1]; 66:13; 76:12[11]; 116:14 = 18; 132:2), to be made after “going up” to the temple of Baal (cf. Ps. 24:3; note also the procession in 48:13–15[12–14]). This one Ugaritic prayer evokes a traditional praxis of prayer, vows, and sacrifice that also lies at the heart of the Psalms and temple worship.

Other traditional forms of prayer are embedded with Ugaritic literary texts, such as requests for blessing, whether from a god (KTU 1.17 I 23–24; SAC 35; see also KTU 1.108.18–27) or from another human being (KTU 1.19 IV 32–33, SAC 54; cf. Gen. 48:15–16, 20). Divine blessing is likewise a staple of the Psalms (5:13[12]; 28:9; 29:11; 45:3[2]; 67:7–8[6–7]; 72:17; 107:38; 109:28; 115:12–13, 15; 128:5; 134:3; 147:13). The lament genre in the Psalms, an extended form of prayer that includes a complaint stating what the speaker lacks, can also be found embedded in the Ugaritic literary contexts (see Pardee 2012: 107). In the Baal Cycle, for example, the god Baal laments that he has no house like his brethren (KTU 1.3 IV 46–53, SAC 123; KTU 1.4 I 4–18, SAC 126; KTU 1.4 IV 50–57, SAC 131), and Aqhat describes the lament of the hero Danil that he has no son like his kin (KTU 1.17 I 16–22, SAC 35). Parenthetically, this Danil is thought to be the Canaanite antecedent to the figure of Daniel mentioned in Ezek. 14:14, 20 and 28:3 (and the namesake of Daniel in the biblical book named after him). The children of King Kirta lament their father’s life-threatening illness (KTU 1.16 I 12–23, SAC 87–88; KTU 1.16 II 33–49, SAC 89–90), an occasional source of lament also in the Psalter (6:3[2]; 38:4[3], 6[5]; 41:4–5[3–4]).

Praise of the deity can be found in the Ugaritic texts, as in the Psalter, again in narrative contexts. As noted above, both Psalms 92 and 145 praise Yahweh much as Kothar wa-Hasis celebrates Baal. Similarly, in two other passages from the Baal Cycle (KTU 1.3 V 30–33, SAC 124; KTU 1.4 IV 41–44, SAC 131), the goddesses Anat and Athirat (biblical Asherah) offer praise to the god El for his wisdom and then to Baal for his kingship:

Your decree is wise, El,
Your wisdom is eternal,
A lucky life is your decree.
But Baal the Conqueror is our king,
Our judge higher than all.

God’s wisdom is likewise praised in Psalm 104:24, and praise for Yahweh’s kingship is common in the Psalter (e.g., Psalms 29, 48, 93, 96, 97, 99; Brettler 1989).

A Ugaritic hymn to ‘Athtart (biblical Astarte) contains features attested in some psalms (Pardee 2007: 27–39; Lewis 2011: 226–27):

The name of 'Athtart let my voice sing,
 may I praise the name of the lion.
 O name, may you be victorious over . . .
 may you (or, she) shut the jaw of El's attackers.
 A great panther is 'Athtart,
 a great panther that pounces.

This hymnic piece consists of three parallel bicola. The combination of the parallel verbs to sing and praise in the first bicolon is regular in biblical psalms (e.g., 101:1; 104:33; cf. 18:49; Pardee 2012: 82–83). Just as praise of 'Athtart's name marks the first bicolon of her hymn, so praise of Yahweh's name serves in the opening of Psalm 29: "Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name." Praise of the divine name is an important feature in the frame of Psalm 8 (Ps. 8:2[1] = 8:10[9]) and for the closing of Psalm 18 (in v. 50[49]). Similarly, blessing of the divine name opens Psalm 103. In the Ugaritic hymn, the goddess is compared to a lion and a panther. While such an image for Yahweh can be found outside of the Psalter (Hos. 13:8), this biblical book uses lion imagery for enemies who attack the speaker (e.g., Pss. 7:3[2], 10:9; 17:12; 22:14[13], 22[21]).

Another form of praise in both bodies of literature is what may be broadly called love poetry. The story of King Kirta praises the beauty of a royal daughter whom the hero seeks as a bride (KTU 1.14 III 41–44, SAC 77). In the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, the goddess Anat sings of the love of Mighty Baal and his three women (KTU 1.3 III 4–8, SAC 118–19). While Kirta has its longest biblical comparison in the Song of Songs with its praise of the two lovers (Pardee 2012: 113–15), Psalm 45 is a wedding song offering best wishes to the royal bride and groom. Praises of the royal groom (vv. 3–10[2–9]) include his handsomeness (v. 3[2]); praise of his royal bride (vv. 11–16[10–15]) mentions her beauty (v. 12[11]), as well as her attractive clothing (vv. 14–15[13–14]). One element in the king's praise in Psalm 45:7[6] involves the address to him as "O God," reflecting his status as a minor divinity, not unlike the status of King Kirta himself as "El's son" (KTU 1.16 I 10, SAC 87), or the king as "my son," as Yahweh calls the monarch (Ps. 2:7). Praise of the Israelite king expresses the traditional royal ideology of the king as the son of the god, which would figure later in Christian understandings of Jesus as the "Son of God."⁹ Finally, the closing of Psalm 45 includes a prediction of offspring (in v. 17[16]), much like the wedding blessing issued by El to Kirta about the many children that his bride will bear to him (KTU 1.15 II 21–28, SAC 83).¹⁰

The psalms reflect any number of experienced problems, such as enemies and illness, as seen also in the Ugaritic texts. In both corpora, recourse to divine help in the form of prayer, blessing, and vows are evident. There are some further Canaanite backgrounds to the situations in the Psalms that deserve mention. Psalm 16 complains of those who "choose another god" with "their drink offerings of blood" (v. 4). These may belong to "the holy ones" (v. 3). The cultic practice of blood libations has been thought to be associated with devotion to deceased ancestors, a concern also attested in various ways in the Ugaritic texts (Spronk 1986: 249, 334–37; cf. Lewis 1989: 166). Accordingly, "the holy ones in the land" (literally, "earth") may refer to the dead in the earth or underworld (van der Toorn 1996: 210). These may compare with "the gods" and "the dead" in parallelism

in KTU 1.6 VI 45 (SAC 152), who may participate in food and wine, as mentioned in the preceding line.

TYPE-SCENES

Although the Psalms largely consist of prayer and praise, they also contain classic type-scenes attested in the Ugaritic texts. One well-known scene in both the Psalms and the Ugaritic texts is the divine council. In KTU 1.2 I (SAC 111–13), El presides over this meeting of “the Assembly in council,” as it is called, when the messengers of the god Sea arrive and demand that the council surrender the god Baal. El then makes his judgment and decides to meet their demands. The Psalms contain rather dramatic examples of a divine assembly scene in Psalms 82 and 89 (esp. vv. 5–7; cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19; Isa. 6; Dan. 7; cf. “the seat of the gods” in Ezek. 28:2). Psalm 82 is a particularly notable case. According to verse 1: “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.” According to verses 2–7, God indicts the other gods¹¹ for failing to maintain traditional standards of justice (commonly involving care for the poor and needy as well as the orphan and the widow; see Pss. 33:5; 37:28; 68:6–7[5–6]; 74:21; 99:4; 89:16[15] = 97:2; 111:7). This is a standard of justice expected of human kings in Ugaritic tradition (KTU 1.16 VI 45–50, SAC 95) and biblical thinking (Ps. 72:4). So, in Psalm 82:6–7, God declares these divine figures not as gods but as mortals. The psalm closes in verse 8 with a request made to God to judge the earth, “for all the nations belong to you.”

Not only is the type-scene evident in both KTU 1.2 and Psalm 82, even the divine actors are comparable. The presider over the divine council is the god El in the Ugaritic example, while “the divine council” in verse 1 is called more literally, “the council of El.” This psalm seems to reflect an Israelite adaptation of the classic Canaanite scene of the assembly of the gods headed by El, used here—perhaps ironically—to condemn other gods. From this type-scene with its Canaanite background, this discussion may move to other pronounced examples of worldview shared by the Ugaritic texts and the Psalter. Psalm 29 is highly marked by Canaanite features.

THE CANAANITE BACKGROUND OF PSALM 29

In the preceding section, the hymnic motif of praising the divine name was discussed for the Ugaritic texts and the Psalter, including Psalm 29:2. Of all the Psalms, Psalm 29 shows a strong Canaanite background (Handy 2009; especially Pardee 2009: 115–25). The psalm opens with a call on “heavenly beings” (v. 1) to praise Yahweh. These designate the deities in divine council in Ugaritic (e.g., KTU 1.4 II 14, SAC 128: “the gods”; see also KTU 1.17 VI 29, SAC 41: “the sons of El”). Psalm 29 then depicts Yahweh as a warrior god in a storm moving from west to east. The divine “voice” thunders over the waters,

evidently with the Mediterranean Sea in view (vv. 3–4). The picture here recalls Baal's theophanic "voice" issued against his enemies (KTU 1.4 VII 25–37, SAC 137) as well as his victory over the god Sea (KTU 1.2 IV, SAC 114–15). Then the divine "voice" breaks the cedars of Lebanon (v. 5) and strikes the mountains of the Lebanon and Siryan (in v. 6). Lebanon and Siryan appear here in poetic parallelism (as in Ugaritic):

He [the Lord] makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The storm of Yahweh in Psalm 29 also creates lightning ("flames of fire" in v. 7). Then Yahweh's storm-theophany "shakes the wilderness of Kadesh" (v. 8), a place with virtually the same name in Ugaritic (KTU 1.23.65; SAC 165: "holy desert"). Even if these are two different places with the same name, they point to a shared tradition. Then Yahweh's theophany is witnessed by people in "his temple" (v. 9). The psalm closes with Yahweh enthroned as king "over the flood" (v. 10) and with the wish that Yahweh will give strength and blessing to his people (v. 11).

Psalm 29's depiction of Yahweh as a storm-god, along with specific geographical references, suggests a Canaanite background. The Lebanon and Siryan mountain ranges named in both the Ugaritic Baal Cycle and Psalm 29 run roughly parallel to the Mediterranean coast of Phoenicia north of Israel. Dennis Pardee states: "Beyond the simple appropriation of one or two individual characteristics of Baal to Yahweh, however, Psalm 29 seems to reflect a familiarity with a significant portion of the Baal story as it is known from the Ugaritic texts" (2009: 121; see also 2005: 153–81; 2012: 96–101).

Some scholars, most notably H. L. Ginsberg, proposed that based on four Ugaritic parallels Psalm 29 originally was an adaptation of a Phoenician hymn (1938: 472–76). First, the best parallels for the warrior storm-god in Psalm 29 are not in the Bible but in various Canaanite sources or in Egyptian sources that can be shown to be influenced by Canaanite tradition. Second, the place-names in Psalm 29 favor a Phoenician setting. The combination of Lebanon and Siryan appears nowhere else in the Psalms (Siryan appears elsewhere only in Deut. 3:9). Third, the attestation of the so-called enclitic *mem* in v. 6 suggests "north Canaanite" grammar (although this feature would come to be recognized elsewhere in biblical poetry). Fourth, Yahweh's enthronement in v. 10 is paralleled by a passage that describes Baal's enthronement on his throne (KTU 1.6 VI 33–35, SAC 152). Aloysius Fitzgerald attempted to strengthen Ginsberg's proposal in noting that replacing the name of Yahweh with the name of Baal in Psalm 29 strongly increases its alliteration (1974: 61–63). While Ginsberg's view was accepted for decades, it has been challenged. Pardee suggests that the psalm was not originally Canaanite but was composed by an Israelite author to counter the claims made about Baal by Canaanites. Whether the psalm was an Israelite adaptation of a Phoenician composition, in line with Ginsberg's theory, or an Israelite composition drawing heavily on Canaanite tradition, *pace* Pardee, it is clear that Psalm 29 manifests a strong Canaanite background.

A further question is which Canaanite tradition Psalm 29 drew on. Ginsberg suggested Phoenician influence during the monarchy. For Pardee the author of Psalm 29

shows familiarity with the Ugaritic sources. While Ugaritic influence is possible, there are some reasons for locating the traditions in Phoenicia and not Ugarit. Unlike Psalm 29, the Baal Cycle depicts the progression of the god across Phoenicia. The Lebanon and Siryon in the Baal Cycle represent locations at considerable distance from the text's action at Mount Sapon in the kingdom of Ugarit, while in Psalm 29, its action includes the sanctuary (in v. 9) to the east of the Lebanon and Siryon.

So the psalm might be located against the background of religious traditions of Lebanon. Moreover, the motifs in Psalm 29 paralleled in the Ugaritic texts may not derive from Ugarit but could have come from the Lebanon. Baal of Lebanon is attested in a Phoenician inscription incised on a bronze bowl apparently from Cyprus (KAI 31).¹² Philo of Byblos reflects a tradition of his god transformed into a giant that named the mountain range "the Lebanon."¹³ In this passage, the Lebanon appears with Siryan (as the Anti-Lebanon), as in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle and Psalm 29:6. The mythology of Baal Lebanon made its way independently to Ugarit and Psalm 29 (whether the mythology of Baal Lebanon shared a great deal with Baal Sapun's traditional lore at Ugarit and whether the story of Baal Sapun at Ugarit influenced the mythology of Baal Lebanon, or vice-versa). In any event, the religious traditions of the Lebanon region itself, and not Ugarit, may be the specific Canaanite backdrop to Psalm 29.

THE CANAANITE MYTHOLOGICAL TEMPLATE IN THE PSALMS

The discussion of Psalm 82 above points to the assimilation of Canaanite tradition about El in the divine council, much as Psalm 29 is indicative of the adaptation of Canaanite tradition about Baal to Yahweh. These two psalms are remarkable for how close they seem to stand to their Canaanite forebears. Psalm 68 would also fall into this category (note the many references below to this psalm). By contrast, many other psalms show a broader thematic template for Yahweh that also has an identifiable Canaanite background, which outside the Bible is best attested and elaborated in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle.

The first major part of this template consists of the warrior-god battling against cosmic enemies. The most notable enemy is Sea (KTU 1.2 IV), but Litan is also mentioned as one of Baal's foes (KTU 1.5 I 11–13, SAC 139). Sometimes Baal is envisioned as marching (see KTU 1.4 VII 7–14, SAC 136; cf. KTU 1.10 III 7); at other times he is represented as riding in his chariot into battle, as reflected in his title, "rider of the clouds" (e.g., KTU 1.2 IV 8, SAC 114). The second part of this template following Baal's defeat of his enemy is his palace on his holy mountain constructed of gold, silver, and the cedars of Lebanon. There he is enthroned as king and where he serves as divine host to his many divine siblings (KTU 1.4 VI–VII, SAC 134–37; see Jeremias 1965; Cross 1973: 147–77). Indeed, Baal says of himself: "I alone rule over the gods; I alone fatten gods and men; I alone satisfy earth's masses" (KTU 1.4 VII 49–52, SAC 137). The highpoint within this sequence

is marked by the god's theophany. After he opens the window in the clouds, he issues his "holy voice" (KTU 1.4 VII 27–35, SAC 137):

Then Baal opened a break in the clouds,
 Baal sounded his holy voice,
 Baal thundered from his lips . . .
 the earth's high places shook.

The third part of this template in the Baal Cycle turns to Baal's conflict with the god of Death (KTU 1.5–1.6). As this particular part of the template is less well attested apart from the Baal Cycle, it has been thought to represent an elaboration of the mythology of Death modeled on the template's first part. Baal's engagement with Death seems to mythologize the desiccating east wind (cf. Hos. 13:14),¹⁴ just as Baal's conflict with Sea mythologizes the rain-bearing west wind (cf. Psalm 29) and the completion of Baal's palace mythologizes the coming of the rains. These parts of the basic template presented in the Baal Cycle all evoke the meteorological transition during the late-summer/early fall when the east wind desists, replaced by the west wind and the arrival of the early autumn rains.¹⁵ An elaboration of this template involves the role of Anat as warrior goddess who battles against several of the cosmic enemies, including Sea, the Dragon, and the Twisty Serpent, also called the seven-headed monster (KTU 1.3 III 38–42, SAC 120). The goddess also comes to the aid of Baal when she decimates Death (KTU 1.6 II, SAC 147–48).

While the Psalms lack the extensive mythological narrative that the Baal Cycle constitutes, they contain mythological allusions to Yahweh's divine enemies. Sea, the dragons, and Leviathan are prominent in Ps. 74:13–14:

You divided the sea by your might;
 You broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.
 You crushed the heads of Leviathan. . . .

The three enemies here correspond to Ugaritic Sea, battled by both Baal and Anat (cf. Pss. 18:17[16]; 68:23[22]; 89:10[9]); Anat's enemy, the Dragon (see Ps. 148:7; cf. Job 7:12; Isa. 27:1; 51:19); and Baal's enemy, Litan. It is interesting to note that Psalm 74 evokes praise of Yahweh for victories over these old, divine enemies while lamenting Jerusalem's condition at the hands of its earthly enemies. In the ancient worldview, the divine king in heaven parallels the earthly human king, the heavenly palace of the god matches his earthly temple, and their enemies likewise correspond (see Psalms 2 and 89). Thus the praise of Yahweh for his ancient victories is part of the psalmist's plea to help against comparable human enemies on earth. The mythology of divine battle (18:8–16[7–15]) may serve as a way to represent divine aid for the king (vv. 17–20[16–19]) when he is engaged in battle (vv. 32–51[31–50]). When the god goes forth for battle, sometimes he marches (68:8[7]; cf. 2 Sam. 5:24); at other times he rides his chariot on the clouds (Pss. 18:11[10]; 68:5[4], 18[17], 34[33]; 104:3). Echoes of Anat's bloody battle on the earth in the Baal Cycle (KTU 1.3 II, SAC 117–18) may be heard in the imagery of Yahweh's battle: "you

may bathe your feet in blood” (Ps. 68:24[23]).¹⁶ This military imagery is turned into a moral expression: “they will bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked” (58:12[11]).

The victory of the warrior-god leads to the construction of his new heavenly palace and his enthronement. In this regard, Jerusalem (also called Zion in the Psalms) represents God’s “holy habitation” (Ps. 46:5[4]; cf. 68:18[17]), the god’s “holy mountain” (Pss. 48:3[2]; 99:9; cf. 68:17[16]) and the god’s temple as his palace on earth (48:10[9]; 65:4; Miller 2010: 218–40). This temple is famously built with cedar (cleverly used by 92:13–14[12–13]; cf. 104:16). In this sacred place Yahweh is enthroned (47:9[8]; 99:1; cf. 65:3[2]) and is manifest (see 50:2–3), sometimes by “his voice” (46:7[6]; see Ps. 29 above).¹⁷ Yahweh’s enthronement results in rain (see 68:7–10), and his enemies quake at his presence (99:1). This sacred site is viewed as the center of the world, impervious to opposition from enemy nations (Psalm 2) and the divine source of the earth’s fertility (65:9–13; Clifford 1972: 142–53). Here the divine warrior king offers to Israelites “the abundance of your house” and “drink of the river of your delights” (36:9[8]); the word for “delights” apparently plays on the word Eden, suggesting that the temple of the divine King is analogous to paradise.

There is an allusion to the Canaanite background to this part of the temple in Psalm 48:3[2], which identifies Zion with Sapon (this point is obscured in the NRSV translation: “Mount Zion, in the far north”). Psalm 48 may contain a further Canaanite mythological element. It has been suggested further that a Canaanite background informs the biblical personification of Jerusalem as “young woman” and “daughter.” The “towns (literally, daughters) of Judah” following Mount Zion in Psalm 48:12[11] is suggestive of some sort of female imagery for Jerusalem as mother; this, however, may not involve a Canaanite background of the city as queen or goddess as the proposal is sometimes made.¹⁸

The third part of the template as seen in the Baal Cycle involves the mythology of Baal’s conflict with Death and the underworld. There is some mythology of Death in the Psalms (*DDD* 598–603), but unlike the Baal-Mot conflict in the Baal Cycle, it is not represented as a matter of conflict between Yahweh and Death personified. Still some imagery for Death in the Psalms (141:7; cf. Isa. 5:14; Hab. 2:5; Prov. 1:12; 27:20; 30:15–16) echoes the traditional language found in the Baal Cycle: “One lip to the earth, one lip to the heavens; . . . his tongue to the stars. Baal must enter inside him; he must go down into his mouth” (KTU 1.5 II 2–5, *SAC* 141; cf. KTU 1.23.61–63, *SAC* 165). This mythic image of the cosmic enemy’s ravenous mouth is transferred to descriptions of human enemies (Ps. 73:9; cf. Isa 9:19). Another image of Death represents him as a shepherd leading people to the underworld (Ps. 49:15[14]); this metaphor has been read in light of the warning not to get too close to Death so that he not take “like a lamb in his mouth” (KTU 1.4 VIII 14–20, *SAC* 138). The Psalter shows considerable underworld imagery that is paralleled in the Baal-Mot section of the Baal Cycle. One example from this vast subject (Tromp 1969) may illustrate: the Pit is a metaphor for the underworld (e.g., KTU 1.4 VIII 12, *SAC* 138; Ps 88:5[4]), an image that may have been drawn from pit burials.

While Canaanite material serves as background for many aspects of the Psalms, they also reflect a number of developments, such as the older motif of conflict with cosmic

enemies transmuted into conflict with evil or evildoers, one of the Psalter's central concerns. And there are other developments. First, a psalm may reflect the adaptation of an older Canaanite element. For example, the reference to God in Psalm 68:5[4] as one "who rides upon the clouds" (NRSV, NJPS) is thought to be a direct reflection of Baal's title, "rider of the clouds" (e.g., KTU 1.2 IV 8, SAC 114). However, the Hebrew text may be read, "rider in the deserts," perhaps a modification of the title reflecting Israel's exodus-wilderness traditions. In this case, a traditional Canaanite element has been interpreted in light of one of Israel's non-Canaanite traditions.

Second, the Psalms express an inner-Israelite religious innovation that constructed the separation of Yahweh from Death and his underworld realm (Pss. 6:7[6]; 88:13[12]; 115:17; Lewis 1989: 170), in contrast to Baal's association with revered ancestral spirits (cf. "the Rephaim of Baal" in KTU 1.22 I 8, SAC 62). As a corollary, the Psalms show a rejection of devotion to the dead as traditionally practiced in ancient Israel (see Psalm 16 discussed above), also seen in the Ugaritic texts (e.g., a royal version of such devotion in KTU 1.161). The Psalms represent the Israelite deity as the God of the living and as the living God (Feldmeier and Spieckermann 2011).

Third, the polytheistic character of the old template gives way to a rather different picture of divinity in the Psalms. Without major divine competitors, Yahweh seems to reflect a convergence of images associated with other deities. The God of Israel displays specific language and terms associated with El, Baal, and even Anat, even as Yahweh shows his own ancient mythology involving his southern sanctuary beyond Canaan (even if this non-Canaanite mythology of Yahweh's may be said to parallel Baal's). With its rejection of Baal, its assimilation of El to Yahweh, and its silence about Asherah (or her symbol, the asherah), the Psalms also manifest a differentiation of Israel's own older Canaanite heritage, which would eventually become normative in Jerusalem's temple worship.¹⁹ Indeed, the notion that the other deities are nothing but idols is one of the Psalter's innovative pieces of non-Canaanite mythology (115:4–8; 135:15–18; Levitow 2008: 72–85).

NOTES

1. Yon 2006; Watson and Wyatt 1999.
2. Cf. Isa. 27:1; Job 3:8; 40:25.
3. Ginsberg 1945: 52.
4. For different formulations of this view, see SAC 3; Greenstein 2010: 48–53; Pardee 2012: 79–80; Parker 1989: 3–4; Smith 2007: 5–29.
5. For the El Amarna letters, see Moran 1992. For a convenient collection of West Semitic inscriptions, see Ahituv 2008; cf. Gibson 1971–1982. For Philo of Byblos, see Attridge and Oden 1981.
6. On poetic parallelism in the Psalms, see the contribution to this volume by Dobbs-Allsopp. For detailed comparison of Ugaritic and biblical poetry, see Watson 1984, 1994. For a superb discussion of parallelism and formulas in Ugaritic poetic narrative, see Parker 1989: 7–59.
7. For the different types of Psalms, see the essay of Bellinger in this volume. For the comparison of literary forms in the Ugaritic texts and the Psalter, see also Pardee 2012: 107–20.
8. For a handy edition, see Pardee 2002: 149–50.

9. For the Canaanite background to Israelite kingship as well as its trajectories into the New Testament, see Collins and Collins 2008.
10. Parker 1989: 88–89, 96, 98, also comparing the royal blessing in Ps. 72:17.
11. For a divine council scene presenting one god denouncing another, see also Nissinen 2003: 26–27. For comparison with Psalm 82, see Smith 2008: 136–39.
12. Baumgarten 1971: 154. For a convenient translation, see Gibson 1971–1982: 3.67–68. Greek Zeus Labranios known from Cyprus and the Lebanese Adad attested in a Syrian temple in Rome are thought to be Baal of Lebanon; see Lipiński 1995: 306–308.
13. Baumgarten 1971: 154. See Attridge and Oden 1981: 42–43 for the text.
14. Fitzgerald 2002: 26.
15. Fitzgerald's (2002) study is critical for understanding the meteorological imagery in the Psalms. As for such imagery in the Baal Cycle, see Smith 1994: 97–114; cf. de Moor 1971.
16. Smith 1995: 368–86; 2002: 101–107. Cf. the bloody imagery in the Edomite oracles in Isa. 34 and 63:1–6.
17. See the heavenly window in Gen. 7:11; 8:2; 2 Kgs. 7:2, 19; Isa. 24:18; Mal. 3:10.
18. Fitzgerald 1972: 403–16; 1975: 167–83. Cf. Hermisson 1997: 19–39; Day 1995: 283–302. For a constructive response, see Maier 2008: 60–93, esp. 63–64.
19. For “convergence” and “differentiation,” see Smith 2002: 7–11.

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CHAPTER 4

EGYPTIAN BACKGROUNDS TO THE PSALMS¹

BERND U. SCHIPPER

THE quest for the Egyptian background of the Psalms dates back to the first decade of the twentieth century. This quest had a forerunner in the investigation of possible parallels between the newly discovered Egyptian literature and the Hebrew Bible. Since the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs by Jean François Champollion in 1822, many parts of the Hebrew Bible such as the five books of the Torah, the Book of Kings, love poetry, and sapiential literature, were compared to Egyptian texts (Gunkel 1909; Williams 1975: 231–52).

The Psalms in particular came into focus due to an archaeological discovery. During the 1884 excavations at Tell El-Amarna, the tomb of a courtier by the name of Ay was discovered.² On the Western wall of this tomb a hymn to the god Aten is engraved. The text begins at the top of the wall and runs over thirteen columns. This “Great Hymn to the Aten” was published in 1903 and subsequently made available to a wider audience by the Chicago Egyptologist James H. Breasted in 1906 (1906: 371–74). Breasted was also the first to point to the similarities of this hymn and Psalm 104. Even though scholarship has come to realize that these similarities are limited to only a small passage from Psalm 104 (i.e., vv. 20–30), the Great Hymn to the Aten remains the only Egyptian text that seems to have influenced a biblical psalm directly (Assmann 1991: 248).

In the more than one hundred years since Breasted’s research, scholarship has been able to show that the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible are indeed acquainted with—or better, close to—Egyptian beliefs (Keel 1997; Janowski 2013). In the following I take this common ground as my starting point to investigate the relationship between Psalm 104 and the Great Hymn to the Aten. A statement of the British Egyptologist Alyward M. Blackman may serve as a motto here. In his 1926 contribution to a handbook *The Psalmist*, Blackman stated in regard to the hymns of the 19th dynasty from Egypt:

[These] hymns are imbued with exactly the same spirit as many of the Hebrew Psalms, a spirit that displays itself in a belief in God’s justice, a trust in Him in time of

trouble, a consciousness of sin, a personal love for Him, a desire for what my almost be termed familiar intercourse with Him, and in the feeling that He loves the humble, that indeed only the possessor of a humble and loving heart can approach Him. In these hymns the sun-god appears as the good herdsman and as the judge of the poor, two rôles frequently assigned to Jahveh in the Psalms (Blackman 1926: 182).

Blackman's statement renames the context in which the Egyptian background of the Psalms needs to be discussed. It is true that many statements in the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible bear close resemblances to the Egyptian texts. These resemblances, however, are seldom the result of direct literary dependence. Rather, they have to be seen as a common treasure of motifs that originate as part of the ancient Near Eastern conception of the world. Here, a second point has to be added: Blackman stressed that it is impossible to assume that hymns of the Ramesside Period did not continue to be known after the end of the New Kingdom (1926: 187). During Blackman's time, however, one lacked the sources to investigate the further history of the literary genre and the motifs used. Scholarship has since filled this gap as we now have available a whole series of texts from the first millennium BCE. In the course of this essay I make use of these texts wherever possible, for they stem from a period in which we find direct cultural contacts between "Israel" and Egypt (Schipper 2012).

THE PSALMS AND EGYPTIAN RELIGION

To understand the similarities between Egyptian texts and the Psalms, it is necessary to recall the basic parameters of Egyptian religion. Over the course of three thousand years, Egyptian religion was basically determined by three motifs: (i) the principle of justice (Ma'at), (ii) the connection of the divinity with the sun, and (iii) the orientation toward the afterlife expressed by elaborate speculations about the realm of the dead.

Egyptian religion is determined by the thought that justice, Ma'at in Egyptian, holds the world together in its inmost folds (Assmann 2006). It is the connection of act and consequence that can be summarized as follows: "The reward of an acting person is that someone acts for him. A god regards this as Ma'at" (Assmann 2006: 65). Ma'at determines both the interactions between humans and the interactions between humans and god. If Ma'at no longer applies, Isfet (i.e., lie and chaos) rules. This is already stressed in the Prophecy of Neferti from the 12th dynasty and is developed widely in the political prophecies of the Ptolemaic Period (Blasius and Schipper 2002). The texts are fuelled by a dualism between a time when Ma'at applies and a time where it does not apply. The latter is the time of chaos, the former a period salvation. Here, in Egyptian thought the sun-god himself is linked to Ma'at. It is he who guarantees Ma'at.

Especially in the solar theology of the New Kingdom this idea was widely embellished (Assmann 1995). This theology consists of the main idea that Ma'at has to be

implemented as world order, and this happens—among other things—by overcoming the enemies. In the divine realm this overcoming is symbolized by the killing of the enemy god Apopis at the hand of the sun-god. Conversely, in the human realm it is enforced when Pharaoh smites his enemies. This thought is often developed in the short antithesis between Pharaoh as guarantor of justice (Ma'at) and the enemies as representatives of chaos (Isfet). In Egyptian iconography, the motif “Pharaoh smites his enemies” (Hall 1986) is attested from the beginnings of Egyptian history until the late period. It does not only represent the killing of (actual) enemies; it also occasions world-sustaining action. As representative of the world order (Ma'at), Pharaoh defeats the enemies, who represent chaos. The notion of overcoming chaos (Isfet) can be represented in the iconography in a variety of ways, inter alia in the well-known motif of the “Lord of the animals” identified by Keel and Uehlinger (1998: 162, 277). Here, animals such as the crocodile, snakes, or lions are much more than dangerous beasts; they symbolize nothing less than the forces of chaos, and thus to subdue these animals—be it by a god or by Pharaoh (e.g., Horus against crocodiles; Keel and Uehlinger 1998:116–117)—is to maintain the world, similar to the killing of enemies.

The Egyptian hymns, whose genre lies closest to the biblical psalms, rest upon this basic principle of Egyptian religion. They feature, however, an important detail known since the beginning of Egyptian history: the significance of the sun and its connection to divinity. Already during the age of the Pyramids, we know of the existence of solar sanctuaries, and the pyramids themselves reflected the significance of the sun (Pyr 573; Foster 1995: 31–32). The hymns of the New Kingdom, then, developed a fully developed theology of the sun with Amun-Re as its center (Assmann 1995). Since the work of Breasted, these texts are often connected to the phenomenon of personal piety, texts that address the relationship between the individual and his or her god. As far as the history of religion is concerned, we see a development whereby the individual's relationship to Pharaoh is now transferred to the divinity (Schipper 1998). This development started in the autobiographies of the Old Kingdom and moved via the loyal teaching of the Middle and New Kingdoms. The royal hymn of Ramesses III shows this quite clearly (Assmann 2006: 231):

I have kept the whole country alive,
 foreigners, subjects, *p^c.t*-people and *hnmmt*-people,
 men and women.
 I saved anyone from his crime, I gave him air (to breathe);
 I saved him from the strong one who suppressed him.
 I placed everyone in his place in his village
 I revived the others in the hall of the netherworld.

The text stresses Pharaoh's life-sustaining actions, his significance for human interaction, and his life-giving work in the netherworld (Assmann 2006: 231). The hymns of personal piety take up this train of thought and transfer it to the sun-god. Thus we

read, for example, in a hymn to Amun-Re (pChester Beatty IV rto. 11:8-12:13 = Assmann 1999: 437, No 195)

Strophe II

282 [How beautiful you are,] when you rise,
 283 Re, my Lord!
 284 Creator, who (also) created me and who provides for me,
 285 who turns to me when I call!
 286 May you deliver (me) from him [...]
 287 Who turns his heart to the one who says, why?
 288 the shepherd in front of whom one is placed,
 289 until one reaches the dwelling.

Strophe IV

297 How beautiful you are when you rise,
 298 Re, you, the great shepherd!
 299 Come all, all you heroes!
 300 Behold you have spent the day to graze with him.
 301 He has banished all evil,
 302 when he dwells in peace in his land of light;
 303 your countries [...]

Even at a first glance it becomes apparent that we have a series of motifs that also appear in the Psalms: God hears the call of the praying person, delivers him, acts as a good shepherd, and conquers the enemies (evil).

The thought that god hearkens to the call of the praying person is a fundamental idea of Egyptian hymns (Guglielmi 1991). God—the sun-god in Egyptian hymns—defends the petitioner and overpowers the enemies. Against the background of the Egyptian theology of the sun, it becomes clear that the antagonism of light and darkness does not simply represent a phenomenon of nature but symbolizes the antagonism of the acts of the sun-god and his enemies.

This basic principle, too, determines the conception of the netherworld. It is a distinctive feature of Egyptian religion that the West—corresponding to the course of the sun—is seen as the realm of the dead. The sun-god, sitting in a barque, crosses this realm in the twelve hours of night. Here, he has again to defend himself against his enemies. At the same time he bestows light upon the dead as a passage from a hymn from the 26th dynasty (656–525 BCE) exemplifies (Knigge 2006: 245):

Hail, chief of the gods,
 who lights up the underworld with his beauty

...

Hail to the one who is mightier than all gods,
 who appears in heaven and rules in the netherworld.

...

Hail to the one who is amongst the gods and judges the necropolis.

The judging of the god in the necropolis refers to the judgement of the dead, “the big test” as it is called in Egyptian texts. Here the heart of the dead person is balanced against Ma’at. Connected to this act are statements of the acts of the dead person. This is necessary because this judgment at the threshold of the netherworld also serves as a review of an individual’s life and the assessment of this life using specific rules of conduct (Taylor 2001). This relation is illustrated in the Judgment of the Dead from Theban Tomb 296 (see Figure 4.1).

In Egyptian hymns these three basic principles—(i) Ma’at and its connection to god and Pharaoh, (ii) the sun and its salvific acts, and (iii) the netherworld—are connected to the fate of the individual. The praying person addresses the god himself. This form of a direct relationship to a god—the personal piety—is the reason why these hymns were not only handed down on Papyri, thus constituting a literature, but also became elements and motifs on funeral stelae and other carriers of texts. In the following I provide a list of motifs in Table 4.1 that are also found in the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible. Here—according to the purpose of the essay—I quote, if possible, texts from the 1st millennium BCE. Due to restrictions of space, the examples will be selective and the texts from the Hebrew Bible are not listed verbatim.

This overview shows that we have in fact one topic with several variations here as the variety of motifs arises from the above-mentioned basic parameters of Egyptian religion: Ma’at, the connection of the divinity with the sun, and the conception of the netherworld. In the hymns from the Ramesside period and the subsequent texts from the 1st millennium, this is tied to the idea of justice given by God. Following Bernd Janowski, we can state that closeness to God implies light and life for the human person, while distance from God means darkness and subsequently death (Janowski 2013: 67). Psalm 13 expresses this when it states that God “forgets” the psalmist (v. 2a), God “hides” his face from him (v. 2b), and the enemies exalt over him. The main difference from Egyptian texts is found in the concept of the netherworld. The Hebrew Bible does not embark on extensive speculations about the afterlife as does Egyptian religion. Accordingly, the netherworld is described as a place of silence (Pss. 94:17; 115:17; 30:13). In Egypt, by contrast, the underworld remains a place where the deity acts.

LITERARY DEPENDENCIES BETWEEN EGYPTIAN TEXTS AND HEBREW PSALMS

Against the background of the material discussed above, one has to be careful when postulating direct literary dependencies, for individual motifs are better explained by common ancient Near Eastern thought. When arguing for literary dependencies, we always have to ask whether a text displays a combination of motifs that are so characteristic that they point to a specific connection between two texts.

Naturally, Psalm 104 comes into focus here, the psalm that has long been seen as the prime example of direct literary dependency (Assmann 1996: 248). The limitations of

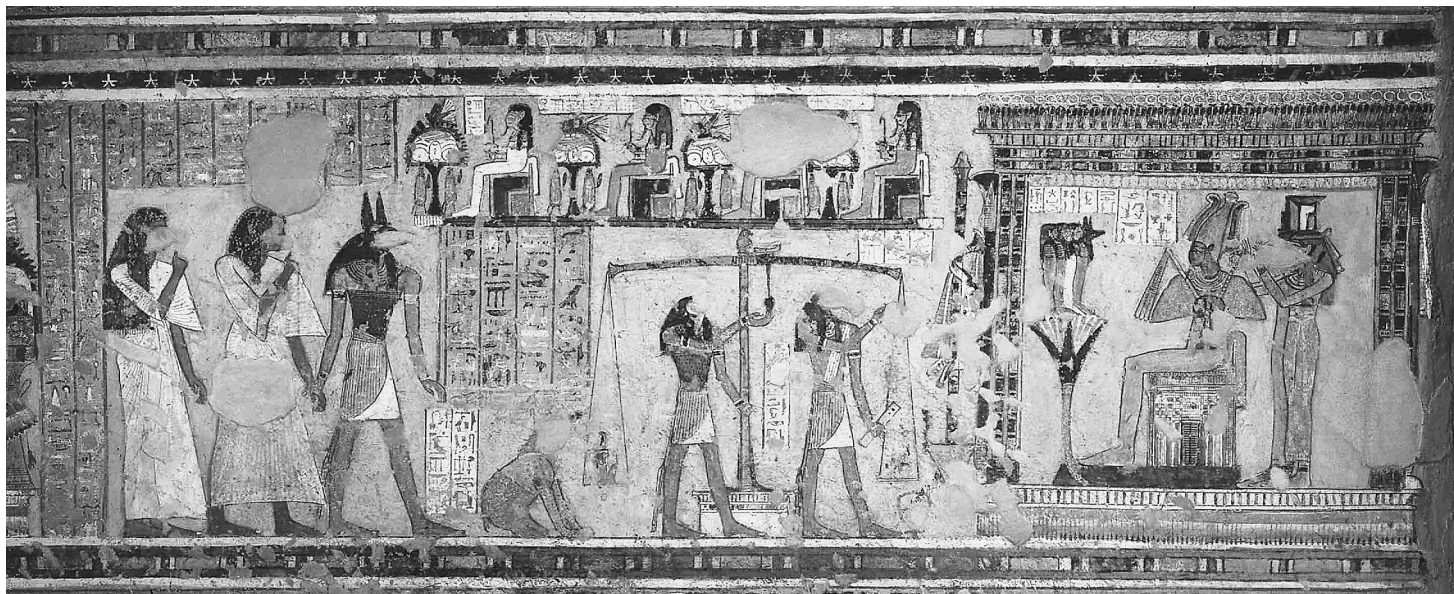


FIGURE 4.1 The Judgment of the Dead from Theban Tomb 296, reprinted with permission from the Egyptological Seminar of the University of Heidelberg.

Table 4.1 Motif Complexes 4.1.1, 4.1.2, and 4.1.3**Motif Complex 4.1.1: God as Creator—God and Creation**

The first motif complex is connected to the creation of the world. God is the creator of humans, animals, and the entire world, and his power is inherent in nature⁴

(a) Creation by word

The "Memphite Theology" (25th dynasty)	(54) It has evolved that heart and tongue have control of [all] limb[s], show[ing] that he is preeminent in every body and in every mouth—of all the gods, all people, all animals, and all crawling things that live—planning and governing everything he wishes.	Psalm 33:4–6, 8–9
Hallo I 2003: 22	(57) So were the male life-principles made and the female life-principles set in place—they who make all food and every offering—through that word that makes what is loved and what is hated.	Psalm 147:15, 18 Psalm 148:5

(b) Creation of plants and animals—formation of the human beings

Steophor of Monthemhat (25th dynasty)	(2) Who rises daily at the height of each hour	Psalm 148:10
Knigge 2006: 225	(3) to create the living, the wild beasts, the cattle, worms and all sorts of birds.	Psalm 139:13–16 Psalm 74:17
Hymn from the temple of Amun, El-Charga (Persian Period)	(15) He has built the human person, (16) cattle and wild animals, what flies, fishes and all worms.	Psalm 94:9 Psalm 22:10–12
Knigge 2006: 266	He has shaped bulls to make cows pregnant and he opened their womb to give birth. (18) He has colored their skin and turned their tongue away from sin. He has (19) opened their noses and lets their throats breathe; he has... the eyes [...]; the heart directs their hands. He lets birds fly in the airspace so that they float low at the command of his mouth. (20) He lets the Chedju-fishes dive in the waters and gives life to their body in the waters; [...] He has removed himself towards heaven and so he lets (his) creation see.	

(c) Chaoskampf / Creation of World

It is an ongoing discussion whether Egyptian creation myths know the motif of "Chaoskampf." Although this is not a main topic, some texts do combine the fight against Apopis with cosmic speculation (Schipper 2006: 200–201)

pLouvre 3292 (21st dynasty)	You have risen in your beautiful barque while sweeping along on the way of the never-ending time, doing the task that you fulfill in an unchangeable duration.	Psalm 74:13–16
Assmann 1999: 135	Your wrap-around snake (<i>Umringer-Schlange</i>) has bewitched your enemies, the might of your team is opposed to evil. The heart expands in the light of the success, the knife of the "Watchful" has butchered Apopis.	

(Continued)

Table 4.1. (Continued)

(d) The King as Image of God / divine begetting of Pharaoh

Pianchi-Stele	I am the King, image of god,	Psalm 2:7
(25th dynasty)	living likeness of Atum!	Psalm 8:6–7
Hallo 2003: 2. 42	Truly, you are born of god,	Cf. Psalm 72; 101; 110
	For we see (it) by the work of your arms.	Psalm 90:17
		Psalm 102:26
		Psalm 19:2

(e) The divine power of the nature—the power of the mountain

The Mountaintop (*t3 dhnt*) of the Theban necropolis was worshipped as a goddess and identified with Hathor or Meretseger.

Funerary Stele of	Beware the Mountaintop,	Psalm 89:13
Nefer-Abet	for there is a lion at the pinnacle,	Psalm 90:2
(20th dynasty / 13th	she strikes, like a wild lion strikes,	Psalm 97:4–5
century BCE)	and pursues whoever sins against her.	Psalm 104:32
Keel 1997: 20		Psalm 121:1–2

(f) The divine presence in the world

Leiden Hymn	His <i>ba</i> is in the sky,	Psalm 139:7–10
(pLeiden I 350 IV.16)	his body in the west,	
(19th dynasty)	his image in Southern Heliopolis,	
Ockinga 1984: 24–25	elevating his appearances.	
Allen 1988: 53	Cp. Urkunden IV 1401.17; 1525.4–7; 1617.4–6;	
	1628.6; 1807.16–18; 1813.9	

Motif Complex 4.1.2: God Acts for Humans and Animals

The second complex of motifs is connected to God acting for his creation. God provides for humans and animals, gives help, provides law, gives a long life, and delivers (even from the netherworld). He behaves like a good shepherd and takes action against enemies. These motifs are essentially connected with the concept of justice, justice established by god and Pharaoh. This motif implies, too, that God is the one who tests the heart at the netherworld's threshold (see above).

(a) God provides for humans and animals

This motif is also found in Psalm 104 and in the Great Hymn to the Aten (see Figure 4.3).

The Great Cairo Hymn	Who made the herbage [for] the herds,	Psalm 65:10–14
of Praise to Amun-Re	The tree of life for the sunfolk,	Psalm 67:7
(pCairo 58038)	Who made that on which the fish live [in] the river,	Psalm 68:10
(18th dynasty)	And the birds flying through heaven.	
Hallo 2003: 1.39	Who gave breath to the one in the egg,	
.	Who vivifies the son of the slug,	
	Who made that on which the gnat lives,	
	The worm and the flea likewise,	
	Who made the sustenance of the mice in [their]	
	holes,	
	Who vivifies the winged creatures in every tree.	

(Continued)

Motif Complex 4.1.2: (Continued)*(b) God helps and rescues*

Stele of Neb-Re (JA276) (19th/20th dynasty) Assmann 1999: 372; Blackman 1926: 185	You are Amun, the Lord of him who is silent: Who comes at the voice of the humble person. I call upon you when I am in distress; And you come that you may save me; That you may give breath to him who is wretched; That you may give breath to him who is wretched; That you may save me when I am in bondage. Who (sc. Amun) saves, whomever he wants, even him who is in the netherworld, who delivers from fate as the heart tells him.	Psalm 30:2–4 Psalm 116:3–9 Psalm 18:4–7 Psalm 34:7
(cp. Leiden Hymn, pLeiden I 350; Foster 1995: 68–79)	Let us remain permanently in your house... for you are a father to us who cares for us and a mother of children, who wet-nurses well, a good helper for the one who inclines toward him and a saviour for the one who follows him.	Psalm 23:6
Statue of Nachtefmut (late 22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 191	He is a helper for the wretched; he hastens to him who is weak.	Psalm 72:12 Psalm 40:18 Psalm 70:6
Priestly annals Cairo JE 36394 / I (late 22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 196		

(c) God fights against evil-doers and enemies

Statue of Monthemhat (Cairo CG 42237) (25th Dynasty) Knigge 2006: 228	Who banishes the wicked, and who directs his horn against the evil-doers.	Psalm 140:12 Psalm 89:11 Psalms 60:14; 108:14 Psalm 68:22 Psalm 110:5 Psalm 59:2–10 Cf. Psalm 22:13–22
	(for the motif of the king smiting the enemies, see the rich iconographical material in Keel 1997: 291–303)	

(d) God promotes justice

Kubban Stele (Ramesses II; 19th dynasty) Keel 1997: 286 See also the hymn of Ramesses III (quoted above)	It is I who have made him. In doing so, I again set justice in its place. The earth is established, heaven is pacified.	Psalms 89:14–15; 97:2 Psalm 33:5 Psalm 103:6 Psalm 111:3 Psalm 119:62
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(e) God as the good shepherd

pBerlin 3053 no. 7 (22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 178	He is the shepherd who protects his cattle.	Psalm 23:1 Psalm 80:2 Cf. Psalms 77:21; 78:52; 95:7
	(For the iconographical material of the "good shepherd" motif, see Keel 1997: 228; pl. 312, for texts from the 19th and 20th dynasty, see Blackman 1926: 182, 189; Instruction of Merikare)	

(Continued)

Motif Complex 4.1.2: (Continued)

<i>(f) God (as sun-god) grants a long life</i>		
Scribal statue of the priest	You have given me a long life in happiness at	Psalms 21:5
Userchons	your mercy.	Psalms 61:7
(Cairo JE 37327, e)		Psalms 66:9
(26th dynasty)		Psalms 72:5
Knigge 2006: 229;		Psalms 128:5
cp. Knigge 2006: 233)		
Stele of Monthemhat	Who determines the life and (its) duration of gods	
(Cairo CG 1098)	and human persons.	
(25th dynasty)	...	
Knigge 2006: 248	the needs of the human beings and the cattle	
Cf. the Elephantine Stele	breathable air that is in the body, for one breathes	
Knigge 2006: 252	the air of his mouth.	
<i>(g) God examines the heart</i>		
Papyri from different times	Judgment of the Dead	Psalms 17:3
with the "book of the dead"		Psalms 26:2
	(Book of the Dead, Spell 125; see previous	Psalms 139:23
	discussion; for further material, see Janowski	Psalms 73:13
	2013: 161–62; Keel 1997: 73 with pl. 83 and	Psalms 119:80
	Blackman 1926: 184–85)	Cf. Jer. 20:12
<i>(h) God and the world of the dead</i>		
(Because of the differences in the Egyptian and Hebrew concept of the netherworld, there are only approximate thematic similarities)		
Book of the Dead,	Hail to you, Osiris, my divine father,	<i>The depths of</i>
Spell 45	may my body not fall victim to the worms.	<i>the tomb</i>
		Psalms 22:30
		Psalms 28:1
		Psalms 30:4
Keel 1997: 67	Rescue me from this danger!	<i>The darkness of</i>
	Save me, as you saved yourself!	<i>the tomb</i>
	May every decay be unknown to me after my	Psalms 88:7
	death.	Psalms 143:3;
		cf. 49:20
		<i>Forgetting</i>
		<i>the Dead</i>
		Psalms 31:13
		Psalms 6:6
		Psalms 88:6 (88:13)
		Cf. 13:2; 22:2;
		42:10

space do not permit a separate literary analysis of the psalm and its similarities to the Great Hymn to the Aten. Rather, I list those passages in Table 4.2 that are generally set in parallel to the hymn of Akhenaten.

From this list two things stand out: (i) There is not a single case of a direct translation; rather, we find several parallel motifs that can be quite close to each other (Motifs 1+2)

Motif Complex 4.1.3: "Personal Piety"—The Human Person before God

The third complex is connected to personal piety: expressions of a direct relationship to God where God is the object of prayer and addressed directly. The petitioner trusts God, can rejoice in God, and can ask for help. The journey of life and many other motifs from complex 2 can be assigned to this topic.

(a) God hearkens to prayer

pBerlin 3056/ 4,2 (22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 181	There is no prayer that you have not heard.	Psalm 5:4 Psalm 17:1 Psalm 54:4 Psalm 55:2,18 Psalm 65:3
Instruction of Any (pBoulaq 4) (18th dynasty) Halla 2003: 1.111	Pray by yourself with a loving heart, Whose every word is hidden. He [the god] will grant your needs, He will hear your words, He will accept your offerings.	Psalm 86:6 Psalm 88:3 <i>Request for hearing:</i> Psalm 27:7 Psalm 130:1–2

(b) To trust in God

Scribal Statue of the priest Userchons (Cairo JE 37327, e) (26th dynasty) Knigge 2006: 229	My lord, my lord I trust in you! For I know that you are mightier than all gods.	Psalm 17:7 Psalm 18:31 Psalm 118:8–9
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(c) To rejoice in God

Thebes, tomb TT 27 (26th dynasty) Knigge 2006: 237	Each face is intoxicated when it sees you, but one cannot be satisfied.	Psalm 128:5 ⁵
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(d) Act-Consequence-Relationship

Statue of Achamenru (Paris Louvre A 85, a) (25th dynasty) Knigge 2006: 231	God is friendly to the kindly disposed person. Whoever does good, good shall be done unto him. A good deed is like a memorial.	Psalm 82 (the correlation of God and Justice, Janowski 2013: 131) Cf. Psalm 7
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(e) The lamenting person (light-darkness)

(for motif of the *Feindklage*, see 4.1.2, Motif c)

Prayer of Hui (Urk IV 2075, 14–17) Janowski 2013: 69	Come in mercy, my lord Neb-cheperu-Re. Daily I see the darkness that you have created, Make me light quickly so that I can see you; then I will tell the fishes in the river about your power.	Psalm 27:1 Psalm 43:3 Psalm 46:6 Cf. Psalms 18:29; 56:14
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or not (Motifs 3+4); and (ii) the parallel motifs appear in different order in both texts. In Psalm 104 the innumerable creeping things in the sea great and wide follows Motif 3, while in the Great Hymn to the Aten, it follows Motif 2. If we add a further motif found in the two texts, as shown in Table 4.3, things get even more complicated, demonstrating that we have additional parallels outside verses 20–30:

Table 4.2 Psalm 104:20–30 and The Great Hymn to the Aten

<i>Psalm 104</i>	(Hossfeld/Zenger 2011, 43–44)		<i>The Great Hymn to the Aten</i> (Hallo 2003: 1. 44–46)
Motif 1	<i>Wild animals in the night</i>		
V.20	You send darkness and it is night, when all the beasts of the forest prowl.	27–34	When you [i.e. Yati] set in western lightland, Earth is in darkness as if in death;...
V.21	The young lions roar for prey to seek their food from YHWH.		Every lion comes from its den, All the serpents bite.
V.22	The sun arises, they slip away and lie down in their dens.		
Motif 2	<i>Humans get up to go to work</i>		
V.23	The human being goes forth to work and to labor until evening.	42–45	Awake, they stand on their feet, You [i.e. Yati] have roused them; Bodies cleansed, clothed, Their arms adore your appearance. The entire land sets out to work.
Motif 3	<i>Call of Admiration</i>		
V.24	How numerous are your works, YHWH; with wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your good things.	76–77	How many are your [i.e. Yati's] deeds. Though hidden from sight.
Motif 4	<i>Swarming/milling mass in river/sea</i>		
V.25	Yonder is the sea, great and immeasurably wide, and there are innumerable throngs, living things, small and great.	53–58	Ships fare north, fare south as well, Roads lie open when you [i.e. Yati] rise; The fish in the river dart before you, Your rays are the midst the sea.
V.26	There go the ships, Leviathan, whom you formed, in order to play with him.		
Motif 5	<i>God supplies according to need</i>		
V.27	They all look to you, to give them their food in due season.	85–86	You [i.e. Yati] set every man in his place, You supply their needs; Everyone has his food
V.28	You give it, they gather it up; you open your hand and they are filled with good things.		
Motif 6	<i>Creation and Death</i>		
V.29	You hide your face, they are terrified; you take back their breath, they vanish and return to their dust.	125–128	<Those on> earth come from your hand as you [i.e. Yati] made them, When you have dawned they live, When you set they die; You yourself are lifetime, one lives by you.
V.30	You send forth your spirit and they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.		

Table 4.3 Psalm 104:10–13 and the Great Hymn to the Aten

<i>Motif 7</i>	<i>Brooks and Rivers (Nile of heaven)</i>		
V.10	Arising (are) springs in the valleys of the brooks, they flow away between the mountains.	96–99	All distant lands, you [i.e. Yati] make them live,
V.11	They give drink to all the beasts of the field; the wild asses quench their thirst.		You made a heavenly Hapy descend [for] them;
V.12	Above them dwell the birds of heaven; among the branches they lift up their voices.		He makes waves on the mountains like the sea,
V.13	From his lofty chambers watering the mountains, from the fruit of his works the earth is satisfied.		To drench their fields and their towns.

Against the background of the textual evidence, we must stress three points:

- 1) The similarities arise only if we accept the order of the Hebrew psalm and if one compares individual verses with the Egyptian hymn. If one takes the other passages from the Great Hymn to the Aten into account (esp. paragraphs 35–41; 46–52; 59–75; 78–84; 87–95; 100–124), a different picture emerges. In the Great Hymn to the Aten the common motifs are part of different contexts. The most important argument for a direct dependency—the order of the motifs—is a weak one. It can only be maintained when one takes Psalm 104 as a starting point and subsequently ignores the intermediate passages of the Egyptian hymn.
- 2) Scholarship has stressed time and again that with the mention of the ships a motif appears that is firmly anchored neither in Egypt literature nor in the Hebrew Bible. Accordingly, scholars assumed that we might have Phoenician influence here (Uehlinger 1990).
- 3) If one abandons the order of the motifs and looks at them individually, another possible explanation opens up, because these motifs are also found in other Egyptian hymns—partly in similar formulations to the Great Hymn to the Aten. Scholarship has only rarely followed this trail; as the present author tends to favor it, several basic principles will be stated.

Already in his 1969 dissertation, Jan Assmann pointed to the fact that the solar theology of the Great Hymn to the Aten was embedded in a broad stream of ancient Egyptian hymns ranging from the New Kingdom to the Greco-Roman period. The religion of Akhenaten may be unique in ancient Egypt, but it can be explained by the significance of the sun and by the above mentioned texts of personal piety. More recent studies have taken up Assmann's insights and investigated citations in hymns from the 1st millennium BCE (Knigge 2000; see also Wilson 1968 [1951]: 228–229). In the texts of the historical period that follows the New Kingdom and the Ramesside Period, we have a plethora of evidence that is relevant for our quest. In Table 4.4, I compare and contrast these texts with the motifs listed above:³

Table 4.4 The Motifs of Psalm 104 in Egyptian Hymns from the 1st Millennium BCE

Motif 1	<i>Course of the sun (rising and setting of the sun—wild animals)</i>
Statue of Amenemopet (Berlin 6910) (19th dynasty) (c. 1290 BCE)	When he (Amun-Re) rises, humans can live and their hearts can live when they see him.
Statue of Monthemhat (25th dynasty) Knigge 2000: 108	(Re-Horakhty), who rises daily at the height of each hour to create the living, the wild beasts, the cattle, worms and all sorts of birds.
Motif 2	<i>Humans get up to go to work</i>
Statue of Nachtfehut (Kairo CG 42208) (22nd dynasty) Assmann 1999: 448–49 no. 200	You (Amun-Re) are able to guide each face when they are busy with their work.
pBerlin 3056 (VIII/8) (22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 180	One rises early to pray to him—every day; all work happens, while the face is directed toward him who orders gods and humans what should be done.
pBerlin 3049 (II/9) (22nd Dynasty) Assmann 1999: 282, No. 127A	You (Amun-Re) place their (= humans') hands at the task that needs to be done.
Motif 3	<i>Call of Admiration</i>
pBerlin 3049 XVI/4 (22nd dynasty) Assmann 1999: 287 no. 127B	Everyone whom you have created stretches their arms toward you in admiration; citizens and people praise you; they pay homage to your rising in the land of light of heaven.
Adoptionsstele (Kairo JE 36327) 5 (26th dynasty, Psammetichus I = 664–10) Ritner 2009: 579; Der Manuelian 1994: 299	How good is this which god has done for you! How profitable is what your father has done for you!
Motif 4	<i>Swarming/milling mass in river/sea</i>
Hymn from El-Charga (Persian Period) Knigge 2006: 266–67	He lets the Chedju-fishes dive in the waters and gives life to their body in the waters.
Motif 5	<i>God supplies according to need</i>
pBerlin 3048 VIII,3–4 (so-called "Berlin Ptahhymn") (21st dynasty) Assmann 1999: 341 no. 143)	The wood of life grows upon you (Ptah); you let the land become green so that gods, humans, and cattle have abundance.
pBerlin 3049 VIII, 2.7–8 (21st dynasty) Assmann 1999: 287–97 no. 127B	(Amun-Re) who begets each eye (= living being) and always provides for their needs....

(Continued)

Table 4.4 (Continued)

Stele of Montuemhat (Cairo CG 1098 + JE 28944, 8–10) (25th dynasty) Knigge 2000: 117	He (Re-Horakthy) provides for the needs of gods; he provides for needs of humanity; he provides for the needs of the Akhs.
Statue of Monthemhat (Cairo CG 42241 + JE 37176) (25th dynasty) Knigge 2006: 227	You take care of the alimony for everyone who breathes and keeps him alive.
<i>Motif 6</i>	<i>Creation and Death</i>
pBerlin 3048 VI, 2–4 (Ptah-Hymn) (22nd dynasty) Assmann 1999: 341	There is not anybody who can live without you (Ptah), because from your nose proceeds breathable air.
pGreenfeld (London BM 10554) Book of the Dead 15c (22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 101–102 ¹	If you have gone away, you are hidden from their face.
pBerlin 3055 (text 38) (22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 160	When you open your eyes, you look to them, so that light can arise for everyone; If, however, shadow pleases your eyes it cannot become day.
Elephantine Stele (Cairo without number) (26th dynasty, Amasis: 570–526 BCE) Knigge 2006: 252	Each face can live if it sees him like Re who appears on the horizon.
<i>Motif 7</i>	<i>Brooks and Rivers (Nile of heaven)</i>
pBerlin 3048 (text C) (22nd dynasty) Knigge 2006: 166	The mighty primeval ocean that creates food offerings, the Nile with flourishing vegetation, ... who lets the bitter waters and the sea erupt [....] Who has constructed both lands, the mountains and foreign lands and lets them become green with waters.
Taharqo building, Karnak Room F (25th dynasty) Knigge 2006: 215	You, who enters into the flood and who supplies the throats with air— in his name as "Ba who is in the waters."

¹The same wording (including the mistakes) can be found on the coffin of Hori (Rio de Janeiro 526) from the 21st dynasty (Knigge 2006: 106–107).

If one surveys the overall findings, two things can be noted:

- 1) Egyptian hymns acknowledge the life-giving effect of the sun, but they generally do not stress the consequences of the sun's absence. Rather, they emphasize the salvific acts of the sun-god in the netherworld. The accentuation is on the positive act and not on the negative outcome. If that is the case, the motif of the dangerous animals that come forth from their caves and the motif of the robbery in the Great Hymn to the Aten represent a fairly singular tradition within Egyptian literature.
- 2) The examples taken from texts from the 1st millennium show that motifs from the Great Hymn to the Aten continued to be known in later periods. The knowledge of the hymn from Amarna is attested for example in the Berlin Papyri 3048–3050, 3053, 3055, 3056, which stem from a temple archive of the 22nd dynasty (Knigge 2000:100). A notice in the temple of Hibis in the El-Khargeh Oasis illustrates how texts were handed down. Before the hymn proper we find a colophon-like formulation that refers to a wooden tablet used by the scribe: “The great, secret hymns to Amun that are written on tablets that are made of *nbs*-wood” (Davies 1953: Pl. 28:1). This corresponds to what we know from the process of handing down sapiential texts: sample books (*Musterbücher*), containing older texts, existed to be used by scribes (on papyrus) or artisans decorating, for example, walls of temples (Der Manuelian 1994: xxxv–xxxix). On the reverse of pLondon BM 10474, which contains the Instructions of Amenemope from the 26th dynasty, one finds a quote from a solar hymn that is quite close to Psalm 104 and to the Great Hymn to the Aten: “Pray to the sun-disc as it rises and speak: give well-being and health to me so that they will give you your need for life because only then will you be free from fear” (Knigge 2000: 233).

SUMMARY

The quest for the Egyptian background to the Psalms takes one deep into the world of the ancient Near East. It shows how much Israel's beliefs were part of this world and how ancient Near Eastern concepts known to us from literary sources helped to determine biblical literature. The salvation of God in the morning, his advocacy for justice as well as his actions against enemies, and the faith of the petitioner in the “good shepherd” who saves and whose power extends into the netherworld are motifs that connect the Psalms with Egyptian religion. At the same time we must note apparent differences, as ancient Israel did not engage in extensive speculation about the netherworld that is so prominent in Egyptian texts.

Against the background of such structural similarities one has to be careful in postulating direct literary relations. Rather, one must consider whether certain

correspondences cannot be explained by looking at the rules and adaptations that we find in Egyptian literature of the 1st millennium BCE. If the scribes of this period worked with sample books containing passages from hymns of the Ramesside period, it is entirely possible that such sample books or wooden tablets also came to Israel. If so, the parallels between Psalm 104 and the Great Hymn to the Aten may be explained in terms of a similar process of tradition that can be assumed for another body of literature from the Hebrew Bible where Egyptian influence is likely: the author of Proverbs 22:17–24:22 probably worked with a scribal tablet of the teaching of Amenemope from the 25th or the 26th dynasty and copied individual motifs and formulations (Schipper 2005: 241–43).

As far as the Psalms and especially Psalm 104 are concerned, a detailed comparative study that fully utilizes the Egyptian hymns from the 1st millennium BCE remains to be done. With regard to methodology, such a study would have to take into account the only known reception of a Hebrew Psalm in an Egyptian papyrus. In a Demotic papyrus from the Persian Period (pAmherst 63:11–19), we have a parallel to Psalm 20. The papyrus is written in Demotic script, but its language is Aramaic (Vleeming and Wesselius 1982). Even though it might be a document of a group of Jewish exiles in Egypt of the Persian period, the text can, nevertheless, be used to illuminate questions regarding the comparison of genres of literature or the translation of texts (Rösel 2000). In this respect, and 125 years after the discovery of the Great Hymn to the Aten in the tomb of Ay, the question of the relationship between Egyptian hymns and the Psalms remains open. To reach a conclusive result, the present author favors an approach that focuses on the hymns and quotes found in the literature of the 1st millennium BCE.

NOTES

1. The present article is dedicated to Klaus Baltzer on the occasion of his eighty-fifth birthday. My deep gratitude goes to Anselm C. Hagedorn for his help in bringing the article into good English.
2. Further information can be found in Porter and Moss 1994: 550–51 no. 23. Below the hymn are the kneeling relief figures of Ay and his wife.
3. Chronology: 21st dynasty (1069–945 BCE), 22nd dynasty (945–713 BCE), 25th dynasty (728/16–656 BCE), and 26th dynasty (664–525 BCE).
4. Verse citations are given according to Hebrew versification.
5. Especially for the motif of the divine “countenance” in Pss. 95–98, we have several parallels in Egyptian cultic hymns; see Hartenstein 2008: 3 nn. 6 and 7.

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PART II

LANGUAGE OF
THE PSALMS

CHAPTER 5

POETRY OF THE PSALMS¹

F. W. DOBBS-ALLSOPP

PSALMS are poems. On first blush this may seem naively tautological. After all, the poetic medium of biblical psalms was recognized almost from the very beginning of psalmic commentary. Josephus (37–100 CE), for example, observed how David (in the Psalms) “composed songs and hymns to God, of several sorts of meter; some of those which he made were trimeters, and some were pentameters” (*Antiq.* 7:305). However the statement is to be analyzed, his Greek terminology (*metron*, *trimetrous*, *pentametrous*, *epoiēsen*) leaves little doubt that Josephus has poetry in mind. Similarly, Origen (184–254 CE), Eusebius (264–340 CE), and Jerome (331–420 CE) all reference the Psalms (as traditionally authored by David) in terms that clearly indicate their understanding of them as poetry, even as verse arranged in lines (literally *stichoi* according to Origen).² However, interpreters through the centuries have not always kept this deeply embedded cultural knowledge to the fore, or at least they have not always exploited such knowledge to the fullest. Quite simply, whatever ultimate interest one brings to the biblical text (e.g., theological, exegetical, linguistic, historical), the Psalms must be encountered initially, if not primarily, as poetry. In what follows, I provide an orientation to the poetry of the Psalms and to the psalms as poetry, saying something about what psalmic verse consists of.

THE POETIC LINE

The question of what counts as poetry is inevitably an historical question. As language art, poems come necessarily encrusted in cultural, historical, and linguistic peculiarities. Therefore, there can be no question of identifying in any meaningful way essential, transcendent, unexceptional characteristics that are definitive of poetry for every case. Cultural artifacts simply do not behave in such a manner. Rather, at best what is manageable is to isolate from a comparative perspective (itself always staged theoretically) those features that prototypically show up time and again in poems cross-culturally and

transhistorically. Empirically, then, almost all premodern (prior to c. 1850 CE) poetry was set as verse, that is, in lines (Brogan 1993b: 938). The very concept of a “line” as “a row of written or printed letters” (*OED*) is itself belated and hyperliterate, emerging out of a chirographic world with specific conventions in place for how to spatialize the technology of writing. But the phenomenon that the term “line” has come to name in the (English) vernacular of Western literary criticism subsumes whatever culturally specific conventions are in place for spatializing it³ and may be described less chirographically, following T. V. F. Brogan, as the fundamental rhythmic and auditory unit whose segmentation interrupts the otherwise continuous flow of sense (as in prose) “so as to increase information density and perceived structure” (1993a: 694).

Even today, with the notable exception of a few modern, boundary-bending genres (such as the “prose poem”), the line is the single differentia of poetry on which almost all critics and poets agree, hence T. S. Eliot’s seemingly tautological observation, “the only absolute to be drawn is that poetry is written in verse and prose is written in prose” (Eliot 1917: 158). That biblical psalms consist of such discourse regularly segmented by rhythmic and auditory units we may call lines (though also variously called cola, versets, half-lines, stichs, or hemistichs), and thus rightly considered poems, is inferable from a wide variety of considerations (e.g., the logic of parallelism and line grouping)⁴ but most especially from the special formatting they receive in Hebrew manuscripts in the Masoretic tradition and from the Judean Desert as well as in Greek manuscripts of the Septuagint.

In the Masoretic traditions, the Psalms is one of three biblical books (Proverbs and Job are the other two) that receive special formatting. The normal Masoretic practice throughout the Hebrew Bible is to copy the text in narrow columns (e.g., three to a folio page in both the Aleppo and Leningrad codexes) in a continuously running format. By contrast, in Psalms (as well as in Proverbs and Job), the usual practice is to lay out the writing in two wider columns (per folio page), with columnar lines composed prototypically of two blocks of writing separated (where appropriate or possible) by space (of varying lengths).⁵ With some exceptions (e.g., Psalm 119), the blocks of writing with intervening spacing follow in a running manner across and then down the column. The dominant resulting visual effect is to have columns of text with lines consisting of blocks of writing typically punctuated by a (variable) span of space. The difference in spatial arrangement evidenced by the two-page layout conventions is apparent on even the most cursory of glances. The distinct blocks of writing on the columnar line isolated (where possible) by variable spans of spacing provide stunningly graphic evidence for the verse line in Psalms.

The earliest evidence for the special layout of the Psalms manuscripts currently attested comes in the Hebrew manuscripts recovered from the Judean desert.⁶ Of the thirty-nine Psalms scrolls preserved from Qumran and its environs, parts of fifteen scrolls exhibit some form of special formatting: 1QPs^a (only Psalm 119); 4QPs^b;⁷ 4QPs^c; 4QPs^d (parts of Psalm 104); 4QPs^e; 4QPs^f; 4QPs^g; 4QPs^h; 5QPs; 8QPs; 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b (only Psalm 119); 5/6HevPs; MasPs^a; MasPs^b. Three principal systems for special formatting are used in Psalms scrolls at Qumran.⁸ The first utilizes the columnar line of writing

as a means for framing the verse line, either with one verse line per columnar line (e.g., 4QPs^b; 4QPsⁱ) or two (e.g., 4QPs^e; 4QPs^b; 11QPs^a [only Psalm 119]). Both varieties lack (perceptible) line-internal spacing.⁹ The second system entails two verse lines written on one columnar line of writing, with a space (of uninscribed text) separating the two verse lines and centered in the middle of the columnar line (e.g., 1QPs^a [only Psalm 119]; 4QPs^c;¹⁰ 5QPs; 8QPs; 5/6HevPs; MasPs^a). In the third system, space is inserted between the individual verse lines (as in the second system) but is not centered on the line of writing; that is, it may occur at different points along the columnar line (e.g., MasPs^b). This system resembles (to greater and lesser degrees) the variable Masoretic spacings in Psalms. In each instance it is either spacing or the columnar line, or a combination of the two, that isolates the poetic line—a block or unit of segmentation that punctuates the otherwise continuous flow of language. The poetic line in the Psalms is thus given graphic visibility in writing almost a millennium before our best medieval Masoretic manuscripts.¹¹

From the Hellenistic period on, it was the custom of Greek scribes to write out prose and poetry with distinct page layouts. Greek prose was written out continuously in narrow, squared-off columns of writing, separated by uniform intercolumns of uninscribed space. The individual lines of writing are relatively short (e.g., often only fifteen to twenty-five letters for well-written texts of history, oratory, or philosophy) and have no inherent structural significance; that is, line-ends fall where they may depending on the predetermined width of the column. By contrast, for Greek (stichic) verse, which is metrical, the line of writing is meaningful, and its length, except in very early papyri (e.g., Timotheos), which were copied in continuous lines like prose, is determined usually by the meter; that is, it is normally the length of the complete metrical verse (e.g., hexameter, iambic trimeter). Each (metrical) line of verse, then, is written out on a corresponding (columnar) line of writing. The resulting columns of writing tended to be wider than the corresponding columns of prose in order to accommodate the natural lengths of the meters (e.g., hexameter verse has the longest lines, consisting of sixteen syllables and thirty-four to thirty-eight letters) and have ragged right-hand margins.¹² An alternative method of line division, at least for lyric verse and the lyric components of drama (i.e., the choral passages), develops in the Hellenistic period with Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 258–180 BCE), who initiates the practice of measuring the length of the verse line by sense-divisions known as *kōla*—the prosodic subparts of a particular meter (e.g., the Greek hexameter is often composed of four such *kōla*)—and of allotting to each *kōlon* a separate line (or *stichos*) of writing.¹³ But whether divided by meter or colometry, the distinguishing feature of written Greek verse from the Hellenistic and Roman eras is its stichic layout. Greek *stichos* was used to reference the biblical verse line at least as early as Origen (c. 3rd century CE), who uses the term in a Scholion on Psalm 119:1 (see Gray 1972 [1915]: 12 and n. 1). Both Jerome (c. 347–420 CE) and Hesychius of Jerusalem (c. 433 CE) knew of manuscripts in which some poetic books of the Bible, including the Psalms, were divided into *stichoi* (Swete 1968: 346; Treat 1996: 394). In fact, Tov lists some fourteen Greek papyrus fragments containing stichic layout of Psalms from the fourth century CE or earlier (Tov 2004: 303–15). And some of the early major Greek

uncial manuscripts (e.g., Vaticanus, 4th century; Sinaiticus, 4th century; Alexandrinus, 5th century) lay out the Psalms in two fat columns and in the manner of Greek lyric verse, *per cola et commata*. The individual verse lines are written out on either one or two columnar lines. The first columnar line begins flush with the left-hand margin, while the second (if necessary) is indented. The latter are not always in complete agreement with one another across manuscripts; that is, they vary to the same degree as do other scribal interventions, though in general the *cola et commata* are consistent with the sense divisions of MT.

In sum, the several manuscript traditions of the Psalms briefly reviewed above—Masoretic, Qumran, and the various Septuagint manuscripts and papyri fragments—reveal the reality of line structure in psalmic verse through the variety of special formats they employ. Such meta-script conventions are not inevitable (e.g., the many Psalms scrolls at Qumran that are set in a running format, just like for most of the Latter Prophets and so much ancient Egyptian verse). Therefore, any notation of line structure in the biblical manuscript traditions is noteworthy and not to be lightly dismissed. In fact, these traditions of writing psalmic “verse as line units” are the “greatest source” for our knowledge of the Psalms *as verse*.¹⁴

The nature of the line that these manuscripts reveal may be briefly characterized as follows. The line’s length is variably but ultimately constrained; overly short and overly long lines do not tend to occur. The overall length constraints may be measured variously. Quantitatively, for example, biblical poetic lines on average consist of five to twelve syllables, three to five words, and two to four stresses.¹⁵ These length constraints likely follow from the tradition’s origins in an oral performative environment in which the limited capacity of working (or short-term) memory cognitively circumscribes the nature of the art form.¹⁶ There is also a strong tendency in biblical poetry, as in much oral or orally derived verse, for line-end and syntactic juncture to coincide. That is, most poetic lines in the Bible tend to be end-stopped in nature, composed of sentential, clausal, or phrasal wholes. Even in enjambed lines when the syntax runs over line-ends—as it does in almost a third of the biblical poetic corpus—the cuts normally follow the major contours of biblical Hebrew syntax, realizing what J. Longenbach describes as a “parsing” line—a line that is not strictly end-stopped but nonetheless breaks at predictable syntactic points (2008: 55). These lines tend not to involve overly complex syntactic structures (e.g., excessive embedding is rare), and they contain a high percentage of content words—their overall concision often by necessity doing without all kinds of particles (e.g., definite article, relative particle) and making frequent use of various kinds of ellipses (e.g., verb gapping). Finally, unlike the ancient Greek stichic tradition (and the vast majority of contemporary verse), psalmic verse, like biblical verse more generally, is dominantly distichic. That is, lines in psalms tend to come grouped in twos and threes—as couplets and triplets (or combinations thereof). The odd singular line does occur, though only rarely, and there are no whole psalms (or even substantial sections of whole psalms) that are made up entirely of singular, nonaffiliated lines. The commonality with which specially formatted manuscripts of biblical psalms from Qumran to the Masoretes group two lines (or parts

of lines) of verse, with or without intervening spans of space, on a single columnar line gives eloquent graphic expression to the distinctive binarism of the biblical poetic tradition.

THE PSALMS AND LYRIC VERSE

The outstanding fact about psalmic verse is its thoroughgoing lyricism. Poetry in the ancient Near East is of two broad kinds, narrative and nonnarrative. The Hebrew Bible, in fact, contains only varieties of the latter. As Robert Alter well observes, “The Hebrew writers used verse for celebratory song, dirge, oracle, oratory, prophecy, reflective and didactic argument, liturgy, and often as a heightening or summarizing inset in the prose narratives—but only marginally or minimally to tell a tale” (1985: 27). Oral epic verse is well known from ancient Mesopotamia (e.g., *Gilgamesh Epic*) and Syria (e.g., *Kirta*, *Aqhat*, *Baal Cycle*), for example, and there is every reason to think that oral epic was still performed in Israel and Judah throughout the biblical period, though it never gets written down.¹⁷ There is no true epic verse in the Bible and certainly none in the Psalms. Moreover, the Psalms are prototypically made up of a particular kind of nonnarrative verse, lyric (Dobbs-Allsopp 2006: 346–79). What distinguishes psalmic verse as lyric is a cluster of characteristics, including most typically the frequent absence of features and practices (plot, character, setting) that are otherwise definitive of more discursive modes of discourse (e.g., narrative) and correlatively, as a consequence of this lack, a necessary dependence on “pure verbal resources—the sound and evocative power of words, meter, alliteration, rhyme, and other rhythmic devices, associated images, repetitions, archaisms and grammatical twists” (Langer 1953: 259). That is, without plot, character, and the like, lyric discourse must rely all the more on these other elements to do the (verbal) work of this language art. For this reason, of all the language arts, lyric verse is “the most obviously linguistic creation, and therefore the readiest instance of poesy” (p. 259). The lyric also tends to be small in scale, feature voice(s) instead of character(s), and is often highly paratactic in structure (i.e., nonsequential, fragmentary, and disjunctive). Such characteristics are good descriptors of most psalms.¹⁸ Additionally, many psalm lyrics, like many lyric poems from ancient Greece, exhibit a sung quality that suggests rootedness in a tradition of song and music. In fact, terminology for “song” and “singing” abounds in the Psalms (e.g., *šyr*: Pss. 13:6; 18:1; 28:7; 45:1; 67:1; 68:1; 76:1; 88:1; 96:1; *zmr*: Pss. 13:1; 19:1; 23:1; 29:1; 48:1; 88:1; 98:1, 5). References to musical instruments are common as well (e.g., Pss. 33:1–3; 47:6; 49:1–5; 81:3, 4; 92:4; 98:6; 144:9; 147:7; 150:3–5),¹⁹ and most scholars assume that some of the obscure technical terms in the superscriptions to individual psalms (e.g., *‘al-haššēmîrît* [Pss. 6:1; 12:1; cf. 1 Chron. 15:21]) likely refer to instruments or to melodic or rhythmic patterns and tones (Cooper 1976: 3–4; Braun 2002: 37–43).²⁰ There is perhaps no more eloquent (relatively) early testimony to this thoroughgoing lyricism of the Psalms than that of Jerome, who observes in the *Preface to Job* that “almost all the songs of Scripture”—including most specifically “the

Psalter”—“bear a resemblance to our Flaccus, and the Greek Pindar, and Alcaeus, and Sappho.”²¹

To recognize the overwhelming lyricism of so many psalms is to achieve a more perspicuous description of these poems and thereby sharpen and extend a critical understanding of them, specifically of their prosody. Narrative approaches, which still dominate (even if only tacitly) the literary study of the Psalms, will only illuminate this kind of poetry to a limited degree. Psalmic verse requires reading strategies properly attuned to the discourse’s leading features and central practices. There is historical significance to this recognition as well. Discussions of lyric verse often privilege Greek lyric as the main historical source for this kind of discourse. But in the Psalms (not to mention lyric poetry elsewhere in the Bible, such as Song of Songs) and their Near Eastern congeners we have a tradition of lyric verse that is more ancient than that of the Greeks and that through some of its common features (e.g., prominence of a communal voice, a more dialogic profile) may well open up new possibilities for appreciating the capacity and nature of lyric discourse more generally. The Psalms’ pronounced rituality is a case in point. Lyric’s ritual dimension has been described more generally by R. Greene as a poem’s performative aspect, its office as a set of directions for performance, a script, a score compounded of sounds, rhythm, and form, and the patterns that organize these in the audience’s experience. The chief aim of ritually oriented lyrics is to effect through a type of transitivity an experience of *communitas* (Greene 1991: 5). Greene characterizes the Psalms’ rituality more specifically:

Taken singly, the psalms generally belong at the most “open” or performative end of the spectrum that runs from ritual to fiction, for they allow, or better, require the reading voice to assume the identity of their represented speaker; in a certain sense a psalm scarcely represents a speaker at all, but is the script for sacred ritual cast in lyric discourse. (1991: 5)

Many psalms, of course, were originally (and quite literally) fit for ritual and, indeed, were cast intentionally in broad and generic terms so as to be assimilatable to a wide range of occasions and circumstances—as witnessed by how individual psalms are put into the mouths of characters in biblical narrative (e.g., Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1–10; Jonah in Jon. 2:3–10).

I emphasize the Psalms’ informing rituality in part because nowadays so much lyric verse hews decidedly toward the genre’s fictive foundation that we can easily forget this other founding capacity, not to mention the many modern poets whose prosodies are thoroughly ritualistic and even informed (directly or indirectly) by the Psalms (e.g., Walt Whitman, Edward Taylor), and in part because this means that contemporary readers of the Psalms, in addition to having to recalibrate their tacit readerly pose toward literature from narrative to lyric, will also need to adjust their notions of lyric so as to include an appetite for ritual. However popular the psalms have been down through the ages, their underlying lyricism—shot through with a strong dose of rituality—have yet to be fully fathomed.

THE FREE RHYTHMS OF THE PSALMS

The assumption that biblical verse, including the Psalms, is metrical is deeply embedded in Western literary consciousness. To take a celebrated example, Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586 CE) assumed biblical poetry by definition to be metrical and its prosody quantitative in nature, like Latin and Greek poetry, even though Sidney was quite aware that the numbers did not always seem to add up—“although the rules be not fully found” (Sidney 1904: 155).²² In fact, a chief motivation for verse translations of the poetic portions of the Bible during the period (16th and 17th centuries) was to offer metrical renditions in English (i.e., employing English meters and rhyme schemes) in compensation for the presumed lost metrical schemes that allegedly underlay the Hebrew original (Smith 1946: 251–53; Roston 1965). For Sidney this assumption of biblical poetry’s metricality reflected a general line of thought handed down through Hellenistic and patristic sources (e.g., Philo, Josephus, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome; see Baroway 1935: 66–91). That the early commentators would have cast their appreciations and evaluations of biblical poetry in the only meta-language known to them, which evolved in the critical reception of Greek and Latin metrical verse, is not at all remarkable. What is surprising, however, is that their language would be literalized and reified for centuries afterwards such that the metrical hypothesis about biblical poetry became all but irrefutable. This is a misreading both of those early writers on biblical poetry and of biblical poetry itself. Of course, not all were so misled about the nature of biblical poetic prosody. An outstanding early example of the latter is George Wither (1588–1667 CE), whose *A Preparation to the Psalter* (1619) is one of the earliest (if not the earliest) specifically literary critical interpretations of the Psalms in English. Wither was quite explicit about his quarrel with the received tradition about meter in the Psalms, since in his view meter is precisely what is lacking:

The *Hebrews* are full of variety in their *Numbers*, and take great liberty in their *Verses*. For as *Marianus Viçlorius* reports, they are not alwaies measured out by the same Number or quality of Syllables, as the *Greeke* or *Latine Verses* are; but sometime lengthened and sometime abbreviated in the pronountiation by accents of time, according to the manner of the *Italian Measures*, and that liberty which it seemeth our *English* vsed in their *Poems*, about foure hundred yeeres agoe: for to vs now (though I am perswaded, they are as they were at first intended to bee) there appears sometime to be a want, and sometime an *Ouerplus*, in the Syllables of many of their *Verses*. (1619: 59)

In short, Wither is quite emphatic with respect to a comparison of biblical Hebrew verse with Greek and Latin verse: there is not “any likeliness in the Scansion or manner of their *Verse*” (p. 61).

Now, almost 400 years later, the position that Wither stakes out in his study of the Psalms has obtained a consensus among specialists working on biblical poetry: Biblical verse is not metrical—at least not in any way that the term “meter,” which “is an

organizing principle which turns the general tendency toward regularity in rhythm into a strictly patterned regularity that can be counted and named" (Attridge 1995: 7), retains any recognizable sense.²³ Historically, it has been phonological features (e.g., stress, pitch, length) that usually are organized metrically. Biblical Hebrew is a stress-timed language, as stress is phonemic,²⁴ and thus stress figures prominently in the rhythmic drive of the language that naturally pulsates through its words and phrases, pushing ever forward "with a certain evenness and predictability" (Attridge 1995: 1, 4). But the beat of the stresses in biblical poetry never exhibits "a strictly patterned regularity that can be counted" (p. 7). This is not because somehow meter is unachievable in Hebrew. To the contrary, a plenitude of metrical verse exists in the various traditions that comprise the post-biblical Hebrew poetic corpus.²⁵ Rather, biblical verse is nonmetrical, and thus its prosody consists in "rhythmical organization by other than numerical modes" (Hartman 1980: 24–25). Potentially, everything in the poem "can contribute to the shaping of the rhythm" (Hrushovski 1960: 181)—that "series of alternations of build-up and release, movement and counter-movement, tending toward regularity but complicated by constant variations and local inflections" (Attridge 1995: 3). The core of biblical poetry's "free rhythms"²⁶ consists in configurations of its typically variable but constrained line, which is commonly grouped in twos and threes, and sometimes fours, with the language's strong word and word-group stress that is frequently reinforced through repetitions of various sorts. Strict regularity of syllables is lacking. Nonetheless, stresses are made to fall within a limited range by excluding contiguous stresses and providing longer words with secondary stresses. Stresses may be separated by as many as two, three, or four syllables (Hrushovski: 1960: 189).²⁷ Biblical poetry is, as Sachs says, "the classical example of a free accentual rhythm" (1953: 69–70). These core constituencies give biblical verse its distinctive rhythmic signature, which the poet (and critic) John Hollander so delightfully illustrates and explicates in his mime of a typical biblical poem to open his treatment of free verse:

The verse of the Hebrew Bible is strange; the meter of Psalms and Proverbs perplexes. It is not a matter of number, no counting of beats or syllables. Its song is a music of matching, its rhythm a kind of paralleling. One half-line makes an assertion; the other part paraphrases it; sometimes a third part will vary it. An abstract statement meets with its example, yes, the way a wind runs through the tree's moving leaves. (1989: 26)

This recognizable rhythmic resemblance of so many biblical poems and psalms notwithstanding, the beats, line constraints, and grouping strategies are sufficiently variable and get mixed in and layered over with other language material (e.g., imagery, syntactic patterns, tone, elements of meaning) such that every biblical poem ultimately evolves its own unique rhythm. In fact, there is a certain "organic" structure to nonmetrical or free verse more generally—no two such poems are ever really rhythmically alike. Therefore, broad brushed characterizations of biblical poetic rhythm only go so far. What is required for a maximally informative assessment of these free rhythms, as Hrushovski

notices for all varieties of free verse, is to gauge “the whole impact of the movement of the language material in the reading of a poem” (1960: 179).

PARALLELISM

The best known feature of biblical poetry is parallelism, which Robert Lowth famously explicates in terms of what he calls “the confirmation of the sentences” as consisting “chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines (or members of the same period), things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each by a kind of rule or measure” (1995 [1787]: 2.34). The notice of “rule or measure” at the end of this celebrated definition is not insignificant. Lowth, writing some 150 years after Sidney, nevertheless shared the latter’s assumptions about poetry in general and biblical poetry in particular—namely that poetry by definition was metrical, “that it be confined to numbers” (p. 1.56). Lowth, again like Sidney before him, recognized that all specifics about this presumed meter had been lost and were “altogether” unknowable.

One of Lowth’s great accomplishments was to not let this ignorance (both presumed and real) about meter deter him from exploring other aspects of biblical poetry. His *Lectures* (1995 [1753]) would eventually establish a field and put the study of biblical verse on a proper scholarly footing. Still, no doubt part of what attracted Lowth to the phenomenon of parallelism was the thought that it provided something like a “rule or measure” that could stand in for the absent rule or measure *par excellence*, meter. To this day parallelism continues to be championed as the leading formal feature of biblical verse, one may suppose in no small part because of its material, empirical tractability. Especially in the variety Lowth dubbed “synonymous parallelism”—which not insignificantly carries over in translation (a perception exquisitely captured in the closing line of Hollander’s riff on biblical poetry: “One river’s water is heard on another’s shore; so did this Hebrew verse form carry across into English” [1989: 26])—this is a phenomenon that scholars may identify and thus be more confident when positing the presence of verse no matter the difficulties posed by an inability to elaborate a consistent underlying meter.

Lowth’s threefold schema for parallelism—synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic—prevailed as the consensus understanding in the field for more than two centuries and remains to this day a familiar staple in handbooks and introductory classes alike. But the late 1970s through the early 1990s saw renewed scholarly interest in parallelism, the net result of which is a much more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. As a consequence, M. O’Connor offered the following as a summary definition of parallelism: “the repetition of identical or similar syntactic patterns in adjacent phrases, clauses, or sentences” (1993: 877). Accordingly, the prototypical core of a parallelism, writes O’Connor, is syntactic—“when syntactic frames are set in equivalence by p[arallelism], the elements filling these frames are brought into alignment as well”

(p. 877). The opening couplet of Psalm 114 (v. 1)—the entire psalm is cited by Lowth as the first example of what he calls “synonymous parallelism” (1995 [1753]: 242–43)—is exemplary:

bšē’ t + {yisrā’ēl + mimṣrāyim}
 VP + {NP + PP}
 When Israel went out from Egypt,
{bêt ya’ āqōb + mē’ am lō’ ēz}
 {NP + PP}
 the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech....

Here the mirroring syntactic frames {NP + PP}...{NP + PP}—the VP is elided or gapped in the second line—align with mirroring semantic statements, and thus syntax and semantics are mutually reinforcing. Whereas in Lowth’s other major “species” of parallelism, “antithetical parallelism,” the matching syntactic frames are filled by counterposing statements, such as in Psalms 30:6 (1995 [1778]: xx).

kî rega’ bē’ appô For (only) a moment is (spent) in his anger,
ḥayyîm biršônô but a lifetime is (spent) in his favor

These, of course, are but prototypical examples of synonymous and antithetical parallelism, and, as Lowth already well recognized, and more recent scholarship has abundantly illustrated, there are many, many variations on these two “species,” both in regard to the syntactic frames and to how these frames are filled.

If today the field generally has a much better and richer phenomenological understanding of parallelism than it once did, still there are a number of peculiarities about parallelism in biblical poetry—and in biblical psalms—that are worth underscoring. First, though the most extreme caricatures of biblical verse can give the impression that parallelism is the only notable formal feature in this verse tradition, this is not the case, and it was not the case even in Lowth’s foundational treatment. Lowth does not develop his now famous notion of parallelism until Lecture XIX of the *Lectures* and does not spend much space elaborating the concept beyond his discussion of prophetic poetry (1995 [1753]: 238–65; 1995 [1787]: 2.24–59). That is, Lowth’s *Lectures* are notable in part for their rich treatment of *all* aspects of biblical verse. Even in his most mature expression of his understanding of biblical poetry and parallelism, in his *Preliminary Dissertation* to his *New Translation* of Isaiah (1995 [1778]: i–lxxiv), where parallelism is given pride of place, parallelism still is never conceived of as the only formal feature of note—“there are other indications of Verse in the Poetical and Prophetical parts of the Hebrew Scriptures (li).

Biblical poetry is much more than parallelism, and thus there is much more to a reading of biblical psalms as poetry than the mere tracking and explicating of parallelistic play. Second, despite Lowth’s concerted efforts to understand parallelism as a distinguishing feature of all biblical poems—the category he labels “synthetic parallelism” is essentially a catch-all category for “all such as do not come within the two former classes”

(1995 [1787]: 2.49)—the fact remains that not all biblical poetry involves parallelism. In fact, as much as a third of the corpus of biblical verse—including much psalmic verse—involves nonparallelistic lines (O'Connor 1980: 409; cf. Geller 1979: 6, 30, 295–96, 379; Watson 1984: 332–36). In Psalms 77:18–19, one of Lowth's "most remarkable instances" of synthetic parallelism, it is not clear how "the sentences answer to each other . . . but merely by the forms of construction" (1995 [1787]: 2.48–50).

The clouds poured out water;
the skies thundered;
your arrows flashed on every side.
The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world;
the earth trembled and shook. (NRSV)

The "sentences" do answer each other. They follow one after another and are parsed out lineally, but their "forms of construction" lack any consistent patterning (although the English renderings of the NRSV seem deceptively alike). Or consider Psalm 137:2: "On the willows in her midst / we hung up our lyres." Here the relationship between the two lines of the couplet is "between adverbial phrase and main clause" (Alter 1985: 19).²⁸ Again, no obvious parallelism is in evidence. In both instances it is syntactic dependency that holds the lines together. In different degrees, these sets of lines may be said to be enjambed (see Dobbs-Allsopp 2001a: 370–85; 2001b: 219–39). As a consequence, it is simply false to identify parallelism as *the* identifying feature of biblical poetry. Not only is there an abundance of nonparallelistic lines in the biblical poetic corpus, but with the exception of some early and/or fairly compressed poems (e.g., Ps. 114), it is difficult to identify many whole poems that are also wholly parallelistic.

Finally, what is truly distinctive about parallelism when it does occur in biblical verse is its use to demarcate the verse line—a common oral poetic technique (O'Connor 1993: 878; cf. Tedlock 1977: 507–508)—and the peculiar rhythm of recursion that its play of matching helps to effect (e.g., statement and restatement; one step forward, iteration, then another step forward and another iteration, and so forth). Neither applies to the use of parallelism in the prose portions of the Bible. If parallelism is not quite the *sine qua non* of biblical verse it was once thought to be, it nevertheless remains a pervasive trope in most psalms.

ORALITY AND PSALMIC VERSE

To state that the roots of psalmic verse are oral in nature will elicit little surprise. After all, it has now been over a century since Hermann Gunkel started articulating his program of form criticism, at the heart of which stood the unshakable conviction that the poems and stories of ancient Israel and Judah emerged initially as oral productions.²⁹ And the recent spate of monographs in the field on the broad topic of orality and literacy

has underscored the overwhelming and thoroughgoing orality of ancient Israelite and Judahite culture in general (Niditch 1996; Schniedewind 2004; Carr 2005; Carr 2011; van der Toorn 2007; Sanders 2009). Indeed, as O'Connor maintains, much biblical poetry appears "comparably close to the oral poetic situation" (1993: 878), and most biblical poems, however originally composed and transmitted, were intended for oral performance of one kind or another (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:7, 36; cf. Deut. 31:30; 32:44–46; 2 Sam. 1:17–18; Jer. 36:4–8). Some of the more obvious orally derived features of psalms may be briefly identified: parallelism itself is a rather common feature of oral performative art. No one has seen this more incisively than M. Jousse, who already in 1925 writes the following:

It is precisely such an examination that enables us to establish the psycho-physiological origin of the linguistic phenomenon known, since Lowth, by the name of "parallelism of clauses." But what Lowth could not have realized, when he wrote, was the enormous psychological importance of this phenomenon. One can say without any exaggeration, that it plays as vital a role in the world of thought and human memory as does gravitation in the physical universe. Indeed, the deep-seated laws of the "human compound" of flesh and spirit dictate that each improvised utterance has a curious tendency to trigger, in the phonatory system of the speaking subject, one or more utterances of parallel construction and of similar or opposed meaning. (1990 [1925]: 95)³⁰

Jousse stressed throughout his work that "parallelism is but the consequence and transposition of the bilateral structure of the human body onto the oral mechanism" (p. 95), thus providing perhaps an organic basis for the dominance of couplets in biblical poetry and the dyadic shaping of their parallelistic play.

A second prominent aspect of biblical verse that has long been linked with orality is the presence of a large class of more or less fixed pairs of parallel words that frequently recur. So, for example, Psalm 7:6 features the word pair *'ereš* ("earth, ground")—*'āpār* ("dust"):

Then let the enemy pursue and overtake me,
trample my life to the ground (*'āreš*),
and lay my soul in the dust (*'āpār*). (NRSV)

The pair occurs another eleven times in the Bible, including once more in Psalm 44:26. Such stereotypical pairs would have proved extremely beneficial in a traditional performative context, as Cassuto explains with reference to this pair: "A poet who introduced the word *'rš* in the first hemistich already knows that in the second hemistich he would have to employ *'pr*. Or, contrariwise, if he used *'pr* first, he would have to conclude with *'rš*" (1975a: 45). The existence of such conventional pairs started being noticed after the recovery of the Ugaritic tablets beginning in 1929. The same pairs tended to recur, frequently so, in these newly recovered poetic narratives from the end of the Late Bronze Age, indicating the pairs' traditional nature. H. L. Ginsberg, in a series of articles from the mid-1930s (1935: 327; 1936: 172; Maisler 1934: 248–49 n. 11), was the first to begin

identifying such synonymous pairs. The first example he discusses is the common Ugaritic pair, *ksp* (“silver”)—*ḥrṣ* (“gold”), which appears more than two dozen times in Ugaritic. Whenever *ḥārûṣ* “gold” occurs in the Bible, it is always paired with *kesep* “silver” (Zech. 9:3; Ps. 68:14; Prov. 3:14; 8:10, 19; 16:16), despite the fact that the usual word for “gold” in biblical Hebrew is *zāhāb*. Here is a case of “traditional usage” triggering word selection instead of the contemporary idiom (Ginsberg and Maisler 1934: 248 n. 15; Cassuto 1975a: 51). Similarly, in addition to the dozen occurrences of *ʿereṣ*/*ʿāpār* in the Bible, the pair appears at least another ten times in Ugaritic poetry (Cassuto 1975a: 43–45; cf. Gevirtz 1963: 38).

O’Connor’s sense that such pairs (or “dyads” as he calls them) “are of the same class of phenomena as formulas” in other oral poetries, albeit “involving much less syntactic complexity and fixity,” seems right (1980: 105). He continues: “On a scale of formularity, Hebrew and Ugaritic verse must be set low because the entities which are ‘formularized’ are smaller” (O’Connor 1980: 105; cf. Gevirtz 1963: 3, 8; Whallon 1963: 2). This is not to rule out of hand the existence of some more complex and larger formulas in biblical verse. In fact, in one of the only studies of its kind, Culley has shown that phrasal formularies beyond word pairs do appear in the Psalms (1967: 32–101). Still, biblical verse is noticeably less formulaic than Ugaritic verse, and both West Semitic traditions are themselves considerably lower still in formularity than Homeric verse. But this need not call into question the animating orality of so much biblical (or Ugaritic) verse, as scholars have now isolated many modes of orality beyond the strictly formulaic Parry-Lord model that suits Homeric verse so well. Rather, what is signaled by this low(er) degree of formularity, for example, is the distinctive character of biblical poetry’s (originary) orality.

Other features of psalmic verse that may be readily associated with an informing orality include (as already noted) the tradition’s typically constrained and concise poetic line, the predominance of relatively uncomplicated clausal syntax (cf. Polak 1998: 5–105), the high incidence of end-stopping (Chafe 1985: 106–8, 111–12), and the prevalence of short- and medium-length poems (O’Connor 1980: 27).³¹ None of these features, or any of those just discussed, may be said to identify psalmic verse incontrovertibly as oral per se, or even as orally derived. Psalmic verse, regardless of its debt to oral performance, has only come down to us in writing, and thus, by its very medium of inscription, is indubitably marked by textuality and literacy. Indeed, orality and literacy are not monolithic descriptors, at least not in reference to ancient Israel and Judah, where the fact of writing would have been well recognized. (Writing emerges in the ancient Near East during the middle of the fourth millennium BCE.) “Orality and literacy,” whether in the southern Levant during the Iron Age or in medieval England, “are parts of a subtle, complex, lengthy process of change” and thus “do not occupy discrete and conflicting cognitive spheres” (Amodio 2004: 22). Moreover, just because oral poems begin to be written down and copied or that composition itself begins to take place in writing does not entail the immediate loss of all (or even most) informing oral sensibilities for the simple reason that these very sensibilities are the only idiom known for articulating poetry (p. 30). Even narrative prose—a specifically written genre—as it first emerges everywhere after

the writing down of poetry bears the telltale signs of an originary oral poetics (see Kittay and Godzich 1987).³²

To recognize the informing orality of much psalmic verse is an important historical datum. It will also constrain how contemporary readers engage these poems, if only as a reminder that their textuality is complicated and that many psalms did not originate as written compositions.

In sum, the above discussion has sought to map out the poetry of the Psalms from a number of different angles. In every case, the aim has been to lay bare aspects (literary, material, performative) of psalmic verse that are crucial ultimately for a maximally empathetic and informed reading of this verse. In the process, I wanted to sample and give voice to some of the Psalms' rich and long history of interpretation, a selective gathering of voices whose insights in my view still merit hearing and attention. What remains now is to read the Psalms and to delight in their poetry.³³

NOTES

1. The verse numberings in this essay are from the Hebrew only.
2. Conveniently, one may still consult Grey 1972 [1915]: 11–17; cf. Vance 2001: 41–62.
3. For example, spacing in many of the Psalms manuscripts from Qumran. For details, see Dobbs-Allsopp 2012: 19–61.
4. It was above all the logic of parallelism that helped in discerning the verse line on biblical poetry.
5. In reality, the formatting is highly variable, depending on such factors as the length of individual poetic lines and the presence of triplets. Sometimes, then, space limitations prohibit larger spans of white space, or limits them to one per manuscript line even when two are required. Of course, spacing is only one kind of visual cue provided for readers of these manuscripts. Accentuation marks (especially the presence of the *sillûq* and *'atnāḥ*) also aid in the visual demarcation of poetic lines. In fact, the combination of the columnar set, the presence (or absence) of spacing, and accentuation markings are highly effective (though by no means infallible) in visually signaling the presence of poetry and demarcating the individual poetic lines. In Masoretic discussions of the special layout of some of the festival poems (e.g., Exodus 15, Judges 5), a poetic block of writing (separated by spacing) is called an *'ārīaḥ*, “small brick” (see *b. Meg.* 16b; *j. Meg.* 3:7; *b. Menah.* 31b; *Sof.* 12:8–12).
6. For details, see Dobbs-Allsopp 2012. The discussion is indebted in particular to Tov 1996: 115–28; Tov 2004: 166–78; and Flint 1997.
7. In his discussion, Tov assumes that 4QPs^b contains portions of Psalm 119, which is lined differently than the other psalms in this scroll. According to the editors of the *editio princeps*, however, this scroll contains nothing from this psalm (Skehan et al. 2000: 23–48, pls. III–VI; cf. Flint 1997: 33–34).
8. This is according to Tov's analysis in 1996 and 2004.
9. Notice, however, that in Psalm 119 in 11QPs^a a number of the component lines of a couplet are sometimes separated by space (e.g., VII, 4; VII, 6; XI, 7; XII, 12), see Tov 1996: 120.
10. Mistakenly listed by Tov with the first group, but internal spacing is clearly present in the line formatting of this scroll (cf. Skehan et al. 2000: 50–51).

11. There are no universal givens when it comes to how to write down verse. Poetic traditions vary remarkably cross-culturally. As it turns out, there is roughly an equal number of Psalms scrolls from Qumran that lack special formatting conventions: 1QPs^a (only Psalm 119); 4QPs^b; 4QPs^c; 4QPs^d (parts of Psalm 104); 4QPs^e; 4QPs^b; 4QPs^l; 4QPs^w; 5QPs; 8QPs; 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b (only Psalm 119); 5/6HevPs; MasPs^a; MasPs^b. That is, they are written in columns of continuously running text just like prose, which, of course, is also the formatting convention employed by the Masoretes for the large blocks of verse in the Latter Prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos) and the Writings (e.g., Song of Songs, Lamentations). It is likely that this running format finds its origin in the dominant ancient Egyptian convention for writing out poetry in papyrus rolls. For details, see Dobbs-Allsopp 2012 (with relevant bibliographic references).
12. For standard descriptions of these writing conventions, see Kenyon 1951: 56; Turner 1968: 63; 1971: 8; cf. Johnson, 2004: 100–30. Interestingly, Masoretic practice enshrines a variation of the latter practice, arranging all biblical compositions in three columns per codex page, except the several festival songs (e.g., Exodus 15, Judges 5) and Psalms, Proverbs, and Job. For details about the origins and evolution of the codex, see Turner 1977: 10, 35–37; Serat 2002.
13. Cole 1993: 223. On Aristophanes of Byzantium, see Pfeiffer 1968: 171–209, especially 181–89. Prior to Aristophanes, lyric verse, unlike hexameter (and other stichic) verse, apparently was written out in continuous lines like prose. For an example of a papyrus roll containing poems by Bacchylides written out according to cola, see Kenyon 1897; cf. Nagy 2000: 7–28.
14. The language and insight come from M. O'Connor's estimation of the import of what is revealed more generally about biblical Hebrew verse in the extant manuscript tradition; see O'Connor 1980: 29. There are many other, nongraphic considerations that also speak to the existence of the verse line in biblical poetry. For detailed discussion, see Dobbs-Allsopp forthcoming.
15. Other measures are also possible. Syntactically, the range of lexical and clausal components that the standard biblical poetic line can accommodate is ultimately constrained (see O'Connor 1980).
16. The seminal statement on these constraints is Miller 1956: 81–97. Most working oralists are astutely aware of the constraints imposed on oral art by its performative context, whether or not they make the cognitive connection (e.g., the literature has much talk about poetic “breath units” and the like). For Greek oral literature, see Willett 2002: 7–19. For related reflections on the biblical poetic line, see Dobbs-Allsopp forthcoming.
17. See Cassuto 1975: 69–109; Cross 1998: 22–52; Zakovitch 1991: 18–25. That none of Israel or Judah's putative oral epic tradition gets written down is no aberration, since there is no necessary reason why any oral performative art form should be written down. Indeed, many of the world's epic poems come down to us in singular copies (e.g., *Beowulf* and all the Ugaritic epic poems).
18. Psalm 119 is the outstanding example of a non-short psalm. It can only achieve such length through the enabling artifice of the alphabetic acrostic—the sequence of the abecedary (viz., *aleph*, *bet*, *gimel*, etc.) literally guiding readers (the acrostic is an explicitly graphic trope) from the psalm's beginning (*aleph*) stanza to its final (*taw*) stanza.
19. Cf. King and Stager 2001: 290–98; Braun 2002: 8–32.
20. It is worth stressing that in traditional societies words and music are closely associated since the premier musical instrument is the human voice. Therefore, it may well be that the most abundant evidence of the sung nature of the Psalms is the preserved words themselves (e.g., *dibrê haššîrâ hazzô' t* [“the words of this song”], Ps. 18:1).

21. J.-P. Migne, *Pratologiae Latina* 28: 1141 (translation in Gray 1972 [1915]: 15 n. 1). Cf. Jerome's "Preface to the Chronicle of Eusebius," where he extols the musicality, rhythm, and loveliness of biblical verse (including Psalms) in comparison to well-known Latin and Greek lyric poets (Gray 1972 [1915]: 15 n. 1).
22. Sidney's verse translation of the Psalms was completed posthumously by his sister, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, and circulated in manuscript form. It was only published much later (1823).
23. For example, Hrushovski 1960: 189–90; Collins 1978: 251; O'Connor 1980: 138; Kugel 1981: 141; Pardee 1981: 115; Alter 1985: 9; Peterson and Richards 1992: 37–47. Vance (2001) provides a comprehensive survey of the debates surrounding the question of meter in biblical poetry and convincingly argues that meter does not exist in biblical Hebrew poetry.
24. Cooper 1976: 31; cf. Sachs 1953: 69–70; Hrushovski 1971–72: 13.1201; Blau 2010: 70–71. For a convenient overview of the historical development of stress in biblical Hebrew, see Blau 2010: 143–55.
25. See the many examples collected in Carmi 1982.
26. The phrase derives from the German *freie Rhythmen*, which Hrushovski prefers to the more negatively marked French *vers libre*, or its English counterpart, "free verse," because of its explicitly positive accent (1960: 176, 183–84). The German term itself is a fairly late coinage, used initially in the 1850s to describe five early poems ("hymns") by the German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, whose prosody, as it happens, was greatly indebted to that of the Psalms in particular (for details, see Kohl 1990).
27. See Sachs 1953: 71. This variability alone tells against the metrical hypothesis.
28. The upshot of Alter's discussion here is to call into question the all-pervasiveness of parallelism in biblical poetry, though Alter himself only goes so far in recognizing that "the semantic component of the parallelism is dropped" (Alter 1985: 19).
29. Gunkel's most elaborate statement on the topic comes in his *The Legends of Genesis* (1901). But the assumption pervades most of his writings from the turn of the century on, including those on the Psalms. For a thorough and critical overview of Gunkel and his scholarship, see Buss 1999: 209–62. Both Ong (1982: 173) and Culley (1963: 113) credit Gunkel's influence with the widespread assumption in the field about the orality of so much biblical literature.
30. Jousse 1990 [1925]: 95; cf. Ong 1982: 40; Buss 1999: 112 n. 47.
31. If Gunkel's accent was not quite right, nonetheless his association of originating orality with brevity was on target. An oral performative context places sustainability constraints on the ultimate length of performances. Even extended epic poems would have been performed episodically (cf. Flueckiger 1989: 1–11).
32. There is no mistaking some of these telltale signs in early biblical prose narrative (e.g., its pronounced rhythmicity, prominence of simple and constricted clause structure, traditional phrasing, commonality of little runs of parallelism).
33. For one of my own readings of a psalm that emerges out of the kinds of considerations surveyed here, see Dobbs-Allsopp 2008: 2–30.

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CHAPTER 6

THE PSALMS IN POETRY

PETER S. HAWKINS

THE Psalms form the largest concentration of poetry within the Bible and for millennia have served both Jews and Christians as a primary resource for worship, prayer, hymnody, and devotion. Less commonly recognized is the inspiration they have long offered poets who also want to sing the Lord's song in their own time, place, and language. It is easy to see why this should be the case, for where better to learn how to speak with candor to and about God than from the book that John Calvin called "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul"?¹ Those who follow in David's line have at their disposal an extraordinarily wide range of emotions for addressing God, from adoration of the Almighty enthroned upon the praises of Israel to an angry cry for help that has fallen on deaf ears: "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? forever?" (Ps. 13:2[1]).² For the lyric poet, moreover, the personal voice of the psalmist provides a biblical warrant for laying the heart bare before God. That said, the first person-speech of the Psalms holds within it a strong sense of a communal "we" that encompasses a much larger reality than the speaker's own.³ Along the interior drama of the self there stands the outer world of history and politics, court and temple, and nature itself. Finally, the Psalms contain a treasury of literary images and metaphors that, despite three millennia of continuous use, remain vital. No matter how venerable, therefore, they continue to inspire a perpetually "new song" (Ps. 40:4[3]).

One can see the medieval manifestation of this influence in the early twelfth-century Hebrew poetry of Judah Halevi (d. 1141). Writing in David's own language, Halevi gave new life to the poignancy of the Psalter's songs of Zion for the Diaspora. Although "bound by Arabia's chains" in Muslim Spain, he longs for Jerusalem from afar: "My heart is in the East— / and I am at the edge of the West. / How can I possibly taste what I eat? / How could it please me?" (Cole 2007: 164). Dante (d. 1321), by contrast, knew the Psalms not in Hebrew but in Latin, and it is largely in the Church's language (and in the context of its liturgical life) that they appear in his vernacular *Commedia*. Yet plentiful textual citation is only one part of the story. The figure of David as the great composer of "divine song" (*tëodia*) looms large in the poet's imagination. Over the long course of the poem he serves as Dante's role model, both as penitent sinner—the pilgrim's first cry for help

is David's "*Miserere*" (Ps. 51:3[1])—and as the paradigmatic religious artist, "the highest singer of the highest Lord" (*Par.* 25.72).⁴

ENGLISH VERNACULAR PSALTER

With the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation came many vernacular translations of the Bible that brought the Psalter into the language of the people and into a prominent place in public worship. Suddenly, what had been the mainstay of daily worship only for priests, monks, and nuns became the prayer book of the laity; monastic chant in Latin became congregational song in the vernacular. To make that song easier to learn and remember, the Psalms were brought into meter, rewritten to conform to the notes and measures of established hymn tunes that often came from the Protestant churches on the Continent. The Calvinist Genevan Psalter, completed in 1562, was translated into a score of languages. In the same year, an expansion of the metrical Psalter of Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins produced a work that long remained the "people's choice" in England. So too did Miles Coverdale's 1535 Psalter, which was incorporated into the *Book of Common Prayer* and therefore became (until very recently) the version recited, sung, and learned by heart by generations of Anglicans. The 1640 *Bay Psalm Book*, the first book published in New England, made this metrical tradition an Early American phenomenon as well.⁵

Turning the Psalms into meter meant paraphrasing them into verse, with stanzas, rhyme, and lyric conventions. The result was often singsong. Poets who intended their versions of the text to be read rather than sung, and to exhibit a much higher degree of poetic achievement than found in, say, Sternhold and Hopkins, also took up the art of paraphrase; but their appeal was more to connoisseurs than to congregations. In one sense they meant to do justice to the sheer beauty of the Psalms, which were commonly thought to surpass the "magnific odes and hymns" of ancient Greece and Rome, "not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition."⁶ One suspects, however, that more was at stake here than rendering justice to the Psalms' incomparable "Lyrick poesy." A brilliant paraphrase might demonstrate not only the aesthetic power of David's ancient lyre but also a poet's own skill.

THE PSALMS AS ENGLISH POETRY

Poets who took on the whole Psalter include (in chronological order), Philip Sidney and his sister Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke; George Wither; George Sandys; and, as one untimely born in the Age of the Enlightenment, Christopher Smart (d. 1771). His *The Translation of the Psalms of David*, as well his personal homage to the "highest singer of the highest song," *A Song of David*, bring the Reformation-era vogue for

biblical paraphrase up to the mid-eighteenth century, when paraphrased psalmody was giving way to the writing of original hymns. Isaac Watts (d. 1748) succeeded at both enterprises, but it is for his hymns (e.g., “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”) that he is remembered today.

However few there were who took on the whole Psalter, it would seem that every poet worth his salt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tried his (or her) hand at some part of the whole: Thomas Wyatt, Thomas Campion, George Herbert, Thomas Carew, Francis Quarles, John Milton, Henry Vaughan, Anne Finch. Whatever may have been Mary Sidney’s actual contribution to her brother Philip’s share of their joint work (Pss. 1–43), her own rendering of what remained to be done after his death produced poetry that often soars beyond mere paraphrase, notable both for its sensitive understanding of the text and for its technical ingenuity.⁷ Take, for instance, a stanza from her Psalm 139. Coverdale’s verse 15 reads: “My bones are not hid from thee, though I be made secretly, and fashioned beneath in the earth.” In Mary Sidney, the psalmist’s notion of God as a craftsman at work in prenatal development becomes startlingly concrete. In the darkness of her mother’s womb, the poet imagines her creator as a hands-on builder in the process of her fetal construction:

Thou, how my back was beam-wise laid,
And raft’ring of my ribs, dost know;
 Know’st ev’ry point
 Of bone and joint,
How to this whole these parts did grow,
In brave embroid’ry fair array’d,
 Though wrought in shop both dark and low.

In the alchemy of this verse (with its careful rhyme scheme of abccbab), the poet takes us quite beyond where David goes. We watch in the mind’s eye as God works in an *in vitro* “shop” using the tools of his builder’s trade: rafts and beams and joints. The atmosphere may be “dark and low,” but God is in control: “Thou . . . Know’st ev’ry point / Of bone and joint.” We also sense the mystery of how things come to be knit together in stages, how they are not only “beam-wise laid” but develop organically from parts to whole. What begins in carpentry ends in exquisite needlework, a woman’s craft: The fetus is “In brave embroid’ry fair array’d.” Indeed, Mary Sidney’s poem itself turns out to be mysteriously and wonderfully made, not unlike God’s own human handiwork.

GEORGE HERBERT: PSALMIST IN *THE TEMPLE*

The goal of the “Sidnean Psalms,” warmly celebrated in a poem by John Donne as achieving “the highest matter in the noblest form,” has been justly described as an

“attempt to bring the art of the Elizabethan lyric into the service of psalmody, and to perform this in a way that makes the psalm an intimate, personal cry of the soul to God.”⁸ Perhaps no other poet realized this goal more fully than George Herbert, whose posthumously published *The Temple* (1633) is virtually an echo chamber of references to the Prayer Book’s Coverdale version and is a seventeenth-century Psalter in its own right. Fitting, then, that the motto on the collection’s title page comes from Coverdale’s Psalm 29, “*In his Temple doth every man speak of his Honour.*”

Despite the pervasive influence of the Psalter throughout his poetry, Herbert produced only one paraphrase. Coverdale’s Psalm 23 begins, “The Lord is my shepherd, I can want nothing. He feedeth me in a green pasture, and leadeth me to a fresh water.” Herbert opens with similar directness but adds, along with quatrain stanzas and rhyme scheme, his own characteristic poetic touches, among them the deceptive simplicity of his plain, conversational, distinctly “English” voice:

The God of love my shepherd is,
And he that doth me feed.
While he is mine and I am his,
What can I want or need?

Herbert’s strategy from the outset is to make a biblical text already rich in the language of “I,” “my,” “he,” and “his” more intimate still. For instance, in lieu of “The Lord” he gives us “The God of love.” For God to be my shepherd means that “he is mine and I am his,” a phrase that suggests the depth of the connection, the intertwined identities of lover and beloved. Moreover, in the psalm’s context of eating and drinking—a table prepared, a cup that overflows—the Anglican Communion service’s Prayer of Humble Access (BCP 1549) also comes to mind, with its petition that in the sacrament’s offering of Christ’s flesh and blood, “we may continually dwell in him and he in us.”

It is this intercommunion of “him” and “me” that brings Herbert’s sense of plenitude to overflow. It is not enough to say, with Coverdale, “I can want nothing.” Instead, Herbert turns Psalm 23 into a conversation with a close friend, whom he asks, by way of a rhetorical question, “What can I want or need?” Given that the Lord is the God of love, the divine host ensures that (as the paraphrase continues) “I have the best,” that I “sit and dine,” that “my cup with wine / Runs over day and night.” Therefore, the answer to “What more can I want or need?” can only be “Nothing” and “No one.” The rest of Herbert’s poem follows the lead of the psalm’s boast of abundance; then in closing, it moves to yet another surplus of gratitude. Coverdale’s final verse reads: “Oh let thy loving-kindness and mercy follow me all the days of my life, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” Herbert, on the other hand, promises to give God something back, the “measure” of thanksgiving that is his own “utmost art” of praise: “Surely thy sweet and wondrous love / Shall measure all my days; / And as it never shall remove / So neither shall my praise.”

CHRISTOPHER SMART: “MINSTER OF PRAISE AT LARGE”

Apart from Herbert, Christopher Smart is the poet most deeply involved with the letter and the spirit of the Psalms. During a period of incarceration in an asylum (1757–63), he produced *A Translation of the Psalms of David* that advertised itself as “attempted in the spirit of Christianity”—Old Testament songs explicitly brought into the theological world of the New. Smart hoped, to no avail, that his metrical Psalter would provide the Church of England with an alternative to Sternhold and Hopkins (1562) and its successor, the “New Version” (1696). The opening stanza of Psalm 23, with its Christological import, gives a sense of his larger project: “The shepherd Christ from heav’n arriv’d, / My flesh and spirit feeds; / I shall not therefore be depriv’d / Of all my nature needs.”

Smart’s genius is better represented in the lengthy ode *A Song to David* and in the unfinished *Jubilate Agno*. In the latter work, with its antiphonal alternations between lines beginning with “let” and “for,” he drew upon Robert Lowth’s *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753). Lowth’s influential analysis of Hebrew poetry and its characteristic “parallelism” helped Smart acclimatize Hebrew into English so as to make a new Davidic verse. It is in *Song to David*, however, that his deep love for the Psalms (and for the one he named “Great Author of the Book of Gratitudes”) shines brightest. He begins his ode:

O THOU, that sitt’st upon a throne,
With harp of high, majestic tone,
To praise the King of kings:
And voice of heaven, ascending, swell,
Which, while its deeper notes excel,
Clear as a clarion rings:

To bless each valley, grove, and cost,
And charm the cherubs to the post
Of gratitude in throngs;
To keep the days on Zion’s Mount,
And send the year to his account,
With dances and with songs:

O servant of God’s holiest charge,
The minister of praise at large,
Which thou mayst now receive;
From thy blest mansion hail and hear,
From topmost eminence appear
To this the wreath I weave.

In the Psalter, David found 150 ways to “praise the King of Kings.” In recognition of this poetic legacy waiting to be claimed in eighteenth-century England, Smart took up his lyre, assumed “the post of gratitude” himself, and became, like his master, “the minister

of praise at large.” More powerfully than in his metrical Psalter, his *Song* lets David’s clarion ring clear.

GERALD MANLEY HOPKINS: PRAISE AND LAMENT

Smart wrote of David, “His muse, bright angel of his verse, / Gives balm for all the thorns that pierce, / For all the pangs that rage” (stanza xvii). It was this particular Muse that enabled Gerard Manley Hopkins (d. 1889) to give voice to the thorns and pangs that characterized the final years of his life. In an earlier period, during his Jesuit novitiate in Wales, he had been entirely a poet of praise. He celebrated a world “charged with the grandeur of God” in which the pied beauty of dappled things became an occasion to rhapsodize the creator in the creation:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

This poetic flare-up of joy and gratitude later darkens almost entirely in the period when he wrote what he called his “Terrible Sonnets.” Whereas the biblical psalmist typically concludes even the most despairing lamentation with some sort of affirmation, Hopkins remains in the pit, his strength dried up like a potsherd:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light’s delay.
With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

Although complaining *de profundis* to God “with cries countless,” Hopkins manages nonetheless to keep talking to the One who stays hidden in the shadows—an out-of-touch beloved who never picks up his mail.

Yet Hopkins does not take this desertion quietly; he becomes openly argumentative in a sonnet from mid-March of 1889, one of several written in the spirit of the psalmist when he asks in sheer exasperation, “Why?” or “How long?” Placing himself from the outset within a scriptural frame, Hopkins gives his poem a Vulgate epigraph that openly aligns him with the weebegone Jeremiah as well as with psalmist of lament: “Thou

indeed, O Lord, art just, if I plead with thee, but yet I will speak what is just to thee: Why doth the way of the wicked prosper: why is it well with all them that transgress, and do wickedly?" (Jer. 12:1, Douai-Rheims).

Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum: verumtamen iusta loquar ad te. Quare via impiorum prosperatur? &c
 Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
 With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
 Why do sinners' ways prosper? And why must
 Disappointment all I endeavor end?
 Were thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
 How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
 Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
 Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
 Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
 Now leavèd how thick! Lacèd they are again
 With fretty shervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
 Them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
 Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
 Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

The sonnet echoes with the complaints of all those Old Testament friends of God (Job and the prophets, along with the psalmist) who find themselves seduced and abandoned. Life has been "spent" in the Lord's service, but in the end what has it amounted to? "Why must / Disappointment all I endeavor end?" The contrast with the wicked could not be starker: "sinners' ways prosper," "the sots and thralls of lust / Do in spare hours . . . thrive." In the words of Psalm 92:7, the workers of iniquity spring up like grass in the rainy season; they even flourish. But not "I."

The speaker pleads his case by contending with God respectfully: he uses the word "sir" twice when addressing his "Lord." Still, what all but overwhelms the poem is the speaker's sense not only of being frustrated in his hopes but defeated, thwarted, "worsted" by the One he has been trying tirelessly to serve. Sterile, dried up, he looks around him and sees the abundance of the natural world. The banks and brakes of even the meanest roadway are vivid with green life; wind moves like breath through everything; birds build their nests and await the birth of their young. "[B]ut not I build; no, but strain, / Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes."

The "work" Hopkins speaks of here is no doubt his ill-fated teaching career in Dublin: "Five wasted years almost have passed in Ireland," he notes on New Year's Day 1889, during what was to be his last spiritual retreat and only three months before composing this sonnet. "I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time . . . All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch."⁹ Together with the conviction of having been thwarted and defeated in his profession and worn down by illness, he has also realized a loss of poetic power. Gone is the transfiguring vision that enabled him to see "God's grandeur" everywhere and to harvest "Christ my savior" from a Welsh landscape "barbarous in beauty." By contrast, nothing grows in his spiritual desert.

And yet, even if Hopkins does not close the poem with an abrupt switch to the affirmative such as we find in Psalm 22's final verses, he nonetheless ends with a supplication to the "Lord of life": "send my roots rain." The showers of blessing never actually fall in this psalm of complaint; the desert never blooms. But in the prayerful turn to God we find a root of faith stuck so deep into bedrock that the poet's withered tree can, if not flourish, at least outlast the drought. This is the promise of Hopkins' parent text, the Psalter, where, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps. 126:5); where the mute can yet have a new song put into their mouth, "even praise unto our God" (Ps. 40:4[3]).

To speak of the Psalms as a "parent text" for Hopkins requires no stretch of imagination anymore than it does for the other poets named thus far. They were all steeped in biblical culture; for them to speak to or about God, therefore, involved what amounts to an unconscious ventriloquism of scriptural voices. Texts like these that were known by heart, recited day by day and year by year, would not have to be researched or cited deliberately; rather, they would be always and already in mind, a mother tongue.

THE PSALMS AS "PRETEXT" FOR POETRY

A poet's debt to the Psalter, however, might take a variety of forms, with paraphrase only the most obvious way to take up David's lyre. A single verse might give rise to an entire poem, or a cluster of metaphors invoke any number of psalms so as to strike up a complex reciprocal relationship between the new text and the old. Like Psalm 104, for example, Herbert's poem "Providence" celebrates God's universal oversight of Creation and then moves on to name particulars that range from landscape, to weather, to individual creatures. But whereas the psalmist looks at a natural world quite apart from the interests of humankind, Herbert demonstrates how divine providence wittily constructs a heaven and an earth that benignly cater to us:

Bees work for man; and yet they never bruise
 Their masters flower, but leave it, having done,
 As fair as ever, and as fit to use;
 So both the flower doth stay, and honey run.

More subtle is the connection between the five poems to which Herbert gave the title "Affliction" and Psalm 102, whose superscription in the AV is, "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord." Take, for instance, Psalm 102:5[4]: "My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread." Then consider "Affliction" (IV), where the speaker finds that his thoughts "are all a case of knives":

Broken in pieces all asunder,
 Lord, hunt me not,
 A thing forgot,
 Once a poore creature, now a wonder,
 A wonder tortur'd in the space
 Betwixt this world and that of grace.

It is not so much that Herbert in his “Affliction” poems or, say, Hopkins in his “Terrible Sonnets,” wrote with the Psalter open before them; instead, they had in their deep memory of Scripture a particular mode of discourse for disappointment or distress over God, as well as for gratitude and praise. In this lexicon, hearts are smitten, grass withers, but if weeping endures for a night, “joy cometh in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). The intertextual connection with the Psalms in such cases is atmospheric or dispositional rather than systematic, but nonetheless powerful for being so.

What happens, however, when the Bible’s cultural hold on the poetic imagination loosens, and the lyrical “I” loses the sense of institutional and communal connection to a living Scripture? One might expect a wholesale falling off of interest in the Psalter, and yet this has not been the case with many twenty- and twenty-first century poets who, while not conforming to the model struck in Herbert or Hopkins, are nonetheless engaged in “psalming” God, albeit in thoroughly unconventional, even iconoclastic, ways. In the United Kingdom, there is the priest-poet R. S. Thomas (d. 2000), with his decades-long attempts to speak with a God who is *deus absconditus*—more “it” than “Him”: “It is this great absence / that is like a presence, that compels / me to address it without hope / of a reply” (“Absence”).

CONFESSIONAL PSALMISTS: BERRYMAN AND SEXTON

A more overt link to the Psalms can be found in two mid-century Americans, John Berryman (d. 1972) and Anne Sexton (d. 1974). Both were serious readers of Scripture, preoccupied with theological matters in their later verse, whose religion (like their poetry) was intensely idiosyncratic and often bewilderingly personal. The Psalter’s larger world of reference shrinks to the dimensions of the poet’s self: The “we” within the “I” is largely submerged in a welter of private history, sexual conflict, terror, and exaltation. Bouts of alcoholism and manic-depressive mood swings afflicted both Berryman and Sexton; both spent time in asylums; both also took their own lives. It is from a desperate “pit,” therefore, that they speak to a God whom they hope, with wavering conviction, is *there*.

Berryman opens his *Eleven Addresses to the Lord* (1971) by celebrating the “Adonai of Rescue,” at once the creator-sustainer of the cosmos and the “Caretaker” who made (and continues to put up with) him:

Master of beauty, craftsman of the snowflake,
 inimitable contriver,
 endower of Earth so gorgeous & different from the boring Moon.
 thank you for such as it is my gift.

The “gift” referred to here is no doubt his writing, which in this sequence shows itself to be at once self-deprecating and wildly self-confident, colloquial and rhetorical, and, in every sense of the word, “fresh.” Is this David on a bender, or are we discovering a viable way to address the Lord, warts and all, as might a “confessional poet” of the 1960s? At times Berryman speaks worshipfully to the “master of insight & beauty,” whom he calls “Your Majesty” and “Sole watchman of the flying stars.” At others he is not so sure of what or to whom he speaks, so that he seems to take away with one hand what he gives with another: “I say ‘Thy kingdom come,’ it means nothing to me.” Rather than move between praise and lament, therefore, the poems oscillate between inherited biblical language and the lingua franca of skepticism; they are both serious and off-hand. The reader who comes to Berryman expecting the straightforward affirmations of Psalm 18:2 (“The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer”) will be disappointed. Nonetheless, the *Eleven Addresses* overflow with a mixture of wary affirmation and measured praise: “Holy, as I suppose I dare to call you / without pretending to know anything about you / but infinite capacity everywhere & always / & in particular certain goodness to me.”

Sexton’s reinvention of the Psalter in *O Ye Tongues* (1973) is mediated through Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*, which begins, “Rejoice in God, O ye tongues; give glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.” The poet also becomes a character in this sequence of ten loosely associated poems that Sexton calls “psalms”: “Christopher, my imaginary brother, my twin holding his baby cock like a minnow.” Like Smart, she alternates between “let” and “for” clauses that swing between a playful, Genesis-inflected celebration of the Creator—“Let there be a God as large as a sunlamp to laugh his heat at you”—and a veiled narrative of her struggle to break free of her mental prison (“Anne is locked in”), not only to survive but to write: “For I am placing fist over fist on rock and plunging into the / altitude of words. The silence of words.” Similarly, the poems move between whimsical appreciations of God’s creatures—“[Let Anne and Christopher] present a bee, cupped in their palms, zinging the / electricity of the Lord out into little yellow Z’s”—to obscure laments over the “death hole” that threatens to swallow her up along with her “brother”: “For Anne sat down with the blood of a hammer and built a / tombstone for herself and Christopher sat beside her and was / well pleased with their red shadow.” Sexton’s Sixth Psalm is addressed to “America”—“For America is a fat woman dusting a grand piano in English / Creek, New Jersey”—but there is in fact little sense of an outside world in *O ye Tongues* or even of the elusive “Master of insight & beauty,” whom Berryman addresses with reverence and familiarity. Tellingly, she speaks about, but not to, God. The psalmist that Sexton would like to be, therefore, is self-enclosed, sadly “locked in.”

THE ONGOING “NEW SONG”

Although common wisdom would have it that the Bible has been lost to contemporary culture, poets continue to be drawn to the Psalms. A revived interest in paraphrase, for instance, is evident in the editorial work of Laurance Wieder (1995) and Donald Davies (1996), each of whom compiled poetic versions of the Psalms that date from the early sixteenth to the late twentieth century. Neither limited himself to compilation alone, however. Not only did Davies (1988) publish a substantial number of his own poetic “riffs” on particular psalms—“The Thirty-ninth Psalm, Adapted” is the most renowned—but Wieder (2003) joined the tradition spearheaded by the Sidneys in producing his own paraphrase rendition of all 150.

Brooks Haxton’s *Uproar: Antiphonies to Psalms* (2004) is a sustained response to the Psalter but is more riff than paraphrase. Each poem is preceded by a psalm text from the King James Version, but the relationship of the one to the other runs from clear echo to “free association.” Haxton strikes up an antiphonal relationship to David so that the psalms become “outcries” that he responds to from whatever vantage he can find: “atheist, devotionalist, agnostic, child, lover, husband, friend, parent, citizen.”¹⁰ Psalm 42 (“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?”) takes him deep into the sea in a submersible looking for a buried shipwreck, “where no one / could have come till now but corpses.” Psalm 36 (“Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures”) evokes the body-surfer’s dangerous ecstasy.

Brad Davis has produced a similar venture in his four-part series, *Opening King David* (2002–8), with a poem for every psalm, each of which touches base with a single verse and spins out from Scripture into the poet’s world of New England gardens and ponds, e-mail and television. But whereas Haxton writes his free-ranging meditations from a perspective of ambivalence (“atheist, devotionalist, agnostic”), Davis, for all his occasional satire and rough edges, stands squarely within the Herbert–Hopkins fold.

Other contemporary American poets engage the Psalter in a less programmatic way. Anthony Hecht (d. 2004) draws heavily on the Psalms, from “Rites and Ceremonies” in *The Hard Hours* (1967), to his final collection, *The Darkness and the Light* (2002), whose title poem springs from Psalm 139:12. Alicia Ostriker’s *Volcano Sequence* (2002) shows her in a lover’s quarrel, entranced with the Psalms’ beauty and yet repelled by the call to violence and revenge that threads its way through. So too with David’s God, whom she can neither embrace nor abandon: “I pull my eyes away from the hills / I will not kill for you / I will never love you again // unless you ask me.”¹¹ Mark Jarman’s “Five Psalms” (2004) proposes different ways to imagine David’s Adonai: “Let us think of God as a lover / Who never calls”; “Lord of dimensions and the dimensionless, / Wave and particle, all and none.” Scott Cairns takes up the same task in his “Idiot Psalms” (2009), with a jocular tone that is no less earnest for being playful and sassy: “O God Belovéd if obliquely so . . . Ostensible Lover of our kind—while / apparently aloof.”

Playfulness is also an aspect of Jacqueline Osherow's relationship to the Psalms. But unlike any of the other poets mentioned thus far (with the exception of the twelfth-century Judah Halevi), she knows the Psalter in Hebrew, in the tradition of the synagogue and Yiddish Diaspora, and with a linguistic intimacy that is foreign even to the likes of Herbert, Smart, and Hopkins. Her thirteen-poem *Scattered Psalms* in *Dead Men's Praise* (1999) takes off from specific psalm texts, as we have seen in the work of others; but her poems bare a close, Midrashic connection to the Scripture that is utterly distinctive.¹² They are dazzling in their formal construction (Dante's *terza rima*, for instance), breathlessly conversational, colloquial in a blend of American English and Yiddish, and outright funny. She confesses a "weakness for the wisecrack" but evidently enjoys in giving way to it, even with the Lord: "I'm not sure God cares much for piety; / my guess is, since David was his favorite, / That he's partial to passion, spontaneity, // And likes a little genuine regret."

Osherow assumes the voice of a mother, grandchild, daughter-in-law; she is also a conversation partner with Rashi, Yakov Glatstein, her old Hebrew teacher, the "translation committee / Of the Jewish Publication Society"—all of whom have helped her sing "a song of Jacqueline" that is not afraid to question whether it is possible after the Holocaust to sing the Lord's song. It may be, as Psalm 115:17 has it, that "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." Nonetheless, Osherow will not relinquish her own lively Hallelujah or refuse to imagine that the Psalter meant something even *then*. With Psalm 37 in mind, she places us inside a concentration camp when there would seem to be no more words to say:

I know it sounds crazy, but couldn't one of them –
 Not that it matters, they all died anyway –
 But still, so many people, and enough time
 For reciting what the dying are supposed to say
 (*Hear, O Israel, et cetera*) and a psalm.
 Or even not a whole psalm. Just one line.
 All those people waiting. Couldn't one of them
 Have mumbled to a brother, a father, a son,
 (The women, of course, were on another line
 and this is not a psalm they would have known),
just a little longer and there will be no wicked one;
just a little longer . . . he'll be gone.

The wicked still manifestly flourish in the twenty-first century, but so too does the desire to address the God who made heaven and Earth, the just and the unjust. The Psalms bear witness to the need to express both praise and lament because there is abundant reason for giving voice to both. So, too, poets continue to find in David's words the motive—and metaphor—for their own new songs.¹³

NOTES

1. "I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, 'An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul'; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror" (Calvin 1949 [1845]: 1.xxxvi–xxxvii).
2. All scriptural citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the AV.
3. On the "limits of subjectivity" in the Psalms, see Fisch 1988: 104–35. Alter speaks of biblical poetry's "fundamentally collective nature": "the Bible knows nothing of the personal lyric" (1985: 207). "Psalm" poets since the Renaissance, however, have scanted the communal for the private, the divine for the idiosyncratic human speaker.
4. For Dante and David, see Federici 2010: 180–209.
5. For the metrical psalm tradition, see Davie 1988 ("Introduction"), Hamlin 2004; Holladay 1996; Hunter 2009; Wieder 1999 ("Introduction").
6. John Milton, *Reason of Church Government*, cited in Hamlin 2004: 3.
7. See the appraisals of Mary Sidney's skill by contemporary poets Jacqueline Osherow and Rosanna Warren.
8. John Donne, "Upon the Translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip and the Countess of Pembroke his Sister" in Martz 1976: 278. See also Alter on Herbert's "Antiphon," a poem "that re-creates in the idiom of its own age and culture the poetic matrix of many Hebrew psalms" (Alter 1985: 209–11, quote on 211).
9. Hopkins 1959: 262. See Mariani 1970: 301–4.
10. Haxton 2004: xiv.
11. See also Ostriker 2008: 20–37 and her dialogue with Peter O'Leary, "If the Psalms Aren't Poetry, They're Useless," available at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/182864>.
12. In addition to the *Scattered Psalms* sequence, see Osherow's lengthy "Autumn Psalm" in Osherow 2005: 33–40.
13. For another discussion of this topic, see Hawkins 2003: 381–94.

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CHAPTER 7

LANGUAGE OF LAMENT IN THE PSALMS

CARLEEN MANDOLFO

LAMENT as a practice and as a literary theme is not unique to the Hebrew Bible. Cultures worldwide engage in lamentation. The two primary forms of lament across cultures are “dirge” and “supplication to the deity” (Lee 2010: 32, 51–52).¹ Lament is expressed both ritually/orally and literarily, but its original constitution was surely as a praxis and not as literature. That is to say, the lamentation genre that we experience in the Bible is most likely a secondary form, written down in order to preserve a memory of an originary ritual. As a genre, biblical lamentation displays tremendous variety. It appears within a variety of literary contexts, including narrative, prophetic, and liturgical collections. Defining lament literature is more complicated than it might seem because of its contextual variety but also because historically biblical scholars have labeled portions of the biblical corpus “lament” when those texts might have been more properly termed something else. The “lament” genre in the book of Psalms, for instance, is at variance with what is understood as lament by classicists.

In classical Greek literature, lament language appears in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* (and in many other contexts), and it almost always denotes a cry of mourning. In other words, it is closer to a “dirge” than the lament featured in biblical psalms. In the Psalter, the laments (whether individual or communal) are better understood as crisis language. That is, psalmic laments do not seem to be grieving an irreparable loss so much as appealing to the deity for reparation of status, whether physical, social, or psychological—for example: “Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue” (Ps. 120:2[1]). They often exhibit a mood of complaint:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?

22:2[1]

There are only a few examples of lament literature in the Bible that approximate the Classical understanding, such as David’s eulogy for Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1, which like

the laments found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is embedded in a broader historical context that is focused on war, and the book of Lamentations, a work that grieves the destruction of a city (Jerusalem) personified as a woman. City laments of the latter sort were not uncommon in the ancient Near East and come closer to the genre of “dirge” than do lament psalms, especially those of the individual.

FORMAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are approximately forty-two psalms of lament in the canonical book of Psalms.² About thirty of those are individual psalms of lament; the rest are communal. Nineteen of the individual psalms of lament appear in Book One, with only a smattering appearing throughout the remaining four books of the Psalter. With the Dead Sea Scrolls evidence suggesting that the latter books of the Psalter were still in flux in the Greco-Roman period, it is fairly safe to say that most of Book One was more or less “canonical” early in the history of the collection. The reason for this disproportionate emphasis on psalms of lament is unknown, though many scholars point to the experience of the Babylonian exile as a rationale.

The work of Hermann Gunkel, in the early decades of the twentieth century, set a tone for Psalms study that continues today. Gunkel was interested in approaching biblical texts more holistically by going beyond the purely historical questions about the Bible that fragmented it into discretely authored pieces. He posed more formal and literary-oriented questions than his peers at the time, queries that made him a pioneer in the area of biblical form criticism. Gunkel and his students were interested in identifying the forms or genres (*Gattungen*) of biblical literature as well as how those genres functioned in their original context. That is, each form had a “situation in life” (*Sitz im Leben*) and served a particular purpose in the community (the same way pledging allegiance to the flag or swearing an oath in court serves a function in the United States). The genres Gunkel determined for the poems in the Psalter have more or less stood the test of time, though they have been nuanced and tweaked in the intervening decades. The psalms that are the concern of this essay were identified from the beginning by Gunkel as discrete genres—“laments of the community” and “laments of the individual.” His student Sigmund Mowinckel extended Gunkel’s interest in contextualizing the forms he catalogued by trying more or less to locate every category of psalm within the cult of ancient Israel. While many of Mowinckel’s theories have been rejected, I believe the impulse to contextualize psalms within the worship life of Israel remains relevant and on track.

Genres are identified by the standard format each member of the genre shares. The following features are typical of most lament psalms:

1. *Invocation*—the initial cry to God to take notice
2. *Complaint*—the description (usually general) of the psalmist’s suffering that includes a complaint either against God or some enemy/ies

3. *Request*—the psalmist petitions God to act on the psalmist's behalf
4. *Expression of Confidence*—often a recital of God's trustworthy characteristics
5. *Vow of Praise*—assurance of praise that will follow deliverance (though the verbal tenses in this section are sometimes ambiguous).

Not every lament psalm exhibits each of these features, and, in any case, these elements are more common to individual than communal laments. Communal laments sometimes have an extended historical section that may be understood in relation to the "expression of confidence." Even among the individual laments, however, there is great generic range. Note Psalm 88, which has no praise and little expression of confidence. Nearly the entire psalm is complaint. And some laments include a penitential element (e.g., Ps. 130), though most do not. The lack of standardization within genres led Gunkel to consider some psalms "corrupt" examples of their genre (e.g., Ps. 9–10). That claim, however, seems largely dependent on a modernist commitment to generic integrity. Gunkel's platonic view of form just does not hold up in actual literature. There is, in fact, no such thing as a "pure" genre. Additionally, we should remember that our categories are constructions imposed on these texts from a temporal remove of over 2,000 years. The names associated with the different psalm types are not attested in the canon. In fact, several psalms come with their own titles, but we have never unlocked the mystery of their ancient designations. It is not even clear that a meaningful distinction can be made between some psalms that are designated "communal" and others that are designated "individual." Psalm 12, for example, is often considered a communal lament, but its focus on the decline of social values could just as easily be understood as a single citizen expressing anxiety about the direction his or her society is taking.

In terms of the *Sitz im Leben* of lament psalms, there is little consensus. The fact that we cannot even distinguish absolutely between individual and communal laments only exacerbates the uncertainty. Laments seem to have been written over the course of hundreds of years and were performed in varying social contexts. Those laments that are clearly communal are probably easiest to situate. They were most likely prayed by the king or a priest of high standing during times of social unrest or upheaval (Pss. 12, 126, 137), war (Pss. 44, 60, 74, 77, 80, 85, 94, 123), or some kind of vague existential angst (Ps. 90). Psalm 44 is a powerful illustration of the terror the people of Israel experienced at the loss of their deity's protection:

In God have we always gloried,
and we will give thanks to your name, forever. *Selah*
But you have cast us off, and brought us to confusion;
and you do not go forth with our armies.³ (44:9–10[8–9])

The words seem plausibly situated in an official communal supplication in response to a threat from national enemies. While the precise nature of the threat is not specified, it is easy to understand why prayers such as these were preserved in the aftermath of

the Babylonian exile. Because these psalms dealt with national distress, most scholars assume they were prayed in the temple or some other official venue. This notion is reinforced by the fact that several communal laments seem to include an “answer” to the plea that is at their heart. After the complaint and request sections of Psalm 60, there seems to be an oracle that must have served as a response from the deity: “God speaks/spoke from His holy place: ‘I will exultantly carve up Shechem . . .’” (v. 8[6]; my translation). We do not know much about the functionaries who would have presided over services of this type, but some have posited a cultic prophet who may have delivered the oracle (see Ps. 12:6[5]). This might have been in contrast to those prophets who seemed to operate outside the cult and clearly did not always deliver positive oracles to the people or their leaders!

Individual lament psalms are more difficult to locate in their original context. The formal diversity in these psalms has led some scholars to posit subdivisions separated along thematic lines (e.g., Kraus 1988): laments for illness (Pss. 6, 22, 31, 103, etc.), spiritual distress (Pss. 13, 69), persecution or unfair accusation (Pss. 35, 69), and for the effects of sin (though this last one is disputed and may include only Pss. 51 and 130).⁴ It is tempting to assume such psalms operated in the private realm of individual worship and prayer, but I think we have to accept that their very preservation suggests a more public function. That is not to say that the ancients did not pray privately. It is certainly possible if not probable that they occasionally prayed these “official” prayers in nonofficial settings, not unlike a Christian praying “The Lord’s Prayer” in solitude as well as in church. But we have to consider a more formal setting for works that were deliberately preserved for the community’s use.

Erhard Gerstenberger has done considerable work on this question and says that even individual laments would have had a cultic context but that we need to reconsider what we mean by cult.⁵ Usually when we speak of cult in biblical scholarship, we are alluding to the “official” cult of the state that conducted most of its ceremonies at the temple. It is possible that individuals brought their private concerns to a centralized worship venue (consider Hannah in 1 Samuel 1), but surely that could not have been possible in every case. Not every Israelite lived within a short walk to the temple, and familial and clan duties would have made it impossible to respond to every crisis with a trip to Jerusalem (or Dan or Bethel if the individual was a northerner). Many illnesses, as well, would have required some sort of prayer ritual in the home or close by.

Family (as opposed to official) religion in ancient Israel has received little attention in the history of scholarship, but there have been some gains made in the past couple of decades. Gerstenberger, Rainer Albertz, and Karel van der Toorn have tried to recreate aspects of Israelite family religion using comparative evidence (from recent tribal communities in the case of Gerstenberger). There is not sufficient space to rehearse much of the fascinating material they have uncovered, but what is clear is that ancient Israel, like its neighbors, surely had a rich local or family cult life. The *bēt ’āb* (“house of the father”) was the primary institution in ancient Israel, and before YHWHism took firm hold of both the official and unofficial cultic life of Israel, the ancient Israelites probably worshipped a variety of deities that were particular to their families or clans. Alongside

these gods and goddesses would have been local shrines and holy places (see 2 Kgs. 23 for Josiah's genocidal tactics against these holy places). Much of the people's ritual life would have taken place at these local shrines, and only major festivals would have required the presence of the people at *the* temple. This is probably the context to which the origins of the individual laments can be traced. At some point these individual prayers migrated into official circles and were preserved for community liturgical use. There was most likely a symbiotic relationship between family and official cult in which prayers were adapted and inflected in dialogic interaction, but I agree with those who insist that the individual lament originated within a familial religious setting. It makes sense because centralized cultic life came on the scene fairly late in the religious lives of many ancients.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN AND GREEK LAMENTATION—CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS

In order to fully appreciate the language of lament psalms, it would be instructive to briefly survey the similarities and differences that exist between them and the lament literature of Israel's neighbors. Biblical scholars have typically paid little or no attention to Greek lamentation in their efforts to understand biblical lamentation. In part, this represents prudent caution; biblical scholars on the whole are ill-trained in the classical tradition. Still, this area has the potential to break through a few of the dead ends currently confronting Psalms scholarship. For instance, since Mowinckel we have made little progress in understanding the cultic context from which most psalms surely originated, and Mowinckel's contributions have to a significant degree been rightly undone. Pictorial and textual representations of classical lamentation offer many more cultic and liturgical clues than do biblical representations. Although it has been suggested many times that psalms are better understood as "literature" than cultic scripts, it is plausible that even in their literary form they were used for liturgical purposes in ancient Israel and still retain elements from their former oral iterations. Related to this is the question of authorship and/or performative agent. The Greek attestations suggest a gendered element to lament composition and performance, a fact that has received shockingly little attention by biblical scholars; this is especially surprising given the fact that Mesopotamian lament literature likewise suggests female involvement in lamentation.

Before discussing the Greek counterparts to the biblical lament psalms, let us briefly address the Mesopotamian context(s) of lament. Hundreds of lament prayers have been attested in Mesopotamian literature beginning with the Sumerian city laments, dated to the early 2nd millennium BCE. Because city laments bear little relation to the lament psalms, we will not discuss them. The most common Mesopotamian prayers that are relevant are the *balag/ershemma* and *shuilla* prayers.⁶ A less common, though plentifully attested form is the *dingir.sa.dib.ba*-prayers.⁷ It should be noted that our designations

for Mesopotamian prayers are somewhat arbitrary, since they are based on an inadequate knowledge of the function of these prayers. Oftentimes, the prayers we refer to as one type or another are not so designated in the literature itself.

I start by discussing the *shuilla* and dingir.sa.dib.ba prayers, their relation to the laments found in the Psalter, and how they might shine a light (albeit a dim one) on the unknown ritual aspects of biblical laments. I then move to the *balag/ershemma*, which may suggest a way to break the impasse concerning who might have performed these laments. Akkadian *shuilla* prayers are lamentations that seem to be delivered by an individual actor, which has motivated biblical scholars to draw comparisons between them and individual psalms of lament. (There is also a Sumerian version attested that seems to be communal in nature.) Like individual psalms of lament, *shuilla* prayers are delivered by individuals who are trying to re-secure the good favor of their personal deities, but, unlike biblical psalms, the supplicant offers his or her prayer through the mediation of a high god, such as Marduk, Ishtar, Ea, and so on. These prayers are often initiated with elaborate hymnic invocations to the deity.

In contrast, individual psalms of lament often begin with very spare invocations, usually consisting of only a word or two, such as “O YHWH” (Ps. 3:2[1]) or “O my God” (Ps. 59:2[1]). Like the biblical psalms of lament, the *shuilla* prayers were usually offered in order to secure relief from some type of suffering, such as illness. They also often expressed a fear of death, as is commonly seen in the lament psalms (e.g., Ps. 88:3–4[2–3]). Moreover, similar to a few lament psalms (though not nearly the number that many assume) is the acknowledgment that the supplicant has done something to anger the gods and thus deserves the suffering that forms the basis for their entreaty. The *shuilla* prayers often end with a vow of praise or a hymnic feature, paralleling a similar trend in the psalms. Although these prayers were obviously recorded in written form, they also reflect usage in a cultic setting. The long invocation makes little sense in a purely written format. In addition, the very term *shuilla* means “the raising of the hands,” indicating a ritual gesture. We have descriptions of what a typical lament ritual might have looked like:

Schematically presented, the supplicant sets out an offering of various items, lifts the hands in a gesture of greeting, bows to the ground, rises up again, and then speaks the prayer (usually multiple times). All of this is intended to move the beseeched superior—whether human or divine—to be obligated to the supplicant and extend a helping hand. (Lenzi 2010: 311)

Alan Lenzi has suggested we would do better to compare individual laments to another type of Akkadian lament prayer—the dingir.sha.dib.ba prayers. These supplications were offered for the abatement of a personal god’s wrath, just as were the *shuilla*. The difference is that these prayers were offered directly to the personal deity rather than routed through the influence of the high gods, and they had very brief invocations, reminiscent of individual biblical laments.

Unfortunately, the psalms preserved in the biblical canon do not come with instruction books, so we do not know for sure what ritual accompanied them, but it is hard

to imagine that they did not involve some kind of ritual accompaniment, like their Mesopotamian counterparts. Tzvi Abusch posits that *shuilla* prayers were originally part of family cult operations and only later came to be associated with the temple and/or palace elites, at which point they saw a transformation and elaboration of the opening invocation. Early *shuilla* prayers (or prayers that have similar formal features to these prayers) did not employ the long invocations and were directed toward the personal deity, making them very similar to the biblical lament psalms.

Biblical scholars still have considerable work to do on the cultic context of lament language. The idea that individual prayers in the Psalter might have a cultic context outside of the official temple space has received scant attention. Some have argued that individual psalms could not have had any cultic context because some of these prayers seem so personal it is hard to imagine what role they would have played within the official or state cult. This problem led some scholars, such as Mowinkel, to suggest that prayers of the individual were actually communal prayers whereby one cult leader (perhaps the king) prayed on behalf of the entire community. These extremes are unnecessary when we consider the Mesopotamian prayer tradition. Van der Toorn and Albertz have demonstrated the rich cultic/prayer life experienced at the family level by Israel's neighbors. Working specifically on biblical psalms, Gerstenberger has made progress in establishing a similarly complex family cult for Israel. He acknowledges that at some point even the individual prayers of the Psalter must have become part of the official cult (otherwise we would not have them in written form) but that they plausibly have roots outside of the state/temple cultus. The evidence from the *shuilla* is instructive here. The *shuilla* typically does not seem to have played a role in the temple liturgy but rather was conducted in the home or in an outdoor area set apart for the ritual. The *shuilla* seemed to require the service of a specialist in this type of lament called the *ashipu*. Over time this specialist "increasingly thought in terms drawn from the urban temple as he became a servant and representative of the elite" (Abusch 2004: 354). This progression is reflected in the fact that there are a wide variety of *shuilla* prayers—some that reflect temple concerns and others that seem purely private and individualistic. This kind of variety is true of the biblical laments as well, which is why it is often difficult to distinguish between individual and communal laments. But what we do learn from the Mesopotamian evidence is that quite likely even laments of the individual required a functionary (even if local or low-level) in order to assure their correct expression and the positive fulfillment of their petition.

The *balag* and *ershemma* prayers provide clues to the mystery of who might have presided over the ritual involving lament prayer. These Mesopotamian prayers are more closely related to the city laments in that they are often communal in nature but apparently not always. The terms *balag* and the *ershemma* seem to connote different musical instruments that probably accompanied the lyrical lament. The prayers were usually sung by the *gala* priest, who typically chanted this prayer in a Sumerian dialect called *emesal*, which seems to refer to a thin or attenuated speech often ascribed to women (or goddesses in mythic texts). The officiating priests themselves seem to have been men, but it is telling that the formal demands of the prayer seem to require the use of a

feminine dialect for their performance. This phenomenon is roughly equivalent to the lament language we encounter in the classic Greek tragedies in which male performers acted out the role of female lamenters. Furthermore, the Greek words for “lament” (*goos* and *threnos*, primarily), reference a high-pitched cry or wail, such as would have been more likely to emanate from a woman. Lamentation as ritual is transhistorically and transculturally often under the purview of the female members of a given society. However, men presumably developed the language into distinct literary genres, such as *elogos*, *epitaphios logos*, and *epikedeion*, that were more widely circulated and functioned in a large-scale commemorative way. Although laments occurring within the Greek tragedies are more akin to what should be called “dirges,” both dirges and laments (or prayers of supplication) fall within the same emotional range, and there are clear cross-cultural indications that women were involved to some degree in both, at least at the smaller community level.⁸ For instance, the Greek words *goos* and *threnos* over time came to express any kind of lament, not just expressions for the dead.

Lament rituals in Greece are recorded not only in literature but pictorially as well. Vases probably offer the most immediate access to the funerary rituals, thereby reflecting the prominent place of women in the lament tradition as both family members and professional mourners. Karen Stears writes, “[W]omen were...a medium through which a kin group was able to display ‘correct’ grief and emotion, even if not actually felt, both for the kin group itself and for the social whole. This grief was ‘required’ as one of the means by which the social crisis initiated by a death was resolved” (2008: 151). In Athens, so prominent had women’s roles in these rituals become that Solon (Athenian statesman and lawmaker, 7th–6th century BCE) felt it necessary to curtail the exuberance of female mourning.

Of special note in the Greek witness is evidence that female lamentation sometimes functioned as social protest (Caraveli 1986: 169–94). Laments gave women a rhetorical platform that they otherwise would not have had. For instance, women apparently used lament language in part to subvert the prevailing social status quo, to bemoan one’s social position, or any number of other challenging situations. Likewise, recent work on the lament psalms suggests that certain psalms can be understood as leveling a challenge to the prevailing ideologies surrounding the psalmist (Mandolfo 2002). Relatedly, Job’s laments are best understood as a sustained critique of the dominant theodic ideology espoused particularly in Deuteronomic texts. What the Greek evidence makes possible is the understanding that the subversive nature of the majority of lament psalms (particularly of the individual, but see also Pss. 44, 74, and 79) might find its roots in a lament tradition originally anchored by Israelite women. Of course, this evidence is only suggestive and does not *prove* the existence of female composers or participants in biblical psalms of lament or their attendant rituals. Nevertheless, at the very least the paucity of references to female lamentation in biblical texts should arouse scholarly interest, since women were (and continue to be) the primary actors in a variety of proximate lament contexts.

PERVASIVE THEMES IN THE PSALMS OF LAMENT

The vast majority of biblical literature consists of either revelation (words of God/prophets to people) or third-person narrative. The voice of the people is relatively absent, comparatively, which is why the Psalter and the lament psalms in particular are a rich and unique record of ancient Israel's perspective on its existence and especially its relationship with its God. The Psalms do not, however, teach us much about how the Israelites understood their *daily* interaction with one another or their God. Rather, the Psalms record the extremities of existence: the highs and lows that are the time-less inheritance of humanity. Given that orientation, the Psalms exhibit an interest in specific recurring themes, such as creation, justice, conflict, death, joy, enemies, the body, hope, despair, and so on. Without a doubt, of these, "justice" (and perhaps, relatedly, "conflict" in the communal lament psalms) is the most pressing concern of the lament psalmists. Deeply implicated in this concern, of course, are the related issues of "enemies," "death," and "the body." These themes are explored in nearly every lament psalm in the Psalter, but the rich and diverse metaphors employed to examine these issues keep the poetry fresh and penetrating (Brown 2002). In order to delve a little more deeply into the language of lament, I offer some concrete illustrations of these themes in action in the psalms.

"Justice"

Although it is commonly believed that the supplicants in the lament psalms are pleading for God's mercy, a close reading reveals that nearly every lament can be characterized as a demand for justice.

Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry.
Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. (17:1)

Rarely do supplicants admit to any personal fault that has landed them in their situation of distress.

O LORD, my God, if I have done this,
if there is wrong in my hands,
if I have repaid my ally with harm
or plundered my foe without cause,
then let the enemy pursue and overtake me. . . . (7:4–6a[3–5a])

Rather, they insist that they are being persecuted by God or enemies—God’s neglect or the enemies’ active harassment.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
 Why are you so far from helping me,
 from the words of my groaning?
 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
 and by night, but find no rest. (22:2–3[1–2])

O LORD, why do you cast me off?
 Why do you hide your face from me? (88:15[14])

How long must I bear pain in my soul,
 and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
 How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” (13:3[2])

On occasion a psalm will claim God’s anger as the cause of the speaker’s plight. But even if God’s anger implies some kind of malfeasance on the part of the supplicant, such is rarely acknowledged directly and certainly not as the primary emphasis of the prayer.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
 you who have been my help.
 Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
 O God of my salvation! (27:9)

“Enemies”

Related to the issue of justice is the vexed representation of the “enemies.” Christians are often uncomfortable with the vengeful nature of the language the psalmists use against the enemies. One of the most notorious examples is found in Psalm 137.

O Daughter Babylon, you devastator!
 Happy shall they be who pay you back
 what you have done to us!
 Happy shall they be who take your little ones
 and dash them against the rock! (137:8–9)

Two things should be kept in mind when assessing the moral status of these psalms. First, the supplicants in these psalms are almost always on the brink of despair. These are not authority figures flexing their muscle against the weak but rather the vulnerable and powerless exercising the only agency left to them, namely their imaginations. Second, never do these psalms imagine the supplicant taking the matter of justice (or vengeance) into his or her own hands. It is always left to the deity (or fate) to exact retribution.

Repay them according to their work,
and according to the evil of their deeds. (28:4)

From a privileged Euro-North American point of view, these expressions are understandably distasteful. It is all too easy, however, to take a superior attitude toward these “crude” expressions of anguish. From the point of view of the perennially downtrodden, such expressions seem a rather healthy attempt to reclaim some semblance of control over their lives.

“Death”

The profound scale of the supplicants’ suffering is made evident in the frequent use of metaphors referring to their imminent demise (Brown 2002: 26–27). No less than twenty-four psalms make mention of “death,” “pit,” or “Sheol.” Only a few of these express praise to YHWH for rescuing the speaker from the underworld, but in most cases salvation has not yet been realized.

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death. (13:4[3])

The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of perdition assailed me;
the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me. (18:5–6[4–5])

I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help. (88:5[4])

It is disputed whether or not the references to death are hyperbolic or factual, but in either case we should assume that such references reflect the extremity of the supplicant’s situation. For instance, the following is clearly hyperbolic.

You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep. (88:7[6])

Although clearly the supplicant has not actually descended to Sheol, the severity of the supplicant’s suffering is borne out in the rest of the poem.

The frequent mention of death in the lament psalms serves not only a cathartic function but also a persuasive one. The supplicant often reminds YHWH that He, too, will suffer should the supplicant die.

For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise? (6:6[5])

Attached to the language *in extremis* is frequent mention of the body. The pain may be emotional, but it is expressed through the body as well as the soul.

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
 my eye wastes away from grief,
 my soul and body also. (31:10[9])

The somatic quality of lament language creates an emotional immediacy and a *pathos* that pulls the audience into the suffering in a way more abstract language could not.

I am poured out like water,
 and all my bones are out of joint;
 my heart is like wax;
 it is melted within my breast. (22:15[14])
 For my life is spent with sorrow,
 and my years with sighing;
 my strength fails because of my misery,
 and my bones waste away. (31:11[10])

THEOLOGY OF LAMENT LANGUAGE

Lament language shows little interest in philosophical abstractions. Its theological vision is firmly rooted in the themes of suffering and justice that comprise the thematic heart of lament psalms. The relationship between suffering, God, and justice is more or less explicit throughout every lament psalm.

Vindicate me, O LORD, my God,
 according to your justice (*šedeq*),
 and do not let them rejoice over me. (35:24)
Then my tongue shall tell of your justice (*šedeq*)
 and of your praise all day long. (35:28)

In other words, lament language might be considered one of humanity's earliest attempts to grapple with the conundrum of God's role in human suffering. This relationship is made especially explicit in some of the communal laments that seem to demand that God make good on His covenantal commitment to the people as a whole (see Pss. 44 and 74). In the individual psalms of lament, however, the psalmists' interest in justice has often gone unremarked by scholars who are more interested in human sin and divine mercy. Psalm 88, for example, has been bypassed in most Jewish and Christian worship services for more orthodox theological expressions, so that the challenge it levels at God's justice is largely unknown outside of Psalms scholarship.

You (YHWH) have put me in the depths of the pit,
 in the regions dark and deep.

Your wrath lies heavy on me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. (88:7–8[6–7])

Lament psalms might be understood as the liturgical equivalent of the story of Abraham confronting God over Sodom in Genesis 18. Characters throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Abraham, Jacob, Jeremiah, Job) do not shy away from holding the deity up to His own standards of fealty, and neither do the supplicants in the psalms of lament.

Be mindful (*zēkōr*) of your mercy, O LORD,
and of your steadfast love (*hesed*),
for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love (*hesed*) remember me (*zēkōr*),
for your goodness' sake, O LORD! (25:6–7)

Although mercy is mentioned, the emphasis here is on covenantal loyalty (*hesed*); that is, the supplicant's request is based on a prior arrangement, an expectation that YHWH owes him or her something and will remember (*zkr*) the supplicant. Few readers pay attention to this aspect of the lament psalms and focus instead on the reassuring language that God is steadfast and loyal without fail.

Good and upright is YHWH,
therefore He guides sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in judgment;
He teaches the humble His way.
All the paths of YHWH are steadfast truthfulness
for those who keep the decrees of His covenant.⁹ (25:8–10)

The language of reassurance and that of complaint sit side by side in the lament psalms without either getting the final say. Within a single psalm one or the other position might receive more emphasis, but within the entire lament corpus one should note an unresolved tension between expressions of faith and doubt. This dialogic exchange is implicit in most lament psalms, but it is manifest in several. Take, for example, the verses of 25:6–7 and 8–10 above: two voices and two points of view are in evidence (Mandolfo 2002: 52–58). Verses 6–7 represent the first-person voice of the supplicant, calling on God (similar to Abraham's requests in Genesis 18) to act justly according to His own standards. The second voice is a third-person didactic voice that reassures the supplicant with normative theological language: "Do not worry, YHWH is 'steadfast'" (*hesed*). Together these two ideological positions—doubt and faith—offer a profound reflection on human experience. Faith without doubt is myopic; doubt without faith runs the danger of sliding into existential meaninglessness.

Lament psalmists put contrasting and complementary theological voices into dialogue. In the world of the Psalms it is a dialogue that must never be settled—for the poetry that makes up that world is all about the immediacy of experience, not the systemization of ideas engaged by philosophers. An emphasis on experience over intellect is the reason the Psalms have been turned to for solace and catharsis for millennia.¹⁰

NOTES

1. What I am calling “supplication” Lee calls “lament prayer,” but “lament prayer” as a category of lament lacks a clear enough distinction.
2. Pss. 3–7, 11, 13, 17, 22–23, 27–28, 30–32, 35, 38–39, 41, 44, 51, 57, 60, 63, 69, 71, 74, 77, 79–80, 83, 85, 88, 90–91, 94, 102–103, 123, 126, 130, 137.
3. Author’s translation.
4. The early church identified seven penitential psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. However, there is little penitence in most of these psalms.
5. See his essay in this volume.
6. For a general introduction to these prayers, see Abusch 2004: 353–55.
7. For an introduction, see Lambert 1974: 267–322.
8. Recently, B. Weinbaum has argued that the laments recorded in Homer’s classics borrowed from earlier lyrical compositions authored and performed by women, claiming in essence that women created lament rituals and men recorded them (2001: 20–39).
9. Author’s translation.
10. I am grateful to doctoral students Pamela Nourse, Beau Harris, Nick Pappani, Ben Laie, Tim Seals, and KyungSik Park in my “Lament Literature” seminar at Claremont School of Theology for helping me think through some of the issues explored in this essay, especially related to the comparative material. Also a special thank-you is owed to Wilson “Beau” Harris, my invaluable and talented research assistant who did the initial bibliographic research for this piece and who turned a rough draft into a polished one. Any lingering errors are solely mine, of course.

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CHAPTER 8

PRAISE AND METONYMY IN THE PSALMS

TRAVIS J. BOTT

IN his classic 1954 study, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*,¹ Claus Westermann begins by asking, “What does it mean in the Psalms to ‘praise God?’” This is a question about the language of praise: What do the words mean? But Westermann abruptly changes course: “An exhaustive answer to this question cannot be found simply through an investigation of the vocabulary of praise as it occurs in the Psalms. Indeed, this investigation must take second place.” He then rephrases his guiding question: “In which Psalms is God praised?” This is a form-critical question, and it soon becomes clear that Westermann’s real purpose is to recast Gunkel’s genre classification. Lamentably, the neglect of the language of praise has continued even in recent scholarship on the Psalms.²

While it is true that word studies alone cannot provide an “exhaustive answer” to the question of praise in the Psalms, it is certainly also true that language plays a major role in any attempt to give an answer. Careful attention to the ways in which ancient Israelites *spoke about* praise should grant some access to the ways in which they *understood* it. If that is true, then any scholar undertaking an investigation of psalmic praise should give language first place rather than second. I attempt to do just that. Given space limitations, however, I cannot offer a comprehensive account of the language of praise. Rather, I have chosen to limit myself to the goal of demonstrating a cognitive-linguistic approach to the subject. More specifically, I argue that metonymy shapes the language and concepts of praise in the Psalms.

METONYMY IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Traditionally, metaphor and metonymy are viewed as poetic figures of speech. Metaphor equates two dissimilar entities for the sake of comparison. For example,

in “All the world’s a stage,” life is compared to a theatrical performance. By contrast, metonymy substitutes the name of one entity for the name of another associated entity. For example, in “The pen is mightier than the sword,” the pen stands for communication and the sword for violence. Cognitive linguistics broadens our understanding of these tropes by viewing them as cognitive processes that influence all levels of language (Evans and Green 2006: 27–44). This means that metaphor and metonymy are not limited to poetry; they are common in everyday language. In addition, metaphor and metonymy are not limited to language; they influence the conceptual patterns of human thought. People gain knowledge from experience of the world and organize that knowledge into coherent mental representations called conceptual domains. On the basis of perceived similarity, conceptual metaphor systematically maps elements from a source domain onto elements of a target domain for the purpose of understanding.³ For example, the conceptual metaphor *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* maps elements from the domain *JOURNEY* (e.g., travelers, roads, destinations) onto the domain *LIFE* (e.g., people, decisions, goals).⁴ This metaphor gives rise to expressions like “She’ll go places,” “He’s without direction,” and “I’m at a crossroads.” By contrast, metonymy involves a perceived contiguity between two elements within the same domain.⁵ The more accessible entity, which is called the vehicle, maps onto the less accessible entity, which is called the target. In this way, metonymy uses one concept to provide mental access to another. Thus, the purpose of metonymy is to direct attention by highlighting or referencing.

To illustrate a cognitive understanding of metonymy, consider the following examples:⁶

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|----------------------------|
| (1) | They have a strong <i>arm</i> in the field. | ⇒ | a baseball player |
| (2) | The <i>car</i> needs to be washed. | ⇒ | the exterior of the car |
| (3) | I’m reading <i>Shakespeare</i> . | ⇒ | one of Shakespeare’s plays |

None of these examples makes sense literally. No one would think that the baseball team has a single arm in right field, that the engine of the car requires washing, or that someone is reading text on the body of Shakespeare. Instead, we intuitively know that these words provide mental access to other associated entities. The word *arm* stands for a baseball player; *car* stands for the car’s exterior; and *Shakespeare* stands for one of his literary works. In all three examples, there is one conceptual domain involved (*BASEBALL PLAYER*, *CAR*, and *SHAKESPEARE’S WORKS*) and one mapping between contiguous vehicles and targets. In each case, the more concrete or easily accessible entity acts as the vehicle. The car as a whole is more easily accessible than a particular part of it, and Shakespeare is more well known than many of his plays. Finally, these metonymies serve the purposes of highlighting and referencing. The player’s arm is highlighted because throwing is important in baseball, and the name Shakespeare effectively refers to some works and not others. These examples do not exhaust the possible types of metonymy, but they do illustrate its basic features.

Since metonyms do not possess multiple mappings like conceptual metaphors, they are conceptual when they follow general patterns. We may group the three examples considered above with other examples in the following way:

PART FOR WHOLE

They have a strong *arm* in the field.
We need more *heads* on this problem.
She's just a pretty *face*.

WHOLE FOR PART

The *car* needs to be washed.
He hit me.
Let's go to the *theatre* tonight.

PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT

I'm reading *Shakespeare*.
She collects *Picasso*.
He bought a new *Ford*.

The fact that we are able to identify other metonyms that follow the same conceptual patterns shows that these metonyms are conceptual in nature. All of the examples in the first group use a part (arm, head, face) to stand for the whole (person). Examples in the second group use the whole (car, he, theatre) to stand for a part (the car body, his fist, the play). Examples in the third group use the producer (Shakespeare, Picasso, Ford) to access the thing produced (play, paintings, car). These examples also illustrate the two basic types of metonymy: The first two are whole-part metonyms, and the third is a part-part metonymy. In whole-part metonymy, a part stands for the whole, or the whole stands for a part, and the other parts remain in the background. In part-part metonymy, one part stands for another part, and the whole remains in the background.

In addition to operating at the conceptual level, metaphor and metonymy also play a role in cases of polysemy, that is, cases in which words have a number of related senses. In such instances, metaphor and metonymy can explain relationships between the senses of words both at one point in time and over time. To see how metonymy can play a role in lexical semantics, consider the following examples of the word *love*:⁷

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| (1) I <i>love</i> you. | ⇒ emotion of intense affection |
| (2) The <i>love</i> between them is strong. | ⇒ relationship |
| (3) Come here, <i>love</i> . | ⇒ object of love |
| (4) They are <i>lovers</i> . | ⇒ romantic partners |
| (5) She has a <i>love</i> for music. | ⇒ enthusiasm |

In the first example, the word *love* has its most common meaning “emotion of intense affection.” This central sense is the vehicle that provides mental access to the other target

senses within the conceptual domain of ROMANTIC LOVE. In the second example, the emotion stands for the relationship it produces (CAUSE FOR EFFECT). In the third example, the emotion stands for the person who is the object of the emotion (EFFECT FOR CAUSE). In the fourth example, the emotion stands for the person who feels the emotion (STATE FOR AGENT). Finally, in the fifth example, the whole emotional notion stands for one of the properties it assumes (WHOLE FOR PART). Here we see that, although a metonymy may be unique on the linguistic level, it can also follow conceptual patterns that are operative elsewhere in the language.

CONCEPTUAL METONYMY IN THE PSALMS

Having laid out a theory of metonymy, I now demonstrate the presence of metonymy in the Psalter's praise language at the conceptual and lexical levels. This part focuses on conceptual metonymy and has two sections. In the first section, I look at the objects of the most common verbs of praise and show that the divine name is a common metonym for Yahweh. In the second part, I consider some subjects of praise and find that the mouth is a frequent metonym for the worshipping speaker.

THE OBJECT OF PRAISE

The verbs *hll* II in the *pi'el* stem,⁸ *ydh* II in the *hip'il*,⁹ and *brk* II in the *pi'el*¹⁰ are the most common verbs for praise in the Psalms. When they denote "praise," all three of these verbs typically take Yahweh as their object. The verb *hll* has Yahweh or a divine pronoun as object fifty-nine times in the Psalms; *ydh* has Yahweh or a divine pronoun as object fifty-two times; and *brk* has Yahweh or a divine pronoun as object twenty-three times. In addition, Yahweh's "name" (*šēm*) also appears as object of these verbs a smaller, though significant, number of times. The verb *hll* has Yahweh's "name" as object eight times;¹¹ *ydh* also has Yahweh's name as object eight times;¹² and *brk* has Yahweh's name as object five times.¹³ This general distributional pattern is the first piece of evidence that the word "name" (*šēm*) is a metonym for Yahweh. Yahweh is the typical object of praise in the Psalms, but in a smaller group of examples, Yahweh's "name" stands in for Yahweh. The second piece of evidence comes from parallelism in the poetry of the Psalms. Consider the following examples in which Yahweh, divine pronouns, and the word "name" are used interchangeably as objects of praise:

Sing to *Yahweh*; bless his *name* (*šēmô*);
tell of his salvation from day to day.

(96:2)¹⁴

I will praise God's *name* (*šēm*) with a song,
 and I will magnify *him* with thanksgiving. (69:31[30])

I will exalt *you*, my God the king,
 and I will bless your *name* (*šimkā*) forever and ever.

Every day I will bless *you*,
 and I will praise your *name* (*šimkā*) forever and ever. (145:1–2)

The first example is a bicolon in which the first colon exhibits inner-linear parallelism. The divine name Yahweh is followed immediately by “his name.” The second example demonstrates the same phenomenon between parallel lines of a bicolon. The first colon praises God’s name, but the second shifts to the divine pronoun “him.” The third example shows a similar interchange in two consecutive bicola. In each case, the first colon praises the divine pronoun “you,” but the second colon substitutes “your name.” Note especially that the identical verb is carried over from the first bicolon to the second. In both cases, the verb is “I will bless” (first-person singular imperfect of *brk*), but the object shifts from “your name” to “you.” The same interchange can even take place at the level of a whole psalm. For example, Psalm 148 consists of two major sections (vv. 1–6, 7–14). Each section begins with the imperative “Praise Yahweh” (vv. 1, 7), and each ends with the jussive reformulation “Let them praise the name (*šēm*) of Yahweh” (vv. 5, 13). Taken together, the general distribution of objects for the verbs of praise and the interchangeability of Yahweh and the divine name provide strong evidence that the word *šēm* is a metonym for Yahweh in the Psalms.

For such uses of the word *šēm* as we have seen, previous scholarship has proposed alternative senses for the word. For example, instead of meaning only “name,” *šēm* could mean Yahweh’s revealed character or a hypostasis of Yahweh.¹⁵ However, I am arguing that metonymy is at work here, not polysemy of the word *šēm*. That is to say, the word *šēm* does not have a new meaning when it is the object of verbs of praise. It means simply “name,” but it stands in for Yahweh’s self. If that is true, what is the significance of this metonymy? Is it a euphemism that seeks to avoid mentioning the divine name? Metonymy can have a euphemistic function, and the word *šēm* certainly comes to be used in that way in later Jewish tradition, but that is not its function in these examples. We have already seen cases where the divine name is used in parallelism or conjunction with the word *šēm* (Pss. 96:2; 148:5, 13), but two more examples should help to make this point:

With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you;
 I will give thanks to your name, Yahweh (*šimkā yhw*), for it is good. (54:8[6])

Praise Yah!
 Praise, servants of Yahweh,
 praise the name of Yahweh (*šēm yhw*). (113:1)

In the first example, the word *šēm* stands in for the second-person pronoun, and then a vocative of the divine name immediately follows. In the second example, the imperative “praise” occurs three times, each time followed by a form of the divine name. The third example features *šēm* in construct with Yahweh. If the intent was to avoid the divine

name, the psalmists would hardly have included it in these ways. In fact, the correct conclusion seems to be quite the opposite. The name standing for the deity is a part-whole metonym that highlights the name itself. Of all the things that the psalmists could highlight in praising Yahweh, they chose to underline the fact that Yahweh is named in worship. Another text provides additional support:

Sing praise to Yahweh, his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name (*zēker*). (30:5[4])¹⁶

Instead of *šēm*, the synonym *zēker* appears. While *zēker* occurs in parallelism with *šēm* elsewhere and seems to have a similar meaning, the term carries the added nuance of a mentioned or uttered name (*HALOT* 1:271). This provides further evidence that the point of the metonym is to highlight the actual naming of Yahweh in worship.

So far we have seen evidence that the praise of Yahweh's name in the Psalms is metonymic, but is there any evidence that this use of metonymy is conceptual? In order for such metonymy to qualify as conceptual, we need to identify other examples that follow the same conceptual pattern. If we consider the same verbs of praise, we find evidence that confirms the conceptual nature of the metonymy:

In God—I praise his word (*dēbārō*)—
in God I trust. (56:5[4])¹⁷

Let the heavens give thanks to your wonder (*piḥ'ākā*), Yahweh,
and to your faithfulness (*ṣmūnātkā*) in the assembly of holy ones. (89:6[5])

The first example exhibits staircase parallelism (Watson 1995: 150–56). In this type of parallelism, the first colon begins a thought that is interrupted. Then the second colon returns to the initial thought and completes it. Here “in God I trust” is interrupted to affirm the speaker's praise of Yahweh's word. The second example is a bicolon with an elided verb in the second colon. The word “heavens” in the first colon is a metonym for the divine council that resides in heaven. Thus, the speaker calls on angels to praise both Yahweh's “wonder” and “faithfulness.” In all these examples, an attribute of Yahweh stands for Yahweh. Thus, we can posit a conceptual metonym attribute for the person that also fits the praise of Yahweh's name.

THE PRAISING SUBJECT

In addition to metonymic objects of praise, there are also metonymic subjects. In fact, various subjects of praise in the Psalms exhibit metonymy.¹⁸ For present purposes, however, I focus on just one of the most prominent conceptual patterns. Consider the following examples:

My tongue (*lēšônî*) will utter your righteousness,
your praiseworthiness all day long. (35:28)

Yahweh, open my lips,
and my mouth (*pî*) will declare your praiseworthiness. (51:17[15])

My lips (*šēpātay*) will pour forth praise,
because you teach me your statutes. (119:171)

Each case follows the same pattern. A mouth-related word takes a first-person singular suffix and serves as the subject of a verb of speaking. In each case, “praise” or “praiseworthiness” (*tēhillâ*) is also the object of the verb. Thus, the mouth-related word stands for the person who utters the praise. Because there are several speech organs that follow the same pattern—“tongue” (*lāšôn*), “mouth” (*peh*), and “lips” (*šēpātayim*)—this appears to be a conceptual metonymy.¹⁹

How do we know for sure that this is metonymy? First, when we consider the verbs of praise in the Psalter, we see that the speaker normally refers to himself or herself with a verb conjugated in the first-person singular. The verb *ydh* occurs twenty-six times in the first-person singular;²⁰ *hll* occurs ten times;²¹ and *brk* occurs six times.²² Second, there are a number of cases where mouth organs serve as instruments of human speaking rather than as speaking subjects themselves. For example, see the following:

While I mused, a fire burned;
then I spoke *with* my tongue (*bilšônî*). (39:4[3])

I will give thanks to Yahweh greatly *with* my mouth (*bēpî*),
and in the midst of the throng I will praise him. (109:30)

With my lips (*bšēpātay*) I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth. (119:13)

In each example, the verb is conjugated in the first-person singular and the subject speaks by means of an organ. The mouth-related word takes the preposition *bêt* with an instrumental function (IBHS 196–97).²³ This seems to be the literal way of conveying the same idea. Thus, when the organ of speech occurs without the preposition and as the subject of the verb of praise, we are dealing with metonymy. Since multiple lexical items follow this pattern, there is evidence for a conceptual metonym MOUTH FOR THE PERSON, a more specific version of BODY PART FOR THE PERSON.²⁴

If the preceding arguments have established the existence of the MOUTH FOR THE PERSON metonym in the Psalms, then it is possible to interpret another example in its light. Consider Psalm 103:1:

Bless Yahweh, my throat (*napšî*),
and all that is within me his holy name.²⁵

The NRSV translates *napšî* in this case as “my soul,” but there are three reasons for taking the word as “my throat.” First, “throat” is an established meaning of the Hebrew word

nepeš (HALOT 2:712; DCH 5:724–25). For example, the speaker of Psalm 69:2[1] asks for Yahweh's help because waters have come up to the neck or throat (*nepeš*). Also, Psalm 107:9 says that Yahweh satisfies the thirsty and hungry throat (*nepeš*). In Psalm 103:1, the context of speaking also suggests understanding *nepeš* as an organ of speech. Second, *nepeš* parallels and shares the same verb with “all that is within me,” that is, the speaker's internal organs. Since the second colon concerns body parts, it makes sense to see a body part in the first colon as well. Third, the word *nepeš* fits the metonymic pattern already described: A mouth-related word takes a first-person singular suffix and stands in for the speaker as subject of a verb of praise (*brk*).²⁶ For these reasons, *napšî* should be translated here and in similar examples²⁷ as “my throat,” another metonym for the praising subject in the Psalms.

LEXICAL METONYMY IN THE PSALMS

In the previous section, I demonstrated the existence of metonymy at the conceptual level. In this section, I move to the lexical level to investigate metonymy in the semantics of the two most common nouns for praise in the Psalter: *tēhillâ* and *tôdâ*, which derive from the root verbs *hll* and *ydh*, respectively. As with other nouns having the prefix *tāw*, these nouns convey the actions of their verbal roots (IBHS 90–91). But these words are also polysemous, and I show that their senses are related by metonymic semantic links.

The Noun *tēhillâ*

The central meaning of the noun *tēhillâ* is “praise,”²⁸ but it has three other senses in the Psalms that are related to this meaning by means of metonymy. In fact, the meaning “praise” occurs less frequently than one might expect. This meaning is clearest when the word has a first-person singular suffix.²⁹ A good example is Psalm 22:26[25]:

From you comes my praise (*tēhillātî*) in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

In verse 23[22], the speaker uses the verb *hll* to promise praise: “in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” Then, in verse 26[25], the speaker restates the same idea using the noun *tēhillâ*. Therefore, the noun denotes the action of praising, and the first-person suffix is best understood as a subjective genitive, indicating the speaker as the agent of the action. When the noun *tēhillâ* occurs in the absolute state,³⁰ it can be translated as either “praise” or, more specifically, “song of praise.”³¹ Sometimes it is difficult to choose between these senses, but in other cases the context suggests one sense as more appropriate:

Rejoice in Yahweh, righteous ones.
 Praise (*tēhillā*) befits the upright. (33:1)

He put a new song in my mouth,
 a song of praise (*tēhillā*) to our God. (40:4[3])

The same form appears in 33:1 and 40:4[3], but “praise” seems to fit in the first case and “song of praise” in the second. In 33:1, the noun follows a command to rejoice and sums up the following praising actions of the upright (vv. 2–3). In 40:4[3], however, the word stands in apposition to “new song.” Therefore, the translation “song of praise” makes sense in the context. Although the noun may have this more specific sense in certain cases, its central meaning is “praise.”

In the Psalms, the most common metonymic sense for the noun *tēhillā* is “praiseworthiness.”³² When the word has this meaning, it always takes a possessive genitive referring to Yahweh.³³ In other words, Yahweh is seen as the possessor of the attribute of “praiseworthiness.” Unfortunately, this meaning is not easily recognized in most English translations. For example, the NRSV always translates *tēhillā* as “praise.” There are, however, ways to recognize this sense of the word. Consider the following examples:

My tongue will utter your righteousness,
 your praiseworthiness (*tēhillātekā*) all day long. (35:28)

Bless our God, peoples,
 and make heard his praiseworthiness (*tēhillātô*). (66:8)

Then they believed his words;
 they sang his praiseworthiness (*tēhillātô*). (106:12)

Here we see two features that make this meaning clear. First, the word *tēhillā* is the object of a verb of speech, for example, telling, making heard, and singing. It would make little sense to speak about the *activity* of praising, but it would make good sense to speak about the praiseworthy *character* of Yahweh. Second, the word *tēhillā* occurs in parallelism with a divine attribute or with the divine self. In Psalms 35 and 106, Yahweh’s praiseworthiness parallels Yahweh’s righteousness and words—both with possessive genitives. And in Psalm 66, *tēhillā* parallels “our God.” In some cases, the word *tēhillā* lacks one or both of these features, but it is still possible to discern the meaning. For example, Psalm 111:10 reads, “His praise (*tēhillātô*) endures forever.” The word has a suffix referring to Yahweh, but it lacks a verb of speech and a parallel colon. However, verse 3 of the same psalm provides a distant parallel: “And his righteousness endures forever.” This line is identical except for the attribute of “righteousness,” and the suffix is clearly possessive. It seems best, therefore, to understand verse 10 in the same way: “His praiseworthiness stands forever.”

When the noun *tēhillā* is plural in the Hebrew Bible, it has the metonymic sense of “praiseworthy deeds.”³⁴ There are two examples of this meaning in the Psalms.³⁵ Once the word appears with a suffix referring to Yahweh, and once it occurs in construct with the divine name. These genitives are subjective: Yahweh is the agent who performs the deeds.

You are the one who lifts me up from the gates of death,
 so that I may recount all your praiseworthy deeds (*tēhillôtēkā*),³⁶
 and, in the gates of daughter Zion,
 rejoice in your deliverance. (9:14–15[13–14])

We will not hide them from their children;
 we will tell to the coming generation
 the praiseworthy deeds (*tēhillôt*) of Yahweh, his might,
 and the wonders that he has done. (78:4)

As in the case of the previous meaning, the word *tēhillôt* appears as the object of verbs of speaking—recounting and telling. Once again, it would make little sense to speak about the act of praising itself. Instead, the *tēhillôt* form the content of the speech, so the genitives are not objective. Unlike the previous meaning, however, the genitives are not possessive. Yahweh is active in these contexts. In Psalm 9, the recounting of *tēhillôt* responds to Yahweh's rescue from death and parallels rejoicing in deliverance. In Psalm 78, the *tēhillôt* are associated with Yahweh's might and parallel to "the wonders he has done." In the case of the meaning "praiseworthiness," the action of praise stands for the character of Yahweh that elicits the praise, but here the action of praising stands for the deeds of Yahweh that call forth the praise. Since both of these senses operate according to the same pattern, we can posit a conceptual metonym ACTION FOR THE CAUSE OF THE ACTION.

The final metonymic meaning for *tēhillâ* is "object of praise."³⁷ Although it is attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible,³⁸ it occurs only once in the Psalms. Unfortunately, this sense is not commonly recognized in Psalm 22:3[2].³⁹ Consider, for example, the NRSV:

Yet you are holy,
 enthroned on the praises of Israel (*tēhillôt yiśrā'ēl*).

This translation follows the MT in dividing the verse at the word "holy" and reading the key phrase as plural. But this understanding is problematic for two reasons. First, although Yahweh is pictured elsewhere as enthroned in holiness (e.g., Ps. 47:9[8]), this is the only case in which Yahweh is enthroned on "praise." Second, this is the only instance in which the plural form (*tēhillôt*) is attributed to Israel. Elsewhere, as we have seen, *tēhillôt* are always Yahweh's "praiseworthy deeds." However, this meaning does not fit in the present context. Yahweh is not enthroned on the deeds of Israel. For these reasons, we must look for an alternative understanding of the verse, and the LXX proves helpful. In contrast to the MT, the LXX divides the verse at the word "enthroned" and translates the key phrase as singular. A few Hebrew manuscripts also attest the singular, which merely lacks the letter *wāw*. Reading with these witnesses results in the following translation:

But you are the holy one enthroned,
 the object of Israel's praise (*tēhillat yiśrā'ēl*).⁴⁰

This understanding is superior for three reasons. First, it creates a nicely balanced poetic bicolon. Second, it suggests a meaning for the word *tēhillâ* that is attested

elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Moses says about Yahweh to Israel, “He is your object of praise (*tēhillātkā*), and he is your God” (Deut. 10:21). Third, it fits well in the context of Psalm 22. Verse 4[3] is intentionally formulated to contrast with verse 6[7]:

But I am a worm and not a man,
the object of humanity’s taunt (*herpat ’ādām*) and despised by people.

Verse 4[3] begins “but you,” and verse 7[6] begins “but I.” Both are nominal clauses that continue in the second colon. Yahweh is the holy one enthroned on high, but the speaker is a lowly worm. Yahweh is the object of Israel’s praise (*tēhillat yiśrā’ēl*); the speaker is the object of humanity’s taunt (*herpat ’ādām*). Both are feminine singular nouns of speaking in construct with collective nouns that serve as subjective genitives. Most importantly, both words exhibit metonymic polysemy. Like *tēhillā*, the noun *herpā* can mean both the action of speaking and the object spoken about (BDB 357–58). So the semantic structures of these words provide evidence for the conceptual metonymy ACTION FOR THE OBJECT OF THE ACTION.

The Noun *tôdâ*

The noun *tôdâ* is polysemous and possesses three different senses in the Psalms. The central meaning of *tôdâ* is “thanksgiving,” and the meaning “thanksgiving sacrifice” relates metonymically to this central sense.⁴¹ In the Psalms, “thanksgiving” occurs seven times,⁴² and “sacrifice” appears four times.⁴³ As with *tēhillā*, patterns of usage differentiate these senses. Unlike *tēhillā*, however, *tôdâ* never takes pronominal suffixes. Instead, the word’s syntactic relations distinguish its meanings. Consider the following examples:

I wash my hands in innocence,
and go around your altar, Yahweh,
making myself heard with the sound of thanksgiving (*bēqôl tôdâ*),
and telling all your wondrous deeds. (26:6–7)

Let them sacrifice thanksgiving sacrifices (*zibhê tôdâ*),
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. (107:22)

In both cases, sacrifice and verbal thanksgiving are closely connected. In Psalm 26 the speaker circles the altar (implying sacrifice) and tells of Yahweh’s deeds, and in Psalm 107 the speaker offers sacrifices and sings for joy. But the word *tôdâ* denotes a different aspect of the scene in each case. In the first example, *tôdâ* is the verbal proclamation. It is in construct with the word “sound” (*qôl*), takes a *bêt* preposition, and is adverbial. In the second example, *tôdâ* is a sacrifice. It is in construct with the word “sacrifice” (*zebah*) and the object of the verb “to sacrifice” (*zbh*). By metonymy, the action of thanksgiving

stands for the sacrifice that accompanies it. In addition, the same patterns of usage hold for the other examples of these meanings. When *tôdâ* is used adverbially with the preposition *bêt*, it means verbal “thanksgiving.”⁴⁴ When *tôdâ* is the object of the verb “to sacrifice,” it means “thanksgiving sacrifice.”⁴⁵

To see that this metonym follows a conceptual pattern, we can consider a passage from Amos:

Bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every three days;
burn a thanksgiving meal (*tôdâ*) of leavened bread,
and proclaim freewill offerings; make them heard. (4:4–5)

Here *tôdâ* is neither the verbal thanksgiving nor the animal sacrifice but the bread offering that, in some cases, accompanies the sacrifice (Lev. 7:13).⁴⁶ I reach this conclusion on the basis of three features of the text. First, the preceding verse urges the people to bring their “sacrifices” (*zēbāhîm*). This is the word normally used for the thanksgiving sacrifice, but here the elements are separated in the context. Second, the prophet commands the people to “burn” (*qtr*) the *tôdâ*. This verb is used for meal offerings but not for animal sacrifice (*HALOT* 3:1094–95). And third, the *tôdâ* is to be made “of leavened bread” (*mēhāmēs*). The partitive *mēm* shows that this offering consists of bread (*IBHS* 213–14). Above we saw examples where the action of thanksgiving stands for the sacrifice, but here the action stands for the bread offering that accompanies the sacrifice. Therefore, we are able to posit the shared conceptual metonym ACTION FOR OBJECT USED IN THE ACTION.

There is one final metonymic sense of the noun *tôdâ* in the Psalms, that is, “vow of thanksgiving.” This rare meaning occurs only in Psalm 56:13[12]:

I owe you vows, God;
I will pay vows of thanksgiving to you (*’āšallēm tôdôt lāk*).

The verse is normally translated “thanksgiving sacrifice,”⁴⁷ but the unusual usage here suggests another meaning. When *tôdâ* is adverbial, it means “thanksgiving,” as we have seen, and when it is the object of the verb “to sacrifice” (*zbh*), it means “thanksgiving sacrifice.” But here, in addition to the close association with “vows” (*nēdārîm*) in the first colon,⁴⁸ the word *tôdâ* assumes the standard usage of vows. Compare this text with the following example:

I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay my vows to you (*’āšallēm lēkā nēdārāy*). (66:13)

In both cases, the verb is “to pay” (*šlm*), the direct object is plural, and the indirect object takes the preposition *lamed*. The verb and the plural form are particularly striking because this is the only time in the Hebrew Bible that *tôdâ* is used with the verb “to pay”

and the only plural form of the word in the Psalms.⁴⁹ By contrast, the word “vow” typically occurs in this construction.⁵⁰ Although these features suggest a unique meaning for the word *tôdâ*, the metonymic pattern is not unique. Rather, it operates according to the conceptual metonymy ACTION FOR THE CAUSE OF THE ACTION. With the word *tēhillâ*, we saw that the action of praise could stand for Yahweh’s character and deeds that elicit such praise. Here we see that thanksgiving can stand for the vows that promised it.

CONCLUSIONS

I have sought to introduce into biblical studies the idea of conceptual metonymy from the field of cognitive linguistics, and I have done so by studying some of the language of praise in the Psalms. Along the way, I have demonstrated the existence of two major types of metonymy in the Hebrew Psalter. First, by investigating the objects and subjects of the most common verbs of praise, I have uncovered part-whole metonymy at the conceptual level. When Yahweh’s name stands for Yahweh as the object of praise, it follows the conceptual pattern ATTRIBUTE FOR THE PERSON. When speech organs stand for the praising subject, they follow the pattern BODY PART FOR THE PERSON. In both cases, the vehicles serve to highlight important elements of their targets, that is, the name of Yahweh articulated in worship and the mouth that pronounces Yahweh’s praise.

Second, by studying the polysemy of the two most important nouns for praise, I have discovered part-part metonymy at the lexical level. In addition, I have shown how relationships among the senses can be governed by conceptual metonymy. The word *tēhillâ* means “praising,” but it can also mean “praiseworthiness,” “praiseworthy deeds,” and “object of praise.” The metonyms involved are ACTION FOR THE CAUSE OF THE ACTION and ACTION FOR THE OBJECT OF THE ACTION. The word *tôdâ* means “thanksgiving,” but it can also mean “thanksgiving sacrifice” and “vow of thanksgiving.” The metonyms involved here are ACTION FOR THE OBJECT INVOLVED IN THE ACTION and, once again, ACTION FOR THE CAUSE OF THE ACTION. All of these semantic links use the activity of praise as a vehicle to reference target elements involved in the cognitive domain of praise. There is, however, a major difference between the semantic structures of the words *tēhillâ* and *tôdâ*: *tēhillâ* uses metonymy to understand Yahweh as the cause and object of praise, while *tôdâ* employs metonymy to understand the human causes and rituals of response.

While form criticism has undeniably made important contributions to the study of the Psalms, it has also discouraged scholars from asking Westermann’s initial question: “What does it mean in the Psalms to ‘praise God’?” In response, I have argued that studying the language of praise can supply a foundational, though partial, answer to the question. I have also shown that a cognitive approach to metonymy provides fresh insight into the conceptual world of the Hebrew psalmists. What emerges is an understanding of Israel’s praise that is more immediate and interactive. Instead of distancing themselves from the deity, the psalmists revel in taking the name Yahweh upon their lips. At the same time, they picture the human self not in abstraction but concretely as a

mouth opening to extol God. The psalmists regard praiseworthiness as a central divine attribute; it belongs to Yahweh's very essence to evoke and receive praise. In praise-filled response, the psalmists affirm the goodness of the temple's community and rituals; sacrifice complements speech in the expression of holistic praise.

NOTES

1. Reprinted in Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (1981: 1–162). The following quotes come from page 15.
2. Walter Brueggemann, for example, discusses only one minor praise term (1988: 30–38), and James Hutchinson echoes Westermann in warning against linguistic reductionism (2005: 87).
3. The seminal statements on metaphor and metonymy are Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989.
4. In cognitive linguistics, small capital letters indicate concepts.
5. For more recent work on metonymy, see Panther and Radden 1999; Benczes et al. 2011.
6. This discussion is based on Kövecses 2010: 171–93.
7. This discussion is based on Kövecses 2010: 251–65.
8. BDB 237–39; *HALOT* 1:248–49; *DCH* 2:559–62. I use the homonym numbering of *HALOT*.
9. BDB 392; *HALOT* 2:389; *DCH* 2:95–97.
10. BDB 138–39; *HALOT* 1:159–60; *DCH* 2:267–71.
11. Pss. 69:31[30]; 74:21; 113:1; 135:1; 145:2; 148:5, 13; 149:3.
12. Pss. 44:9[8]; 54:8[6]; 99:3; 106:47; 122:4; 138:2; 140:14[13]; 142:8[7].
13. Pss. 96:2; 100:4; 103:1; 145:1, 21. In Ps. 103:1, the verb *brk* is elided in the second colon, where the object is Yahweh's name.
14. All translations are my own. Hebrew verse numbers are in brackets.
15. BDB 1028; *HALOT* 4:1550–51; *DCH* 8:426–29.
16. See also the identical colon in Ps. 97:12.
17. The same language appears twice more in v. 11[10], where metonymy is even more pronounced because the object lacks a pronominal suffix.
18. Indeed, the entire Psalter concludes with such a metonymy: “Let all breath praise Yah!” (Ps. 150:6).
19. See other examples: “my mouth” (Pss. 49:4[3]; 63:6[5]; 66:14, 17; 71:15; 145:21), “my tongue” (51:16[14]; 71:24; 119:172), and “my lips” (63:4[3]; 66:14; 71:23).
20. Pss. 7:18[17]; 9:2[1]; 18:50[49]; 28:7; 30:13[12]; 32:5; 35:18; 42:6[5], 12[11]; 43:4; 43:5; 52:11[9]; 54:8[6]; 57:10[9]; 71:22; 86:12; 108:4[3]; 109:30; 111:1; 118:19, 21, 28; 119:7; 138:1, 2; 139:14.
21. Pss. 22:23[22]; 35:18; 56:5[4], 11[10] (2x); 69:31[30]; 109:164; 119:30; 145:2; 146:2.
22. Pss. 16:7; 26:12; 34:2[1]; 63:5[4]; 145:1, 2.
23. See also Pss. 39:2[1]; 59:8[7]; 62:5[4]; 78:36; 89:2[1]; 106:33.
24. Hans Walter Wolff notes this phenomenon and calls it “stereometric thinking” (1974: 8).
25. Wolff has suggested a similar translation (1974: 25).
26. “My throat” also differs from the other examples of the metonym in that the speaker addresses it directly with an imperative. Thus, the personification creates a metaphor from metonymy (Kövecses 2010: 188). But see Pss. 71:23; 119:175.
27. Pss. 71:23; 103:1, 2, 22; 104:1, 35; 119:175; 146:1.
28. BDB 239–40; *HALOT* 4:1692; *DCH* 8:594–95.

29. Pss. 22:26[25]; 71:6; 109:1.
30. Pss. 33:1; 40:4[3]; 65:2[1]; 100:4; 119:171; 145:1; 147:1; 148:14.
31. BDB 240; *HALOT* 4:1692; *DCH* 8:595–96.
32. BDB (240) and *DCH* (8:596) acknowledge this meaning, but *HALOT* does not.
33. Pss. 34:2[1]; 35:28; 48:11[10]; 51:17[15]; 66:2, 8; 71:8, 14; 79:13; 102:22[21]; 106:12, 47; 111:10; 145:21; 149:1.
34. BDB 240; *HALOT* 4:1692; *DCH* 8:596. BDB and *DCH* group the examples with the meaning “praiseworthiness.” See Exod. 15:11; Isa. 60:6; 63:7.
35. The MT has a plural in Ps. 22:3[4], but I emend to a singular (see below). Also, the MT has a singular in Ps. 106:2 that may reflect an original plural. The word parallels “mighty works,” and the LXX reads it as plural.
36. The MT’s consonantal text is plural, but the *Qere* points the word as singular. I vocalize according to the *Ketib* (*HALOT* 4:1692).
37. BDB (240) and *DCH* (8:596) acknowledge this meaning, but *HALOT* does not.
38. See Deut. 10:21; 26:19; Isa. 62:7; Jer. 13:11; 17:14; 33:9; 51:41; Zeph. 3:19, 20.
39. BDB takes the word as “praises” (240), *HALOT* as “songs of praise” (4:1692), and *DCH* as “glory” from the homonymous verb *hll*, “to shine” (8:596).
40. For a similar understanding, see the NJPS translation.
41. BDB 392–93; *HALOT* 4:1695–96; *DCH* 8:597–98.
42. Pss. 26:7; 42:5[4]; 69:31[30]; 95:2; 100:1, 4; 147:7.
43. Pss. 50:14, 23; 107:22; 116:17.
44. The only partial exception to this rule is Ps. 100:1, where *tôdâ* occurs in the superscription with a *lāmed* of purpose. The meaning “thanksgiving” is supported by v. 4.
45. *HALOT* suggests that the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” is metaphorical in some of these texts (4:1696), but usage and context argue against this proposal.
46. The dictionaries do not distinguish this meaning from “thanksgiving sacrifice.”
47. BDB 393; *HALOT* 4:1695. *DCH* agrees (8:598), but it also suggests emending so that “vows” is the object of the verb.
48. Other psalms link *tôdâ* and *nēdārīm* (Jonah 2:10[9]; Pss. 50:14; 116:17–18). Leviticus subsumes thanksgivings and vows under the category of well-being sacrifices (7:11–34).
49. Later *tôdôt* comes to mean “choirs” of people who engage in thanksgiving and sacrifice (Neh. 12:31, 38, 40). This shows that metonymy can reflect a diachronic process.
50. The noun *nēder* occurs nine times in the Psalms (22:26[25]; 50:14; 56:13[12]; 61:6[5]; 61:9[8]; 65:2[1]; 66:13; 116:14, 18). All but one (65:2[1]) are plural, and all but one (61:6[5]) use the verb *šlm*.

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CHAPTER 9

WISDOM LANGUAGE IN THE PSALMS

DIANE JACOBSON

UNCOVERING the nature and significance of wisdom language in the Psalms has a long and torturous history in modern scholarship, giving rise to a number of highly debated questions that this essay attempts to address. Is there such a thing as a wisdom psalm? Is there evidence of distinctive wisdom language in certain psalms? If so, what are the distinguishing characteristics of these psalms or this language? What is their *Sitz im Leben*? Can we speak of sages or scribes as authors of some psalms or as editors of the Psalter in whole or part? What is the relationship between school and cult, scholar and praise-giver?

WISDOM PSALMS: FORM CRITICAL CATEGORIES

All modern discussions of the relationship between psalms and wisdom begin with the insights of Hermann Gunkel. Along with hymns, laments, thanksgiving psalms, and the like, Gunkel posited a category he called “wisdom poems” (Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 293–305). This category, like the category “royal psalms,” was problematic from the start because “wisdom poems” had no common or distinctive *Gattung*, and their purported *Sitz im Leben* of wisdom circles was problematic at best. In addition to the psalms classified as wisdom poems, Gunkel saw the evidence of wisdom thinking and forms in many other psalms too numerous to indicate. Following Gunkel, various scholars have tried their hand at this category, each writing an article or a section of a book, most beginning with a review of past attempts at identifying these psalms and then suggesting his or her own list or judgment. Some scholars have even returned to this topic two or more times in their careers. Below is a representative list of suggested

wisdom psalms over the past seventy-five years (parentheses indicate psalms with wisdom elements):

- Gunkel and Begrich (1998 [1933])—1, 37, 49, 73, (91), 112, (127), 128, (133)
 Mowinckel (1955)—1, 19b, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112, 127
 Von Rad (1972)—1, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, 139
 Murphy (1962)—1, (25), (31), 32, 34, 37, (39), (40), 49, (62), (92), (94), 112, (119), (127), 128
 Perdue (1977b)—1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 105, 112, 119, 127
 Gerstenberger (1974, 1988)—1, 8, 14, 19, 25, 33, 34, 37, 49, 62, 73, 78, 90, 112, 119, 127
 Hurvitz (1988)—34, 37, 112, 119
 Whybray (1995)—8, 14, (18), 25, (27), (32), 34, 39, 49, 73, 78, (86), 90, (92), (94), (105), (107), (111), 112, 119, 127, 131, 139, (144), (146)
 Kuntz (2000)—1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, (119), 127, 128, 133
 Weeks (2005)—1, 10, 14, 19b, 25, 32, 34, 37, 49, 52, 73, 90, 94, 112, 125, 128

As this diverse listing suggests, identifying which psalms are good candidates for the classification “wisdom psalm” is tricky at best. Each of these scholars argues that a fairly large, though unspecified, number of elements frequently, though not exclusively, found in other wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) is a fair indication that a particular psalm is a wisdom psalm. Each scholar in turn speaks of the fact that because wisdom psalms have no common form (and, in fact, make use of a variety of other identifiable forms), such psalms must be identified by common style, themes, vocabulary, life setting, and, at least in one case, common perspective.

The common wisdom styles suggested by Murphy and others, particularly Kenneth Kuntz, include the following: an *ʾašrê* formula, numerical and better sayings, aphorisms, direct address to “my son” or “my sons,” admonitions and comparisons, alphabetic structure, and rhetorical questions. The suggested common wisdom themes include the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, as well as the contrast between the two ways, practical advice about conduct, retribution themes, and the “fear of the Lord.” In the case of sapiential vocabulary, R. B. Y. Scott compiled a list of sixty-four words he says are common wisdom words (1971: 121–22). Almost everyone agrees that this list is problematic as it includes such common vocabulary as *evil*, *path*, and *know*, alongside more specialized vocabulary such as *insight*, *proverb*, and *investigate*. Still, Kuntz finds it significant that only eighteen psalms have eight or more of these so-called wisdom words.

A minimalist approach to wisdom vocabulary is adopted by Avi Hurvitz, who, by limiting his linguistic inquiries to only one turn of phrase (*sûr mērāʾ*—“turn from evil”) and a single word (*hôn*—“wealth”) exclusive to wisdom, arrives at only four psalms (34, 37, 112, and 119) that indicate a “wisdom sphere.” The issue of a common setting in life for these psalms has led to a wide range of speculation, which is addressed below. After acknowledging that each of these marks of identification can be problematic, Stuart Weeks suggests that wisdom psalms share a common focus on individuals rather than nations and a common perspective that concentrates either on guidance for achieving

well-being (as does Proverbs) or description of obstacles to that well-being (as do Job and Qoheleth).

The inconclusive nature of various attempt to pin down wisdom psalms and their characteristics have led some scholars, beginning with Engnell and culminating with Crenshaw, to maintain that no such category exists. James Crenshaw notes that Gunkel's two underlying assumptions of the category—that psalms evolved from shorter to longer units and that instruction is separable from cultic worship—have collapsed (2000: 9–17). And with these assumptions, the whole necessity of the category collapses as well. Crenshaw addresses every thematic and stylistic claim listed above and calls each one into question. His basic approach is this: If any so-called wisdom theme or style is not exclusive to the wisdom literature—that is, if such a theme or style is found, say, in the prophets—one ought not to make a claim that it indicates that a psalm with said theme or style is a wisdom psalm. And insofar as none of the themes, style, or vocabulary can truly make such a claim, the category itself should be abandoned altogether.

The arguments abound, and one is best served by looking at them detail. In some ways the situation is best illustrated by a story told about Thomas Lambdin, who, when teaching a class in comparative Semitics, was asked whether Ugaritic was a Northwest Semitic dialectic. Lambdin reportedly responded, “Tell me what a Northwest Semitic dialectic is, and I will answer yes or no.”¹ The whole notion of a “wisdom psalm” is slippery because the very notion of “wisdom” as an identifiable category is a modern and quite elusive notion. Wisdom can be defined as the literature found in specific books (Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth, as well as Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon), as one or more movements in history (from sage to scribe), as a set of ideas (learned from observation, experience, and tradition), or as a cultural way of thinking (much as our current society is defined by scientific thinking even by nonscientists).

Each of these ways of thinking about what wisdom is has its own set of pitfalls. Taking just one example, consider defining wisdom as a set of writings. In what way precisely is Proverbs related to Job and Qoheleth? Some scholars have called into question the tendency to call Job a wisdom book. And even if we were to say Job is wisdom (as well as Qoheleth and Sirach, to say nothing of Baruch and Wisdom of Solomon), this tells us nothing really about how these books are related to each other. The category of “wisdom” tends to blur the very real differences in genre, time, and presumably author and *Sitz im Leben*. This confusion over the category of wisdom itself leads one to wonder if, on a formal level, we might be better served by identifying psalms with wisdom language by abandoning the meta-category “wisdom psalms” and attending instead to other, less grand categories and themes.

For example, perhaps, following the lead of Crenshaw and others, we could recognize that some psalms such as 37, 49, and 73 struggle mightily with the prosperity of the wicked and that these and other psalms struggle with issues of death and mortality. In their struggles, these psalmists tend to use language akin to either Job or Qoheleth or occasionally both. That is, when the psalmists bring such issues to God in prayer, they use the same language we see in those books. We can therefore speak of common language around common issues, carefully noting that such observations tell us little about

the profession or situation of the psalmist. We then avoid placing such psalms together with, say, Psalms 127 and 128, which do not speak of such themes.

Another promising approach is to follow more closely Murphy's insight that "it was the testimony in the Thanksgiving Psalms that offered an opportunity for teaching" (1963: 167). That is, psalmists frequently promise to teach something to the congregation in response to God's ongoing or sudden saving activity in their lives. Clearly a more indirect, even didactic address to the congregation, rather than a direct address to God, is a common aspect of certain psalms.

Three other categories of psalms have also been the subject of fruitful inquiry into the connection between psalms and wisdom. These are acrostic psalms, torah psalms, and anthological psalms. Acrostics (9-10, **25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145**) are psalms arranged in alphabetical order so that each verse or half verse or group of verses begins with the next letter of the alphabet. The eight acrostic psalms (counting 9-10 as one psalm) are in some ways the most obvious subgroup of psalms in the Psalter in that one can physically see them. (Though even here some would add other psalms, such as 33, identifying them as line count acrostics because they have twenty-two verses.) Technically, the acrostic is a literary form or technique rather than a genre. Still, the connections to various wisdom traditions are clear, given that other acrostics are found in Proverbs 31 and Sirach 51, as well as in Lamentations. When such psalms are identified as a group, prayer is tied to the written word. As Ceresko observes, acrostics reflect the preoccupation of the sages/scribes who wrote them with ordering or, more precisely, with tying the order of God in the world to the order of the alphabet and written prayer (2002: 224-26). Parenthetically, and as van Leeuwen articulately argues on other grounds, when acrostics are taken as a group, identifying Psalm 112 as a wisdom psalm without also tagging its companion Psalm 111 becomes difficult (2003: 65-84). And because of the link with Lamentations, one has a hard time believing that acrostic psalms, which presumably arose in some sort of wisdom circle, are unrelated to the worship life of Israel.

Torah Psalms (**1, 18, 19, 25, 33, 78, 89, 93, 99, 103, 105, 111, 112, 119, 147, 148**) have been creatively and insightfully brought to the fore by James L. Mays. Mays defines torah psalms as "psalms in which the instruction of the Lord is the central organizing topic" and torah (instruction, law) is viewed as the primary reality in humanity's relation to God (1994: 128). The three central torah psalms are 1, 19, and the majestic 119. To these, Mays adds fourteen others. Here the category gets a bit murky when Mays suggests that in these psalms, though torah is not always mentioned directly, the pattern of law-giving is implicit. These psalms are further linked by attitudes of meditation, prayer, delight, study, obedience, and trust. They tend to highlight the individual and how the individual hears from God and leads a good life, which bears particular resonance with the wisdom tradition. Additionally, these psalms often use vocabulary, forms, and themes found most frequently in Proverbs and Sirach.

Finally, anthological psalms (**1, 25, 33, 34, 103, 111, 112, 119, 145**) are psalms that are composed primarily by bringing in quotations from other parts of Scripture, particularly from Torah and Prophets. The work in this category has mainly been done in French, beginning with A. Robert (1957: 405-21) and subsequently in German by Deissler

(1966: 225–33). These scholars claim that anthological psalms are more than mere collections; the various quotations combined in each psalm together form a purposeful unity. Such psalms are tricky to identify because one is never clear when a psalmist is quoting from a known written Torah or prophetic tradition or drawing more generally from the ideas of the community or tradition. What makes them interesting is that they reflect a period in Israel's history when the written word becomes the main vehicle of revelation and insight and that such a vehicle leads to a form of prayer.

Notably, these three categories of psalms show considerable overlap (note the psalms listed above in **bold**). Very few psalms reside in only one category, and four of the psalms—25, 111, 112, and 119—are found in all three groupings. These four psalms in particular appear to be linked in a way reminiscent of Sirach in their association of wisdom and Torah. These acrostics reflect very concretely the torah psalms' interest in ordering life and living lives in line with the divine order, while as anthological psalms, by using excerpts and references to Torah and Prophets, they show forth the practical workings of a torah piety.

Does it do any good to call all of these psalms “wisdom psalms”? To do so clouds the issue because it is not clear how these psalms are related to, for example, Psalms 49 and 73, which deal with the thriving of the wicked, or Psalms 127 and 128, which speak of the blessing of family. One could speak about earlier wisdom psalms and later torah psalms, though many of the objections and complications mentioned above are not eliminated by doing so. Certainly the issue of author, history, and situation in life are relevant.

HISTORICAL ISSUES: SAGE TO SCRIBE AND WISDOM TO CULT

Just as scholars through the years have talked about formal issues, they have also speculated about who wrote these psalms, when, for what purpose, and in what venue. As with issues of form, historical speculation also began with Gunkel, who had little doubt that what he called “the wisdom poems” did not have their origin in worship settings (Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 303). Gunkel supposed such psalms to have been adapted for worship at a later date by priests and singers swayed by the laity's affection for them. Following Gunkel, Jansen speculated that a school existed alongside the temple and that sages from such a school composed psalms for both devotional and instructional purposes. Mowinckel largely followed this later suggestion. He was struck by what he saw as the noncultic character of most wisdom psalms. Thus, he saw these psalms to be post-exilic and separate from Temple worship. He also suggested that the latter-day composers of such psalms, whom he called “learned psalmographers,” were the final editors of the Psalter (1962: 2.104–14).

These scholars set the stage for lengthy conversation posing the following questions: Are wisdom psalms pre-exilic, post-exilic, or both? Were they originally part

of the cult and, if not, what other settings or venues were possible? Were there pre- or post-exilic wisdom schools associated with temple or synagogue? And what of the writers of these psalms? Were they pre-exilic sages, post-exilic scribes, or is it simply foolish to speculate?

Perdue (1977b) suggested that some psalms, written prior to the exile and originally noncultic, were later included in the Psalms by redactors. Other psalms were written by temple scribes specifically for worship. The use of cultic terms was the major indicator as to whether a psalm fell into one category or the other. Contrast this with Gerstenberger, who maintained that wisdom psalms in reality were “liturgical pieces from the very beginning” (1988: 20).

Drawing from Whybray, Davidson (1990) speaks of a “shared approach to reality” in which worship leaders adapt common teaching and used this shared wisdom in worship. He sees worship and teaching as fitting well together as common questions are brought rather naturally to worship either by priests with a common worldview or by teachers who brought their ideas to the temple. Davidson is rare among recent scholars in favoring a pre-exilic setting for wisdom psalms. He sees a much earlier integration of wisdom and worship in Israel’s history, significantly predating the time of Sirach.

The majority of recent scholars find no persuasive reason to rule out a cultic setting for wisdom psalms or psalms with wisdom elements. That wisdom leaders and schools interacted with worship seems evident. As Brown eloquently remarks, “Zion’s edifice is edifying and wisdom’s house is salutary” (2002: 51). Furthermore, most are persuaded that wisdom thinking, such as it is, is more of a common worldview shared by all ancient Israelites than a way of thinking practiced only by sages. The question might be asked whether this worldview changes considerably from pre-exilic to post-exilic times. And even if the worldview is “common,” might we not still imagine that certain “scholarly” types wrote both pre- and post-exilic “wisdom” writing? What we do not know are the differences or connections between the pre-exilic purveyors of “old wisdom,” usually designated “sages,” and the post-exilic writers, usually designated “scribes.” Most tend to agree with Whybray that “the post-exilic period as the matrix of wisdom literature” (1989: 230). But again, questions remain.

What do we mean when we speak of a “post-exilic” setting? Are we talking about a wisdom dimension to worship associated with the Second Temple? Are we speaking of synagogue or proto-synagogue worship? Are we suggesting a symbiotic relationship between the temple and a pre-synagogue school? Are we speaking of a personal piety of prayer at home?

Perhaps the best place to start is Sirach for the simple reason that we know a great deal about his date, life-setting, occupation, and the content of his teaching. We know he wrote in Hebrew between 200 and 180 BCE in Jerusalem. We know he wrote or quoted psalms that for the most part do not resemble what we have identified as wisdom psalms (Sir. 36:1–17; 39:13–35; 51:1–12), including an acrostic psalm at the end. There is a lengthy description of the scribe in 38:34–39:11, in which the sage tells us, among other things, that such a one “devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High”; glories in the “law of the Lord’s covenant” (38:24b; 39:8b); seeks out ancient wisdom including

prophecies, sayings, parables, and proverbs; and travels in foreign lands. He also prays to the Lord both to ask pardon for sins and to give thanksgiving. We also know that Sirach has connections with both the official temple worship and the *bet midrash* and *yeshiba*, both mentioned in Sirach 51:23, 29, where presumably he taught. What we do not know are the differences or connections between the pre-exilic purveyors of wisdom, usually designated “sages,” and the post-exilic writers or “scribes.”

From Sirach we presumably go back in time, though how far back is unclear, to look at the torah psalms. We see a clear connection between their torah piety and Sirach. While these psalms do not speak explicitly of Woman Wisdom as do both Sirach and Proverbs (and also, one might add, Baruch and Psalm 154, along with other writings found among the Dead Sea Scrolls), one could speculate that these psalms stand, marking a transition, if you will, between Proverbs 1–9 and the likes of Sirach.

But now, alas, new historical problems and questions emerge. We must look back at the dating of Proverbs, and we have yet another level of historical difficulty, namely the social milieu of Proverbs 1–9. If, as seems likely, chapters 1 through 9 and their companion Proverbs 31:10–31, the acrostic hymn to the woman of “strength” (*hayil*), are the final pieces added to Proverbs, then these chapters also arise from the post-exilic period. Perdue and Washington align these chapters with the politics and times of Ezra and Nehemiah, perhaps even later. Indeed, Washington would date this material fairly late in the Persian period because of the clear pun on the Greek word *sophia* in Proverbs 31:27. In the light of this, one must re-ask questions about the relationship of these chapters to torah. Can we assume that when torah is spoken of in Proverbs, it is always in reference to the teaching of the elders and sages, and when referenced in Sirach it does not? What are the differences between the beginning of Proverbs and Sirach, and where do the torah psalms or other “wisdom psalms” fit into this picture?

Thus we are thrown back into looking at the particular details of particular psalms, which lead to intriguing, albeit speculative and conflicting ideas. Three examples suffice. Stephan Geller speculates that the torah psalms, as well Psalms 8, 104, and 139, represent different pre-exilic reactions to the triumph of the Deuteronomic movement over old wisdom (2002: 101–21). Geller identifies torah piety as a new wisdom begun in Josiah’s reform that was essentially anti-nature in orientation concerning the place where God or God’s wisdom is revealed. Gellar speaks of old wisdom as centered on nature as a vehicle of God’s revelation and interaction with humans, whereas in the torah piety of the Deuteronomic movement, “Nature has no role, except as witness to God’s power of creation and, negatively, as inciter to idolatry” (2002: 102). Geller then analyzes the above-mentioned psalms as representing a variety of reactions to this idea. Different conclusions from those of Geller are certainly plausible, but his theory is both fascinating and consistent with the evidence.

The second and earlier study comes from Jon Levenson. Levenson is primarily interested in the issue of oral and written torah (1987: 559–74). His aim is to refute the notion that torah was first identified as the written Pentateuch and only later does one find an oral interpretation of the written word. He principally uses Psalm 119

to make his point, a psalm composed anthologically, with special attention paid to Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. He then lists all the connections between Psalm 119 and Deuteronomy, saying that the “poet stands in the Deuteronomistic tradition of repentance, not in the Priestly tradition of atonement and expiation” (564). Levenson then shows how unlike Deuteronomy this psalm is in that it lacks any mention of covenant, Moses, history, Exodus, the land, or Israel, not to mention any trace of book consciousness. In truth, the psalm’s language resonates more with the torah of the sage in Proverbs 13:13–14 and 28:4 than with the torah of the Pentateuch. It is worth noting that Levenson nowhere includes the first nine chapters of Proverbs among his comparisons.

Levenson then turns to Sirach for comparison and sees Sirach and Psalm 119 very much in the same light. Sirach, like the poet of Psalm 119, saw his own wisdom as spiritually inspired. But unlike the poet of Psalm 119, Sirach has an acute book consciousness, shows a deep commitment to the cult, and speaks openly of Israel’s sacred history. Levenson concludes that in Psalm 119 one finds three sources of torah: (a) received tradition, passed on explicitly by teachers but also including some sacred books; (b) cosmic or natural law; and (c) unmediated divine teaching. Torah for this psalmist is never only the Pentateuch; it is always both written and oral tradition.

The third study is William Brown’s essay (2005). Brown examines Psalms 32, 34, 37, 78, and 111–112 (all but Ps. 32 are acrostic) in some detail and shows inductively that while they share certain rhetorical features with Proverbs, the emphases are different. Thus, for example, Psalm 37 places emphasis on the destiny of the wicked and righteous rather than on their conduct; the righteous in this psalm are characterized in a decidedly different manner than in Proverbs; and waiting and taking refuge in God is central to the psalm’s rhetorical aim. Psalm 34 emphasizes salvation rather than moral formation, and Psalm 32 holds forgiveness, a theme absent in the wisdom literature, as foundational. Brown discusses as well the major literary and theological significance of the absence of the figure of Woman Wisdom throughout the Psalter. In the Psalms, there is no intermediary figure between the human and the deity; prayers are offered directly to God. Torah, as the source of instruction in Proverbs, is never personified. Brown concludes that the relationship between Psalms and Proverbs is better characterized as a fruitful dialogue between books with different aims than by speculation about direct influence of wisdom on Psalms.

What these three arguments illustrate is that often the meta-arguments about wisdom psalms are called into question when one attends to the particular rhetorical arguments of specific psalms. The psalms themselves help us to determine the meaning of such words as torah rather than importing a meaning from the outside or glossing over real differences. The meaning of wisdom words and phrases no doubt changes over time and in different contexts, and we find ourselves open to reasoned arguments that such terms change in directions we might not anticipate. We are invited to examine the evidence with great care and to recognize that merely saying something is post-exilic is not itself sufficient to clarify what is occurring in the tradition.

WISDOM AND THE FORMATION OF THE PSALTER

One final issue of the relationship remains to be addressed. As mentioned above, Mowinckel early on suggested that so-called “learned psalmographers” were the final editors of the Psalter. This original observation has been expanded, enlarged, and sometimes challenged by a number of scholars including Wilson, McCann, Whybray, Brueggemann, Sheppard, Ceresko, and Kuntz. Among the various observations they have made are the following. The Psalms are purposefully arranged. Wisdom psalms hold a prominent and strategic placement throughout the Psalter and within at least some of the five books. Psalm 1 plays a particularly crucial role as the Psalter’s introduction. Psalm 1, alongside other strategically placed psalms, invites us to see the Psalter as more than a prayer book or a loose collection of hymns; the Psalter is also as a book of instruction. Psalms are not only prayed and sung; they are also to be read and studied. Wisdom psalms, moreover, are frequently linked to royal psalms, thus linking instruction to messianic hope.

Much of this argument is persuasive, but it also sends us straight back to many of the formal and historical issues addressed previously. If we suppose that we do have a final wisdom editor to the Psalter, what precisely is this editor’s theology? Is it closer to Sirach or Proverbs 1–9 or Deuteronomy or Ezra? Are there further reasons, for example, why there is no reference to the figure of Woman Wisdom as there is in some psalms at Qumran? Why is the student of *tôrâ*, rather than *tôrâ* itself, like the tree that bears fruit in Psalm 1? Are the roots of rabbinic Judaism firmly planted here? If wisdom psalms, through their pairing with royal psalms, are given an eschatological thrust, where does this thrust find resonance in other work? Perhaps the most profound answers to such questions are more literary and theological than historical.

Not much is settled about wisdom language in the Psalms. We end with more questions than answers, perhaps a happy circumstance for students of the Bible. We know somewhat intuitively after steeping ourselves in the material that something is true about a relation existing between wisdom and the Psalms. But, in truth, the nature of that something is as elusive as ever.

NOTE

1. Oral communication from my colleague Dick Nysse, who was Lambdin’s student.

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PART III

TRANSLATING
PSALMS

CHAPTER 10

THE ARAMAIC PSALTER

DAVID M. STEC

THERE is no official Targum of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible. According to *b. Megillah* 3a, Jonathan b. Uzziel sought to provide one but was restrained by a *Bath Kol* (heavenly voice). While we do have a Targum for every book of this section of the Bible (except Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah), these Targums have received less scholarly attention than those of the Torah and the Prophets. As far as the Targum of Psalms (TgPs) is concerned, there is still no complete critical edition available. A partial critical edition (with the text given in transliteration) was produced by Emanuel White in his doctoral thesis, but this covers only Books I and II of the Psalter and remains unpublished. A study of TgPs published by Timothy Edwards in 2007 is based on a selection of fifteen psalms and includes an edition of each of them with a critical apparatus, noting variants from manuscripts representing each of the different text types. Willem F. Smelik gives details of nineteen complete manuscripts that contain TgPs, as well as some damaged, incomplete, and fragmentary manuscripts.

White (1988) classifies the manuscripts used for his edition according to their textual tradition into three divisions: (1) Sephardi manuscripts: Madrid Complutense 116-Z-40; Madrid Escorial G-1-5; Salamanca M-2; Montefiore H. 116; Paris Héb 110. (2) Ashkenazi manuscripts: Cambridge Ee. 5.9, Paris Héb 17, 114; Parma 3095, 3231, 3232; Wrocław M1106; Berlin MS 4; Rome N 72; Florence Plut. III.1; Vatican Codex Urbinas 1. (3) Nuremberg Solg. 6.2, falling somewhere between (1) and (2). Most printed editions reproduce essentially the same text as that in the First and Second Rabbinic Bibles printed by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1517 and 1524–25, respectively, and which was probably based on the Nuremberg manuscript. A widely used edition has been Paul de Lagarde's *Hagiographa Chaldaica*, published in Leipzig in 1873, which has the Venice edition of 1525 as its source but makes several editorial corrections. The Sephardi textual tradition was first represented in printed form in the Antwerp Polyglot or *Biblia Regia* of 1569–72 and is more recently represented in the transcription of the Madrid Ms 116-Z-40 (Villa-Amil n. 5) published by L. Díez Merino. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, no English translation of TgPs had been published. This lack was first made good by Edward M. Cook, who published an English translation of Lagarde's

text, noting also variants from Díez Merino's edition, on the Internet in 2001. An English translation produced by the present writer then appeared in print in the Aramaic Bible series in 2004. This is based on the Paris MS Hébr 17 and includes an apparatus listing variants from four other manuscripts and the printed editions. Timothy Edwards (2007) also includes an English translation of the fifteen psalms used in his study.

DATING

TgPs is difficult to date with any confidence. It seems not to have been widely known, or at least widely used, until a relatively late date. The first medieval work to quote extensively from it is the *Arukh* of Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome (1035–1110). Within the Targum itself the only clear historical reference that has a bearing on dating is the mention of Rome and Constantinople at Psalm 108:11: “But now that I have sinned, who has brought me to the wicked city of Rome? Who has led me to Constantinople, which is Edom?” This would suggest a *terminus a quo* of early in the fourth century, and a *terminus ad quem* of 476 when the Western Roman Empire came to an end. But it is possible that this reference is applicable only to 108:11 itself, rather than to TgPs as a whole, which probably contains material belonging to more than one period. According to Timothy Edwards (2007), the earliest datable tradition found in TgPs comes from dependence on Aquila (92:15) and can thus be dated to the early second century CE, but the majority of its exegetical traditions are close to Amoraic traditions, which would suggest that a date before the fifth century for the “original” TgPs is very unlikely (p. 221, cf. 28–34).

LANGUAGE

The language of TgPs is probably a dialect of Palestinian Aramaic. As evidence for this one might cite the use of such words as *'rwm* rather than *'ry* as an equivalent for the Hebrew particle *ky* “for,” *mwy* rather than *my'* for “water,” *hmy* rather than *hzy* for the verb “to see,” and the predominance of the third-person masculine singular suffix with plural nouns in the form *-wy* rather than *-why*. But the situation is not straightforward, since Eastern forms such as *hzy* are also occasionally found. The Aramaic of TgPs is very similar to that of TgJob and broadly similar to that of the other targums to the Hagiographa (except perhaps Proverbs) and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to the Pentateuch. One interesting feature of the language of TgPs is its use of several loan words from Greek and Latin, especially the former. Some examples of these are: *'wklws* “troops” from Greek *ochlos* “crowd” (45:6), *gnys* from Greek *genos* “family” (22:28), *klyd* from Greek *chalis*, Latin *calix* “cup” (11:6), *nymws* from Greek *nomos* “law” (1:2), *snhdryn* from Greek *sunhedrion* “council” (45:1), *qyrys* from Greek *kurios* “lord” (53:1), and *bsys* from Greek *basis* “base” (82:5).

GENERAL CHARACTER

TgPs is made up for the most part of a fairly literal base translation into which various expansions have been added. In many cases, it would be possible to bracket out these additions and be left with a nonexpansive version of the original. The base translation does make some changes to the Hebrew original, but many of these are stylized and follow certain well-established conventions that are characteristic of the translation method followed by the targumist. There are, however, some exceptions to this usual pattern. Perhaps the most notable of these is to be found at Psalm 68, most of which features a very paraphrastic rendering, with many aggadic traditions, and from which the expansive elements cannot be readily extracted so as to leave a linguistically viable base text. Much of Psalm 18 is likewise given expansive paraphrastic treatment, as are several individual verses scattered throughout the Psalter (e.g., 50:13; 80:11; 84:8; 90:2, 5; 118:22).

A feature that TgPs has in common with the Targum of Job (TgJob) is its use of multiple translations. There are some verses that contain two translations to the whole verse and also many individual words or phrases to which an alternative translation is given (usually in the margin). The second or alternative translation is almost always introduced by a formula that varies with the manuscript or edition, the most common of these being *targûm ʾaḥēr* and *lāšôn ʾaḥēr*, either written in full or abbreviated, which may be translated “Another Translation.” In TgPs this is found on a smaller scale than in TgJob: In the printed editions (which follow Bomberg) TgPs has only five verses with a double translation (76:11; 77:11; 78:64; 88:3; 110:1), whereas TgJob has forty-two. A few more verses with a double translation are to be found in the manuscripts of TgPs (e.g., 66:10, 11, 12, 13; 68:14, 15; 90:5; 92:9; 127:2), and the number and distribution of these vary among the manuscripts. One of the translations may be mainly literal and the other more free or paraphrastic (e.g., 78:64; 88:3), or both may be paraphrastic (e.g., 76:11; 110:1). It is likely that such alternative translations arose when manuscripts were compared and readings from one manuscript were written in the margins of another, and then in the course of transmission these readings entered into the text from the margins (see Stec 1994: 86–94).

TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES

TgPs makes use of various reverential devices, for the most part in a stereotypical way. Particularly frequent is the term *Memra* (“Word”), which has the main function of maintaining a proper distance between God and humans. For example, “Blessed are all who trust in *his Memra*,” for MT “Blessed are all who take refuge in *him*” (2:12); “they have rebelled against *your Memra*,” for MT “they have rebelled against *you*” (5:11); “*The Memra of the Lord judges the peoples*,” for MT “The Lord judges the peoples” (7:9). Another frequent term is *Shekinah* “Presence,” which is used particularly for sayings

that have to do with the presence of God. For example, “the Lord *who makes his Shekinah dwell* in Zion,” for MT “the Lord *who dwells* in Zion” (9:12); “*your Shekinah does not dwell* with our armies,” for MT “*you do not go out* with our armies” (44:10). *Shekinah* is also often used as an equivalent for references to God’s face, such as where “remove his *Shekinah*” is used for the common MT expression “hide his face” (e.g., 22:25); and it is the standard equivalent for MT “wing,” where the reference is to the wings of God (e.g., 17:8).

A third term of some importance is “glory” ([*ʾyqr*]), which is especially associated with theophany. For example, “his glory was revealed,” for MT “he came down” (18:10); “in the *splendour of your glory*,” for MT “in *your light*” (36:10). We also find the phrases “throne of glory” (e.g., 68:5), “clouds of glory” (e.g., 68:14), and “*Shekinah of glory*” (e.g., 68:19). Examples of various other devices used to place distance between God and humans are: “we will not turn back from *your fear*,” for MT “we will not turn back from *you*” (80:19); “they do not *bless the name of the Lord*,” for MT “they do not *call upon the Lord*” (14:4); “I sought *instruction from before the Lord*,” for MT “I sought the Lord” (34:5); “*revealed before the Lord is the way of the righteous*,” for MT “*the Lord knows the way of the righteous*” (1:6).

There is some inconsistency in TgPs in its treatment of anthropomorphisms. Sometimes these are removed by substitution. The use of *Shekinah* for MT “face” has already been mentioned. Other substitutions include: *Memra* for “eyes” (18:25) and for “voice” (95:7), *yqr* “glory” for “eyes” (31:23), *mḥt* “stroke” for “hand” (32:4) and *twšbḥt* “praise” for “mouth” (138:4). Sometimes TgPs softens the force of anthropomorphisms by means of the insertion of words, for example, *sbr* “brightness of” before “face” (17:15), *mḥt* “stroke of” before “hand” (21:9), *gbwrt* “might of” before “right hand” (77:11) and *tqwp* “might of” before “arm” (71:18). But frequently anthropomorphisms are simply retained. Thus there are references to God’s face (10:11), mouth (33:6), lips (17:4), eyes (5:6), ears (10:17), fingers (8:4), hand (10:12), right hand (118:15), and arm (89:14).

A frequent practice of TgPs is to give an explanation of what is unclear or ambiguous in the MT. For example, MT “this” is explained as “this prayer” (102:19), MT “these” as “these miracles (42:5), MT “they will offer” as “the priests will offer” (51:21), and MT “he remembers them” as “he remembers the righteous” (9:13).

Sometimes the discrepancy between what TgPs provides as a translation and what is found in the MT can be attributed to TgPs deriving a Hebrew word from a root other than the normally accepted one. An example of this is to be found at 6:7, where the MT reads literally “I cause my bed to swim.” The Hebrew word *ʾšḥ* comes from the root *śḥḥ* “to swim,” but TgPs apparently derives it from the root *śyḥ* “to meditate, talk” and thus renders the clause “I speak in my grief all night upon my bed.”

In some cases, if a Hebrew word has a homonym, TgPs translates not according to the generally accepted meaning in the context but according to the meaning of the homonym. Thus at 139:2, 17 *rʿ* is normally understood to be *rʿ* III “thought/purpose,” but TgPs, with its translation as *ḥbrwt* “attachment/friendship” at 139:2 and *rhym* “friend” at 139:17, evidently took the Hebrew word to be *rʿ* II “friend.”

MIDRASHIC AND AGGADIC ADDITIONS

Various themes stand out in the midrashic and aggadic material to be found both in the additions made by TgPs to the biblical text, as compared with the MT, and in the paraphrastic translations it sometimes provides. The following references are only examples:

1. Law (*'wryt*), especially the giving or receiving of the Law (42:7; 46:7; 68:9; 94:10), instruction in the Law (49:16; 68:19; 84:7; 110:1), occupying oneself with the Law (40:8; 44:4; 68:31; 73:5; 121:8; 139:2), and returning to the Law, that is, repentance (86:5; 107:35).
2. Instruction (*'wlpn*), in phrases such as *'wryt 'wlpny* "Law of my instruction" (102:5), *byt 'wlpny* "my house of instruction" (60:9; 101:2), *qbl 'wlpn* "accept/receive instruction" (2:12; 110:7), and especially where phrases such as "seek the Lord" or "seek God" are rendered "seek instruction from before the Lord" or similar (14:2=53:3; 34:5; 69:7; 70:5; 77:3).
3. Prophecy. The phrase "spirit of prophecy" occurs several times (14:1; 22:27; 49:16; 77:3). David is said to have sung a psalm in prophecy (18:1), to have spoken one in prophecy (103:1), and to have prophesied (49:17). Prophets in general are referred to (18:17; 68:34; 74:9), and particular prophets are mentioned: Moses (68:19), Samuel (118:27), Joel (107:33), and Jonah (107:23).
4. Prayer. Where God is the subject of the verb *'nh* "answer" in the MT, TgPs translates as *qbl šlwt* "accept prayer" (3:5; 13:4; 20:2). When the MT speaks of "spreading out" or "lifting up" the hands, this is interpreted as being in prayer (44:21; 63:5). TgPs also inserts various other added references to prayer (10:17; 50:5; 78:36). The verb *šl* "pray" is often used as an equivalent for verbs of speech directed toward God, such as *qr* "call/cry" (3:5), *š'q* "cry out" (107:6), and *šw* "cry for help" (28:2). The verb is also found in various additions made by TgPs (4:5; 72:5; 132:6).
5. Angels and demons. Angels are often brought in by TgPs using both the Semitic term *ml'k* and (less frequently) the Greek loan word *'ngly*. Often where MT speaks simply of "heaven," TgPs makes this "angels of heaven" (57:6; 69:35) or "angels of the height" (50:4; 97:6). One specific angel referred to is "the angel of death" (89:49; 91:5; 140:12), and Michael and Gabriel are mentioned by name (137:7–8). There are just a few references to demons (89:33; 91:5, 6, 10), including both morning and night demons (121:6).
6. Reward and punishment, righteousness and merit. TgPs frequently refers to the world to come (50:21; 102:25), and it is associated with the reward of the righteous (63:4), of the people of God (66:9), and of the messianic king (110:4) but also with the punishment of the wicked (92:10; 101:8). Gehenna is mentioned as a place of judgment (49:10), to which the wicked are brought (55:24; 125:5) but from which God can deliver (103:4). The righteous (*šdyq*) are often referred

to in TgPs. It is said that God remembers them (9:13) and protects them (12:8), that they are God's friends (139:17), and that they pacify his wrath (90:11). The phrase "righteous ones of the earth" occurs more than once (35:20; 50:4), as does "assembly of the righteous" (26:12; 82:1). TgPs sets out the beneficial effects of the merit (*zkwt*) of Abraham (46:6), the patriarchs (84:10), David (110:4), and the king (72:17). Several aspects of the treatment of these themes in TgPs are surveyed in some detail by Edward M. Cook (2003: 203–20).

7. Exile. TgPs explicitly makes the Hebrew phrase *šwb šbwt* refer to the return of Israel from exile by using the term *glwwt* 'exiles' in its translation (14:7; 53:7). It also brings in the theme of restoration from exile elsewhere (18:28–29; 80:4) and adds various other references to exile (23:4; 69:3; 102:24).
8. The temple and the priesthood. The temple is a frequent element of expansive and nonliteral translations (24:7; 45:13; 66:6; 80:11), and there are numerous references to priests (23:5; 50:13; 51:9; 89:45).
9. Historical figures and events. People and events from biblical history inserted by TgPs include the Garden of Eden (24:9; 50:10), the patriarchs, particularly in connection with their righteousness and piety (18:26–27; 60:6–7), the overthrow of Sodom (107:34), the Exodus (42:8), Pharaoh and his army (68:7; 74:14), Moses (49:19; 62:12), Korah (49:17), the receiving of the Law on Mount Sinai (42:7; 68:16), Saul (7:1; 110:1), Goliath (9:6), David (87:5), Doeg and Ahithophel (55:16), Solomon (86:17; 87:5), Sennacherib (83:9), Hezekiah (107:17), and Zedekiah (107:10).

Several of the midrashic and aggadic additions of TgPs have parallels in *Midrash Tehillim*. They include the application of 18:26 to Abraham, 49:17 to Korah, 55:14 to Ahithophel, and 78:64 to Hophni and Phineas, as well as the identification of the one who hates peace with Edom at 120:6, the use of 50:2 to assert that the beginning of the creation of the world was from Zion, and that of 90:2 to state that repentance was established before the creation of the world. Such additions also comprise the linking of 68:7 with the deliverance of Israel at the exodus, which is credited to the good deeds of the patriarchs, the connection of the mire of the deep with the exile at 69:3, the identification of the valley of Baca with Gehenna at 84:7, the view that 91:5–6 refers to the work of demons, the reference to the Levites biting off their thumbs at 137:4, and various other exegetical traditions at 68:9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 23, 26; 84:8; 87:2; 110:1; 122:3.

It is far from clear, however, what may be inferred from the existence of these parallels. As Timothy Edwards points out, both TgPs and *Midrash Tehillim* remain obscure in relation to their respective date and provenance, and both appear to have a complex redaction history (Edwards 2007: 149). According to Pinchas Churgin, most of the midrashic material in TgPs was preserved in other midrashic collections and most of them in *Midrash Tehillim*, though it is unclear which drew upon which, and in most cases they drew on a third source (Churgin 1945: 31–44). Edwards makes an

examination of interpretations that are unique to TgPs and *Midrash Tehillim* in the fifteen psalms that he studies and concludes that there is no evidence of a specific relationship between these two texts, beyond being based on the same biblical book from which they both derive their name (Edwards 2007: 149–68).

RELATIONSHIP TO THE TARGUM OF JOB

The Targums of Psalms and Job are for the most part transmitted in the same manuscripts (though there are a few more manuscript sources available for the former than the latter), and they also have enough similar features to raise the question as to whether they might have had a common origin. As already mentioned, these two targums share the phenomenon of multiple translation, although, as also pointed out, this is found on a smaller scale in TgPs than in TgJob. They also have much vocabulary in common, frequently using the same equivalents to render the Hebrew original, even if there are often differences between them.¹ Most importantly, they are both similar in general character, giving what is mainly a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew, into which aggadic insertions are made; and they share several common themes in these insertions.

Thus of the themes already indicated as being characteristic of TgPs, TgJob takes an interest in the Law (3:16; 11:8), instruction (5:8), prophecy (4:18; 27:11), prayer (8:5; 11:13), angels (1:6; 3:3; 25:2[2nd Tg]), and Gehenna (2:11; 15:21). TgJob also refers to many of the same people and events from biblical history as those found in TgPs, including the Garden of Eden (28:6; 38:18), the patriarchs, particularly their righteousness and piety (4:7; 5:17), Sodom (14:18[2nd Tg]; 34:20), and the exodus, particularly the Egyptians and Pharaoh (5:12–13; 7:12[1st Tg]; 38:23). On the other hand, some themes that are prominent or well attested in TgPs are either poorly attested in, or totally absent from, TgJob. For example, the world to come is mentioned twenty-six times in the expansive or non-literal parts of TgPs but only twice in TgJob (5:4; 28:17[3rd Tg; in some manuscripts found as 2nd Tg at 28:19]), the temple nineteen times in TgPs but only three times in TgJob (3:5; 5:24; 23:3), and priests eight (or in some manuscripts ten) times in TgPs but not at all in TgJob.

Also, many of the historical figures and events referred to in TgPs are absent from TgJob, though it should be pointed out that some of these are referred to only once in TgPs and in some cases not in all the manuscripts. Of course, it is possible that some of these differences are due to the differences in literary character between the Psalms and Job. In particular, as a liturgical work, the book of Psalms, as one would expect, exhibits an interest in the temple and the priesthood, whereas it is understandable that such themes could be less readily associated with the book of Job. All things considered, although there are similarities between TgPs and TgJob, it is not clear whether these are sufficient to be attributed to a common origin.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE MT AND THE VERSIONS

Where the Targum differs from the MT, the modern textual critic naturally wishes to consider whether such discrepancies are attributable to the targumist possibly having a different Hebrew original in front of him. But this is a notoriously difficult question to answer, since a targum is by its very nature a nonliteral translation in some measure. Of course, except in very paraphrastic sections, it is relatively easy to discount differences that are due to the methods of translation described above, to disregard insertions of aggadic and midrashic material, and perhaps also to exclude deviations that can be attributed to the theological stance and exegetical concerns of the targumist. When this is done, one is left for the most part with what appears to be a fairly literal translation of a Hebrew text that does not differ greatly from the MT. Nevertheless, some differences do remain, and it is these which may provide evidence of a different Hebrew original.

Any comparison between TgPs and the MT necessarily begs the question of what one takes to represent each of these. Both the variation in the textual tradition of TgPs and the lack of a full critical text present obvious difficulties. A convenient way of defining the MT might be to take it as consisting of what is set out in the text of BHS, or the Leningrad manuscript that underlies it, but this would be too narrow. Despite a high degree of standardization, there is still some variation in the wider manuscript tradition of the MT, as the apparatus of BHS testifies. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that at the time of composition of TgPs the text represented by the MT was probably not yet as fixed as it later came to be. Thus it is not surprising that readings in TgPs, or some manuscripts of it, are sometimes in agreement with textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the MT. For example, at 62:11 most manuscripts of MT read *thblw* “act vainly,” but some manuscripts read *tbhlw* “hasten”; most manuscripts of TgPs read *tytbhlwn* “hasten,” but some read *tthblwn* “act vainly.” At 54:5 BHS reads *zrym* “strangers,” but many manuscripts of MT read *zdym* “arrogant ones”; most manuscripts of TgPs read *zydynym* “arrogant ones,” but at least one manuscript reads *nwkr’ym* “strangers.” At 105:36 BHS reads *br’sm* “in their land,” but some manuscripts of MT read *bmsrym* “in Egypt”; most manuscripts of TgPs read *bm’srym* “in Egypt,” but some read *br’hw* “in their land.”

In many cases where it deviates from the MT and might well be based on a different Hebrew original, TgPs has the support of other ancient versions, particularly the Septuagint and the Peshitta. Some of these instances involve nothing more than a different vocalization of the same consonantal text. For example, at 17:14 where MT reads *tēmāllē* (pi’el) “may you fill,” TgPs (+ LXX, Pesh) suggests a vocalization of *timmālē* (niph’al) “may it be filled.” At 34:22 where MT reads *tēmōtēt* “it shall slay” (po’lel of *mwt*), TgPs (+ LXX) has *mytwē*, which suggests a reading of *tēmūtāt* “death of.” At 50:18 where MT reads *wattireš* “and you were pleased,” TgPs (+ LXX, Pesh) has *wrhēt*, which suggests a reading of *wattāroš* “and you ran.” At 78:69 where MT

reads *rāmīm* “heights,” TgPs (+ LXX, Theodotion) is based upon a reading of *rēmīm* “wild oxen.”

Many deviations of TgPs from MT, which also have wider versional support, suggest a Hebrew original with a different consonantal text. For example, at 38:3 where MT reads *wattinḥat* “and it has gone down” (√*nḥt*), TgPs (+ Pesh) reads *wšrt* “and it rests,” which suggests a Hebrew original of *wattānaḥ* (√*nwh*). At 97:11 where MT reads *zārua* “is sown” (subject: light), TgPs (+ LXX, Pesh) gives a rendering that includes *dnh* “rises,” suggesting a Hebrew original of *zārah* “rises.” At 52:9 where MT reads *bēhawwātō* “in his desire/wickedness,” TgPs (+ Pesh) reads *bmmwnyh* “in his wealth,” which suggests a Hebrew original of *bēhônō*. At 115:16, where MT reads *haššāmayim šāmayim* “the heavens (are the) heavens,” TgPs (+ LXX, Pesh) reads *šmy šmy*, which suggests a Hebrew original of *šēmē haššāmayim* “the heaven of heavens.” At 138:3 where MT reads *tarhibēnī* apparently “you made me arrogant,” TgPs (+ LXX, cf. Pesh) reads *šgy’tny* “you made me great,” which may suggest a Hebrew original of *tarbēnī* “you made me great.”

Although agreements between TgPs and other ancient versions against the MT may be evidence that these versions shared a *Vorlage* differing from the MT, as was suggested by Wilhelm Bacher in his influential article of 1872, caution is in order. From an examination of a few examples taken from fifteen psalms, Timothy Edwards concludes that only two cases suggest the possible use of a different *Vorlage* from that represented by the manuscript tradition of the MT, and even in these the proof is far from conclusive. In his view, on numerous occasions similarity in translation or interpretation between TgPs and other early translations could be attributable either to the Hebrew text itself or to a similarity in exegetical technique, which independently produced similar results in different texts (Edwards 2007: 25–53). Such possibilities always need to be taken into account before attributing any given translation in TgPs to a *Vorlage* shared with other versions but differing from what is found in the MT. Each case must be assessed on its own merits.

RELEVANCE TO NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

The question of how relevant the Targums in general are to our understanding of the New Testament has been much discussed over the years, and widely differing views have been held. This is a topic given comprehensive treatment by Martin McNamara (2010), a revision of a work originally published in 1972, a revision necessitated by significant developments in scholarship in the intervening period.

It was once believed that the bulk of the material in the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch came from pre-Christian times and that by the time of Christ the tradition making up this Targum had already been formed and has for the most part been faithfully transmitted. Consequently, it was assumed that the Palestinian Targum (in its various forms) provides both an important resource for accessing rabbinic exegesis in New

Testament times and a witness to the dialect of Aramaic spoken by Jesus. Perhaps two of the most notable exponents of the concept of a pre-Christian Palestinian Targum were Paul Kahle, who published some Genizah fragments of the Palestinian Targum, and Alejandro Díez Macho, who identified Codex Neofiti 1 as an almost complete text of the Palestinian Targum. Belief in an early date for the Palestinian Targum was widely held until as late as the last two decades of the twentieth century. But the arguments for a pre-Christian date for the Palestinian Targum (whether collectively or in any one of its representative forms) have since been examined in detail and found to be unconvincing. It now seems unlikely that the language of the Palestinian Targum texts, which, as noted above concerning Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, has some similarity to that of TgPs, can be earlier than the third century CE, and many scholars would be sceptical of an early date for the Targum itself. However, as Martin McNamara observes,

The likelihood is that there was in Palestine an early, even pre-Christian translation of the Pentateuch (and presumably also of the Prophets) into Aramaic, the language spoken by the people. How literal, or how close to the basic translation of our present texts of the Palestinian Targums this was we cannot say. However, there were also traditions and paraphrases which developed from and around the Pentateuch. A number of these were early and pre-Christian. That a good part of this earlier tradition continued in Rabbinic Judaism and in the Palestinian Targum tradition, as a continuum, can be reasonably presumed, while granting that some paraphrases in our present texts of the Palestinian Targums are later developments. (2010: 135)

Similarly, despite the likelihood of a relatively late date for TgPs, as noted above, there is always the possibility that it preserves some old traditions within the later Targum text. The question of whether particular passages preserve traditions of translation and interpretation going back to the first century, and can therefore contribute to an understanding of the New Testament, has to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

One passage of TgPs that is often cited in connection with the New Testament is 68:19, which has been thought by some to represent the text used by Paul in his quotation of Psalms 68:19 in Ephesians 4:8. TgPs renders the verse: “You ascended to the firmament, O prophet Moses, you took captives, you taught the words of the Law, you gave them as gifts to the sons of man; even among the rebellious who are converted and repent does the Shekinah of the glory of the Lord God dwell.” The crucial words here are “you gave them as gifts” (*yhbt’ ythwn mtnn*), which translate the MT “you received gifts” (*lqht mtnwt*). In Ephesians 4:8 the quotation from the Psalm reads (RSV): “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, he gave gifts to men” (*edōken domata tois anthrōpois*). This differs from the LXX, which translates the MT literally: “you have received gifts for man” (*elabes domata en anthrōpō*). Martin McNamara explains the text in Ephesians as probably reading a Hebrew root *hlq* “divide/distribute” instead of *lqh* “receive,” and he adds that this is the same understanding of the passage as that found in TgPs and also *Midrash Tehillim* (2010: 234–35). Timothy Edwards cites several other rabbinic sources that give the same interpretation, and he suggests that the reason for understanding the text in such a way may be the seeming inappropriateness of God receiving gifts from

man, especially the rebellious, in the context of the Sinai revelation and the giving of the Torah (2007:137 nn. 545–46). The Peshitta tradition here is mixed: Some manuscripts have the verb *yhb* “give,” and others have *nsb* “take.” Clearly Ephesians 4:8 and TgPs 68:19 reflect an early and widespread interpretive tradition, though whether they also reflect a Hebrew text differing from the MT is much less certain.

New Testament scholars have sometimes used the translation of TgPs at 118:22–29 to shed light on the interpretation of verses 22–23 in connection with the rejection of Jesus (e.g., Mark 12:10–11; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7), and the interpretation of verses 25–26 in connection with the messianic greeting given to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9–10; John 12:13). TgPs places this whole psalm in the context of King David, locating verses 22–29 in the context of David’s being anointed king by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:1–13. Such a tradition would obviously make the psalm lend itself to the messianic interpretation found in the New Testament. But Timothy Edwards thinks it probable that this linking of Psalm 118:22–25 with 1 Samuel 16:1–13 found in TgPs was a later development of that tradition rather than an integral part of it from the start and thus that the earlier application of TgPs on these verses to the New Testament seems “overly optimistic” (2007: 174–83).

Given that TgPs as we now have it evidently dates from a time later than the New Testament, if one allows that it may incorporate some much earlier traditions, it inevitably becomes a matter of judgment to decide what material within TgPs belongs to these earlier traditions. In order to make such a decision, it is necessary to look at each case individually and to compare the exegesis of TgPs with that found in other rabbinic sources and thereby attempt to determine where the material in TgPs fits into the larger picture of the development of that exegetical tradition. There will always be some scope here for different scholars to make different judgments. TgPs, like any other targum, cannot be used uncritically in New Testament research, but neither can it be rejected out of hand as irrelevant to such research.

NOTE

1. A few examples of common equivalents are given by Céline Mangan. She concludes: “While the parallel expressions are striking, this need not add up to a common translator for Tg. Job and Tg. Psalms since there are sufficient differences between them to counteract these” (1991: 13).

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CHAPTER 11

THE SEPTUAGINT PSALTER

JOACHIM SCHAPER

THAT Hellenistic scribes produced more copies of the Psalter than of any other Old Greek version of a biblical book, including even the books of the Pentateuch, is one of the most eloquent testimonies to the importance of the OG Psalter, commonly called the “Septuagint Psalter” or LXX Psalms. The proliferation of copies makes the new critical Göttingen edition of the OG Psalms the project’s most arduous task.¹ The extraordinary number of textual witnesses underlines the fact that the Psalter—both in its Hebrew original and in its Greek version, as well as in its Old Latin and Vulgate renderings—is a pillar, probably the main pillar, of the Jewish and the Christian liturgical traditions.

In what follows, I outline the history and characteristics of the Septuagint Psalter, the theological features that inform it, and key aspects of its reception. In doing so, I pay special attention to (the concept of) the translator, the situation in which he worked,² and the intellectual climate in which he operated.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS “SETTING” FOR THE PSALTER’S TRANSLATION

The translators who produced the various books of the OG Bible, or Septuagint (LXX), operated in a specific cultural and religious climate. The interaction of Hellenistic Jewish authors and translators with holy and authoritative religious writings³ took place against the background of a confluence of the “streams of tradition” of Judaism since the Persian period (Oppenheim 1977). This phenomenon and its effects on the interpretation of the Jewish “scriptures” have met with considerable interest in the scholarly community. It has been said that the rendering of the Pentateuch in Greek “constituted exegesis as well as translation” and that it represented “the transmission of scripture together with an interpretative tradition” (Horbury 2006: 100). In other words, by the time the LXX

Pentateuch came into being, a mainstream hermeneutics of “scripture” and of other authoritative texts outside “scripture” had arisen, a hermeneutics characterized by the aforementioned confluence of “streams of tradition” that hitherto had been separate.

This tendency in Jewish writing in the Hellenistic period toward “amalgamating, through interpretation, concepts from diverse biblical strata in a Hellenistic environment” (Kister 2004: 19) is, of course, an element of the overall development of the movement of Second Temple Judaism toward a “religion of the book” (cf. Stroumsa 2009).⁴ The consequence of the rise of the new hermeneutics was that all Jewish interaction with “scripture,” along with other authoritative texts in the Hellenistic period, found itself located somewhere in the “coordinate system,” so to speak, of “scriptural interpretation” (Horbury 2006: 100–2). Important examples of “reading together” originally diverse traditions include some of the characteristic messianic interpretations that only became possible because of “an ability to associate,” under the influence of the new hermeneutics, “the series of Pentateuchal prophecies . . . in the mouths of Jacob, Moses and Balaam, with the prayer of Hannah and the oracle of Nathan in the historical books and with Davidic oracles in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the minor prophets and the Psalms.”⁵

We shall see later that such interpretive moves, and others like them, inform LXX Psalms. Given the pervasiveness of the so-called mainstream hermeneutics of Hellenistic Jewish exegesis, the *translators* of holy texts were inescapably *interpreters* of such texts.

THE DATE AND PLACE OF THE PSALTER’S TRANSLATION

In his lecture on the Septuagint, Joseph Ziegler unfolds numerous aspects of the significance of the Septuagint in academic research and beyond (1971: 590–614). He discusses its textual-critical and exegetical uses in the study of the Hebrew text, its significance in Greek lexicography, and its influence on early Christian liturgy. But unlike most contemporary exegetes, Ziegler discusses the value of the Septuagint as a witness to the cultural history of Hellenistic Egypt (p. 604)—and, one might add, to that of Hellenistic Palestine, since a number of OG translations of biblical books were translated in the motherland, not in Egypt. As we shall see, the Psalter was one of these books.

The probable references to Judas Maccabaeus in LXX Psalms 59 and 107 help us to solve the complex problem of the OG Psalter’s date and place of origin. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the translation found in LXX Psalms 59:9 and 107:9 is best explained as a reference to Judas Maccabaeus and thus helps us to date the OG Psalter to the second half of the second century BCE (Schaper 1995: 42–45). Judas was in power from 166 to 161/160 BCE, thus the *terminus a quo* for the OG Psalter.⁶

If uncertainty remains regarding the date of the translation—in spite of supporting observations, not least “the fact that Judas Maccabaeus never held the title of king” (Williams 2001: 262), contrary to the formulation “Judas, my King” in the passages

mentioned—it must be pointed out that there is plenty of external evidence to support the date that we have proposed for the translation. T. F. Williams has drawn together the evidence from LXX Isaiah, LXX Proverbs, 1 Maccabees, and the works of Philo to indicate the influence the OG Psalter has exercised on all of them. Williams rightly concludes that “if 1 Maccabees was dependent on the Septuagint of Psalms, which seems likely, that would mean that the translation of the LXX Psalter took place sometime prior to the first century BCE” (2001: 272). And while the “quotations of the LXX Psalter by Philo provide evidence to suggest that the translation of Psalms must have taken place no later than the early part of the first century BCE” (p. 275), it is also true that Philo cites from LXX Proverbs. “This could mean that the date for the creation of the LXX Psalter is to be located within the second century BCE, if not earlier” (p. 275). Williams then settles for the second century, without committing himself to a more specific period (p. 276).

There is reason, however, to be more confident in dating the Greek translation of the Psalter. The supporting evidence is found in the OG of Zechariah, where, in LXX Zech 14:14—just as in LXX Psalms 59 and 107—a reference to the political and geographical entity Judah in the MT has been rendered as “Judas,” clearly referring to an individual and thus most likely to Judas Maccabaeus (Pola 2008: 572–80). The rendering provided by the translator of Zechariah would be another independent example of the importance of Judas Maccabaeus in Hellenistic Judaism, thus vindicating the use of the reference to “Judas” in the OG of Psalms as a foundation for dating and placing it.

With regard to the place of origin, it is true—indeed, a truism—to say that “[e]ven if the LXX version of the verses in question [in LXX Pss. 59 and 107] contains a veiled allusion to Judas Maccabaeus, this does not necessarily mean that the translation has a Palestinian provenance or was produced in the Maccabaeus period” (Williams 2001: 263). Yes, “not necessarily,” but a Palestinian provenance remains the most *probable* interpretation of the evidence (Schaper 1995: 45), which now receives further support from Pola’s interpretation of LXX Zechariah 14:14. But it also receives support from a number of other features of the LXX Psalter that many authors, including Williams, fail to take seriously, most especially the occurrence of the term *baris* (LXX Ps. 44:9), a term Jerome thought to be typically Palestinian (*epichōrion* Palaestinae), as has been pointed out by Venetz (1974) and van der Kooij (1983: 67–74) in support of their thesis of a possible Palestinian origin of the Greek Psalter. As I have pointed out by adducing further evidence, “Jerome’s statement is not altogether correct, whereas the general tendency of his argument is perfectly acceptable” (Schaper 1995: 38).

We can sum up by saying “that, while not being used in Palestine alone, the term seems to have been confined to the Syro-Palestinian cultural area” (Schaper 1995: 38). *Baris* carries the meaning “tower” or “citadel” and is a homonym of the Egyptian Greek *baris* (“flat-bottomed boat”). It is only in its Palestinian Greek sense of “tower”/“citadel” that *baris* makes any sense in the context of LXX Psalm 44:9. This is incontrovertible evidence for the Palestinian origin of the Greek Psalter, a conclusion that is in complete harmony with our observations on the significance of the “Judas” passages in LXX Psalms 59 and 107.

TRANSLATION AND EXEGESIS IN THE OLD GREEK OF PSALMS

It is a truism to say that all translations involve interpretation, yet that insight is not taken sufficiently seriously in Septuagint scholarship. In what follows, we pay attention to traces of interpretative, indeed exegetical activity in the OG of Psalms, activity that, in our view and that of an increasing number of other Septuagint scholars, reflects the religious and political concerns of the translators and their milieu. However, in order first to establish what the Greek Psalter is not, we must turn to a recent model that purports to explain the nature of most Septuagint books, the so-called interlinear paradigm or interlinearity model.

Albert Pietersma has recently posited that the interlinear model provides “an appropriate explanatory model for most of the books of the translated corpus” (2002: 357), including the Psalter. Accordingly, his paradigm “suggests fairly localized interpretive activity.”⁷

One expects the interlinear translator to render his source text a unit at a time. Needless to say, when the parent text presents no linguistic difficulty, its translated counterpart is adequate Greek if not literary Greek, but when the parent text is problematic or misunderstood, the minimum a translator can do is to produce a grammatical, if not semantically transparent text. (p. 355)

Pietersma further states that he “find[s] [him]self substantially agreeing with Soisalon-Soininen when he argues that unlike modern translators, the translators of the Septuagint often translated the Hebrew a fairly small unit at a time. As a result of this procedure it becomes very difficult to speak of ‘the translator’s view or conception of . . .’ since the translator cannot be said to be engaged in exegesis, in the standard use of that term” (p. 356). Pietersma sums up by stating, “Any failure to recognize this limitation inherent in formal correspondence-type of translations—whether or not one subscribes to the strictures of the interlinear paradigm—can result in some far-fetched claims being made” (p. 356).

While Pietersma claims that Sebastian Brock’s way of distinguishing two types of ancient translators support his “paradigm,” Brock in fact stresses that the distinction between two (ideal) types of translator (i.e., the *expositor* and the *interpretes*) plays a role only in *later* theorizing (e.g., in Cicero, Horace, and Jerome). Brock uses them, in dialogue with Barr, only as *heuristic devices* to locate the Septuagint translators’ work in what Brock calls a “continuum” “between the two extremes of the work of the most conscientious and self-effacing *interpretes* and the most self-confident expositional translator,” that is, “a continuum in the amount of interpretation that can be observed in the various translation styles, just as there is a continuum between the poles of ‘literal’ and ‘free’ translation” (1988: 95).⁸

Brock assumes it to be “likely” that the Ciceronian distinction had predecessors in the Hellenistic period and “that even in the time of the translators of the Pentateuch these two main styles of translation were already in usage, the literal for legal texts, the free for literary ones” (1972: 20). According to Pietersma, “in terms of the *verbum e verbo* and *sensus de sensu* distinction with which Brock works, Job stands decidedly on the *sensus de sensu* side, while the Pentateuch belongs on the *verbum e verbo* side (even though it is scarcely Aquilanic)” (2002: 357). He adds, “Therefore, the translators of the Pentateuch seemingly did make a deliberate choice, as Brock argues” (p. 357). Pietersma thus reports Brock as saying that the translators of the LXX Pentateuch opted for a *verbum e verbo* approach. But Brock says no such thing. On the contrary—as Brock rightly states, the Pentateuch translators’ “solution was, not surprisingly, something of a compromise, in that they are neither consistently literal, nor consistently free” (1972: 20). The same could be said of the Septuagint of Psalms, as we shall see. Brock’s statement is very far from the misguided view of the Greek Pentateuch as a *verbum e verbo* translation. Indeed, Brock even states, “With *both* approaches [i.e., both the ‘literal’ and the ‘free’ translation] we can readily acknowledge the truth of the observation that ‘the ancient versions of the Bible are themselves also part of exegetical literature’” (1988: 96).

Since Pietersma’s “interlinearity paradigm”—including his view of the Septuagint Psalter as an “interlinear translation” and his claim “that the Septuagint text of most books is interlinear in character and that this text was produced as a schooltext” (2002: 357)—is built on the view that the Greek Pentateuch is a *verbum e verbo* translation, his “paradigm” can be considered discredited. Furthermore, it finds no support in Brock’s work on the Septuagint. To the contrary, Brock sees the Septuagint, with Vermes, as “part of exegetical literature” (1988: 96).⁹ We shall see that the Greek Psalter proves Brock’s and Vermes’s point.

INTERPRETIVE TRANSLATIONS IN THE GREEK PSALTER

Due to limited space, it seems best to concentrate on a representative example of interpretive translations in the Greek Psalter and to choose a psalm that has been subjected to messianic interpretation.¹⁰ LXX Psalm 109 (MT Psalm 110) is a key text in the Greek Psalter. It renders the rather obscure Hebrew of verse 3 in a truly intriguing fashion. The Greek can be translated as follows:

With you [will] the dominion [rest] on the day of your strength
Amid the radiance of the saints:
from the womb I have begotten you before the morning star. (Schaper 1995: 104)

The verse transports a messianic concept of kingship and can be called a “psalm of *messianic judgement*” (Schaper 1995: 107). As I have argued elsewhere,¹¹ the translator attempted to make sense of a difficult Hebrew original by interpreting the consonantal text with considerable acumen. He understood *ʾmk* (MT *ʾammēkā*) to mean *ʾimmēkā* (“with you”) and, not altogether convincingly, translated *ndbt* (MT *nēdābōt*) as *archē* (“dominion”). The most important decisions the translator had to make concerned the latter part of the verse; while *en hēmera tēs dynameōs sou* (“on the day of your strength”) is a straightforward translation of one possible reading of the Hebrew text, the rest of that text is obscure and can be translated as follows: “in sacred splendours, from (or from the time of) the womb of the dawn... to you the dew of your youth” (NJB). The Hellenistic Jewish translator managed to turn this into a coherent text, as we just saw. The key element of this translation, which was by necessity a highly interpretive one, is probably an *al tiqre* reading of *mišḥār* as *miššaḥar*, which accounts for the rendering *pro eōsphorou* “before the morning star.” The conceptualisation of the messiah in LXX Psalms 109:3 is rooted in the traditions of Jewish angelology, as was noted by Bousset and others years ago.¹² The reference to heavenly bodies and their “radiance” (*lamprotēs*) is paralleled in texts like Daniel 12:3.

Arie van der Kooij takes a different line and draws attention to the relation between the Old Greek of Psalms and 1 Maccabees (2001: 232–38). The first example he discusses is the relation between LXX Psalm 78 and 1 Maccabees 7, since Psalms 78:2–3 is quoted in 1 Maccabees 7:17. We shall concentrate on his second example: LXX Psalm 109 and 1 Maccabees 14 (pp. 238–45). Van der Kooij takes the genitive plural *agiōn* in LXX Psalm 109:3 to refer not to “saints” (*agioi*) but to “temples” (*agia*), adduces LXX Psalm 28:2 and LXX Psalm 95:9, and concludes that “[t]he Old Greek version of these two latter cases supports the idea that the temple is the point of reference,” although he has to concede that “the actual rendering is different from the one in LXX Ps 109” (p. 241).

In addition, van der Kooij’s interpretation of *pro* as local rather than temporal, based on a comparison with LXX Psalm 71:5, 17a, leads him to conclude that in LXX Psalm 109:3 “[t]he meaning of the expression then would be ‘before / in front of the morning star’, that is, at the moment of the morning star,” which he then interprets as “the moment of help, because ‘aid in the (early) morning’ is a well-known motif in the Old Testament” (2001: 241).¹³ In his view, LXX Psalm 109:3 “is about birth at a favourable moment, a moment associated with the help of God. It means that verse 3b can be seen, to some extent, as a parallel to verse 3a: ‘(With you is the dominion) on the day of your power’” (p. 242). Van der Kooij concludes, “Just as in LXX Ps. 2.7, LXX Ps. 109.3 refers to a ‘birth’, that is, the consecration of a leader, ‘in the splendours of the sanctuary’ (in the temple), ‘at the moment of the morning star’ (at a moment symbolizing God’s aid and salvation).” Van der Kooij proposes to link “in the splendours of the sanctuary” with what follows, not, as I proposed, with the preceding segment of verse 3. He thus postulates a “relationship between LXX Psalm 109 and LXX Psalm 2” which, according to van der Kooij, “is of particular interest because it points to the concept of the priestly monarchy with a leader who is both ‘king’ (Ps. 2) and ‘priest’ (Ps. 109)” (p. 242).

While van der Kooij’s interpretation is interesting, as well as grammatically and lexically possible, more recent research has taken up my suggestions again, with the result

of confirming, against van der Kooij's and others, my earlier results and, indeed, coming up with additional insights into the complexities of LXX Psalm 109 (see von Nordheim 2008: 171–97). To name just a few problems with van der Kooij's interpretation: He does not take into account that *lamprotēs* often occurs in conjunction with the “saints” and their heavenly existence, not just in Jewish Hellenistic religious literature (e.g., 1 Enoch 16:7; 39:7; 104:2; Matt. 13:43) but also in funerary culture (cf. Schaper 1995: 103 n. 375). A. Cordes tries to support van der Kooij's view: “Nun hat m.E. Ps 109,3 LXX mit Dan 12,3 θ' nichts weiter gemein als einzig die Verwendung des Begriffes *lamprotēs*, die nicht ohne Weiteres den Schluss zulässt, dass in Ps 109,3 LXX dieselbe eschatologische Bildwelt zu lesen ist wie in Dan 12,3 θ'” (Cordes 2006: 253–60). Cordes, like van der Kooij, fails to take into account the wider evidence of Jewish Hellenistic life and literature.

In the most thorough interpretation of LXX Psalm 109 in recent years, von Nordheim has shown that the translator of Psalm 110 produced a rendering that is both grammatically and stylistically competent, a fact that makes her interpretive rendering of verse 3 all the more interesting (2008: 171–97). Developing an observation made by I. L. Seeligmann, she has shown that *eōsphoros* refers to Heosphoros, the son of dawn in Greek mythology (and not simply *eōs* “dawn”).¹⁴ She has consequently been able to argue in favor of a spatial interpretation of *pro* but with consequences different from those of van der Kooij's argument (von Nordheim 2008: 185). However, the argument in favor of a spatial interpretation is not convincing, especially if we take into account—as M. Hengel pointed out years ago (1997: 507, 511–12)—that the Hellenistic Jewish world is full of examples of the concept of preexistence.

Be that as it may, one of the key results of von Nordheim's investigation is the insight that *agiōn* indeed refers to “saints,” not to “sanctuaries,” and that *lamprotēs* refers to the eschatological “radiance” of the people of Israel (2008: 191). All in all, her work has succeeded in demonstrating that the translator produced a messianic interpretation of Psalm 110, not just by means of interpretive renderings but also through the subtle handling of the tenses and aspects in the Greek text he devised (p. 196). The debate remains open as to my understanding of LXX Psalm 109 as a “psalm of messianic judgement,” but it can now be considered proven that the translator subjected the psalm to a “messianizing” interpretation (cf. von Nordheim 2008: 196). And while the discussion also remains open with regard to the concept of the messiah's preexistence, it is clear that LXX Psalm 109 is at the root of later concepts of preexistence, such as the one informing Paul's Christological reasoning (2008: 197).

WHAT DID THE TRANSLATOR OF THE PSALTER INTEND TO ACCOMPLISH?

Having explored some of characteristics of a key Greek psalm, it is now necessary to sketch an overview of the translator's background and his aims and objectives. What purpose did he intend his translation to serve?

Most of the recent work done on the Septuagint translators have focused more or less exclusively on the question of “translation technique.”¹⁵ I have criticized this reductionist approach elsewhere (Schaper 1995: 16–20). I would like to concentrate instead on drawing conclusions from the discussion of the evidence given above and on situating the Greek Psalter theologically, culturally, and historically. The answer to the question of the translator’s aim is probably implied in those passages that betray a strong interest in Judas Maccabaeus. In them, we find more than just a clue to the place and date of origin for the OG of Psalms; these passages potentially betray the wider cultural context of the translator and the practical and theologico-political purpose of his work.

Now it has been taken for granted by some that this purpose was primarily liturgical, or, more precisely, that the Septuagint Psalter was produced for public worship. Aejmelaeus states, “The poetic structure of the text and its function as religious poetry—prayer and praise—must be taken into account when characterizing the work of the translator” (2001: 72). Interestingly, she concludes “that the avoidance of concrete epithets for God indicates that the translator was very conscious of his duty to create a Greek book of Psalms which could be used by his religious community in prayer and praise to God—nothing less” (p. 72). Remarkably, she adds: “It is only natural that the translator had a religious or theological motivation for several of his choices” (p. 72). It could be that Aejmelaeus’s conclusions regarding the translator’s purpose and “duty” are inspired by the traditions of Finnish Lutheran hymn-singing rather than by an informed consideration of the culture and religion of Hellenistic Judaism. Also, apart from rather general conclusions regarding the absence of a certain type of divine epithet, she offers neither evidence nor argumentation in favor of her sweeping statement about the translator’s purpose and his “religious or theological motivation.”

What, then, did the translator set out to achieve? His work clearly reflects Jewish religious and political concerns of the late second century BCE. Why would he have allowed that to happen? He allowed himself to use the act of translating to propagate his political and religious views, the political and the religious being indissolubly intertwined in his messianic interpretation of kingship and the hopes linked with it. There is no reason to assume a liturgical origin for the OG of Psalms. The beliefs reflected in the Greek Psalter and the interpretive techniques that inform its renderings and permeate its fabric betray what I have called a “proto-Pharisaic” concept of interacting with the Hebrew Scriptures (Schaper 1995: 160–65).

THE GREEK PSALTER, THE NEW TESTAMENT, AND THE PSALTER’S *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE*

The Greek Psalter exercised considerable influence on the authors of the New Testament (Rüsen-Weinhold 2004), not least through LXX Psalm 109, and the Pentecost sermon in the book of Acts is a particularly significant example of the use of psalms in the New Testament (Schaper 1995: 165–73).

It cannot be overstated just how important the Greek Psalter has been in Christian liturgical practice (cf. Ziegler 1971: 595). It has not exerted an immeasurable influence on just the liturgy of the Orthodox churches; it has also exercised a continuous influence on the Western Church, where it entered the liturgy via several pre-Vulgate translations into Latin. Even Jerome did not manage to break the traditional reliance of the Latin liturgies of the West on those early translations, made from the Greek and not from the Hebrew. The fact that even in the Church's official Vulgate the Psalter is represented not by Jerome's own translation from the Hebrew (the *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos*) but by the *Psalterium Gallicanum*, an early Latin translation of the OG of Psalms, is a testament to its overwhelming importance.¹⁶ Only in the twentieth century did the Roman Catholic Church start to replace the traditional text of the Latin Psalter with a Latin translation of the Hebrew text, the *Psalterium Pianum*.

NOTES

1. Olivier Munnich has taken up the challenge.
2. From all we know about the epoch in question (the Hellenistic period), we can only conclude that women were unlikely to be entrusted with the task of translating authoritative religious texts.
3. On the difference between "holy" and "authoritative" texts and the "stages" or "steps" in the Jewish conceptualization of "scripture," see Assmann 1999.
4. The rise of the concept of scriptural interpretation from the early Persian period onwards—a development rooted in the work of the Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic tradition—significantly influenced the development of the Jewish religion in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods (see, e.g., Hengel 1994: 1–71; Levinson 1997).
5. It is no exaggeration to say that the interpretive tradition "will in some form always have accompanied the transmission of laws or prophecies which were taken to be authoritative, but it emerges with particular influence in the Persian period, when the Law, Prophets, and Psalms have begun to be read together" (Horbury 2006: 100).
6. Cf. Williams 2001: 248–76, who lists three points that lend further support to the view proposed here: the fact that "Judas" and "my king" (*basileus mou*) occur in conjunction "indicates that this reading may be more than just a bad translation or a scribal error. Second, the content and concerns of the psalm reflect the historical situation and events that serve as a backdrop to the heroic actions of Judas as recorded in 1 and 2 Maccabees" (pp. 261–62). Finally, *emoi allophyloi hypetagēsan* ("the Philistines have been subjected to me"; LXX Ps. 59:8c) "may be taken as a description of the success of the Maccabean revolution" (p. 262).
7. While Pietersma is clearly engaged in a discussion of the translators' preconceptions and their "techniques," it is surprising to read in his later defense that "interlinearity" for NETS has nothing to do with Septuagint origins. Instead it is... a heuristic device, a way of conceptualizing (and thus accounting for) the LXX as a translated document that contains a conspicuous, Hebraistic dimension... which includes an aspect of intelligibility that goes beyond literalism" (2008: 5). Pietersma then states: "Even though the interlinear paradigm was not introduced into Septuagint studies as a theory of origins, its reception history has evidently made it into a theory of origins" (p. 6). But the reason the "interlinear

paradigm” is indeed perceived as a theory of Septuagint origins is because it was originally put forward as such. Pietersma clearly refers to “the interlinear paradigm of Septuagint origins” (p. 338). He states in the same essay that “it should, therefore, be clear from the outset that, when I speak of the interlinear paradigm, I am speaking of the birth of the Septuagint, i.e. its original *Sitz im Leben*” (p. 340). It is indisputable that the “interlinear paradigm” was put forward as a model of Septuagint *origins*—and as such it should be judged.

8. In conversation with Barr 1979.
9. See Vermes 1970: 199–231, which Brock quotes. Even Anneli Aejmelaesus concedes that “[i]n lexical choices, the translator of the Psalter was by no means literal” and that “the poetic structure of the text and its function as religious poetry—prayer and praise—must be taken into account when characterizing the work of the translator” (2001: 70, 72).
10. Messianic interpretation as a characteristic of a number of Septuagint books has attracted considerable attention in scholarship over the past twenty years. See, for example, Knibb 2006.
11. For the details of the following interpretation, see Schaper 1995: 101–7.
12. For bibliographic details, see Schaper 1995: 102–3, 182–93.
13. Van der Kooij refers to Exodus 14:24; 2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 17:14; and Psalm 46:6. On the wider history of the motif in question, see Janowski 1989.
14. See von Nordheim’s ingenious explanation for the lack of a direct Greek translation of the Hebrew term for “dew” (2008: 85–90, 195).
15. Arie van der Kooij and Jan Joosten are exceptions. See van der Kooij 1998: 214–29; Joosten 2002: 1–19; and especially Joosten 2007: 69–80.
16. See the essay by Scott Goins in this volume.

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CHAPTER 12

JEROME'S PSALTERS

SCOTT GOINS

EUSEBIUS Hieronymus (Jerome) is renowned as the creator of the biblical translation that would eventually become known as the Vulgate, but the saint was noteworthy to his contemporaries as much for his dedication to the prayerful, ascetic life as for his scholarship. Scholarship and asceticism were inextricably linked for Jerome. While pursuing a life of prayer during two stays in Palestine, Jerome yielded to his academic side by taking his collection of books and seeking to add to it. Similarly, while working in Rome as a papal secretary, he spent much of his time counseling widows and their daughters on how to live a life of consecrated virginity.

This union of the academic and the ascetic is also seen in Jerome's literary works. Although his central scholarly focus would be on scriptural exegesis, his earliest works were letters on the spiritual life. Alongside his commentaries on biblical books is his *Life of Paul the Hermit*, written to offer a Western example of the eremitic life comparable to that of the famous Anthony, the Latin version of whose biography had created in the West a fascination with desert spirituality. Throughout his life, Jerome was known as much for being an "ascetic champion" (Rebenich 2002: 12) as for being a scholar. That Jerome sought to promote both these aspects of his persona has been a frequent theme in recent studies (Rebenich 1992; Rebenich 2002; Williams 2006; Cain 2009). History has appreciated these dual aspects of Jerome, as is evident in the iconography concerning the saint. Medieval portraits generally depict him as a Doctor of the Church, while in the early Renaissance he is usually cast as a penitent (Rice 1985: 75–83). Many subsequent portraits, such as Dürer's famous depiction of Jerome (1514), combine the ascetic and the studious Jerome by showing him in a cave containing books but also a skull as a *memento mori* (Rice 1985: 104–15).

Translating the Psalms offered Jerome a unique opportunity to combine his scholarly and ascetic passions. In the earliest days of Christianity, the Psalms were primarily seen as prophetic, predicting and describing Jesus Christ as the Messiah (Bradshaw 1981: 43). But by Jerome's time, the Psalms had also become the prayer book of the Church. Jerome would have known Eastern ascetics who recited the entire Psalter daily. Jerome himself instructs his female disciple Laeta to have her daughter begin her scripture study

with the Psalms (Epistle 107.12). Jerome mentions delight at hearing his monks singing the Psalms in the fields (Epistle 46.12), and he himself wrote over ninety sermons on the Psalms that he delivered to his monks. This appreciation of the Psalms is apparent in Jerome's decision to translate them three times: once revising the Old Latin (*Vetus Latina*) translation, a second time following Origen's Hexaplaric Septuagint, and a third time relying most heavily on manuscripts of the Hebrew text. Although the first version was a cursory revision of the *Vetus Latina*, the second and third, the Gallican and the Hebrew Psalters, are both impressive translations, revealing talent, care, and industry.

JEROME'S LIFE

Born around 347 in Stridon in modern-day Croatia, Jerome spent the first two decades of his life laying the foundation for his subsequent intellectual progress. At the age of about twenty, he, along with a friend, Bonosus, went to Rome to continue their learning. There Jerome studied under Donatus, whose grammars were popular in the Middle Ages, and whose notes on the Roman playwright Terence are still consulted by scholars today. At Rome Jerome began building the library that he would take with him wherever he went. Jerome also collected friends, as he was prone to do. Among his circle were Rufinus, Heliodorus, and Bonosus.

Around 370 Jerome and Bonosus moved to Trier, a vibrant and intellectual city in Gaul, where Jerome could have expected advancement in the imperial bureaucracy. Whatever his intent regarding a career, Jerome also showed an interest in Christian topics, since he copied for his friend Rufinus two commentaries by Hilary: *On the Psalms* and *On the Synods*. Jerome's devotion to Christianity eventually expressed itself even more strongly when he determined to go to Aquileia, in northern Italy, to live an ascetic life in community with friends in the early 370s. A few years later, apparently after some controversy over monastic goals, Jerome and a few friends moved to Palestine, where they could see the holy lands and meet the renowned ascetics of the desert. Jerome eventually settled in Chalcis, about 55 miles from Antioch, probably on the estate of Evagrius, who had translated Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* into Latin. Here, Jerome tells us, he also began to learn the Semitic languages, studying Syriac (the local language) and Hebrew. During this period, Jerome also seems to have become ordained.

In 381 Jerome went to the Council of Constantinople supporting Paulinus in his claim to the patriarchate of Antioch. Here Jerome continued to make important contacts, including Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. While at Constantinople, Jerome translated into Latin Origen's *Homilies* on Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Jerome also began "serving his apprenticeship" (Kelly 1975: 78) in biblical commentary with his own short study of chapter 6 of Isaiah, in which he makes some use of Hebrew. In employing the original languages, Jerome was following the lead of Origen and adopting a more critical approach to scripture than anyone in the Western Church. By the time Jerome left Constantinople, he was becoming widely known "as a well-read exegete

with a profound command of languages, as a talented translator of Greek theological works, and as a capable author of ascetic and monastic literature" (Rebenich 2002: 30).

When, in 382, Jerome accompanied Paulinus to seek Roman support for his cause, Jerome initially found the imperial city most receptive. Several influential women in Rome who had taken up the ascetic life employed Jerome as their spiritual advisor. He would write many, and often lengthy, letters to these women, who accepted a life of widowhood or unmarried virginity as well as simplicity and even strictness in food and attire. Jerome also became a helpful assistant of Pope Damasus, who, like Jerome, was erudite and dedicated to Christian discipline (Rebenich 1992: 142–47). Damasus soon employed Jerome in various capacities including translating important Greek documents from the East, writing papal letters, and, more importantly, revising portions of the *Vetus Latina* Bible. Although Jerome translated only the Gospels and the Psalms before Damasus' death, this work would become the impetus for Jerome's Vulgate.

When Damasus died in December 384, Jerome lost both a friend and a powerful patron. Jerome soon found himself unpopular in the papal city, and he departed for the Holy Land. He resolved never again to return to "Babylon" (Epistle 45.6). Although we do not know all the details of Jerome's fall, there were several reasons why he would have been attacked. Many found Jerome's advice to his aristocratic disciples unbecoming for the nobility and even dangerous. Some hinted at impropriety between Jerome and his female friends. Jerome had also attracted many enemies through his harsh and frequent *ad hominem* attacks on those with whom he disagreed (Cain 2009: 99–128).

By 386 Jerome withdrew to Bethlehem, where he founded a monastery and a hostelry and helped Paula and Eutochium establish a convent. Jerome lived an austere but busy life, pursuing administrative duties, overseeing the copying of manuscripts, and keeping up a steady correspondence with friends. Despite these duties, Jerome continued his scholarly projects of biblical translation and commentary. Adding to the demands was the Origenist controversy that emerged in 393, when Epiphanius, the Bishop of Salamis, attacked the doctrines of the famous Neoplatonic church father. The controversy presented special problems for Jerome, who had styled himself as a Western Origen on the grounds of their similar views of biblical exegesis and their dedication to ascetic ideals (Williams 2006: 74, 97). Jerome quickly sought to disassociate himself from Origen, even going so far as to engage in a vituperative exchange of documents attacking his old friend Rufinus, who retained his loyalty to the Greek father.

The last years of Jerome's life were difficult. Paula had died in 404, and in the following year Jerome himself grew very sick. Five years later, Jerome was stunned by the sack of Rome in 410. Many of his old friends were killed or displaced, and soon many refugees came to Jerusalem. In the midst of these challenges and with failing eyesight, Jerome continued to write scriptural commentaries and a book of controversy, his *Dialogue against the Pelagians* (416). Jerome died on September 30 in either 419 or 420, leaving behind a still-unfinished *Commentary on Jeremiah*.

JEROME'S VULGATE

Although Jerome was demoralized by his humiliation at Rome, it was perhaps this misfortune that enabled him to accomplish his most influential work, his translation of the Bible now known as the Vulgate. Around 383 Pope Damasus asked Jerome to review the *Vetus Latina*, so as to offer a more accurate and definitive text. Although Damasus may have asked Jerome to revise the entire Bible, it is more likely that the Gospels and Psalms, the most prominent works for liturgy, were the original assignment (Tkacz 1996: 60 n. 63). At the time, the *Vetus Latina* texts were so confused that Jerome complained there were almost as many different versions as there were manuscripts (*Preface to the Gospels*, Weber 1975: 2.1515). These versions were based on the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament, and, as Augustine observed, the quality of translation was inconsistent (*De doctrina Christiana* 2.16).

Jerome was relatively conservative in his revisions of the Gospels, exercising caution in changing wording or even word order when changes were not demanded by the Septuagint. Jerome soon began revising the *Vetus Latina* Psalter, again employing the Septuagint. At one time this version was thought to survive as the Roman Psalter, but most now believe that the Roman Psalter is a version of the *Vetus Latina* itself and that Jerome's original Psalter is no longer extant (Tkacz 1996: 49). Jerome finished his Gospels and Psalter in 384, while still in Rome.

After moving to Bethlehem in 386, Jerome continued his project with the financial help of wealthy friends. Here Jerome had access to Origen's Hexapla, which contained a critical text of the Septuagint; three other Greek versions (the *recentiores*) by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian; a Hebrew text; and the Hebrew transliterated into Greek. Jerome had serious doubts about the reliability of the manuscripts for the Septuagint that were commonly available, and he therefore sought in the Hexapla more checks on the Septuagint-based *Vetus Latina*. Using the Hexapla, Jerome made a second version of the Psalter, which later became known as the Gallican Psalter because of its eventual popularity among the clergy in Gaul. After finishing the Psalter, Jerome translated several other books using the Hexapla, including at least Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

By around 390 Jerome began translating from the original Hebrew text, what he called the *Hebraica veritas* (*Prologue to the Book of Kings*, Weber 1975: 1.365). Jerome had several reasons for choosing the Hebrew text over the Hexaplaric Greek versions. Translation from the Hebrew represented only one step from the original, whereas Latinizing the Septuagint was a translation of a translation. To Jerome this was like "pouring into a third jar" (*Prologue to the Books of Solomon*, Weber 1975: 2.957). Jerome, moreover, felt that the Hebrew text represented a more ancient and less corrupt authority. Jerome also argued that a Hebrew-based translation was essential to use in evangelizing the Jews. Jerome worked on this project until about 405, translating only the books of the Hebrew canon. In 407, at the prompting of friends, he also translated Tobit and Judith, leaving Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and 1–4 Maccabees, considering them noncanonical. During

this period of translating from the Hebrew, Jerome rendered the Psalms for a third time, creating the Hebrew Psalter or *Psalterium juxta Hebraicum*.

Jerome considered the translation according to the Hebrew as superior to his Hexaplaric translation, yet he was astute enough to realize that many believers were not ready to accept anything so innovative (Kamesar 1993: 55–63). Especially for the Psalter, which was so fundamental for worship and so well known in the *Vetus Latina* versions, Jerome realized that some circles were more likely to accept the more conservative Hexaplaric translation. Even if full acceptance of the Hebrew version was Jerome's ideal, he still felt that his revisions based on the Hexaplaric Septuagint represented a great advance over the *Vetus Latina*, which was based on inferior Septuagint texts and not checked against the Hebrew original. Kamesar has offered a useful metaphor for understanding Jerome's aims (1993: 70–72). Jerome's view of scriptural texts of the Old Testament can be seen as a three-tiered structure. At the base was the Hexaplaric Septuagint—any inferior Septuagint text or Latin translation of such a text was inadequate. At this first level would also be Jerome's Hexaplaric translations, like the Gallican Psalter. Those wanting to climb to a higher level could go to the second tier, where they could examine Jerome's Hebrew translation and the *recentiores* in order to come closer to the original Hebrew. Those wanting to reach even higher, to a third level, could examine the Hebrew itself, as Jerome and his pupils Paula and Eustochium had done.

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When we consider Jerome's aims in translating, it is evident that he considered both the Gallican and Hebrew Psalters useful but designed for somewhat different audiences. Both versions are relatively conservative in avoiding unnecessary changes from familiar *Vetus Latina* wordings, but Jerome attempts in the Gallican to keep close to the Septuagint whenever possible, while in the Hebrew Psalter the Hebrew text is the ultimate arbiter. Thus Jerome felt that the Gallican Psalter offered a worthy rendition for those who insisted on the ultimate authority of the Septuagint and that the Hebrew Psalter would serve those wished to go further in their understanding.

When Jerome discusses his Gallican Psalter, he uses the word *emendatio* (*Preface to the Book of Psalms*, Weber 1975: 1.767), implying more of a revision than a true translation (Estin 1985: 77–79). Jerome's goal with the Gallican Psalter seems to have been to get to the true Septuagint text as best he could and then to render that text into accurate Latin that follows the *Vetus Latina* when reasonably possible. Thus Jerome's version, like the *Vetus Latina*, often tends to give a roughly word-for-word translation that followed the word order of the Septuagint. Jerome was honest in his rendering, however, and he sometimes insisted on using a translation that was more idiomatic than the *Vetus Latina*. Jerome was a master of Latin style, and it went against his grain to make offenses against Latin idiom. In trying to recover an authentic Septuagint text, Jerome, like Origin, added or eliminated words or phrases as appropriate and marked these changes

in his translation. On some occasions Jerome also made corrections to the common (non-Hexaplaric) Septuagint, where it seemed to have recorded the wrong word or to have mistranslated the right one. In making changes to the common Septuagint, Jerome employs the Hexaplaric Septuagint, the *recentiores*, and the Hebrew itself.

As Allgeier (1940: 63–68) notes, a good sense of what Jerome was trying to do with the Gallican Psalter can be seen in his letter to the Goths Sunnia and Fritila (Epistle 106; trans. Metlen 1937). Apparently the two priests had written Jerome asking why his translations varied in many places from the *Vetus Latina* and/or the common Septuagint. In eighty-six roughly paragraph-length sections, Jerome takes their questions one by one, discussing his editorial and translation choices. He also reminds the Goths of the nature of translation, arguing that it must be idiomatic rather than simply a word-for-word rendering (Epistle 106.3). The largest category of questions deals with places where the common Septuagint is missing a word or phrase or where a word or phrase should be deleted from it. To support his choices, Jerome draws evidence from the Hexaplaric Septuagint, the *recentiores*, and/or the Hebrew. Especially when there is a disagreement among the sources, Jerome argues that the Hebrew must be followed (Epistle 106.2). Jerome also finds words that are mistakes in the common Septuagint; this occurs frequently with pronouns, where the other sources and/or the sense of the passage demand a change (such as a “my” for “your” or vice versa).

There are other types of changes, such as passages where Jerome insists that the *Vetus Latina* or a word-for-word translation of the Septuagint would simply be bad Latin. Jerome does not mind being conservative, but he does not want to be stylistically offensive. In this letter, Jerome is gracious, complimenting the Goths for their interest in the Word of God. He makes no attempt to argue for the superiority of the Hebrew over the Septuagint, even though the letter seems to have been written after Jerome began translating his Hebrew Psalter. Thus we see again Jerome’s desire not to offend and his willingness to meet the readers where they are in terms of their text-critical skills.

Jerome’s discretion is also evident in his Hebrew Psalter, despite the greater degree of creativity he employs in it. Here we see in action Jerome’s theory of biblical translation. He insists that a translation must conform to the sense of the original while also being a true work of art in the target language (Kelly 1975: 162–63; Rebenich 2002: 101–4). Kamesar has argued that among Jerome’s goals in creating his Hebrew translation was producing a work that was aesthetically pleasing to a Latin reader (1992: 46–49). Supporting such a theory is the more poetical form that the Hebrew Psalter takes as well as the possible inclusion of allusions to pagan literature (Cooper 1950: 237–39). Despite this greater freedom, Jerome did consider himself bound somewhat by *Vetus Latina* renderings. When he could, Jerome often stayed very close to the *Vetus Latina*. Part of his conservatism was surely based on a simple desire not to offend. Moreover, Jerome may have had hopes that his Hebrew Psalter would be used liturgically, so the need for relative conservatism was essential (Kamesar 1992: 69–70).

Jerome’s Hebrew Psalter would be considered by modern standards a conservative translation, but of course it was really something very new. Unlike the *Vetus Latina*

Psalters, it was based on the Hebrew and was stylistically much preferable to the older versions. Jerome's Hebrew Psalter was also far more accurate than the *Vetus Latina* or even his own Gallican Psalter. Despite his consultation of the original Hebrew in creating the Gallican Psalter, Jerome often stayed close to Septuagint and *Vetus Latina* readings that made little if any sense. Scholars have noted dozens of places in the Gallican Psalter where Jerome has offered a poor text in his effort to follow tradition (Boylan 1948–49: 1.xxxix–xlv). The number of mistakes in the Hebrew Psalter, on the other hand, is relatively few (Kedar 2004: 317–18). Scholars continue to express some uncertainty regarding Jerome's talents in Hebrew (McCarthy 1992; Newman 2009), but overall the evidence suggests that Jerome was a relatively good Hebraist (Rebenich 1993: 56–58; Kedar 2004: 316–18).

RECEPTION

For several centuries after Jerome, the Bible was read in a variety of translations including the *Vetus Latina* versions. Cassian, a contemporary of Jerome, sometimes translated the Old Testament from the Septuagint but also employed Jerome's translations (Stewart 1998: 35). Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) followed a similar pattern in his Old Testament references (Glunz 1933: 15–17). Some, however, wanted little to do with Jerome's Hebrew translation. Although he valued Jerome's translation of the Gospels and praised Jerome as a scholar, Augustine tried to dissuade him from abandoning the Septuagint for his Old Testament translation. Like many, Augustine considered the Septuagint inspired and feared that Christians might become confused or scandalized when presented with a new text that did not harmonize with the *Vetus Latina* and the Septuagint (Schwarz 1955: 37–43; White 1990: 35–42). Rufinus also heartily opposed Jerome's abandonment of the Septuagint (Rebenich 2002: 58–59), although in this case the disagreement was part of a much larger feud between the two men. Even Jerome's relatively conservative translation of the Gospels did not escape criticism (Kelly 1975: 149).

Despite the reservations and even antagonism toward Jerome's Hebrew-based translation, it slowly gained approval and became the dominant text of the Old Testament by the end of the first millennium (Loewe 1969). An exception to the success of the Hebrew translation was the Gallican Psalter. Although the Hebrew Psalter was a superior version and was frequently used before the time of Charlemagne, the popularity of the Gallican Psalter in Gaul eventually caused it to become dominant in the West. The preference for the Gallican version surely occurred from a special desire for conservatism in a text as popular as the Psalms. By the time of Jerome, the Psalter had become the chosen prayer book, especially for monks. Jerome's contemporaries would have been very familiar with the wording of the Septuagint-based *Vetus Latina*, and so the Gallican Psalter would seem much more natural than the Hebrew version.

The eventual dominance of the Gallican Psalter was the result of a gradual process. Cassian, who like Jerome was instrumental in popularizing Eastern monasticism in the West, employed Jerome's Gallican version of the Psalms, which Stewart considers as "reflecting his liturgical experience of that translation at the monastery in Marseilles" (1998: 35). Gregory of Tours (c. 540–594) likewise favored and promoted the Gallican Psalter. When Alcuin edited the Bible he presented to Charlemagne around 801, the Gallican Psalter seemed to him to be the better choice over the Hebrew version. Alcuin's decision to employ the Gallican Psalter for his Bible established the norm for most of Western Europe (Loewe 1969: 135–39). There were exceptions to this general popularity of the Gallican Psalter. The Roman Psalter remained in use in parts of Italy and often in England until the Benedictine Reformation of the tenth century. Particularly in Spain Jerome's Hebrew Psalter also found favor. But it was the Gallican Psalter that essentially became the Psalter of medieval Western Europe.

As the medieval prayer book for the clergy and many devout laity, the Gallican Psalter was enormously influential in the Middle Ages. In the Divine Office the entire Psalter was recited in rotation weekly. Especially in Benedictine prayer, short passages of the Psalms were the most frequent text for individual daily meditation (*ruminatio*). Often glossed to help young monks understand it, the Psalter served as a reading primer for most monastics. Psalters were commonly copied by monks and were often produced very ornately, as we see in the Utrecht Psalter (9th century), for example. Books of the Hours and other devotional texts containing selections from the Psalms were often very decorative, the most famous example being the Book of Hours made for Jean de Berry around 1410.

Although the Gallican Psalter was by far the more popular of his versions, Jerome's Hebrew version was by no means ignored. In Spain it was the most commonly included Psalter in books containing the whole Bible (Weber 1975: 1.xxi). Theodulf, Bishop of Orleans during the reign of Charlemagne, chose Jerome's Hebrew Psalter for the version of the Bible that he edited. By the eleventh century, a renewed interest in Hebrew caused some scholars to examine Jerome's Hebrew Psalter and even to consult the original Hebrew itself (Loewe 1969: 143–45). Herbert of Bosham wrote a commentary on Jerome's Hebrew Psalter, and several Psalters were produced containing Jerome's Hebrew Psalter along with the Gallican and/or the Roman Psalter. A particularly striking example is the Eadwine Psalter (c. 1155–60), which had the Gallican, Roman, and Hebrew Psalters, along with Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman translations.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Gallican Psalter, as well as sometimes the Hebrew Psalter, became the source for translations into the vernacular. Vernacular Psalters were the most popular vernacular Bible texts in both Germany and France and were fairly common (Lockwood 1969: 432; Robson 1969: 437). In the fourteenth century Richard Rolle translated the Gallican Psalter into English for the mystic Margaret Kirby, and that text became popular among many of the faithful. By the end of the 1300s the Wycliffites began translating and distributing their versions of the Bible, using the Vulgate as their Old Testament source and Greek for the New Testament.

The Renaissance brought fundamental changes with regard to Jerome's Vulgate, and especially the Gallican Psalter. Although scholars and clerics respected Jerome for his spirituality and his awareness of the value of the Hebrew text, many found fault with his sometimes nonclassical Latin and his errors in translation (Rice 1985: 175–80). Moreover, scholars of Hebrew felt that they were taking Jerome's lead by working directly from the original Hebrew rather than by using his Gallican or even Hebrew Psalter. By the first quarter of the sixteenth century, Psalters and entire Old Testaments were being translated directly from the Hebrew, although these translations frequently used Jerome's work as a check upon their own.

Among the reformers, the Vulgate was problematic to those who sought to offer scriptures in the vernacular. While treasuring the beauty of the text that many had heard and read for their lifetimes, some saw the Vulgate as representing the antithesis of what they sought in terms of Scripture, since it was not in the vernacular. Nevertheless, many reformers were objective enough to recognize the value of both the Gallican and Hebrew Psalters. Luther, for example, gave roughly equal importance to the original Hebrew, the Gallican Psalter, and Jerome's Hebrew Psalter in translating his own German Psalter of 1524 (Lauer 1915: 15). As Lauer notes, Luther seems to have memorized large portions of the Gallican Psalter, causing him naturally to use its expressions as a basis for translation and for his commentaries on the Psalms (17). Lauer claims that one can see direct influence of the Gallican in over two hundred passages in Luther's Psalter (19).

Like Luther, Miles Coverdale, the first person to translate the entire Bible into English, also relied on Jerome. For his first translation of the Psalms, which would eventually form the basis for the Psalter of the Book of Common Prayer of the English Church, Coverdale used the Gallican Psalter, the Latin translation of Paginus from the Hebrew Masoretic text, and the translations of both Luther and the Protestants of Zurich (Clapton 1934: ix–x). It is also likely that Coverdale used Jerome's Hebrew Psalter. Like Luther, Coverdale was eclectic in his tastes, generally choosing whatever translation seemed to him to make the most sense. Scholars frequently express amazement that his translation is so good, given his limitations in Hebrew, but Coverdale had common sense and a poetical ear. His keen sense of style appreciates the Gallican reading "*et caro mea requiescat in spe*" and renders it as "my flesh also shall rest in hope" (Ps. 15[16]:9; see Clapton 1934: xii).¹ For the famous "in the valley of the shadow of death" he seems to have combined Jerome's Gallican "*in medio umbrae mortis*" and Hebrew "*in valle mortis*" (Ps. 22[23]:4; Clapton 1934: 48). Coverdale's rendering, though not supported by the Hebrew, is still followed in the KJV. When compiling the Great Bible of 1539, Coverdale revised his own Psalter. Surprisingly, this version owes even more to Jerome than the original. Perhaps because of the conservatism of English bishops, Coverdale follows the Gallican in even more places (Clapton 1934: xx). He also uses the Latin translation of Thomas Munster from the original Hebrew. Since Munster used Jerome's Hebrew versions to check his own work, Jerome again leaves his imprint. This Psalter of the Great Bible has been used for the English Prayer Book with relatively minor alterations throughout the years, and so Jerome has left a strong mark on the view of the Psalms in

the English Church. The most recent Book of Common Prayer (1979) of the American Episcopal Church still uses Coverdale as the basis for its Psalter.

Since the translators of the King James Bible used the original Hebrew for the Old Testament, Jerome's Psalters do not influence that translation as much as they do the Psalter of the Book of Common Prayer. Nevertheless, the translators of the KJV were well acquainted with the Gallican Psalter and with Coverdale's work. Although we cannot always be sure of direct influence, given the many sources the KJV translators used, there are dozens of places where Jerome's Gallican or Hebrew version seems to influence the translation, either directly or indirectly. At Psalm 1:4 we find written of the righteous man "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper," in the Gallican Psalter, "omnis quaecumque facient prosperabuntur" (Clapton 1934: 3). In Psalm 8:3 the KJV speaks of the moon and the stars "which thou hast ordained" (Gallican *quae tu fundasti*; Hebrew *quae fundasti*; Clapton 1934: 15). In verses 5 and 6 the KJV also seems to go back to the Gallican for the "son of man" whom God "has crowned" (*filius hominis . . . coronasti*). Likewise in Psalm 15[16]:6 we find God described as "the portion of mine inheritance" (*pars hereditatis meae*, Gallican and Hebrew; Clapton 1934: 27). In verses 5 and 9 of the same Psalm, the psalmist gives thanks that the "lines" (Gallican *funes*; Hebrew *lineae*) have fallen to him in fair places and that his flesh rests "in hope" (Gallican *spe*).

Although important traces of Jerome's Psalters, especially the Gallican, are frequent in Protestant translations of the Bible and Psalters, Jerome's work is only one of many streams. For the Roman Catholic Church, the case was far otherwise. Faced with Protestant insistence on the superiority of the vernacular, Catholic authorities sought to defend their traditional text. In 1546, at the Council of Trent, Jerome's Bible was declared authoritative (*authentica*), and it more or less officially received the title Vulgate (*haec ipsa vetus et vulgata editio*), although the title had often been unofficially applied to Jerome's work for several centuries. Vernacular translations had to be approved by the Church and had to be based on the Vulgate, rather than on Hebrew or Greek. The most famous Catholic translation of the Old Testament into English was the Douay version, published in 1609 (revised by Challoner in 1749–52). This work, which employs the Gallican Psalter, is often beautiful in its renderings, but it necessarily perpetuates many errors present in its base text (Westcott 1905: 248–53). Catholic authorities recognized the errors in the text and translation but argued that these mistakes were not harmful in matters of the faith. Textual problems were attended to in two revisions under Pope Sixtus and Pope Clementine, resulting in the Sixto-Clementine Edition (1592), which became normative (Crehan 1963: 207–12).

By the late 1800s the Roman Catholic Church began to encourage more attention to Hebrew and Greek and to textual criticism, resulting in a revision of the Vulgate text by the Benedictines of San Girolamo in Rome (1953) and eventually in translations from the original languages. The 1940s saw both a translation of the Psalter from the Gallican, by Ronald Knox, and a New Psalter based on the Hebrew, authorized by Pope Pius XII. Knox's work, though criticized by some as ultra-conservative in using the Gallican Psalter as its basis, has also been greatly praised for its style and imagination.

Although Knox employed the Gallican Psalter, he often consulted the original Hebrew and referred to it in footnotes. Since Knox, the trend in Catholic liturgy and Bible translation has overwhelmingly favored the original languages over Jerome's Vulgate. Thus the Psalms in English-speaking Catholic translations generally show less influence from the Vulgate than do those in Anglican and Episcopal Psalters. In 1979 a *Nova Vulgata* translation was promulgated. This translation, though not ignoring Jerome, is based on the original languages.

CONCLUSION

The history of Jerome's Psalters can be seen as a struggle between the two aspects of life that Jerome most loved: prayer and scholarship. Though Jerome preferred his more scholarly Hebrew Psalter, many were reluctant to give up the traditional language that they loved to pray in, and so they adopted the traditional Gallican rather than the more accurate Hebrew Psalter. In the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as biblical scholarship grew more interested in textual issues, Jerome's Hebrew Psalter and eventually the original Hebrew were often favored over the now-traditional prayer-text, the Gallican Psalter. Still, although movement toward the original Hebrew was even more important with Protestants, conservatism and a love of beauty in prayer-texts caused the Gallican Psalter to remain alive in Luther's Bible, the Coverdale translations, the Book of Common Prayer, the Douay Psalter, and the King James Bible. In the twentieth century these texts remained appreciated for their beauty, but the pendulum has swung away from them. Both Catholics and Protestants tend to favor vernacular translations in relatively up-to-date language for both devotion and study. This attitude is not universal, however, since many traditional Roman Catholics favor the Vulgate and many Protestants are devoted to the King James Bible. The tension between scholarly accuracy and familiar, aesthetically pleasing prayer-texts, a tension that shaped Jerome's Psalters and influenced their reception, remains and no doubt will continue to have an impact on biblical translation. Jerome's instincts were surely right in seeing translations as modeled for the reader, based on individual backgrounds and scriptural inclinations. We can see in the Psalters of Jerome a prefiguring of the numerous translations available today, ranging from traditional renderings conveying the best of Elizabethan prose to ultra-contemporary versions striving to make the gospel relevant to those without a background in the Church.

NOTE

1. Numbers in brackets indicate chapters according to the KJV numbering, when it differs from the Vulgate.

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FURTHER READING

Kelly (1975), Rebenich (1992 and 2002), and Willams (2006) provide excellent biographies of Jerome. Murphy (1952) and Cain and Lössl (2009) contain various essays about Jerome. Most of Jerome's letters in Latin are available in Hillberg (1910–18), and in English in Freemantle (1979 [1893]), supplemented by Wright (1933) and White (1990). For discussions of the Vulgate, see Rebenich (1992), Kamesar (1993), Tkacz (1996), and Hartman et al. (2003). On the reception of the Vulgate, see Berger (1893), Greenslade (1963), Lampe (1969), and Rice (1985). Van Deusen (1999) and Boynton and Reilly (2011) offer good collections of essays on the cultural role of the Psalms during the Christian era. For Jerome's *Homilies on the Psalms*, see Morin (1895–1903) in Latin and Ewald (1964–66) in English.

PART IV

COMPOSITION OF
THE PSALMS

CHAPTER 13

THE LEVITES AND THE EDITORIAL COMPOSITION OF THE PSALMS

SUSAN E. GILLINGHAM

THE Hebrew title *sēper tēhillim* introduces the Psalter as a “Book of Praises,” even though the description fits only about one-third of its contents. Such a title might be appropriate for the concluding paean of praise in Psalms 145–150, but the Psalter really consists of more complaint than praise. Furthermore, many psalms do not even address God but instead attend to the (real or imagined) community of faith. Psalms 1 and 2 are good examples, so too Psalm 24, a liturgy composed for entrance to the sanctuary that is delivered to the congregation rather than to God, and Psalm 34, a thanksgiving song testifying to having been delivered from trouble.

Who might have been responsible for compiling such a diverse collection? Some scholars opine that the compilers were sages and scribes with an attachment to the wisdom and legal tradition in post-exilic Israel and that the Psalter was originally a reflective prayer book, not a hymnal of public praise and lament. They argue that those psalms that are concerned with the right ordering of the world (e.g., 49, 73, 112, 139) exhibit the same interests as the wisdom books. Furthermore, these and other psalms that claim that the means of attaining that “right order” is through keeping the Torah (see 1, 19, and 119) have been placed strategically in the Psalter to echo the concerns of the compilers (e.g., Sheppard 1980; Reindl 1980; McCann 1992; Zenger 1994; Whybray 1996).

Other scholars contend that an interest in prophecy was uppermost in the minds of the compilers, who organized the Psalter to show that, despite the failure of the monarchy and the status of the Temple under foreign rule, God’s kingdom would soon break in and all nations would acknowledge God as King (e.g., Walton 1991; Wilson 1993; Mitchell 1997; Rösel 1999). This then explains the later emphasis on the Psalms as prophecies. For example, Psalm 2, because it no longer applied to a living Davidic king, was increasingly read in the light of the hope for a coming deliverer: In the Christian

community this was Jesus Christ, “Son of David,” and in the Jewish tradition it was held to be about a figure to come from the Davidic line.¹

The problem with these diverse ways of reading the Psalter is that, rather like the use of the term “book of praises,” they cater only to a portion of Psalms. A more wisdom-orientated, didactic approach deals only with some thirty psalms, while a more prophetic-orientated reading encompasses perhaps another thirty. But because the Psalter evolved over such a lengthy period of time, its interests are bound to be multi-valent. The Psalms embrace two very different Temple cults, the former more focused on the king, with national and theo-political interests, and the latter more under the authority of the priesthood and concerned with how to live as a community under foreign rule. It was the task of the compilers to preserve both these concerns. So we are left with the question: Can we find any one group who might have simultaneously been interested in all these issues and in others as well?

Two clues might be found in the liturgical superscriptions to the Psalms and the references to singing and musical accompaniment within the Psalms. Although comparisons between the Hebrew, the Greek, and the Qumran psalms suggest that the superscriptions were not a completely fixed tradition even by the second century BCE, the *liturgical* titles have few inconsistencies.² They fall into four categories: the type of a psalm, the tune to accompany it, the instruments to be used, and the role of the leader of worship.

Of the psalm types, the most common is *mizmôr* (fifty-seven times), translated in the Greek as *psalmos*—a song to music. It is used thirty-five times in psalms with Davidic headings, suggesting that even personal psalms were used in Temple liturgy. It occurs frequently in the Korahite collections (47, 48, 49; 84, 85, 87, and 88) and the Asaphite collection (50, 73, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 82, and 83). Another common term is *šîr* (also meaning “song”), which occurs thirty times, thirteen alongside *mizmôr*, fifteen as a title to the “Songs of Ascents,” and twice in the Korahite psalms (45:1 and 46:1).³ Those who argue for the Psalter as either a didactic or prophetic collection have to explain how their view fits with these indicators of the liturgical performance of psalmody.

Some psalms suggest hymn tunes: These occur in Books I through III. For example, “Do not Destroy” (*’al tašhêt*) occurs in psalms with a Davidic heading (57–59) and in one ascribed to Asaph (75). “The Lilies of the Testimony” (*šûšên ’ēdût*) is found in a Davidic Psalm (60) and in abbreviated form in Psalm 69 (*šôšannîm*), as well as in a Korahite psalm (45 [*šôšannîm*]) and an Asaphite psalm (80, *šôšannîm*). Psalm 22, “On the Hind of Dawn” (*’al ’ayyelet haššaḥar*), and Psalm 56, “To the Dove of the Distant Terebinths” (*’al yônât ’elem rēḥōqîm*), also have Davidic headings. Even if these are not hymn tunes but unknown liturgical titles, they again illustrate that personal psalms could be adapted for musical use. Most occur in Asaphite and Korahite psalms.

Headings indicating musical accompaniment include references to stringed instruments (*nəḡînôt*) in Psalms 4, 6, 54, 55, 67, and 76; an eight-stringed instrument (*haššēmînit*) in Psalms 6 and 12; a lyre (*haggittit*) in Psalms 8, 81, and 84; and a wind instrument (*māḥălat*) in Psalms 53 and 88 (also in 1 Kgs. 1:40). Fifty-five psalms have the titles *lamnaššē(a)h*, usually translated “choirmaster” or “leader.” These occur almost exclusively in Books I through III, again in the Davidic, Korahite, and Asaphite psalms.

The occurrence of both *lamnaššē(a)h* and a Davidic heading in Psalm 18, but not in the duplicate prayer in 1 Samuel 22, provides evidence of the musical performance of *psalms*—where David is viewed both as an exemplar of piety and as the founder of Temple music and song.

The references to singing and musical accompaniment within the Psalms themselves are profuse. Psalm 30 offers an interesting illustration. Its several superscriptions state that it is a hymn (*mizmôr*) and also a song for the dedication of the Temple, in honor of David (*šîr ḥănukkat habbayit lēdāvid*). Its form, however, suggests not a public hymn but a personal thanksgiving, and its contents indicate that it is not so much interested in Temple sacrifice as in singing. Verse 5[4] calls upon the congregation to “sing to the LORD,” and in verse 13[12] the psalmist vows to “sing and give thanks.” A psalm concerned with Temple singing is thus given authority by connecting it with David and the founding of the Temple: This is reminiscent of 1 Chronicles 16, a text considered below.

Other examples of singing and music within the psalms are in the frequent introductions addressed to the assembly to praise God in song (e.g., 95:1–2; 96:1–2; 98:1, 4–6; 135:2–3). Often the Temple is mentioned, such as in “Sing praises to the LORD who dwells in Zion!” (9:11); “Praise God in his sanctuary!” (150:1). Accompaniment on stringed instruments is referred to within the Psalms as well as in the titles (e.g., 33:1–3; 71:22–23a; 81:3–4[2–3]; 92:1, 3). Psalm 92, whose heading indicates that it has been adapted as a song for the Sabbath (*mizmôr šîr lēyôm haššabbāt*), has, like Psalm 30, references to music and singing. Even Psalm 49, whose contents suggest a wisdom psalm about the plight of the righteous, begins with “I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre.”⁴

This interest in singing and music may well suggest the work of Levitical singers.⁵ But how convincing is this? When we look outside the Psalms, a supportive text is Chronicles, but more recently this has sometimes been dismissed as “fantasy literature” and thus unreliable.⁶ Hence, initial evidence for the significance of “singing Levites” should be sought elsewhere.

One source is Philo, who refers explicitly to the role of the Levitical singers in psalmody.⁷ Most other references come from the Mishnah. *Tāmîd* 7.4 speaks of seven psalms (24, 48, 82, 94, 81, 93, 92) being sung by the Levites at the daily sacrifices of the Temple. This corresponds with the additional titles in the Greek over some of these psalms (23, 47, 91, 92, 93). *Pēsāhîm* 5.7 states that during Passover the Levites sang the Hallel (Pss. 113–118), and *Bikûrîm* 3.4 claims that Levites sang Psalm 30 at the first fruits of the harvest. In *Sukâ* 5.4 and *Midôt* 2.5 the Levites are described as reciting the Songs of Ascents (Pss. 120–134) on the fifteen steps of the Temple. Josephus’ *Antiquities* XX, 9:6 makes a similar point. Although this evidence does not point conclusively to the Levitical singers as compilers of the Psalms, it does illustrate that a tradition about their performance of psalms in Second Temple liturgy was well established.

Proposing anything about the origins and development of the Levites as singers is difficult, because they take on different roles in different literary traditions. For example, Deuteronomy 33 and Genesis 49 suggest they were originally a secular tribe, while 1 Samuel 2–3 assumes they created a hereditary priesthood, with Eli, priest of Shiloh,

being a descendant of Moses (1 Sam. 2:27–28). Similarly, the Aaronide priesthood traced its ancestry to the Levites through the figure of Aaron (e.g., in Exod. 4:14; 6:20; Num. 26:59). Nevertheless, by the Persian period the testimony is clear: The Levites are now simply Temple servants, and any purported secular or priestly status is no longer acknowledged. This demise might have been due to the rise of the Zadokite priesthood under David (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:17; 15:24–35; 1 Kgs. 1:8–45). It could have been caused by centralizing policies (e.g., 2 Kgs. 18:4; 22:8–9), which undermined their role in outlying sanctuaries. It might have been due to a schism with the Aaronide priesthood after the exile, as suggested in the priestly legislation in Exodus 28:1; 40:12–15; or it might have been due to the increased status of the Zadokite priesthood in second Temple worship, as reflected, for example, in Ezekiel's program of reform (Ezek. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15).⁸

Among the Levitical Temple servants, the Asaphites seem to dominate. According to Ezra 2:41, they are the Temple singers, and although no reference is made to them there as Levites, the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 3:33–47 shows that Asaph was a descendant of Gershom, the eldest son of Levi, and so of Levitical descent through this line (see Exod. 6:12–25). 1 Chronicles 15:19 identifies Asaph, Heman, and Ethan as singers, and 1 Chronicles 16:4–5 refers to the Levites as singers with the Asaphites taking the lead. The lists in Ezra 3:10–11 and Nehemiah 12:46 also recognize the Asaphites as Levitical singers.

Another group of Temple servants was the Korahites: 1 Chronicles 6:16–29 includes Korah as a descendant of Kohath, and so by implication also of Levitical descent (as in Num. 3:17–20). The only references to the Korahites as singers are found in 1 Chronicles 9:33 and 2 Chronicles 20:19, and the first of these is oblique. Outside the genealogies, the only reference to them in Chronicles is in 1 Chronicles 26, where they are called gatekeepers. Elsewhere the “gatekeepers” are not even specifically named as Korahites. And although in Nehemiah there is a recognition of “Levites, gatekeepers and singers” (e.g., Neh. 7:1, 73; 10:28; 13:5), neither Asaphites nor Korahites are mentioned. If we are looking for a specific group of “Levitical singers,” the Asaphites seem to be likely candidates.⁹

1 Chronicles 16 is a pivotal text. Not only does it use four psalms in its account of the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem (vv. 8–22 use Ps. 105:1–15; vv. 23–33 use Ps. 96:1–13; v. 34 cites Pss. 106:1 and 136:1; and vv. 35–36, Ps. 106:46–47), but it also seeks to legitimize the worship of the Second Temple through the authority of the Asaphite singers alongside the priests. The authority of Moses-as-lawgiver is enhanced through priestly legislation, and the authority of David-as-psalmist is enhanced through the Asaphites' singing of psalms. This is more about contemporary issues of Levitical authority within the Temple than any historical record of Moses or the Davidic monarchy.¹⁰ The Chronicler seems to have a particular interest in the Levites; it may be that the Chronicler's work actually emerged from Levitical circles. In addition to promoting the Levites as Temple singers, there is notable interest in their ancestry (1 Chron. 6, 15, 23, 24, 25, 26; 2 Chron. 17, 23, 29, 31, 34, 35); in their authority in instructing the people (2 Chron. 17, 19); in their role as prophets (e.g., 2 Chron. 30:13–19); in their significance in promoting the reforms of Judah's kings; and in their status alongside the Ark (e.g., in 1 Chron. 15:11–16:6; 2 Chron. 5:4–8; 35:11–19).

Although the Chronicler's view of the Levitical singers is clearly ideological, reinventing the past to make sense of the present, when it is taken alongside other references to the Levitical singers in early Jewish and rabbinical tradition, we can infer that the references to present practices are not entirely "fantastical." So, in the light of our earlier questions about whether one group of compilers could embrace the multivalent number evident within the Psalter, let us test this "Levitical-singer-hypothesis" with reference to the Psalms.

First, if the Levitical singers were the final compilers of the Psalter, the interesting portrayal of *the figure of David* makes good sense. Just as the Chronicler legitimized the Levites' status as singers by making them appear to be cofounders with David of the Temple cult, this legitimization seems to be present in the Psalms, albeit with a different twist. The Chronicler achieved this explicitly through genealogies and a continuous narrative such as 1 Chronicles 16. The Levitical singers achieved this legitimization in part through psalmic superscriptions. David "prays" some seventy-three psalms (as seen in the superscription *lēdāvid*); many of them are personal complaints and laments, although some fifty, with their extra liturgical headings, also suggest some use in Second Temple worship. By making the figure of David an exemplar of piety, and by aligning his piety with cultic practice, the Levitical singers legitimized their own "ancient" authority as singers of psalms.

Another example of this may be seen in the particular placement of Psalm 132. The Ark was an important symbol for the Chronicler in uniting the authority of Moses with that of David within the Temple cult. Chronicles actually only uses four psalms, each time on public occasions, and in each case this emphasizes the significance of the Ark.¹¹ And it seems that Psalm 132 would have also been important for the Levitical singers: This composite psalm not only supported their own authority as bearers of the Ark in laws established by Moses (e.g., Deut. 10:8–9; 31:25–26), but it was that vital link between the Mosaic cult emanating from Mount Horeb and the Davidic cult from Mount Zion. Hence the inclusion of Psalm 132 into the Songs of Ascents (120–134) is not so much about *David* bringing the Ark to Jerusalem but about David bringing the *Ark* to that city, tracing back the worship at Zion to the time of Moses as well as David. In this way, we are able to read those references to David as founder of the Temple cult and paragon of piety in a different light: The figure of David supported the status of the Levites extremely well.

Second, if the Levitical singers were indeed the final compilers of the Psalter, it also accounts for the *interest in the Torah*. The Deuteronomic tradition, according to Deuteronomy 17:14–20, placed the king under the authority of the law, and the Levites were to read this law to the people (31:25–29). In Chronicles, too, the Levites are prominent in the royal reforms—of Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:13–17), Joash (2 Chron. 23:8–11), Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:17–18), and, of course, Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:5–19). It was important, given the prominence of the Zadokite priesthood and its associations with the court of David, that the Levites should be seen as reformers of the court, because their authority lay not only with David but also with Moses. This is reflected in the Psalter: Psalm 2 has been placed after the Torah Psalm 1, and Torah Psalm 19 is set between Psalms 18 and 20–21, all royal psalms. In Book V, the same effect is achieved by following Psalm 118 by

the long Torah Psalm 119. The division of the Psalter into five books, following the books of Moses, bears further witness to this more generally, in aligning the authority of David with that of Moses.

The king's responsibility to keep the law was emphasized by the placing of several other royal psalms at critical points in the Psalter. Again, this would have well served the Levites' purpose. Psalm 72, at the end of Book II, is ascribed to Solomon. This psalm is not so much about royal status as about how the king should be committed to pursuing justice and righteousness in the land. It would have been an ideal psalm for the Levites' "royal theology." Even Psalm 89, at the end of Book III, could be read in this way. The disappointments expressed in verses 39–53[38–52] should be read in the light of verses 20–38[19–37], which, taking up the traditions evident also in 2 Samuel 7, make it clear that the king and his descendants must keep the law, and, if they do not, punishment will follow (vv. 30–32). The superscription to the following psalm (Ps. 90: "A Prayer of Moses. The Man of God," a term also found in Deut. 33:1) is another way of advancing the authority of Moses alongside (and perhaps superior to) that of the king to create a new emphasis at the beginning of Book IV.

Third, the Levitical singers would also have been concerned about the selection and placing of more general *didactic material* in the Psalms. Rather than presuming that these psalms originated from wisdom teachers or scribes at private, wisdom-influenced gatherings, the locus of such psalms could originally have been the Temple.¹² The Chronicler depicts the Levites not only singing but also preaching and teaching the people (see, e.g., Jehoshaphat's reforms in 2 Chron. 17 and 19). For the Chronicler, teaching and singing were mutually dependent aspects of ministry in the Temple, and these were frequently performed by the Levites (e.g., 2 Chron. 34:12–13). This might therefore offer a different explanation as to why there is so much homiletical material not only in Chronicles but also in the Psalter. If the role of the Levites was both to teach the laws of Moses and to sing the psalms of David, it might explain why didactic psalms such as 49, 73, and 78 have specific Levitical superscriptions and why other so-called wisdom psalms, such as 127, 128, and 139, also have liturgical titles.

The most convincing evidence of these Levitical concerns is the didactic purpose of many psalms. One obvious example is the "horizontal discourse," where God is referred to in the third person and the community is addressed instead. Psalms 4, 7, 9, 12, 25, 27, 28, 31, 55, 102, and 130 (laments) and Psalms 30 and 32 (thanksgivings) are good examples of this. These psalms debate God's retributive justice, questioning but usually affirming the more traditional (Deuteronomistic) position of reward and punishment. The Levites, who according to 1 Chronicles 20:3–19 and Nehemiah 9:5 participated in lament rituals, may well have been responsible for their inclusion.¹³

Fourth, another example of Levitical influence in the compilation of the Psalter is found in the attitude to *the efficacy of cultic practice*. Technical priestly terminology is notably minimal within the Psalms. For example, the most obvious term for sacrifice in the priestly legislation—*minḥāh* ("offering")—is rarely used: The only pertinent examples are Psalms 72:10 and 96:8, and even here its use in Psalm 72 is hardly priestly. Other sacrificial terms occur infrequently: we read of a "freewill offering" (*nēdābāh*) in Psalm

54:8; “burnt offerings” (*ôlôt*) in Psalms 20:4[3]; 50:8; 51:21[19] (*ôlāh*); and 66:13, 15; and “memorial offerings” (*lēhazkîr*, literally “for remembrance”) in the titles to Psalms 38 and 70.¹⁴

Even the Aaronide priesthood is referred to only in a handful of psalms; Aaron is usually referred to alongside Moses without any particular priestly associations.¹⁵ The Psalter’s interest in liturgy, in stark contrast with the priestly laws in the Pentateuch, is not so much in what is done by way of ritual and sacrifice as in what is said and sung. And although some psalms do speak of God offering forgiveness (e.g., 28:18; 32:1; 65:4[3]; 79:9; 86:5; 99:8; 130:4), the means of attaining it are rarely described. But this does not mean, as some have suggested, that the Psalter is not interested in liturgy: It is but with a different perspective, namely that of singing and teaching rather than sacrifice. Calls to the congregation to sing a “new song” (*šîr ḥādāš*) are frequent, for example, in Psalms 33:3; 40:4[3]; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1. The “spiritualized” view of sacrifice sometimes states that God simply requires a “song of thanksgiving” (26:7; 95:2; 100:4; 147:7), or simply *tôdāh* (50:23; 95:2; 100:4). On occasion, the negative view of sacrifice is to emphasize instead the value of a “spiritual sacrifice”: 40:7–9[6–8]; 50:7–15, 23; 51:18–20[16–18]; 69:31–32[30–31]; 116:17; and 141:2–3 are the obvious examples.¹⁶ Far from seeing such passages as censuring the Temple cult and originating from outside it, it is more likely that this is the influence of those concerned to reform the cult *from within*. The Levites were ideal cultic reformers, according to the Chronicler.

To see the Levitical singers as editors and compilers might also account for a fifth element in the Psalms: the references to the psalmists as “poor and needy.” Sometimes this assumes a physical dimension, sometimes spiritual, and sometimes both. It is often found in those psalms questioning the value of cultic sacrifice: Psalms 40:18[17]; 69:34[33], and 140:13[12] are the best examples.¹⁷ So does this suggest a disenfranchised community living far from the Temple? It could just as easily be a term adopted by the Levitical singers, who had been divested of any priestly privileges and hence of the opportunity to live off the offerings brought to the Temple. They had no inheritance in the land, and their livelihood and lifestyle fits admirably the description of being “poor and needy.”¹⁸

This is not to say the Levitical singers composed such psalms but rather that they sought to include them and set them in strategic places within the collections. For example, they seem to have deliberately placed royal psalms, which speak of those with power, authority, and privilege, alongside psalms of the poor and oppressed. Psalm 3 follows Psalm 2, 72 precedes 73, and 88 precedes 89. Similarly, Psalms 17/18, 21/22, 101/102, 109/110, and 143/144 fit this pattern.¹⁹ Such placements make clear that God is not only the defender of those in positions of power but also the protector of those who have no voice yet trust in God’s deliverance.

Smaller collections whose major theme is the poor and disenfranchised might also be seen as exhibiting Levitical influence. Two examples must suffice. The first is in Psalms 135–37, a discrete collection in Book V whose common theme is of the longing for security in the land. Psalm 135:20 is one of the few specific references to the Levites (“the house of Levi”) in the body of a psalm. Psalm 136:1 (“For he is good, for his steadfast

love endures forever”) is a refrain that in Ezra 3:10–11 is ascribed to both the Levites (the “sons of Asaph”) and the priests at the time of the laying of the foundations of the second Temple. And Psalm 137, with its longing for Jerusalem, bears many affinities with the beginning and ending of the more obvious liturgical collection, the Songs of Ascents.²⁰

The second and perhaps most contentious collection is at the end of Book I. Psalms 35–41 have frequently been noted for their interest in “Armenfrömmigkeit.”²¹ However, liturgical headings are found over each psalm (except for Ps. 37, which, ironically, has perhaps the most developed sense of longing for security in the land of any of these psalms), suggesting that even these psalms, perhaps compositions originally created far from the Temple, were brought together to be used in Second Temple liturgy. Given that their other headings testify to David as the paradigm of piety, it might also explain why David is not so much the vindicated hero as the righteous sufferer: The Levites, in many ways deprived of privileges, gained advantage by using his piety as their example.²²

Finally, if the Levitical singers did have a hand in the editing and compilation of the Psalter, it also explains the *prophetic emphasis in psalmody*, which was later taken up in the Jewish and Christian use of many psalms. If the actual compilation took place in diaspora communities, far from the Temple, it is difficult to explain not only the liturgical headings of the psalms but also how psalms that were personal reflective prayers were transformed into prophecies affecting the whole community in their eventual fulfillment. The prophetic reading of psalmody that pervades both Jewish and Christian tradition is undoubtedly a more public, David-centered, Temple-centered reading, and the prophetic concerns are better understood by arguing that the Psalter as a whole emerged from the center of Judaism, not from its periphery. The Levitical singers would have been important mediators in this respect.

The Levitical connection with prophecy is given explicit expression by the Chronicler, who has an elevated view of prophecy in general and of the Levites (“prophetic singers”) in particular. The Chronicler had at least two reasons for this. In an age when the living prophetic word was long past, it was important to give the prophetic voice some present appropriation. By emphasizing that the Levites had been endowed with a prophetic spirit, the Chronicler not only offered a new understanding of prophecy for his own age but also affirmed the contemporary authority of the Temple cult by linking its status back to prophets who worked in the royal cultus. In this agenda the Levitical singers were now the mediators of the prophetic word, albeit no longer through living oracles but rather through teaching and song.²³

If the psalms are to be seen as “prophetic songs,” creating through the ministry of the Levitical singers a bridge between the First and Second Temples, this offers an explanation for two different types of prophetic influence in the Psalms. First, it accounts for why earlier oracular material, where God speaks in the first person, has been preserved, a feature explicit in at least eleven psalms and implicit in several others. The fact that the four most extensive examples of this divine speech form occur in the Asaphite Psalms is not coincidental (50:5–6, 7–15, 16–23; 75:3–6[2–5], 11[10];

81:7–15[6–14]; 82:2–4, 6–7). The fact that four other divine speeches occur in royal psalms fits with the Chronicler's view of prophetic inspiration ratifying the king's role in the cult and of the Levites' role, imbued with the spirit of prophecy, within it (Pss. 2:7–9; 89:20–38[19–37]; 110:1b, 4; 132:14–18). So in the Psalms, as in Chronicles, the promotion of prophetically inspired divine speech from the past gives meaning to the present, especially when neither prophecy nor monarchy is evident. This is hardly “fantasy” literature, even though the selection and use of earlier material might be ideological. Those most likely to communicate this through “prophetic song” are the Levitical singers.²⁴

As well as preserving oracular material in individual psalms, with an eye to the past, the Levitical singers brought larger collections together and shaped them with a prophetic bias that not only preserved the past but also looked to the future. It should not be surprising that the two collections where this is most apparent are those of Korah and Asaph. Each includes twelve psalms (counting Pss. 42–43 as one unit in the Korahite collection). In the earlier Korahite collection of Psalms 42–49 (Book II) are three psalms (46–48) that declare with the same confidence of the later prophets that God's presence is in Zion; and in the corresponding group, Psalms 84–88 (in Book III), Psalm 87 makes a similar proclamation. In the Asaphite collection, it is noteworthy that a prophetic exhortation heads the list (Ps. 50); and in the other eleven psalms in Book III (73–83), Psalms 75 and 76 similarly declare that God is in Zion (these occur after a didactic psalm [73] and a communal lament [74]). In the second half of the Asaphite collection, Psalms 81 and 82 proclaim again that God is in Zion, which are preceded by a didactic psalm (78) and communal laments (79, 80). Many of these psalms with Asaphite headings are probably quite old, some suggesting northern names and hence a time before 721 BCE. It seems that the compilers have arranged these different collections with a clear prophetic bias, with the declaration of God residing in the Temple being central to each.²⁵

So in these six ways—the liturgical presentation of David, the interest in the Torah (and the king's status as it relates to the Torah), the more general didactic emphases, the redefining of cultic practice as (essentially) sacred song, the emphasis on the poor and needy, and the interest in prophecy—we might identify those who collected and edited the Psalter as Levites whose particular role was to provide music, singing, and teaching for Second Temple liturgy.

Through “Temple song” an immediate link was made with the First Temple, founded by Solomon but whose roots went back to David, and through teaching the Torah through Temple songs the bond went back to Moses. Temple worship was a unique way of expressing the unity of the people of David and of Moses. The Psalter was a subtle rallying point: an identity marker under foreign domination. The compilers and editors had, of course, a good deal to gain from this: The once marginalized Levitical singers, by claiming the authority of David as well as Moses, were able to maintain their own position in the Temple courts. Perhaps the choice of the title *sēper tēhillim* is not as incongruous as it might first appear.

NOTES

1. In the New Testament Ps. 2 is used frequently, for example, in the accounts of Jesus' Baptism and Transfiguration, as well as in speeches testifying to Jesus as Messiah in Acts 4:24–31 and 13:17–41. At Qumran, for example in 4QFlorilegium, Pss. 1:1–2:1 are taken together along with parts of 2 Sam. 7:10–14; Isa. 8:11; Ezek. 44:10; and Dan. 12.10 as a *pesher* commentary about the restoration of the Temple and the coming figure of the branch of David, the interpreter of the law.
2. See Flint 1997: 118–34.
3. Other headings, which are also possibly liturgical include *miktām* (“Hidden”), as in Pss. 16; 56–60, and *maskil*, probably indicating instruction, used in seventeen psalms. Again these occur predominantly in Books I–III.
4. For a comprehensive account of singing and music in the Psalms, see J. A. Smith 1990, who concludes that as many as 126 psalms have references to singing and the Temple (180–81).
5. One of the earliest references is Saadia Gaon in his tenth-century Prolegomenon to the Psalms: See the translation in Sokolow 1984: 158–66. See also Mowinckel 1982 [1962]: 2.79–84, also 85–100 and 104–25; J. A. Smith 1990: 167–69 and M. S. Smith 1991 also support this theory.
6. One example of this view is Schweitzer 2007.
7. *De specibus legibus* 1.156 (taken from Smith 1991: 262).
8. On the developing role of the Levitical singers, see, e.g., Goulder 1982; 1995: 317–27; 1996; Gese 1974: 222–34; Willi 1999: 75–98; and Jonker 2004: 102–22.
9. This is not to preclude some Korahites as singers. For example, 1 Chron. 6:33 notes that Heman the Kohathite is a singer, and Heman also appears in the title to the Korahite Ps. 88. Ethan, another Korahite, is in the title in Ps. 89 and is referred to as a singer along with Asaph and Heman in 1 Chron. 15:19.
10. See, e.g., Williamson 1982: 128; Kleinig 1993: 133–48; Wallace 1991: 267–91. Wallace argues (p. 277) that the repetition of *tāmīd* (“always”) in 1 Chron. 16:6, 11, 37, 39 is a way of authenticating present liturgical practices by referring to the past and so legitimizes the role of the Levitical singers through the role of David. Similarly Berlin (2007: 23–27) argues that in 1 Chron. 16 the presentation of “David-as-psalmist” is designed not so much to promote the memory of David as to give authority to the Levites. Berlin makes the same point on the use of Ps. 132:8–10 in 2 Chron. 6:41–42, which is about Solomonic rather than Davidic legitimization: “The Chronicler used psalms very carefully, to support and illustrate his view of the Levitical personnel and their songs” (p. 30).
11. Particular passages involving the role of the Ark include 1 Chron. 15:11–16:6; 2 Chron. 5:4–8; and 2 Chron. 35:11–19. As for the use of relevant psalms, Pss. 105, 96 and 106/136 are cited in 1 Chron. 16 and Ps. 132 in 2 Chron. 6:41.
12. Those who see the psalms originating in private gatherings include Lohfink 1990; Gerstenberger 1994; Hossfeld and Zenger 1996; Zenger 2002; and Zenger 2004.
13. See Mandolfo 2002.
14. The word for festival (*ḥag*) occurs only once in the Psalter (118:27). Another reference (81:4[3]) speaks of blowing “the trumpet at the new moon,” a “festal day” (*lěyôm ḥaggēnû*). This may be the “Day of Remembrance,” but specific festivals are not of foremost interest to the psalmists.
15. Pss. 77:21[20]; 99:6; 105:26; 106:16; 115:10, 12; 118:3; 133:2; 135:19. Only Pss. 115, 118 (in the Hallel), and 135 are cultic calls to worship, which include “the house of Aaron.” This is

- different from Chronicles, where Levites and Aaronides work more side by side (e.g., 1 Chron. 5:28, 32). On this issue, see Knoppers 1999: 49–72.
16. In some cases their placement near the beginning or ending of a psalm might suggest editorial additions (e.g., Pss. 50:23; 51:20–21[18–19]; 69:31–32[30–31]; 116:17–19; 141:1–2). Ps. 69 offers a good example: “I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs” (vv. 31–32[30–31]).
 17. The latter two examples feature only the “needy.”
 18. In Deut. 18:1–8 the Levites are described as those “with no portion or inheritance,” and Deut. 14:17, 19 and 26:13 make the same point.
 19. See Gillingham 2006: 25–49.
 20. See Smith 1991: 258–63, especially 260–61.
 21. See, e.g., Hosfeld and Zenger 1992: 21–50.
 22. See Auwers 1999: 150–51 on David as the “righteous sufferer.”
 23. Welch (1939: 42–54) saw the Levitical singers as successors to the guilds of prophets. This was developed, e.g., by Kleinig (1993: 148–57) and Mathys (2001: 281–96). Mowinckel states that “the prophetic element in the psalms... also provides evidence that the psalms are derived from the Temple singers, who were so closely linked with the Temple prophets that the latter were finally organized as belonging to the guilds and ‘families’ of the singers, as we can see from the Chronicler” (1982 [1962]: 2.93).
 24. For a recent account of the relationship between psalmody and prophecy through oracular activity, see Jacobson 2004: 82–130, who examines Pss. 132, 89, 2, 110; 50, 81, 95, 75; 82, 60, 108, 46, 91, and 12 for their use of “God quotations.” Although I would propose only eleven such psalms (2, 89, 110, 132; 75, 82, 81, 50, 95, 12, 91), I also see the role of the Levites in their preservation and transmission (Gillingham 2010: 370–90).
 25. It is interesting to see how the Davidic Psalter (Pss. 51–72) has also been brought into this collection, thus creating a Davidic as well as prophetic bias to Books II and III. On the shaping of these collections in Books II and III, see Gillingham 2005: 308–41. It is also likely that Books I–III were assembled first; this is where the more specific Levitical interests are found. As many scholars now argue, Books IV–V, also the work of the Levites, could have been added at a later stage.

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CHAPTER 14

ON THE ORDERING OF PSALMS AS DEMONSTRATED BY PSALMS 136–150

YAIR ZAKOVITCH

THE writing of the 150 psalms that constitute the book of Psalms was a long and protracted process, and their arrangement and redaction into five books occurred in stages over many years. The order of the individual psalms within the Psalter did not happen by chance but is evidence of deliberate design. This order may even reveal something of the early development and growth of the Psalter. Similarly, the act of arranging the psalms was an exegetical act: The meaning of a single, isolated psalm differs from the meaning it draws from its context, from our reading it in light of the psalms that precede and follow it.

Form critics, disciples of Hermann Gunkel, were not inclined to question the ordering of the psalms since their interest lay in revealing the poems' preliterary *Sitze im Leben*, the sociological contexts in which they were composed and in which they functioned before being put in writing. Interest in the arrangement of the individual psalms grew with the development of redaction criticism and the various aspects of inner-biblical interpretation.

In several of my publications I have noted how rabbinic sages, who often questioned the juxtaposition of biblical texts by asking "Why is [this] placed next to [that]?" (e.g., *Sukkah* 2a) or "What does [this] have to do with [that]?" (e.g., *Berakhot* 15b), had in fact inherited an exegetical practice that was familiar to them from the Bible. In contrast to the rabbis, who posed and answered such questions explicitly, the biblical writers/editors did not overtly proclaim the significance in their ordering of different stories. A number of interpolations that we find inserted into the text, however, testify to the writers' awareness of this exegetical device. This rule holds true for a wide variety of literary genres, including narrative and prophecy, wisdom sayings, and even psalms literature. Franz Delitzsch (1984) made an important contribution to modern scholarship on the ordering of the psalms. See the Bibliography at the end of this chapter for a list of my own and others' more recent contributions to the topic.

Because space is limited, I restrict myself here to examining the ordering of the sequence that begins with Psalm 136 and continues to the book's final psalm, Psalm 150. I will try to uncover the thinking that lay behind the arrangement, any exegesis conveyed by the arrangement, and even something of the various stages through which the sequence developed. I proceed generally according to the psalms' present order, though I occasionally depart from the rule when a previous ordering seems apparent.

ON THE ORDERING OF PSALMS 136–150

Psalms 136, 138

Already at the outset we must diverge from the present order because, I believe, Psalm 138 originally followed Psalm 136 for the following reasons:

1. Compare the repeated refrain of Psalm 136, "for his steadfast love endures forever," with "your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever" (138:8).
2. In Psalm 136, the poet calls to his listeners to give thanks to the LORD (vv. 1–3; 10); the poet of Psalm 138 answers the call, "I give you thanks, O LORD" (v. 1) "and give thanks to your name" (v. 2), and others follow his lead: "All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD" (v. 4).
3. In Psalm 136, kings have suffered from God's punishing hand: "who struck down great kings... and killed famous kings..." (vv. 17–18), and now "all the kings of the earth" are praising him (138:4).
4. The kings will sing, "for *great* is the glory of the LORD" (138:5; see also v. 1), while his glory's greatness is the result of his great acts of creation—"who alone does great wonders" (136:4), "who made the great lights" (v. 7)—and over the course of history, "who struck down great kings" (v. 17).
5. During the exodus from Egypt, God acted "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm" (136:12). Accordingly, Psalm 138 expects God's hand to continue to work: "stretch out your hand and your right hand delivers me" (v. 7); "Do not forsake the work of your hands" (v. 8).
6. Toward the end of Psalm 136, the poet sums up and expresses gratitude that "it is he who remembered us when *we were low*" (v. 23). The writer of Psalm 138 notes that "though the LORD is high, he regards *the lowly*" (v. 6).

Overall, we note the nationalist character of Psalm 136. Psalm 138, read on its own, gives the impression of a personal offering of thanks, except for verse 4, which introduces the praise of the kings. The juxtaposition of Psalms 136 and 138 strengthens the nationalist character of the latter.

Psalms 136, 137

The successive order of Psalms 136, 138 has been interrupted by Psalm 137, a psalm with an historical character. Note that there are no other historical psalms in Book V excepting Psalms 135 and 136. While Psalm 136's horizons never exceed the boundaries of the Pentateuch (and consequently refers to Israel's victories over the kings from the Jordan's eastern bank and does not involve the conquering of Canaan), Psalm 137 pulls us to the difficult events that take shape at the end of the historiographic cluster Genesis–Kings: the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Psalm 137 thus expresses the darker dimensions of history, when one no longer feels able to sing God's praises (v. 4). The people's awareness of the Temple's destruction prevents them from ignoring that traumatic event and praising God for deliverance in the past. But it is precisely in the juxtaposition with Psalm 136 that hope is created: If we bless him for the past, that "it is he who remembered us when we were low" (136:23), there is basis for our expectation that God will answer our prayer to remember us when we will again be in a lowly state: "Remember, O LORD ..." (137:7).

Psalms 137, 138

Psalm 137's placement requires us to look also at its connection with its other neighbor, Psalm 138.

1. In Psalm 137, our enemies and captors expected us to sing the LORD's song (137:3), an immoral expectation that was impossible to fulfill. Now we expect that the kings of the earth (our enemies?) will be the ones to sing praises of the LORD (138:4–5).
2. In Psalm 137 we pledge not to forget Jerusalem: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!" (v. 5). Now we can again hope that God will requite us for our oath with the redemptive power of his right arm: "you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me" (138:7). The enemies who tormented the poets of Psalm 137, "our captors...our tormentors" (v. 3), will not escape requital: "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies" (138:7). We see then how Psalm 137 also imparts a nationalist character to Psalm 138.¹

Psalms 138, 145

I do not exclude the possibility that, previous to the incorporation of Psalms 139–144 (a unit of psalms containing pleas for rescue) into their present position, Psalm 138 was adjacent to Psalm 145; both are psalms of thanksgiving. In any event, all the psalms between 138 and 145 include the element *lēdāvid*, "of David," in their superscriptions. In

Psalm 138, the individual gives thanks and praises his God, but he expects that also “the kings of the earth” will praise him (v. 4), while in Psalm 145 the individual blesses God (see vv. 1, 2, 5) and hopes that everyone will do so (vv. 4, 6, 7, 10, 11). The psalm’s conclusion combines the praise of the individual with that of the many: “My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever” (v. 21).

Numerous linguistic similarities can be found between the two poems:

1. Both poems glorify and sanctify God’s name: “and [I] give thanks to your name...for you have exalted your name and your word above everything” (138:2); “and bless your name forever and ever” (145:1); “and praise your name forever and ever” (v. 2); “and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever” (v. 21).
2. Praise of God’s steadfast love (*hesed*) is spoken by the individual: “and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love” (138:2); “your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever” (v. 8); and by the many: “slow to anger and great in steadfast love” (145:8).
3. The poet gives thanks for God’s truth: “...your steadfast love and your truth” (138:2); God answers only those “who call on him in truth” (145:18).
4. God has made his name great, “for you have made great your name...” (138:2), and his glory is accordingly great: “for great is the glory of the LORD” (v. 5); “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised” (145:3); “and I will declare your greatness” (v. 6); “great in steadfast love” (v. 8).
5. God answers the poet who called to him, “On the day I called, you answered me” (138:3), and will answer anyone who does so, “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (145:18).
6. “The kings of the earth” praise God (138:4), but God is the true king: “I will extol you, my God and King” (145:1; see vv. 11–13).
7. The kings will praise God “for they have heard the words of your mouth” (138:4); he, on the other hand, hears those who turn to him: “he hears their cry, and saves them” (145:19).
8. God saves individuals, “you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me” (138:7) and the multitude, “and saves them” (145:19).
9. The poet hopes that God will continue to work deeds for those who turn to him “Do not forsake *the work* of your hands” (138:8)—deeds that will continue to be praised from generation to generation: “One generation shall laud *your works* to another” (145:4).
10. God’s love is not limited by time: “your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever” (138:8); for this reason he will be praised forever: “all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever” (145:21). Both psalms reach their respective conclusions with this assertion of the eternal character of God’s love being voiced by his believers. Whether or not these two psalms were ever placed next to one another, their present position is fitting, providing bookends to the pleas for redemption in Psalms 139–144.²

Psalms 138, 139

Now we look at the relationship established between Psalm 138's offering of thanks and the plea for redemption found in its immediate neighbor.

1. The poet gives thanks to God: "I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart" (138:1); "I give you thanks for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (139:14).
2. The poet writes of the effect of God's redemption on his soul: "you increased my strength of soul" (138:3); "and my soul knows very well" (139:14).
3. Kings of the earth will extol God's ways, "They shall sing *of the ways* of the LORD" (138:5), but God knows the ways of each person: "You...are acquainted with *all my ways*" (139:3). The poet expects, therefore, that God will always guide him: "See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in *the way* forever" (v. 24).
4. God knows the hidden workings of the human heart: "but the haughty he *knows* from far away" (138:6); "you have searched me and *known me*. You *know* when I sit down and when I rise up..." (139:1–2); "Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you *know* it completely" (v. 4). The poet's soul, too, recognizes and knows how wonderful are God's acts and his concern for the individual: "wonderful are your works that my soul *knows* very well" (139:14).
5. God rescues the poet from his enemies, "you preserve me against the wrath of *my enemies*" (138:7), because his enemies are those who hate the LORD "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?...I count them *my enemies*" (139:21–22).
6. It is God's hand that saves the one who prays: "you stretch out *your hand*, and *your right hand* delivers me" (138:7); "even there *your hand* shall lead me, and *your right hand* shall hold me fast" (139:10).
7. The poet expects divine providence to benefit him and to never abandon him: "your steadfast love, O LORD, endures *forever*" (138:8); "and lead me in the way *forever*" (139:24).

Psalms 139, 140

An abundance of correspondences ties these two supplication psalms together:

1. The writer of Psalm 139 expresses his confidence that his innermost self is known by God: "O LORD, you have searched me and *known me*" (v. 1), "You know when I sit down and when I rise up" (v. 2), "...O LORD, you *know* it completely" (v.

- 4). He even invites God to know him better: "Search me, O God, and *know* my heart; test me and *know* my thoughts" (v. 23). In conjunction with Psalm 140, it becomes clear that this familiarity is mutual, and the poet knows that God will be just in his judgment, "I *know* that the LORD maintains the cause of the needy..." (v. 13[12]), and he is certain that he is counted among those worthy of deliverance.
2. Since the poet attests that "You know when I sit down and when *I rise up*" (139:2) and is certain that God has found no evil in him, he is entitled to expect that God will deal harshly with the wicked: "Let them be flung into pits, no more *to rise*" (140:11[10]).
3. Since the supplicant discovers that God knows every word in his mouth, "Even before a word is *on my tongue*, O LORD, you know it completely" (139:4), he believes that God will punish the "slanderer [literally, "man of the tongue]" (140:12[11]).
4. The one whom God guides with his hand, "even there *your hand* shall lead me" (139:10), will be delivered from evil: "Guard me, O LORD, from *the hands* of the wicked" (140:5[4]).
5. God, who created the poet, "*you knit me together* [tēsukēnī] in my mother's womb" (139:13), will continue to keep him safe: "*you have covered* [sakōtā] my head in the day of battle" (140:8[7]).
6. The poet gives thanks to God, "I *give you thanks* for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (139:14), and expects that the righteous will join him: "Surely the righteous shall *give thanks* to your name" (140:14[13]).
7. The one who prays marvels at God's acts, "wonderful are *your works*" (139:14), and makes it clear that by "your works" he refers to God's righteous acts: "I know that the LORD *will work* justice for the needy" (140:13[12]).
8. God created the poet "in the depths of the *earth*" (139:15). For the wicked, however, there is no place on earth: "Do not let the slanderer be established on *earth*" (140:12[11]).
9. The petitioner hopes for God's complete destruction of the wicked, "O that you would kill the *wicked*, O God" (139:19), and that, in such a way, he will be rescued: "Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the *wicked*" (140:5[4]); "Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the *wicked*" (v. 10[9]).
10. The supplicant addresses the wicked directly, "*Men* of blood, turn away from me!" (139:19), confident as he is that God will answer his call, "Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil person; protect me from the *man* of violence" (140:2[1]; see also v. 5[4]).
11. Corresponding to his confidence in his own guiltlessness, reflected in his invitation to God to know everything that is in his heart ("Search me, O God, and know *my heart*" [139:23]), the speaker voices his knowledge of how the hearts of the wicked are full of evil intent, "who plan evil things in their *hearts*" (140:3[2]).

Psalms 140, 141

The juxtaposition of these two psalms portrays a logical and causal relationship.

1. The request to “deliver me, O LORD, from the *evil* person” (140:2[1]) is followed by the urgent petition that the poet will not be like the evildoer: “Do not turn my heard to any *evil*” (141:4).
2. The poet’s prayer that God will protect him “from the hands of the *wicked*” (140:5[4]) and that the evildoer’s designs will not bear fruit, “Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the *wicked*” (v. 8[9]), leads to the expectation that the fate of the wicked will be bitter: “Let the *wicked* fall into their own nets” (141:10).
3. The mouths of the wicked—their lips—hide poison, “under their *lips* is the venom of vipers” (140:4[3]), and the poet implores God to not let his lips be like theirs: “Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my *lips*” (141:3).
4. The poet asks God to guard him from the evildoers, “*Guard me*, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked” (140:5[4]), and from their evil deeds, “*guard me* from the trap that they have laid for me” (141:9). At the same time he begs God to not let him be like them: “Set a *guard* over my mouth...” (141:3).
5. The evildoers have set a trap for the poet, “The arrogant have hidden a *trap* [*pah*] for me... they have set *snares* [*mōqēšim*] for me” (140:6[5]), because of which the poet is now in need of God’s protection: “Keep me from the *trap* [*pah*] that they *have laid for me* [*yāqēšû lî*], and the *snares* [*ûmōqēšôt*] of evildoers” (141:9).
6. The poet hopes that God will hear his pleas, “*give ear*, O LORD, *to the voice* of my supplications” (140:7[6]), an entreaty he repeats at the beginning of Psalm 141: “*give ear to my voice* when I call to you” (141:1).
7. The poet expects the evildoers’ downfall at the hand of God: “let [God] *make them fall* into pits” (140:11[10]), and again: “Let the wicked *fall* into their own nets” (141:10).

Psalms 141, 142

The connections between Psalms 141 and 142 are few and reveal repetition and not development, causality, or interpretation.

1. “Give ear to *my voice* when I call to you” (141:1); “With *my voice* I cry to the LORD; with *my voice* I made supplication to the LORD” (142:2[1]).
2. The poet finds refuge in God: “in you I seek *refuge*” (141:8); “I say, ‘You are my *refuge*’” (142:6[5]).

3. He pleads with God to save his soul: “do not expose my soul” (141:8); “Bring my soul out of prison” (142:8[7]).
4. His enemies have set a trap for him: “Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me” (141:9); “they have hidden a trap for me” (142:4[3]).

Psalms 142, 143

These two supplication psalms share common terminology, including a number of distinctive expressions.

1. “[W]ith my voice *I make supplication* to the LORD” (142:2[1]); “give ear to *my supplications*” (143:1).
2. “I tell *my trouble* before him” (142:3[2]); “bring me out of *trouble*” (143:11).
3. “When my spirit is faint” (142:4[3]); “Therefore my spirit is faint” (143:4). One of the Aramaic Targum manuscripts of Psalm 143:4 reads *napši* (“my soul”) instead of *rûhi* (“my spirit”). We do not know whether the Masoretic text preserves the original or whether it is the result of assimilation with the parallel verse in Psalm 142.
4. “In the path where I *walk* they have hidden a trap for me” (142:4[3]); “Let me know the way I should *walk*” (143:8). Being that the path the poet has taken until now is fraught with obstacles, he hopes for God’s guidance to show him the right way.
5. “[M]y portion *in the land* of the living” (142:6[5]); “lead me on level *land*” (143:10). The poet’s wish to remain in the land of the living depends upon God’s leadership.
6. “Save me from *those who pursue me*” (142:7[6]); “For the enemy *has pursued me*” (143:3).
7. “*Bring my soul* out of prison” (142:8[7]); “*bring my soul* out of trouble” (143:11).
8. “[S]o that I may give thanks to *your name*” (142:8[7]); “For *your name’s* sake, O LORD, preserve my life” (143:11).

Psalms 143, 144

Psalm 144 is complex and contains additions: Verses 3–4 comprise an exegetical comment directed at Psalms 143:2;³ verses 9–10 identify the poet that speaks in verses 7–8 as David and allude to the scene in which he plays the lyre in Saul’s court (1 Sam. 16:14–23) and to the story adjacent to it, David’s victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17).⁴ Verse 11 is a repetitive resumption of verse 7a β –b. Verses 12–15 are a fragment of a psalm (or a short, independent psalm) that should have been inserted into the Songs of Ascents between Psalms 127 and 128 (or following the latter), since they,

too, praise the sons and speak of a family being blessed with fertility (see Gunkel 1913: 122).

Most of the similarities between Psalms 143 and 144—similarities that are, in any case, few and not particularly strong—are found in the secondary additions of Psalm 144:

1. “Do not enter into judgment with *your servant*” (143:2); “who rescues *his servant* David” (144:10). David is named in the superscriptions of both psalms, as also in the superscriptions of Psalms 138 through 145. In both Psalms 143 and 144, therefore, the “servant,” the poet, is identified as David.
2. “I remember *the days* of old” (143:5); “*his days* are like a passing shadow” (144:4). The poet recalls the past, before his own lifetime, when God’s acts of salvation were commonly seen. The poet, who is aware that his own days are limited, asks that God act quickly now, as in the past, and save him.
3. “*Let me know* the way I should go” (143:8); “O LORD, what are human beings that *you should know them*” (144:3). God, who knows humankind, will be able to guide and inform them of the way to go.
4. The single parallel between Psalm 143 and the original verses of Psalm 144 is between “Let me hear of your *steadfast love* in the morning” (143:8) and “In your *steadfast love* cut off my enemies” (v. 12), with “my *steadfast love* and my fortress” (144:2). God will show his steadfast love (*hesed*), and it will save the poet from his enemies.

Because most of the correspondences between these two psalms relate to the added verses in Psalm 144 that precede verse 11, we may conjecture that the added verses 3–4 and 9–11 were known and considered intrinsic to the psalm by the editor who placed Psalm 144 after Psalm 143.

Psalm 144, which closes the supplication psalms, reflects a certain development in relation to the preceding psalms. This might explain its placement at the end of the supplication psalms in that the poet is not content only with supplications; he is prepared to take action and fight, since God has trained his hands for battle (v. 1).

Psalms 144, 145

As noted earlier, Psalm 145 may have initially been positioned following Psalm 138, another thanksgiving psalm. In any event, it now opens the psalms of praise with which the Psalter concludes. In Psalm 145’s superscription there still appears the “of David” component, though it has been preceded by a declaration of the psalm’s character: “Praise (of)” (*tēhillat*). From Psalm 146 until the end of the book, the word *halēlû-yāh*, “Praise the LORD,” provides a framework, appearing at both the beginning and end of each psalm.

Connections apparent between Psalms 144 and 145 are the following:

1. The poet blesses God, “Blessed be the LORD, my rock” (144:1), “and I will *bless* your name forever and ever. Every day I will *bless* you” (145:1–2), and he expects that all people will do so: “and all flesh will *bless* his holy name forever and ever” (145:21).
2. God is described as acting with steadfast love (*hesed*) toward the poet: “My *steadfast love* and my fortress” (144:2); “and abounding in *steadfast love*” (145:8), “The LORD is just . . . and kind [*hāsîd*: “one who shows steadfast love”] in all his doings” (v. 17).
3. While the poet’s enemies speak lies, “whose *mouths* speak lies” (144:8, 11), his own mouth praises God: “My *mouth* will speak the praise of the LORD” (145:21).

From the added verses in Psalm 144:

4. “What are human beings that you should *know* them . . . ?” (v. 3); God, who knows human nature, “[*makes*] *known* to all human beings your mighty deeds” (145:12), so that they will come to know him.
5. God is “the one who gives victory to *kings*” (144:10), since he is the real king: “to make known . . . the glorious splendor of your *kingdom*. Your *dominion* [*malkûtêkâ malkhût*] endures throughout all generations” (145:12–13).
6. The poet blesses the abundance of food, “Our barns are full with produce of every kind” (144:13), but the blessing is effective since God is the one who supplies the food: “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing” (145:15–16).

Again, it is possible that the editor who set the order of these psalms knew Psalm 144 already with its additions.

Psalms 145, 146

1. Psalm 145’s superscription, “Praise . . .,” joins with the psalm’s final verse, “My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD” (v. 21; see the root *h-l-l* also in v. 2), while Psalm 146 (along with the next four psalms that conclude the Psalter) begins and ends with “Praise the LORD [*halêlû-yāh*].” It seems that the conclusion of the acrostic Psalm 145 with “My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD . . . forever and ever” (v. 21) serves as a general invitation to the cluster of praise-poems (Pss. 146–150) that follows and that are each bracketed by the word *halêlû-yāh* —the reason they provide fitting closure to the Psalter.
2. The poet reveals his closeness to God through his use of the first-person possessive suffix, “I will extol you, *my* God . . .” (145:1); “I will sing praises to *my* God all my life long” (146:2).
3. God is the king: “I will extol you, my God and *King*” (145:1), “They shall speak of the glory of your *kingdom*” (v. 11), “and the glorious splendor of your *kingdom*”

- (v. 12), “Your *kingdom* is an *everlasting kingdom* [*malkût kol-’ölāmîm*]” (v. 13); “The LORD will *be king forever* [*yimlôk...lē’ölām*]” (146:10).
4. The generations will praise God: “One generation to another [*dôr lēdôr*] shall laud your works” (145:4), and God rules in all the generations, “and your dominion endures throughout all generations [*dôr wādôr*]” (v. 13) and will rule forever in Zion: “The LORD will reign... your God, O Zion, for all generations [*lēdôr wādôr*]” (146:10).
 5. An emphatic point of similarity between the two psalms is found in the identical characterization of God as one who “... lifts up all who are bowed down” (145:14); “The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down” (146:8).
 6. All look to God and wait for his deliverance: “The eyes of all look to you *in hope*” (145:16), “Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose *hope* is in the LORD their God” (146:5).
 7. God supplies sustenance: “and you give them their food in due season” (145:15), “who gives bread to the hungry” (146:7).
 8. The expression “The LORD *watches over* all who *love* him” (145:20) is divided between two consecutive verses in Psalm 146, “The LORD *loves* the righteous. The LORD *watches over* the strangers” (146:8–9). In Psalm 145 the people are the ones who love God; in Psalm 146 God rewards them for their love and loves them in return.
 9. A shared fate awaits the wicked in both psalms: “but all the wicked he will destroy” (145:20); “the way of the wicked he brings to ruin” (146:9).

Psalms 146, 147^s

1. In addition to the initial and final “Praise the LORD” (*halēlū-yāh*) framework in each psalm, the root *h-l-l* appears again in both (146:1, 2; 147:1, 12).
2. In Psalm 146 the poet announces his intention, “I *will sing* to my God” (146:2), and in Psalm 147 he offers a generalization, in light of his experience: “How good it is *to sing* to our God” (147:1).
3. God is the “God of Jacob” who watches over Jacob (146:5); it is for that reason that God gave the law to Jacob: “He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel” (147:19).
4. God “makes justice [*’ōśeh mišpāṭ*]” (146:7) for the benefit of his people, Israel: “his statutes and ordinances [*mišpātāyw*] to Israel. He has not done [*’āsāh*] thus with any other nation; they do not know (his) ordinances [*mišpāṭîm*]” (147:19–20).
5. God created the heavens and the earth, “who made *heavens* and *earth*” (146:6), and continues to care for them, “He covers the *heavens* with clouds, prepares rain for the *earth*” (147:8).
6. God provides food to humans, “who gives bread to the hungry” (146:7), and to animals, “He gives to the animals their food” (147:9).
7. God cares for society’s weak, “he *sustains* the orphan and the widow” (146:9);

“The LORD *sustains* the downtrodden” (147:6).

8. At the same time, God punishes the wicked, “but the way of the *wicked* he brings to ruin” (146:9); “he casts the *wicked* to the earth” (147:6).
9. God’s kingdom in Zion will prevail: “The LORD will reign forever, *your God, O Zion*, for all generations” (146:10); accordingly, Zion is called to praise him, “Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise *your God, O Zion!*” (147:12), also since God strengthened Zion (vv. 13–14). The collocation “your God, O Zion” (*šlōhayik šīyôn*) appears nowhere else in the Bible.

Psalms 147, 148

1. God cares for his people Israel: “he gathers the outcasts of *Israel*” (147:2); “He has raised up a horn for his people... for the people of *Israel* who are close to him” (148:14).
2. God created the celestial bodies, “He determined the number of the *stars*; he gives to all of them their names” (147:4); these will praise him, in return: “praise him, all you shining *stars!*” (148:3).
3. God names all the stars that he has created (147:4), and his creation, in turn, will praise his name: “Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created” (148:5).
4. God lowers the wicked “*to the earth*” (147:6) while “*Kings of the earth*... and all rulers of the *earth*” will praise God (148:11–13); and also: “Praise the LORD *from the earth*, you sea monsters and all deeps” (v. 7).
5. God is the ruler of the heavens, “He covers the heavens with clouds” (147:8), and from the heavens all created beings praise him (vv. 1–6).
6. The poet calls to Jerusalem, “Praise the LORD, O Zion” (147:12), and to all creation (148:1–5, 7, 13).

Psalms 148, 149

1. In Psalm 148, as we have seen, the whole of creation is called upon to praise God’s name (see particularly vv. 5, 13). In Psalm 149 the poet calls out to “the children of Zion... praise his name with dancing” (149:2–3).
2. “*Kings of the earth*” are called upon to offer their praise (148:11), but foreign kings who are deserving vengeance will be punished: “to bind *their kings* with fetters” (149:8).
3. Also “*judges of the earth*” are called upon to offer praise (148:11), and they, too, will be among those whom God will punish, “to execute on them the *judgment* [*mišpāt*] decreed” (149:9).
4. God looks after his people, “He has raised up a horn for *his people*... who are close to him” (148:14), “For the LORD takes pleasure in *his people*” (149:4).

5. God brings about “praise for all his faithful [*tēhillā lēkol-ḥāsīdāyw*]” (148:14), which, in Psalm 149, is defined as “glory for all his faithful [*ḥādār ḥū lēkol-ḥāsīdāyw*]” (149:9), and his faithful repay him in kind: “*his praise* [*tēhillātō*] in the assembly of *the faithful* [*ḥāsīdīm*]” (149:1).

Psalms 149, 150

1. The poet calls out to sing to the Lord “his praise” (149:1) and again calls out for his praise in the final psalm of the Psalter (150:1–6).
2. In Psalm 149, the writer urges praise of God “with dancing, . . . with tambourine and lyre” (149:3), a list that is repeated and added to in Psalm 150, “Praise him with lute and lyre. Praise him with tambourine and dance . . .” (vv. 3–4).

The conclusion of Psalm 150, “Let everything that breathes praise God . . .” (v. 6), creates a fitting framework that opened with 145:21: “all flesh will bless his holy name . . .”

CONCLUSION

In this study we have seen how the incorporation of individual psalms (137) or blocks of psalms (139–144) generated a network of connections and relationships that displaced previous connections broken by the new arrangement. This new complex of associative-linguistic relationships entailed exegetical consequences: reading psalms in a sequence encourages us to see the developments implied by that order.

The psalms’ superscriptions also help tighten the connections between individual psalms and between blocks of psalms. This tendency is even more pronounced in the Septuagint. Psalms 136–150, the sequence that we have here examined, include two historical psalms (136–137), the one an offering of praise to God for the wonders wrought in creation and throughout history (136), and the other a lament for the destruction of the Temple (137). Psalm 138 signals the resumption of song and thanksgiving, but it heralds a group of supplication psalms (139–144) that, in turn, prepare the way for the thanksgiving psalm, Psalm 144. At its conclusion, Psalm 144 inaugurates the songs of praise that will bring to conclusion the fifth book of Psalms and, with it, the Psalter itself. The relationship between these two groupings of psalms—Psalms 139–144 and 145–150—is like that between the two historical psalms 136 and 137 but in reverse. We must remember, too, that Psalm 137 is not wholly devoid of hope: The poet’s bond with God endures, and God is called upon to remember and to act. This is true also in the supplication psalms (139–144). In addition, we see how Psalm 136, a call to give thanks to God for his steadfast love, is a sort of precursor, preparing us for the group of psalms that will seal the book, all psalms of praise to God.

NOTES

1. In LXX, Psalm 137 has a superscription (“To David”) that connects it with the psalms that follow it.
2. Creating bookends was favored also by the redactors of the Bible’s historiographic narrative. I bring two examples (of many): The story of the Exodus from Egypt opens with the Sea of Reeds being divided (Exod. 14–15) and closes with the dividing of the waters of the Jordan (Josh. 6:3–4). The cluster of stories telling about the building of the Temple in the Book of Chronicles opens and closes with tales of miracles of fire descending from heaven onto the altar (1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1–3), miracles absent from its sources in the Early Prophets.
3. See Zakovitch 2005: 7–14.
4. In LXX Psalm 144, the superscription specifies that the psalm is about David’s victory over Goliath.
5. LXX attributes both Psalms to Haggai and Zechariah. Apart from these two prophets being juxtaposed in the Minor Prophets, they are mentioned together also in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.

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CHAPTER 15

UNROLLING THE DEAD SEA PSALMS SCROLLS

PETER W. FLINT

AMONG the scrolls found in the Judean desert, forty-five were Psalms manuscripts or ones that incorporate Psalms. Of these, forty-two were found near Qumran, one at Nahal Hever, and two at Masada. Only Deuteronomy is represented by a comparable number of copies (forty-two scrolls, thirty-nine of them near Qumran).

As our earliest extant witnesses to the scriptural text of the Psalms, these scrolls have important implications for understanding the Psalms in the later Second Temple period and their finalization as a collection. In addition, the prominence of the Psalms scrolls at Qumran highlights the importance of the Psalms among the Yahad or Essene movement, whose most prominent center was at the site. All the Psalms scrolls were discovered over a relatively short period of time, from 1949 to 1965. However, their impact upon scholars and their relevance for the Book of Psalms has taken many decades to unfold and, indeed, is still unrolling today.

This article surveys the discovery of the Psalms scrolls and the caves that contained them and then presents five phases of research on the Psalms scrolls and some conclusions on the development of the Book of Psalms. Next follow data and items for further research on the Psalms scrolls, as well as details of new publication projects featuring the Psalms scrolls (Section 5). The article concludes with a Bibliography and makes reference to two appendices featured at the end this volume: (I) “Apocryphal Psalms” and Related Compositions in the Psalms Scrolls or Texts Incorporating Psalms, and (II) Contents of the Psalms Scrolls and Related Manuscripts.

DISCOVERY OF THE PSALMS SCROLLS AND THE CAVES THAT CONTAINED THEM

Cave 1

From February 15 to March 5, 1949, archaeologists excavated Cave 1 under the auspices of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, the École Biblique et Archéologique Française (the French Archaeological School), and the Palestine Archaeological Museum. The leaders were G. Lankester Harding, Director of Antiquities in Jordan, and Père Roland de Vaux, Director of the École. About 600 fragments from numerous scrolls were found, together with the remains of many jars and other objects such as linens. The manuscripts include three fragmentary Psalms scrolls (1QPs^a, 1QPs^b, and 1QPs^c).

Caves 2–11

Between 1952 and 1956, ten more caves were discovered in the vicinity of Qumran, not all of which contained scrolls. Surveys to locate caves were conducted by Harding and de Vaux, who found seven minor caves (3–5, 7–10), none of which contained extensive manuscript remains. However, with their intimate knowledge of the terrain, the Bedouin discovered the three richest caves (1, 4, 11) and two minor ones (2 and 6). The manuscript remains include four Psalms scrolls from the Minor Caves (3QPs, 5QPs, pap6QPs, and 8QS), twenty-five from Cave 4 (of which two incorporate psalms), and six from Cave 11. The most extensive of these manuscripts is the Great Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 (11QPs^a).

Other Sites in the Judean Desert

Several other sites were found with caves containing scrolls and artifacts, notably Wadi Murabba'at, Nahal Hever, and Masada. Nahal Hever was found by Bedouin in 1952 and excavated in 1960–61. A large number of scroll fragments were found in Cave 5/6 (the Cave of Letters) and a few in Cave 8 (the Cave of Horrors). A few of these are biblical, including one Psalms scroll found in Cave 5/6. Masada, the last rebel stronghold in the First Jewish Revolt (68–73), was excavated in 1963–65. The site yielded more than 700 ostraca (pottery with writing), mostly in Hebrew or Aramaic. Fragments of fifteen manuscripts were also found, seven of them biblical, including two Psalms scrolls (MasPs^a and MasQPs^b).

Five Phases of Research on the Psalms Scrolls

Phase I: Cave 1 and the Minor Caves (1947–1962)

Beginning with the excavation of Cave 1 in 1947, this period includes the publication of the three Cave 1 Psalms scrolls by Dominique Barthélemy and J. T. Milik in the first volume in the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert (DJD) series (Barthélemy and Milik 1955) and culminates with the five Psalms scrolls from the “Minor Caves” published in 1962 (DJD 3; Baillet, Milik, and de Vaux 1962).

Note on the Tables: “Variant order” means a sequence of psalms different from the one found in the Masoretic Text. “Different content” denotes apocryphal psalms or other compositions in the same manuscript. “Range of contents” denotes the earliest and latest verse in the Masoretic order of Psalms 1–150. This does not necessarily imply that all the intervening text is preserved in a particular scroll, nor even that it contained psalms in that order. In addition, for keeping track of the number of psalms (out of 150) and apocryphal psalms (or other compositions) in the Psalms scrolls, “cumulative totals” for each follow each table.

As Table 15.1 suggests and Appendix II makes clear, sixteen psalms are represented in these manuscripts: 2, 17–18, 44, 78, 86, 92, 94–96, 103, 104, 119, 126–28. All are very fragmentary, with some (3QPs and pap6QPs) preserving only a few words. One Psalms scroll was written on papyrus (hence pap6QPs) instead of the much more common leather. Not surprisingly, text from Psalm 119 is preserved in two manuscripts: 1QPs^a and 5QPs.

During Phase I, scholars noted a few variant readings against the Masoretic Psalter in three scrolls (1QPs^a, 1QPs^b, and 8QPs) but found no variations in the order of psalms, as well as no differences in content (i.e., apocryphal psalms or other compositions). It seemed evident that for the scribes who copied these Psalms scrolls (and their readers), the Book of Psalms was very much like the collection of 150 psalms found in the Masoretic Text.

Table 15.1 Qumran and the Minor Caves

Scroll by Siglum	Scroll by Number	Variant Order	Different Content	Range of Contents (Using MT Order)	Date or Period when Copied
1QPs ^a	1Q10			86:5 to 119:80	c. 50 BCE
1QPs ^b	1Q11			126:6 to 128:3	1st century CE
1QPs ^c	1Q12			44:3 to 44:25	Herodian
2QPs	2Q14			103:2 to 104:11	Herodian
3QPs	3Q2			2:6–7	1st century CE
5QPs	5Q5			119:99 to 119:42	1st century CE
pap6QPs	6Q5			78:36–37	?
8QPs	8Q2			17:5 to 18:13	1st century CE

Cumulative Psalms Count: 16

Apocryphal Psalms Count: 0

Phase II: *The Great Psalms Scroll from Cave 11* (1965–1985)

This phase begins with the edition of 11QPs^a in DJD 4 (Sanders 1965), continues with the publication of another section of this scroll (Sanders 1967), and extends up to 1985 (the first extensive use of the Cave 4 Psalms scrolls). The Great Psalms Scroll preserves text from thirty-two psalms not counted so far, as well as eleven apocryphal psalms (or other compositions). Added to those in Phase I, our new totals are forty-eight psalms and eleven apocryphal psalms (or other compositions). See Table 15.2

In 1961, James Sanders unrolled the Great Psalm Scroll (11QPs^a), which appeared four years later as *The Psalms Scroll of Qumrân Cave 11* (11QPs^a) in DJD 4 (Sanders 1965). Two years later, he published *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll*, a more popular edition with facing Hebrew text and English translation (Sanders 1967). This “Cornell Edition” incorporated an additional part of the manuscript (Fragment E), which Yigael Yadin had published a year earlier (Yadin 1966a).

The manuscript diverges radically from the MT-150 Psalter, both in the ordering of contents and in the presence of eleven additional compositions. Forty-nine pieces are preserved—with at least one more (Psalm 120) now missing—in the following order (→ indicates that a composition follows directly, not by reconstruction):

Psalm 101 → 102 → 103; 109; 118 → 104 → 147 → 105 → 146 → 148 [+ 120] → 121 → 122 → 123 → 124 → 125 → 126 → 127 → 128 → 129 → 130 → 131 → 132 → 119 → 135 → 136 → *Catena* → 145(with postscript) → 154 → *Plea for Deliverance* → 139 → 137 → 138 → Sirach 51 → *Apostrophe to Zion* → Psalm 93 → 141 → 133 → 144 → 155 → 142 → 143 → 149 → 150 → *Hymn to the Creator* → David’s Last Words → *David’s Compositions* → Psalm 140 → 134 → 151A → 151B → blank column [*end*]

For scholars who believed that early Jews used only one overall edition of the Psalter—the 150 psalms found in the MT and in that order—the explanation for the arrangement in 11QPs^a was simple. They viewed it as a liturgical collection of psalms from the MT-150 Psalter and other compositions, rearranged in its own order. However, as Sanders studied the scroll and produced the DJD edition, he was coming to very different conclusions. In a series of articles commencing with “Variorum in the Psalms Scroll (11QPs^a)” (Sanders 1966), he developed conclusions that challenged traditional views on the text

Table 15.2 The Great Psalms Scroll from Cave 11					
Scroll by Siglum	Scroll by Number	Variant Order	Different Content	Range of Contents (Using MT Order)	Date or Periodwhen Copied
11QPs ^a	11Q5	X	X	93:1 to 150:6	30–50 CE
Cumulative Psalms Count: 32 new + 16 previous = 48					
Apocryphal Psalms: 11 new + 0 previous = 11					

and canonization of the Book of Psalms (Sanders 1968; Sanders 1974). Most notably, this Qumran Psalms hypothesis maintained that:

- The Great Psalms Scroll contains the latter part of an edition of the “Book of Psalms,” and is part of a true Davidic Psalter, at least for the community associated with Qumran.
- 11QPs^a and other Psalms scrolls bear witness to a Psalter that was stabilized over time in two distinct stages: first Psalms 1–89 or so, and then Psalms 90 (or 93) onwards. (The precise cutoff point is unclear, since Psalm 93 is the earliest one preserved by this scroll in terms of the Masoretic order).

For well over a decade following the publication of 11QPs^a, a heated debate took place. On one side were most scholars, such as Shemaryahu Talmon (see Talmon 1966; Talmon 1967), G. H. Goshen-Gottstein (see Goshen-Gottstein 1966), and Patrick Skehan (see Skehan 1973; Skehan 1978; Skehan 1980), who maintained that the MT-150 Psalter had already been finalized (or virtually so) centuries before the Common Era and that 11QPs^a is a liturgical collection derived from, and secondary to, the MT. On the other side, and almost alone, was Sanders, who defended and refined his view that 11QPs^a contains the latter part of an authentic edition of the Book of Psalms, which I have termed the “11QPs^a-Psalter” (For more details on this interchange, see Flint 1997 and Flint 2006.)

The proposal that 11QPs^a contains the latter part of an edition of the Book of Psalms was also viewed with scepticism. For example, Patrick Skehan argued (1978: 170) that 11QPs^a is almost fully extant, originally began with Psalm 101 in Fragment A, and never contained text from Psalms 1–89 (or Psalms 1–92). Reconstruction confirms this to be the case, thus calling for evidence from other scrolls.

As George Brooke observes (1989: 269), the debate between Sanders and these formidable opponents was centered on a single manuscript. Eventually an impasse was reached, one that called for further evidence and additional data. In particular, is there further evidence for the 11QPs^a-Psalter in manuscripts other than the Great Psalms Scroll? And is there evidence that this Psalter originally contained psalms from its earlier part (Psalms 1–89 or thereabouts)?

The first additional evidence was in three Psalms scrolls from sites other than Qumran, published by Yigael Yadin in very preliminary and incomplete editions: the Nahal Hever Psalms scroll (Yadin 1961) and the two Masada Psalm scrolls (Yadin 1965; Yadin 1966b). These scrolls lent some impetus to the view that the MT-150 Psalter had already been finalized before the Common Era and that 11QPs^a was a secondary liturgical collection. However, since the final and far more extensive editions were to appear many years later, these three Psalms scrolls are discussed under Phase IV below.

Phase III: Psalms Scrolls (or Texts Incorporating Psalms) from Cave 4 (1965–2000)

This period begins with the first book to make extensive use of the Cave 4 Psalms scrolls, Gerald Wilson’s *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985), and culminates with the

publication of virtually all these manuscripts in DJD 16 (Skehan, Ulrich, and Flint 2000). *Note:* One of the Cave 4 scrolls listed in the table (*Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* = 4Q448) was published separately in DJD 11 (Eshel, Eshel, and Yardeni 1998). Also, the *Prophecy* (or *Apocryphon*) of *Joshua* (4Q522) was published in DJD 25 (Puech 1998); the portion containing Psalm 122:1–9 was republished in DJD 16 (Skehan, Ulrich, and Flint 2000: 169–70).

Building on several articles and his Yale dissertation, Wilson published *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* in 1985. Since Patrick Skehan, who was preparing the Cave 4 Psalms Scrolls for the DJD series, had given him access to his notes and transcriptions, Wilson

Table 15.3 Psalms Scrolls (or Texts Incorporating Psalms) from Cave 4

Scroll by Siglum	Scroll by Number	Variant Order	Different Content	Range of Contents (Using MT Order)	Date or Period when Copied
4QPs ^a	4Q83	X		5:9 to 71:14	mid-2d century BCE
4QPs ^b	4Q84	X		91:5 to 118:29	Herodian
4QPs ^c	4Q85			16:7 to 53:1	c. 50–68 CE
4QPs ^d	4Q86	X		104:1 to 147:20	mid-1st century BCE
4QPs ^e	4Q87	X		76:10 to 146:1(?)	mid-1st century CE
4QPs ^f	4Q88	X	X	22:15 to 109:28	c. 50 BCE
4QPs ^g	4Q89			119:37 to 119:92	c. 50 CE
4QPs ^h	4Q90			119:10–21	Herodian
4QPs ⁱ	4Q91			48:1 to 53:5	c. 50 CE
4QPs ^k	4Q92	X		(?)99:1 to 135:16	1st century BCE
4QPs ^l	4Q93			104:3 to 104:12	2d half 1st century BCE
4QPs ^m	4Q94			93:3 to 98:8	Herodian
4QPs ⁿ	4Q95	X		135:6 to 136:23	Herodian
4QPs ^o	4Q96			114:7 to 116:10	late 1st century BCE
4QPs ^p	4Q97			143:3 to 143:8	Herodian
4QPs ^q	4Q98	X		31:24 to 35:20	mid-1st century CE
4QPs ^r	4Q98a			26:7 to 30:13	Herodian
4QPs ^s	4Q98b			5:6 to 6:1	50–68 CE
4QPs ^t	4Q98c			88:15–17	50 CE or later
4QPs ^u	4Q98d			42:5 only	c. 50 CE
4QPs ^v	4Q98e			99:1 only	late 1st century CE
4QPs ^w	4Q98f			12:1–9	Hasmonean
4QPs ^x	4Q236			89:20 to 89:31	175–125 BCE
4Q <i>Apocryphal Psalm & Prayer</i>	4Q448		X	154:17–20	103–76 BCE
4Q <i>Prophecy of Joshua</i>	4Q522		X	122:1 to 122:9	mid-1st century BCE
Cumulative Psalms Count: 51 new + 48 previous = 99					
Apocryphal Psalms: 4 new + 11 previous = 15					

was able to take into consideration 11QPs^a and most of the Cave 4 scrolls. His research expanded the Psalms debate and contributed significantly to the discussion. Wilson's conclusions support several elements of the Qumran Psalms hypothesis, especially that many Psalms scrolls point to stabilization the Book of Psalms over time and that 11QPs^a was regarded a true scriptural Psalter rather than a secondary collection.

His analysis shows that 11QPs^a-Psalter was organized in accordance with principles similar to those found in Books IV and V in the MT-150 Psalter. This is most evident in the juxtaposition of superscripts and postscripts,¹ which highlight different kinds of groupings in 11QPs^a. One example is found in Fragment E plus Columns 1–2 (Table 15:4).

Wilson noted the regularity of this structure but also its variation from the MT-150 Psalter. He also regarded the alternation between *hwdw* and *hllw-yh* psalms as systematic, since the *hwdw* phrase in Psalm 105 is an “addition” when compared to the Received Psalter. Wilson concluded (1985: 126) that this addition was made intentionally in order to fill out the symmetry of the grouping in 11QPs^a. The similarity in organization to the MT-150 Psalter is apparent. In that collection, for example, the principle of juxtaposing *hllw-yh* psalms occurs in the grouping of Psalms 104–106, which concludes Book IV, and in the grouping of Psalms 146–150, which concludes Book V (Table 15:5).

With respect to earlier psalms in the traditional sequence, my own analysis (Flint 1997: 141–46, 168–69) shows that 4QPs^a is an important witness to the stabilization of the first part of the Psalter. This is the oldest of the Psalms scrolls (dated to about 150 BCE) and second only to 11QPs^a with respect to the number of verses represented. Among the twenty-two identified fragments (some quite substantial), text from nineteen psalms is found, and three more (64, 65, and 68) may be included on the basis of reconstruction. Among all the Psalms scrolls found in the Judean Desert, 4QPs^a alone contains material from Psalms 34, 38, 47, 54, 56, 62–63, 66–67, and 69.

Since some fragments preserve portions of more than one psalm and others are contiguous, several psalms directly followed others, usually physically (denoted by →), and in some cases by reconstruction (denoted by [→]). The overall contents are as follows (verse numbers not included):

Psalms 5 → 6; 25; 31 → 33; 34 → 35 → 36; 38 → 71; 47; 53 → 54; 56; 62 → 63 [→ 64 → 65 →] 66 → 67 [→ 68 →] 69

Table 15.4 Juxtaposition of Superscripts and Postscripts in 11QPs^a

Psalms	Superscript	Postscript
118	[<i>hwdw lyhwh ky t̄wb</i>] ³	_____
104	<i>ldwyd</i>	<i>hllwyh</i>
147	[_____]	[<i>hllw yh</i>]
105	<i>hwdw lyhwh ky t̄wb</i>	[?]
146	[?]	<i>hllwyh</i>
148	_____	[<i>hllw yh</i>]

Table 15.5 Juxtaposition of Superscripts and Postscripts in Psalms Closing Books IV and V of the Psalter.

Psalm	Superscript	Postscript
104		<i>hllwyh</i>
105		<i>hllwyh</i>
106	<i>hllwyh hwdw</i>	Doxology— <i>hllwyh</i>
146	<i>hllwyh</i>	<i>hllwyh</i>
147	<i>hllwyh</i>	<i>hllwyh</i>
148	<i>hllwyh</i>	<i>hllwyh</i>
149	<i>hllwyh</i>	<i>hllwyh</i>
150	<i>hllwyh</i>	<i>hllwyh</i>

4QPs^a generally reflects stabilization of the first part of the Psalter (at least from Psalms 5 through 69). However, two striking deviations are evident. Psalm 31 is directly followed by Psalm 33 (a sequence also found in 4QPs^a), and Psalm 38 is directly followed by Psalm 71.

In summing up Phase III, the Cave 4 Psalms scrolls speak to the Qumran Psalms hypothesis in two ways:

- They indicate that the 11QPs^a-Psalter was organized in accordance with principles similar to the ones used for Books IV and V in the MT-150 Psalter. This supports the view that the Great Psalms Scroll contains the latter part of an edition of the Book of Psalms and is part of a true Davidic Psalter.
- 4QPs^a (and a few other, less preserved, Psalms scrolls) point to stabilization of the first part of the Psalter (at least from Psalms 5 through 69, the cutoff point being uncertain). This supports the view that 11QPs^a bears witness to a Psalter that was stabilized over time in two distinct stages.

However, three problems remained. The first was surprising to many scholars: None of the Cave 4 Psalms scrolls *unambiguously* confirmed the overall order of the received Masoretic Text (1–150) as opposed to the 11QPs^a-Psalter. Appealing to arrangements such as Psalms 125–130 in 4QPs^c in support of the MT-150 Psalter was inconclusive, since this sequence is also found in 11QPs^a.

Second, do any of the Cave 4 scrolls represent the 11QPs^a-Psalter? The only possible candidate is 4QPs^c, which possibly has a distinctive arrangement found also in 11QPs^a: Psalms 118 → 104 [→ 147 →] 105 → 146(?). (If so, 4QPs^c may be considered the only exemplar of the 11QPs^a-Psalter from Cave 4.) However, this sequence is not assured, since much of the text is no longer preserved and Psalm 147 has to be reconstructed. This scroll is revisited in the discussion of another Psalms scroll from Cave 11 (11QPs^b) in Phase IV below.

Third, is there any evidence among the Cave 4 scrolls that the Psalter represented by 11QPs^a (as the second half of the “11QPs^a-Psalter”) originally contained any psalms prior

to 93? Again, only 4QPs^c may qualify. If it has the distinctive arrangement mentioned above, then 4QPs^c also provides evidence for the earlier part of this Psalter, since it preserves text from Psalms 76–78, 81, 86, and 88–89.

Phase IV: Additional Psalms Scrolls from Cave 11 and Psalms Scrolls from Other Sites in the Judean Desert (1998–2000)

This period extends from the publication of four more Psalms scrolls from Cave 11 (DJD 23; García Martínez, Tigchelaar, and van der Woude 1998). It includes the full editions (Talmon 1999) of the two Psalms scrolls found at Masada and ends with Peter W. Flint's edition of the Nahal Hever Psalms scroll in DJD 38 (Flint 2000). While there is some overlap with Phase III, two distinctive features concerning the shape of the Book of Psalms are highlighted during this phase (Table 15.6).

The twenty-four psalms not previously counted are all from the earlier part of the traditional Psalter: Psalms 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 23, 25, 60, 39, 40, 43, 59, 60(?), 68, 81, 82, 83, 84, and 85. Six apocryphal psalms are also featured: three already known from 11QPs^a and three previously unknown *Songs against Demons* in 11QApocryphal Psalms.

These Psalms scrolls are important for understanding the finalization of the Book of Psalms, in four respects:

- *Stabilization of the first part of the Psalter:* Like 4QPs^a, the Nahal Hever Psalms scroll (with text from Psalms 7 to 31) and the first Masada scroll (MasPs^a, with portions of Psalms 81 to 85) speak to the stabilization of the first part of the Psalter (up to 89 or so, the cutoff point not being certain).

Table 15.6 Additional Psalms Scrolls from Cave 11 and Psalms Scrolls from Other Sites

Scroll by Siglum	Scroll by Number	Variant Order	Different Content	Range of Contents (Using MT Order)	Date or Period when Copied
11QPs ^b	11Q6	X	X	77:18 to 144:2	1st half of 1st century CE
11QPs ^c	11Q7			2:1 to 25:27	Herodian
11QPs ^d	11Q8			6:2 to 116:1	Herodian
11QPs ^e	11Q9			50:5–7	Herodian
11QapocrPs	11Q11	X	X	91:1 to 91:16	mid-1st century CE
5/6HevPs	5/6Hev 1b			7:13 to 31:22	2d half of 1st century CE
MasPs ^a	M1039–160			81:2 to 85:6	1st half of 1st century CE
MasPs ^b	M1103–1742			150:1–6	2d half of 1st century BCE

Cumulative Psalms Count: 24 new + 99 previous = 123

Apocryphal Psalms: 3 new + 15 previous = 18

- *Ending of the MT-150 Psalter:* The second Masada scroll (MasPs^b) provides the first evidence of a book of Psalms ending with Psalms 150 (150 → blank column). Although the scroll preserves only Psalms 147:18–19 and 150:1–6, to many scholars the Psalter that it represents originally contained all or some of the precursor to the MT-150 Psalter.
- *Confirmation of the 11QPs^a-Psalter:* The second Psalms scroll from Cave 11 (11QPs^b) is a true exemplar of the 11QPs^a-Psalter. It features both the distinctive arrangement found in 11QPs^a (Psalms 141 → 133 → 144) and its distinctive contents (the Catena, Plea for Deliverance, and Apostrophe to Zion).
- *The full 11QPs^a-Psalter includes a first half not found in the Great Psalms Scroll:* 11QPs^b preserves material from both the earlier and later sections of the 11QPs^a-Psalter. In the preliminary editions by J. P. M. van der Ploeg (1967, 1992), the scroll began with Psalm 119, which lent no support for the existence of earlier material in the 11QPs^a-Psalter. However, in the critical edition in DJD 23 (García Martínez, Tigchelaar, and van der Woude 1998), the editors include Psalm 77:18–78:1 as Fragment 1 on the basis of the scribal hand and length of lines,² which confirms that this Psalter included material preceding the psalms found in 11QPs^a. Also, as discussed under Phase III, if 4QPs^c indeed preserves a distinctive arrangement found in the 11QPs^a-Psalter, it also preserves text from this Psalter (portions of Psalms 76–78, 81, 86, and 88–89).

Phase V: Newly “Discovered” Psalms Scrolls (Since 2000)

Almost all the Psalms scrolls were published among the forty volumes by Oxford University Press in the DJD series from 1955 to 2011, and the two scrolls found at Masada were published in 1999 in the sixth volume (*Masada VI*) of the Yigael Yadin Excavations.

Since 2000 (the publication of the Nahal Hever Psalm scroll in DJD 38 [Flint 2000]), several additional Dead Sea Scrolls, most containing biblical texts, have been purchased by collectors and institutions in Europe and the United States. It appears that most or all of these scrolls were found in the caves near Qumran, including the following:

- *2000–2005:* Martin Schøyen (a Norwegian collector of manuscripts) purchased about forty Dead Sea Scrolls. Most are biblical fragments, including portions of the Pentateuch, Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Nehemiah, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets. There is also one Psalms scroll, with text from Psalm 9:8–13.
- *2010:* Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Fort Worth, Texas) bought an ancient pen used at Qumran and fragments of six biblical scrolls, including Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Daniel, and one Psalms scroll (with text from Psalm 22:4–13). These were the centerpiece of an exhibit, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible: Ancient Artifacts, Timeless Treasures* (July 2, 2012–January 13, 2013).
- *2011:* The Green Collection (Oklahoma City) purchased twelve scrolls, of which eleven contain biblical texts, including portions of the Pentateuch, Prophetic

books, and Nehemiah. There is also one Psalms scroll, with text from Psalm 11:1–4. Some of these have featured in several *Passages* exhibits, for example in Atlanta (November 19, 2011–June 30, 2012) and at the Vatican (March 1–April 15, 2012).

Table 15.7 Newly “Discovered” Psalms Scrolls

Scroll by Siglum	Scroll by Number	Variant Order	Different Content	Range of Contents (Using MT Order)	Date or Period when Copied
XQPs A	Schøyen Ps			9:8–13	Herodian?
XQPs B	SwB Ps			22:4–13	Herodian?
XQPs C	Green Ps			11:1–4	Herodian?

Note: “XQ” denotes Qumran, but that the number of the cave is uncertain.

No additional psalms to those featured in Phases I–IV are found in these three Psalms scrolls.

Cumulative Psalms Count: 123

Apocryphal Psalms: 18

As the “Cumulative Psalms Counts” and “Apocryphal Psalms Counts” below the tables show, the forty volumes in the DJD series, the *Masada* VI volume, and the three subsequent Psalm scrolls contain text from 123 psalms and 18 apocryphal compositions. The number of psalms may be raised to 124, since Psalm 1:1 is quoted in the *Florilegium* (4Q174) column 3:14.

Of the 150 psalms in the traditional MT-Psalter, no text has been found so far from the remaining 26 psalms. For a list, see below (“Number of Psalms Represented in the Psalms Scrolls”), which indicates that most of the “missing” psalms are alluded to or quoted in various non-biblical scrolls. There are no missing compositions among the apocryphal psalms. However, since some Psalms scrolls include *Psalms* 151, 154, and 155, and some editions of the Syriac Bible contain *Psalms* 151–155, it is noted that *Psalms* 152 and 153 have not been found among the scrolls.

Additional Psalms scrolls will no doubt come to light, since dozens of manuscripts discovered in the caves at Qumran and elsewhere have yet to be made public. As of 2013, I am aware of one more Psalms scroll (containing Ps. 119:40–41) that has been offered for sale.

CONCLUSIONS ON THE PSALMS SCROLLS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Taking into account the evidence from all the Psalms scrolls, it is clear that these manuscripts attest to diversity concerning the shape of the Psalter, not to uniformity in

accordance with the MT-150 Psalter. Eugene Ulrich proposes (1999: 99–120) that during the closing centuries of the Second Temple period, Judaism knew variant literary editions for half or more of the later *Tanakh*. His forthcoming article in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible* states that “variant editions for half or more of the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible existed in Jewish circles at the birth of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism.”

We may conclude that three editions of the Psalms were in circulation in the late Second Temple period (at least among the *Yahad* or Essene movement, whose most prominent center was at Qumran):

Edition I: An early edition of the Psalter that was mostly stabilized, beginning with Psalms 1 or 2 and ending with Psalm 89 or 92 (the cutoff point is not certain). The earliest and most complete example is 4QPs^a, which preserves text from Psalms 5–71 (see Phase III above).

Edition IIa: The 11QPs^a-Psalter, consisting of Edition I plus Psalms 101–151 as found in the Great Psalms Scroll and including at least Psalm 93. It is attested by three manuscripts (11QPs^a, 11QPs^b, and possibly 4QPs^c) with common arrangements of key compositions (*the Catena, Plea for Deliverance, and Apostrophe to Zion*) and the sequence Psalms 141 → 133 → 144 in 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b, and perhaps the sequence Psalms 118 → 104 → [147 →] 105 → 146 in 4QPs^c.

Edition IIb: The MT-150 Psalter, comprising Edition I plus Psalms 90 to 150 as found in the Masoretic Text. It is surprising that this arrangement is not *unambiguously* confirmed by any Qumran scroll (see Phase III above). Some confirmation is provided by MasPs^b (copied in the second half of the 1st century BCE.), which ends with Psalm 150, with blank leather following (see Phase IV above). The MT-150 Psalter, or parts of it, were likely found in several Qumran Psalms scrolls before they were so damaged, but most are too fragmentary for any real conclusions to be reached.

Additional Collections of Psalms. Further arrangements of psalms appear in several scrolls from Qumran. None of these are editions of the Book of Psalms but rather arrangements of material from Edition IIa or Edition IIb and other poems. The most prominent are:

- 4QPs^b (includes Psalms 103 → 112, with 104–111 lacking)
- 4QPs^d (Psalms 106 → 147 → 104); 4QPs^f (includes Psalms 107 [+ 108?] +109 and several apocryphal psalms)
- 4QPs^k (preserves the bottoms of two adjoining columns, the first containing parts of 135:6–16 and the second portions of 99:1–5)
- 4QPsⁿ (135:11–12 followed directly by 136:22–23)
- 11QapocPs (three apocryphal psalms followed directly by Psalm 91).

In summary, the shape of the various Psalms scrolls leads to a reassessment of the development of the Psalter in the Second Temple period. The Book of Psalms was put together in a first stage: Edition I. This was followed by two parallel stages: Edition IIa

(Edition I plus Psalms 90 or 93 onwards = the 11QPs^a-Psalter) and Edition IIb (Edition I plus Psalms 90 to 150 = the MT-150 Psalter).

DATA AND ITEMS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE PSALMS SCROLLS

The Psalms scrolls contain a wealth of information that will prove helpful for scholars investigating the text of individual psalms, writing commentaries on the Psalms, and researching the finalization of the Book of Psalms.

Datings of the Psalms Scrolls

As detailed in the tables, the Psalms scrolls found in the Judaean Desert for which dates can be determined were copied from the 2d century BCE to the late 1st century CE.

- At least sixteen are dated before the Common Era. The two oldest (4QPs^a 4QPs^w) were copied c. 150 BCE; another (4QPs^x) between 175 and 125 BCE; one (*Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* [4Q448]) between 102 and 76 BCE; one (*Prophecy of Joshua* [4Q522]) in the mid-1st century BCE; eleven in the 1st century BCE (1QPs^a, 4QPs^b, 4QPs^d, 4QPs^f, 4QPs^k, 4QPs^l, 4QPsⁿ, 4QPs^o, 4QPs^u, MasPs^b); and one (4QPs^v) is more loosely classified as “Hasmonean.”
- Six are classified as “Herodian” (1QPs^c, 2QPs, 4QPs^b, 4QPs^m, 4QPs^p, 4QPs^r).
- Four Psalms scrolls are assigned to the 1st century CE (1QPs^v, 3QPs, 5QPs, 8QPs).
- Ten are dated more precisely to the early to mid-1st century CE (4QPs^s, 4QPs^g, 4QPs^j, 4QPs^q, 4QPs^t, 11QPs^a, 11QPs^b, 11QPs^c, 11QPs^d, MasPs^a).
- The four latest Psalms scrolls (4QPs^c, 4QPs^s, 11QapocPs, 5/6HevPs) were copied in the mid-1st century CE onwards.

AMOUNT OF TEXT PRESERVED IN THE PSALMS SCROLLS

In decreasing order, the Psalms manuscripts with the highest number of verses preserved (whether wholly or in part) are: 11QPs^a, 4QPs^a, 5/6HevPs, 4QPs^b, 4QPs^c, and 4QPs^e. Such scrolls most likely contained a form of the Book of Psalms when they were fully extant. Of all forty-four manuscripts, only five now preserve material from both Psalms 1–89 and 90–150, namely, 1QPs^a, 4QPs^e, 4QPs^f, 11QPs^b, 11QPs^d.

Most Psalms scrolls consist of one or few fragments, with the following preserving very little text: 1QPs^b, 1QPs^c, 2QPs, 3QPs, 4QPs^h, 4QPsⁱ, 4QPs^p, 4QPs^t, 4QPs^u, 4QPs^v, pap6QPs, and 11QPs^e(?). Several Psalms scrolls were never copies of the Psalter in their undamaged state. Some consisted of smaller sections or even individual psalms. For example, 4QPs^g, 4QPs^h, and 5QPs probably contained only Psalm 119.

NUMBER OF PSALMS REPRESENTED IN THE PSALMS SCROLLS

As indicated in “Accumulative Psalms Counts,” Psalms scrolls found and related texts contain text from 123 psalms and 18 apocryphal compositions. This number can be raised to 124, since Psalm 1:1 is quoted in the *Florilegium* (4Q174) column 3:14. In addition, Psalm 108:8–9 may be quoted in the first *Psalms Pesher* from Cave 4 (4Q171) Fragment 13, lines 3–4. However, since this may also be a quotation of Psalm 60:6–7, it has not been counted.

Of the 150 Psalms in the traditional MT-Psalter, no text has been found so far from twenty-six. Using the structure of the MT-Psalter, of Psalms 1–89 twenty-one no longer survive (3–4, 20–21, 32, 41, 46?, 55, 57–58, 61, 64–65, 70, 72–75, 79–80, and 87). Of Psalms 90–150, only five are not represented (90, 108?, 110, 111, and 117). The reason for this discrepancy is that the beginnings of scrolls are usually on the outside and are thus far more prone to deterioration.

Most or all the “missing” twenty-six psalms were likely represented in the Psalms scrolls but are now lost due of the damaged state of the vast majority of the Psalms scrolls. Most or all are also likely alluded to or even quoted in various non-biblical scrolls (see the extensive list in Lange and Weigold [2011: 163–78]). However, many of these allusions involve only a few words of a particular psalm or an echo of it. For the list in Appendix II (“Contents of the Psalms Scrolls and Related Manuscripts”), Psalms quotations from the following texts are included:

- 1Q16 (*Pesher Psalms*)
- 1QH^a (*Hodayot* or *Thanksgiving Hymns*)
- 4Q171 (*Pesher Psalms*^a)
- 4Q173 (*Pesher Psalms*^b)
- 4Q173a (*House of the Stumbling Fragment*)
- 4Q174 (*Florilegium*)
- 4Q176 (*Tanhumim*)
- 4Q177 (*Catena A*)
- 4Q381–82 (*Non-Canonical Psalms A and B*)

APOCRYPHAL PSALMS IN THE PSALMS SCROLLS AND IN TEXTS INCORPORATING PSALMS

The Psalms scrolls and texts incorporating psalms also contain text from fifteen or sixteen compositions we would traditionally classify as apocryphal, plus at least two other texts (see the “Accumulative Psalms Counts” and comments above). These are found in only six manuscripts, three from Cave 4 (4QPs^f, *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* [4Q448], *Prophecy of Joshua* [4Q522]), and three from Cave 11 (11QPs^a, 11QPs^b, and 11QapocrPs). Of these compositions:

- Two contain material also found in the Hebrew Bible: David’s Last Words (from 2 Sam. 23:1–7) and the *Catena*. (The latter contains eight verses, seven of them from Psalm 118 but in a different order, and thus qualifies as a new composition.)
- Five were previously familiar to scholars from the Apocrypha or in some early Bibles: Sirach 51:13–30 in the Apocrypha, *Psalm 151A* and *151B* in the Septuagint, and *Psalms 154* and *155* in two Syriac Psalters.
- Eight or nine compositions (two may be parts of the same one) were unknown prior to the discovery of the Scrolls: four or five hymns concerning Zion, the Last Days, Judah, God the Creator, of deliverance (the *Apostrophe to Zion*, the *Eschatological Hymn*, the *Apostrophe to Judah*, the *Hymn to the Creator*, the *Plea for Deliverance*), one prose epilogue (David’s Compositions), and three *Songs* (or *Incantations*) *against Demons*.
- Two other previously-unknown works include Psalms. *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* (4Q448) preserves five verses (16–20) from *Psalm 154* as part of a larger psalm, followed by a *Prayer for King Jonathan*. The *Prophecy* (or *Apocryphon*) *of Joshua* (4Q522) probably ended with Psalm 122; one earlier section contains a list of cities in Canaan and the tribes to which they are assigned and another praises God’s choice of Mount Zion for the building of the Temple.

These fifteen (or sixteen) apocryphal psalms and two works that include psalms compositions are introduced in Appendix I. Translations are given for nine texts: David’s Last Words, the *Catena*, Sirach 51:13–30, *Psalm 151A*, *Psalm 151B*, the *Eschatological Hymn*, the *Apostrophe to Judah*, David’s Compositions, and the *Third Song* (or *Incantation*) *against Demons*.

FORMATS OF THE PSALMS SCROLLS

Was poetic layout to be found in ancient Hebrew manuscripts, or was this a later development? More than one arrangement of material is to be found in the Psalms scrolls. For manuscripts that preserve sufficient text or layout for an assessment to be made:

- Eleven are arranged stichometrically, or in poetic format (1QPs^a, 3QPs, 4QPs^b, 4QPs^c, 4QPs^e, 4QPs^h, 4QPs^l, *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* [4Q448], 5QPs, 8QPs, and MasPs^a).
- Twenty-one are written in prose format: two from Cave 1 (1QPs^b and 1QPs^c), two from the Minor Caves (2QPs and pap6QPs), fourteen from Cave 4 (4QPs^a, 4QPs^e, 4QPs^f, 4QPs^j, 4QPs^k, 4QPs^m, 4QPsⁿ, 4QPs^o, 4QPs^p, 4QPs^q, 4QPs^r, 4QPs^s, 4QPs^w, the *Apocryphon of Joshua* [4Q522]), and three from Cave 11 (11QPs^b, 11QPs^c, 11QPs^d).
- One (the Great Psalms Scroll, 11QPs^a) is a prose collection with one piece (Psalm 119) written in stichometric format.

These formats reinforce the view of many scholars that in the later Second Temple period there were more than one Psalters that had varying liturgical functions.

PSALM TITLES OR SUPERSCRPTIONS

Among all the Psalms scrolls, fifty-four superscriptions are preserved, for fifty-two psalms and two apocryphal psalms.

In comparison with the MT-150 Psalter, the preserved titles in the Psalms scrolls show little variation, but with some interesting exceptions. Some titles are Davidic ones: for Psalm 33 (“Of David. A Song. A Psalm. MT: none), Psalm 104 (“Of David.” MT: none), and Psalm 123 (“[A Song of] David. Of Ascents.” MT: “A Song. Of Ascents”). On the other hand, Psalm 144 lacks a title in 11QPs^a (MT: “Of David”), while for Psalm 145 the Davidic title is different (“A Prayer. Of David.” MT: “A Song of Praise. Of David”). Finally, in 11QPs^a the opening *Halleluyah* is omitted from Psalms 135, 148, and 150 but prefixed to Psalm 93 (MT: none).

For psalms found in some other Bibles, two superscriptions are preserved: for *Psalm 151A* (“A Hallelujah of David, Son of Jesse”) and for *Psalm 151B* (“At the beginning of power for David, after God’s prophet had anointed him”). In contrast, the Septuagint reworked both psalms into a single composition with a single superscription: “This Psalm is autobiographical, regarding David and outside the number (when he fought Goliath in single combat).” For more on *Psalm 151*, see Appendix I. For *Psalm 154*, featured in some manuscripts of the Syriac Psalter, no superscription is found in 11QPs^a (which preserves vv. 3–19) or in *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* (4Q448, with vv. 17–20). The same holds true for *Psalm 155* in 11QPs^a (vv. 1–19).

NEW PUBLICATION PROJECTS FEATURING THE PSALMS SCROLLS

Three new project series involve Psalms manuscripts from the Judean Desert attest to the continued relevance of these scrolls for research on the biblical text and Second Temple Judaism.

A NEW SERIES OF TEXTS: DEAD SEA SCROLLS EDITIONS

Some scrolls published in the official DJD editions need to be revised and expanded, incorporating additional pieces and including comparisons to other scrolls that were not available to the original editors. One of these is the Great Psalms Scroll (11QPs^a), discussed above. The manuscript was edited and published in a superb volume by James Sanders in DJD 4 (Sanders 1965). Most of the other Psalms scrolls were not available to Sanders, so the abundance of data they provide could not be taken into account. Fragment E (with text from Psalms 118, 104, 147, and 105) became available only after DJD 4 had been published, but Sanders was able to add it as the “Postscriptum” to his more popular Cornell Edition of 11QPs^a just as it was going to press (Sanders 1967). Thirty-one years later, Fragment E and another small one (Fragment F, with text possibly from Psalm 147:3) were published by Florentino García Martínez, Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, and A. S. van der Woude in DJD 23 (García Martínez, Tigchelaar, and van der Woude 1998). Thus the Great Psalms Scroll needs to be revised and published in a single and comprehensive edition.

In addition to such revised editions, several major scrolls were never published in official editions, and several “new” scrolls are gradually coming to light. To meet the need for more editions, a new series has been launched, “Dead Sea Scrolls Editions” (Brill Academic Publishers), with Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar as editor-in-chief. It will include a new edition of 11QPs^a (see Flint, forthcoming [b]).

A NEW CRITICAL EDITION: THE *SBL* *HEBREW BIBLE*

The biblical scrolls from the Judean Desert play a key role in understanding the development of the biblical text and arriving at the most accurate and preferred text of

Scripture. They will be a key resource for the *SBL Hebrew Bible*, the first critical edition of the Hebrew Bible. (It was previously known as the *Oxford Hebrew Bible*.)

Editions of the Hebrew Bible used to this point by scholars and laypersons contain the Masoretic Text, by far the largest among all our textual witnesses of the Hebrew Bible. This text was developed over many centuries and underwent three stages of transmission (Tov 2011: 26–36). The two most important Masoretic manuscripts are the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex.

- *The Aleppo Codex* (copied in about 925 CE) forms the basis of the *Hebrew University Bible (HUB)* project based in Jerusalem. The first published volume was *Isaiah* (1995), followed by *Jeremiah* (1997) and *Ezekiel* (2004). Many scholars consider this codex the most authoritative manuscript of the Masoretic Text, both in its consonants and vowels.
- *The Leningrad (or St. Petersburg) Codex* was copied in 1008 or 1009 CE and is the earliest complete exemplar of the Masoretic Text. The manuscript is used by most biblical scholars in its published editions, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)* and now *Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ)*, on which almost all modern English translations of the Old Testament are based.

Editions of the Hebrew Bible published so far—whether the *HUB* volumes based on the Aleppo Codex, or *BHS* and *BHQ* based on the Leningrad Codex, or earlier ones—are all “diplomatic editions” (that is, of a single manuscript).

Scholars who work with the biblical text know that every manuscript has errors, often because the copyist was careless or made mistakes. Both the Aleppo and Leningrad Codices were very carefully and meticulously copied, yet there are still hundreds of problematic readings and errors in the Hebrew text they transmit. Many of these were identified by early copyists as they transcribed the Hebrew text. However, since their reverence for the text prevented these scribes from making changes or corrections, they often wrote the correct or preferred forms in the margin (the *qere*).

In some of these cases, and many more besides, the correct or better form is preserved in biblical scrolls from the Judaeen Desert and/or in the Septuagint. Several of these are noted in *BHS*, and many more will be included in *BHQ* and *HUB*—but always in the apparatus (footnotes), never in the text itself. For many scholars and readers alike, relegating correct or preferred readings to footnotes does not seem appropriate and implies that they are not valid or convincing.

In contrast, most modern English Bibles (e.g., *RSV*, *NRSV*, *JB*, *NAB*, *NEB*, and *NIV*) include many of these correct or preferred readings in the translation itself, with problematic or incorrect readings (as in the MT) relegated to the footnotes. Since Bible translation committees involve respected textual scholars and are cautious in adopting changes, we may conclude that new readings in such translations are from a presumed “critical Hebrew text” of Scripture. This critical text is very much like the MT, but includes at least 200 readings that depart from it.

The need for a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible will be filled by the *SBL Hebrew Bible*, featuring a critical text, apparatus, and text-critical introduction and commentary. This project departs from the other major textual—and “diplomatic”—editions (i.e., *BHS*, *BHQ*, and *HUB*). Each book of the Hebrew Bible will be addressed in a separate volume, with single volumes for the Minor Prophets, the *Megillot*, and Ezra-Nehemiah. These volumes are being prepared by an international team of experienced scholars well versed in textual criticism, with Ronald Hendel (University of California, Berkeley) as editor-in-chief and to be published by the Society of Biblical Literature Press. (See separate entries under the *SBL Hebrew Bible Project* in the Bibliography.)

On the *Book of Psalms* for the *SBL Hebrew Bible* (see Flint, in forthcoming[a]), a few comments are in order. Comparison of the Psalms texts found among the scrolls, the Masoretic Text, and the Greek manuscripts shows the text of individual psalms to be quite stable. There are, however, several problematic readings in the MT. For some of these, the preferred or the correct text is to be found in key Psalms scrolls. In such cases, these readings will be seriously considered on text-critical grounds for inclusion in the critical text, not the apparatus, of *Psalms* for the *SBL Hebrew Bible*.

BIBLIA QUMRANICA: A NEW MULTICOLUMN EDITION OF THE BIBLICAL SCROLLS

Biblia Qumranica is modelled after Origen’s *Hexapla* and presents a synoptic edition of all the biblical manuscripts from Qumran and other sites near the Dead Sea, together with the Masoretic Text (the Leningrad Codex) and the Septuagint (from the Göttingen edition). The projected volumes will provide the first comparative edition of the biblical scrolls and a unique tool for text-critical analysis and comparison of the textual witnesses of the Hebrew Bible that survive from the Second Temple period.

The first volume published was Beate Ego, Armin Lange, Herman Lichtenberger and Kristin De Troyer, *The Minor Prophets* (2004), which provides a synopsis of the Minor Prophets scrolls from Qumran, Murabba’at, and Nahal Hever, the Masoretic Text, and the Septuagint. Additional books are in preparation. *The Psalms* volume (Lange and Flint forthcoming) will in some parts have more columns than several other volumes in the series because several psalms are attested by a good number of scrolls. For example, Psalm 18 is represented by no less than five manuscripts (8QPs, 11QPs^c, 11QPs^d, 5/6Hev Ps, and MasPs^a). For specific contents of each Psalms scroll, see Appendix II.

NOTES

1. Wilson’s use of the term “postscripts” is loosely defined, since the *hallelujahs* and doxologies that he cites do not strictly qualify.

2. They write: "Van der Ploeg included this fragment with 11QPs^c on the basis of a superficial similarity between it and 11QPs^c frg. 8. However, the scribal hand of frg. 1 bears a marked affinity with that of 11QPs^b and is dissimilar to that of 11QPs^c. . . . In addition, the line length of frg. 1 matches that of 11QPs^b, and not that of 11QPs^c" (García Martínez et al. 1998: 40).
3. This doxology is not preserved in Fragment E but supplied by Wilson on the basis of its appearance in the MT and the *Catena* in column 16.

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PART V

HISTORY OF
INTERPRETATION
AND RECEPTION: A
SAMPLING

CHAPTER 16

SOME ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL JEWISH PSALMS INTERPRETATION

ALAN COOPER

FOUR PHASES OF JEWISH PSALMS COMMENTARY

The pre-Enlightenment resources available for traditional Jewish study of the psalms may be sorted chronologically into four categories:

- (1) Inner-biblical indications of developing interpretive strategies (also pre-rabbinic interpretation, especially from the Qumran scrolls and in early Christian writings, which would have had little or no impact on most Jewish readers);
- (2) Rabbinic commentaries (c. 4th to 9th centuries CE.), comprising *Midrash Tehillim* (“Midrash on Psalms”) along with myriad interpretations contained in midrashic sermons or embedded in other homiletical texts;
- (3) Standard medieval commentaries (10th to 13th centuries) with literalist tendencies (Cohen 2011a: 347–82; Cohen 2011b), including the works of Saadia Gaon, Rashi, and Abraham Ibn Ezra, culminating with the commentary of David Kimhi (d. 1235);¹
- (4) Late medieval and early modern commentaries (14th to 18th centuries), including an eclectic array of philological, philosophical, mystical, and homiletical writings, sometimes in the form of commentaries but often embedded in works of other genres.

A comprehensive presentation in the allotted space would be impossible, so I present case studies to illustrate trends in Jewish commentary along with reference to significant scholarship on the topics under discussion.

INNER-BIBLICAL INDICATIONS: THE HERMENEUTICAL IMPACT OF DAVIDIC AUTHORSHIP

The history of Jewish psalms interpretation begins within the Book of Psalms itself, particularly in two aspects of the book: the attribution of authorship to King David (Cooper 1983) and the selection and ordering of the psalms into the canonical collection of 150. The claim of authorship is based initially on the superscriptions that mention David by name (seventy-three of them in the Hebrew Bible and about a dozen more in the Septuagint), leading ultimately to the rabbinic declaration that David wrote all of the psalms with or without superscriptions, even when authorship seems to be ascribed to others.

A well-known statement in *Bava Batra* 14b–15a asserts that David “wrote the Book of Psalms by means of [*al yedei*] ten elders,” whom the text goes on to name. The meaning of *al yedei* is unclear, leaving an opening for later commentators to argue for multiple authors: Did David write all of the psalms or assemble a collection that includes compositions of others along with his own? The claim that David was the *exclusive* author of the psalms is credited to Rabbi Meir in *Pesahim* 117a: “All the praises that are stated in the Book of Psalms, David uttered all of them, as it is said (Ps. 72:20): ‘The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are concluded (*kollu*); read *kollu* (‘are concluded’) as if it were *kol ellu* (‘all of them’)”²

A list of David’s putative compositions in the Qumran scroll 11QPs^a, column 27 states that he wrote 3,600 “psalms” and more than 400 “songs” (Sanders 1967: 86–87, 134–35; Dahmen 2003; Noam 2006). Although the text is of dubious historical value, it evinces awareness that the psalms were culled from a much larger corpus of texts. The principles of selection are only a matter for speculation, but the broad outlines of psalms redaction are clear: juxtaposition of individual psalms by concatenation of keywords, assemblage of small collections into larger ones, growth by accretion, and organization into five “books” comparable to the Torah. The specifics remain obscure except for one salient fact: The Qumran manuscripts show that the contents and order of the book—especially of Psalms 90–150—were still in flux between c. 150 BCE and 70 CE (Flint 1997). The Book of Psalms therefore owes its final form to the same period that saw the appearance of the earliest extant Psalms interpretations, namely the expository texts from Qumran and the citations of Psalms in the New Testament.

The earliest interpretations may suggest that the compilers of the book in its final form intended it to be read as a collection of eschatological prophecies (Mitchell 1997).

The collection is framed by the division of humanity into two groups, the “wicked” and the “righteous” (Psalm 1); the commissioning of the royal hero who will subjugate the “nations” (Psalm 2); and the ultimate triumph of the “faithful” (Psalm 149). The psalms collectively catalogue the vicissitudes that the hero and his followers encounter on their way to their final victory.

The same essential “plot” may be discerned in the fragmentary exegetical texts from Qumran known as *pesharim*. In 4QpPs^a (4Q171), a *peshar* on Psalm 37, the members of the sect (God’s “elect”) are the righteous who endure a period of suffering at the hands of their enemies. They await their vindication in the final judgment (Horgan 1979: 192–226).³ Also pertinent are the respective treatments of Psalm 2 in the Qumran text 4Q174 (4QFlorilegium) and Mark 1:11. In both texts the conflict to which the psalm adverts is understood to refer to the messianic era—to the “end of days” in 4Q174 and to the advent of the “kingdom of God” in Mark (especially 1:15; Watts 2004: 26–28).

As prominent as eschatological interpretation seems to have been around the turn of the eras, it was only one of many roads taken by later interpreters. While the Davidic attribution provides “a firm anchor for the use of the psalms as either retrospective or prophetic accounts of the history of Israel” (Cooper 1983: 118), it also allows for a broad range of readings. In a study of the image of David in early Jewish commentary, mainly *Midrash Tehillim*, Esther Menn (2004) suggests that the Bible advances three “portraits” of David that are fleshed out in rabbinic midrash. These represent David as “royal sponsor of corporate liturgy, as private man of prayer and praise, and as inspired author of revelatory literature” (Menn 2004: 61).

The malleable Davidic persona is discernible in three types of Jewish commentary (Cooper 2006: 80). The “David” of the psalms is both a king of yore and the longed-for Messiah, signifying past and future orientations that are reified in historical/biographical readings and prophetic/eschatological interpretations, respectively. In addition, “David” comes to signify the Everyman of the present. The trials and triumphs of this third “David” may be taken to represent the life experiences of any reader who chooses to identify with them. Sometimes David’s experience is exemplary for the reader, and sometimes the reader’s identity effectively substitutes for David’s.⁴ As *Midrash Tehillim* on Psalm 18:1 puts it, “All that David says in his Book of Psalms applies to himself, to all Israel, and to all the ages” (Buber 1891: i.68a; also on Ps. 4:1, Buber 1891: i.20b).

The historical dimension of Jewish interpretation is apparent within the Book of Psalms itself in thirteen psalms with expanded superscriptions that relate the psalms to particular incidents in David’s life. As Saadia writes in his defense of Davidic authorship and inspiration:

[The Book of Psalms] was revealed to the best of kings, the prophet David, peace be upon him, the chosen [of God]: “I have found David, [my servant; anointed him with my sacred oil]” (Psalm 89:21). . . . He began to prophesy from the time he was anointed: “[Samuel . . . anointed him . . .] and the spirit of the Lord gripped David from that day on” (1 Samuel 16:13). As a result, you will find several of its headings

relating to events that befell him after his anointment, some before he came to rule, and some subsequent to that. (Sokolow 1984: 154)

Most modern scholars agree that the “historical” superscriptions are of midrashic character, prompting the reader to interpret the psalms they introduce in relation to the narratives in Samuel/Kings.⁵

The first of these superscriptions introduces Psalm 3, “A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom,” evidently encouraging the reader to consider the affinities of the psalm with 2 Samuel 15–19. The third pericope of *Midrash Tehillim* on the psalm (Buber 1891: i.17b–19a) uses the superscription as a prompt to ask, “When did David compose this psalm?”—that is, *precisely* when during the course of events. The selective retelling of the story in the midrash (with many homiletical asides) begins with the statement that David’s “weeping” in 2 Samuel 15:30 alludes to the psalm. Several other possible placements are adduced, concluding with the contention that the psalm was a response to Shimei’s plea in 2 Samuel 19:20–21.

Other sections of the midrash take up broader application of the psalm with little or no reference to the details of the story. The opening pericope, for example, relates the psalm to Proverbs 21:15, “Judgment is a joy to the righteous” (Buber 1891: i.17a). After some digression, the midrash asserts that according to the Proverbs verse:

When God executes judgment on the righteous, it is a joy to them because God cleanses them of their transgressions. You know that this is true from the example of David: as soon as God’s strict justice struck him, he began to rejoice and sing, “A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom.”

“David’s” lesson is clear: Providential suffering purifies, providing the believer with an occasion to rejoice. Lament and complaint are understood to be forms of thanksgiving.

The standard medieval commentaries⁶ vary both in their approaches to the “historicity” of Psalm 3 and in their appropriations of the midrash. Rashi comments on the superscription by saying, “The midrashists have composed many homilies on the word [‘when he fled’].” He summarizes a portion of *Midrash Tehillim* as well as a talmudic statement that associates the psalm with 2 Samuel 12:11 (*Berakhot* 7a). In his commentary proper, he refers explicitly to David twice: He follows the midrash in naming Doeg and Ahitophel among the “attackers” in verse 2[1], and he pointedly glosses the assertion of David’s enemies in verse 3[2]: “‘There is no deliverance for him through God’ *because he had intercourse with another man’s wife*.”

By way of contrast, Ibn Ezra devotes scant attention to historical matters, using his commentary on Psalm 3:1 to dismiss the notion of any discernible sequence in the psalms. In his Psalms introduction, Saadia had attempted to “explain that the second psalm is attached to the first and the third to the second” (Qafih 1966: 47–48). Ibn Ezra counters with the assertion that “it is impossible for the commentator to attach them in this way.” He also echoes Saadia’s claim that the psalms are not in chronological order (Sokolow 1984: 173), noting that the superscription to Psalm 142 refers to an incident

that took place prior to Absalom's rebellion. Ibn Ezra's commentary proper, however, deals almost entirely with philological matters.

A systematic effort to integrate psalm and story may be found in Ovadia Sforno's commentary, presented below in full with Sforno's elaboration of the biblical text (NJV slightly altered) italicized (Walden 1876: 4a–b). Sforno characteristically provides a rubric for Psalm 3 to give the gist of his interpretation: "In this psalm, he [i.e., David] alerts us that a person should not cavil at reproof, because it is an expression of God's love (*hesed ha-el*).¹" He continues:

¹When he fled, etc., *he prayed both for himself that he be rescued and also for the Israelites that they not die in battle.* ²O Lord, my foes are so many: *all the Israelites who followed Absalom.* Many are those who attack me: *Shimei ben Gera and his aides.* ³Many say of me, "There is no deliverance for him through God:" *Ahitophel and his companions who said that the sin of Bathsheba was irreparably corrupting.* ⁴But You, O Lord, are a shield about me—*unwilling to destroy on account of that sin, and that is because you are my glory in my discernment through diligent study of your Torah, and "transgression cannot extinguish Torah" [Sotah 21a]—He who holds my head high through repentance.* ⁵I cry aloud to the Lord, and He has answered my prayers previously, and I hope that He will do likewise now. . . . *And therefore,* ⁶I lie down and sleep securely, and wake again, for the Lord sustains me, *and therefore* ⁷I have no fear. . . . *because I am confident in you.* ⁸Rise, O Lord, *for indeed, you have smitten all my enemies in the past. . . .* ⁹Deliverance is the Lord's *even without weapons.* Your blessing be upon Your people, *and therefore I am praying for your people that they not die in battle.*

Sforno uses David to convey the lesson that, even in times of duress, immersion in Torah study, prayer, and repentance may yield salvation. The ingenious connection of the psalm with David's story offers the reader ample opportunity for empathy.

Sforno does not comment on a detail of the text that is potentially embarrassing for Davidic authorship, namely the concluding portion of verse 5[4], "He has answered me from His holy mountain." If the "holy mountain" is understood to be a reference to the Temple (as it usually is),⁷ it is anachronistic in relation to David. Among Sforno's predecessors, Rashi also refrains from commenting. Ibn Ezra suggests that the designation "holy mountain" is appropriate because the ark was present in Jerusalem. Kimhi glosses the words "from His holy mountain" with "from Mount Moriah, even though it was not yet holy; perhaps they had a tradition that there would be a temple there." And finally, Menahem Meiri proposes that "holy mountain" is "a metaphor (*mashal*) for heaven." The diversity of "solutions" to what modern scholars would consider a nonexistent problem is a mark of the richness and ingenuity of traditional commentary.

The immediately preceding paragraph reflects a characteristic form of Jewish engagement with Scripture. Cite a verse, identify a problem of interpretation, and consult the traditional commentaries for their solutions. The process is more important than the outcome, since its purpose is not to yield a definitive conclusion but to engender further study and reflection.

THE CONTEXT OF JEWISH PSALMS COMMENTARY

While the psalms play a variety of roles in Jewish religious life, they occupy an ambivalent place in the Jewish curriculum. Confident statements about their use in both communal and private settings, especially in antiquity, are fraught with problems and often founder for lack of clear evidence. One cannot assume, for example, that the relatively many Psalms manuscripts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls (roughly forty of them) were prepared for liturgical use, although there are indications of both antiphonal recitation and of the recombination of psalms verses into new liturgical compositions, commonplace in later Jewish liturgies.⁸

The situation of the ancient synagogue likely paralleled that of Qumran. With a few exceptions, notably the seven daily psalms⁹ and the festival “words of praise” (*hallel*, Psalms 113–118), early rabbinic literature provides little indication that psalmody was prevalent in synagogue worship. In *Shabbat* 118b, Yose ben Halafta expresses the wish that he might “share the lot of those who recite the entire *hallel* every day.” An anonymous commentator interjects that R. Yose is not referring to the festival *hallel*—proscribed for everyday use—but to *pesuqei de-zimra* (“verses of song”). Most commentators define the core *pesuqei de-zimra* as Psalms 145–150 or portions thereof, but the word “verses” more likely indicates a culling of psalms for words of praise rather than recitation of entire psalms (Weinfeld 1975–76: 23–25). For the most part, psalms were incorporated into the public liturgies only gradually during the Gaonic period (6th to 11th centuries CE) and thereafter (Brody 2006), clustering in certain portions of the service (never the main part), less than a third of them in recurrent use.¹⁰ The projection of later liturgical practice back to ancient times is anachronistic, and one might say the same with regard to the contemplative, meditative, and magical practices that characterize later popular use of psalms.

Just as it is uncertain what role the psalms played in early synagogue liturgy, it also is unclear how Jews studied them, whether privately, in the synagogue, or in the academy. Early Christian schools, especially monastic schools, introduced young initiates to the study of Scripture through the psalms and selected New Testament texts. Once admitted to the monastery, the neophyte had to commit psalms to memory and recite them while performing his daily chores. There are similar prescriptions and regimens in Jewish literature, but they are much later and possibly influenced by Christian monasticism. There is no evidence for comparable Jewish use of psalms in the early rabbinic academy.

While the Aramaic Targums of the Torah most likely were composed to facilitate comprehension of the text in the context of worship, one can advance no such claim for the Targum to Psalms. The Targum, usually dated to about the fifth century CE and possibly composed by the translator of other books of the Hagiographa, evinces simplifying and dramatizing tendencies, modest midrashic expansion, and a lack of polemic, all of which *might* indicate pedagogical intent, but that is hardly certain (Komlosch

1973: 68–72). One could make a similar claim for *Midrash Tehillim* (the “Midrash on Psalms,” also known as *Shoher Tov* after a phrase in Prov. 11:27), an eclectic compilation most likely culled from sermons and other sources (Buber 1891; Braude 1959). Like all of the compilatory midrashim, *Midrash Tehillim* probably took shape gradually over time, so its date and social setting cannot be ascertained with confidence.

In the Jewish curricula of the medieval period, the Psalms fell into the same desuetude as the rest of the Bible, perhaps more so. As Ephraim Kanarfogel (1992: 88) remarks about the academies of medieval Ashkenaz, “The low priority given to biblical studies, especially the study of [Prophets] and [Writings, which include Psalms] . . . has been amply documented.” Even authorities who argued in favor of the study of Scripture justified it principally as a means of enabling students to cope with the biblical citations in talmudic literature. Since citations from the Psalms do not abound in the legal discourse that is at the heart of the traditional curriculum, however, there would be little occasion to study the Psalms in depth.

Medieval evidence for systematic recitation or study of the Psalms may come from the Masoretic division of the Book of Psalms into nineteen *sedarim* (“sections”) of approximately equal length. These sections are marked identically in all the best manuscripts and could have been intended to demarcate divisions for structured public or private readings (Offer 1989: 160–61). In later sources there are many texts that prescribe beneficial regimens of psalms recitation, which generally do not call for close reading or careful study (Hashlag 1984: passim; Buxbaum 1990: 351–67).

The vast number of citations from psalms in midrashic homilies suggests that the most likely setting for the rabbinic use of psalms was public preaching. In a story about Ben Azzai recounted in *Leviticus Rabba* 16.4 (Margulies 1953–60: 354), the sage describes the process of expounding Torah as “stringing words of the Torah together with those of the Prophets, and words of the Prophets with those of the Writings.” The majority of classical midrashic proems¹¹ link expositions of verses from the Psalms to the Torah text under discussion. As a result, even setting aside *Midrash Tehillim*, hardly a verse of Psalms goes without comment in the rabbinic corpus.

A MIDRASHIC SERMON WITH AN EARLY MODERN SEQUEL

A brilliant midrash incorporating commentary on Psalm 27 is *Leviticus Rabba* 21.4 (Margulies 1953–60: 473–80 with parallel in Buber 1891: i.112b; see also Cooper 2008). The text provides an excellent example of two kinds of flexibility in Psalms interpretation, with respect to both chronology (past and present) and the identity of the psalmist (David the individual and “David” representing the Jewish people).

The starting point of the midrash is Leviticus 16:3. At the beginning of the priestly ritual that is traditionally associated with Yom Kippur, the instruction reads, “with this

(*bēzōt*) shall Aaron come into the sanctuary.” The ambiguous demonstrative (“this”) serves as the stimulus for the midrash, which seeks to identify the thing (the “this”) that Aaron requires, and finds a ready correlation between *bēzōt* in Leviticus 16:3 and the same word in Psalm 27:3, in the phrase “in this (*bēzōt*) I trust.” Whatever induces confidence in the psalmist, even when enemies surround him, also accompanies Aaron into the sanctuary on Yom Kippur.

The correlation of the two texts occasions a four-part homily on Psalm 27, relating the psalm sequentially to the Exodus from Egypt, David’s encounter with Goliath, David’s war against Amalek, and a New Year judgment scene. The midrash is structured both chronologically and symmetrically: It moves from the distant past to the homilist’s present, and it is arranged in an A B B A pattern, with two stories about the salvation of the Jewish people framing two stories about David’s victories. The midrash thus actualizes the rabbinic dictum that everything in the Book of Psalms applies to David, to all Israel, and to all times.

The story of David and Goliath, for example, is concretized in the psalm through intertextual allusions and glosses that establish the connection between the seemingly disparate texts:

R. Samuel b. Nahman expounded the text as applying to the Philistines. “When evil men assail me” (Psalm 27:2) applies to Goliath, of whom it says, “The Philistine stepped forward morning and evening” (1 Samuel 17:16). “To devour my *flesh*” (Psalm 27:2) is related to the text, “And the Philistine said to David, ‘Come here, and I will give your *flesh* to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.’” (1 Samuel 17:44). . . . “It is they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and *fall*” (Ps. 27:2) recalls the text, “The stone sank into his forehead, and he *fell*” (1 Samuel 17:49). From this point onward David says to God: “Should an army of *Philistines* besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war *against the Philistines* beset me, in *this (bēzōt)* I trust (Psalm 27:3). “In this,” R. Levi said, refers to the farewell address that Moses left for us in writing in the Torah, when he said to the elders: “And *this (zōt)* he said of Judah: ‘Hear, O Lord the voice of Judah. . . . Though his own hands strive for him, help him against his foes’” (Deuteronomy 33:7).

Moses’ word of encouragement to David’s ancestor Judah (the “this” that links Ps. 27:3 to Deut. 33:7) was all David needed to give him confidence in his moment of crisis—“stringing” together Torah, Prophets, and Writings (Deuteronomy/Samuel/Psalms)—all apropos of Leviticus 16:3.

The concluding scene of the midrash vividly depicts the Day of Judgment. The guardian angels of the nations level charges of perfidy against the Jews, and God rebuffs them: “It is *they*, my foes and enemies, [who stumble and fall]” (Ps. 27:2) because God does not permit prosecution of the Jews on Yom Kippur. The midrash then concludes with the language of Psalm 27:3 embedded in a prayer of thanksgiving: “Should an army of *the nations of the world* besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should *the nations of the world* arise against me, in this I trust’—in what you promised me [in saying] ‘with

this shall Aaron come [into the sanctuary],” returning at last to the Leviticus text that prompted the midrash.

In the midrash, the “enemies” of the psalmist are external. Later commentators often internalize them, identifying them with the psalmist’s own evil inclination—in some ways the most terrifying enemy of all.¹² In an interpretation of Psalm 27:3 (“should an army besiege me”) from his little-known seventeenth-century Psalms commentary, Hayyim Katz (1750: 39a) adopts the internalization of the biblical enemy and offers a virtuosic elaboration of the ambiguous “this” of the midrash partially based on *Pesikta Rabbati* 47 (Friedmann 1880: 191a–b; Braude 1968: ii.806–9):

[The “army” is] the army of the evil inclination. Even though it declares war against me—since the evil inclination of a person gains daily in strength...—“in ‘this’ I trust,” namely in the holy covenant [i.e., circumcision] that is called “‘this’ is the sign of the covenant” (Genesis 9:12, 17), and the Torah, which is called “‘this’ is the Torah” (Deuteronomy 4:44), and the *shekhina*, which is called “this.”... “The fool does not understand ‘this’” (Psalm 92:7), but David said, “with ‘this’ I know that you have favored me” (Psalm 41:12).

STANDARD MEDIEVAL COMMENTARIES

Two of the three most influential Torah commentators of the medieval Golden Age—Rashi (Grossman 2000: 332–46) and Ibn Ezra (Simon 2000: 377–87)—also produced commentaries on Psalms. Their commentaries provide the starting point for traditional study. The only other commentary of comparable importance is David Kimhi’s.¹³

Rashi’s commentaries, noted for blending keen philological insight with cannily selected rabbinic midrash, are “canonical” for the study of both Bible and Talmud. The Psalms commentary is available in Mayer Gruber’s edition, which also includes a comprehensive introduction and a thoroughly annotated English translation (Gruber 2004). Gruber devotes a section of his introduction to the topic, “The Importance of Rashi’s Commentary on Psalms.” He observes, “Rashi’s Commentary on the Book of Psalms contains[s] a sampling of most of the various concerns of Rashi’s commentaries on the books of the Hebrew Scripture: *midrash aggadah*, *midrash halakah*, lexicography, grammar, syntax, source criticism, and attention to literary devices such as virtual quotations and change of speakers, metaphors and synonymous parallelism” (Gruber 2004: 127–30).

For Arabic-speaking Jews, the greatest importance was attached to the Arabic translation and commentary of Saadia Gaon. It was not translated into Hebrew until the modern period (Qafih 1966), greatly lessening the impact that it might have had on the Jewish community, although there are both explicit citations and many parallel interpretations in Ibn Ezra’s commentary.

Ibn Ezra's introduction to his commentary is fundamental for students of Jewish exegesis of the Psalms. In it, Ibn Ezra mentions the "great controversy" surrounding the authorship, dating, and character of the psalms. He summarizes two diametrically opposed views: first that the psalms are all Davidic prophecies and second that they are neither prophetic nor necessarily Davidic, being songs and prayers of various dates. Ibn Ezra concludes with his own view, which mediates between the two extreme positions.

The standard published edition of Ibn Ezra's introduction is frustratingly elliptical, ascribing those two opinions of his predecessors to "some" and "others," respectively. The first has long been known to be that of Saadia. The attribution of the second, however, remained uncertain until the discovery of an alternative recension of the introduction, three times longer than the standard one. In this recension, the author of the second opinion is identified as Moses ha-kohen ibn Gikatila, an eleventh-century poet, grammarian, and exegete whose work is known mainly from citations in the writings of others.

In order to explicate the historical and cultural context of Ibn Ezra's introduction, Uriel Simon provides an authoritative analysis of the hermeneutics of early medieval Jewish Psalms commentary (Simon 1991). First, he elaborates Saadia's attitude toward Psalms.¹⁴ Then, since Saadia's position embodies his repudiation of Karaite opinion, Simon surveys the relevant Karaite views. Of particular interest is the statement of Salmon ben Yeruham that since the Book of Psalms "fulfills all the needs of worshippers, whenever and wherever they live, there is no logical reason to supplement it with prayers written by men, which necessarily contain mistakes" (Simon 1991: 63).

In his third chapter, Simon explicates Gikatila's position and then, having provided the necessary background, he concludes with the *raison d'être* of his work, an elucidation of the two versions of Ibn Ezra's introduction and commentary. The book has rightly been regarded essential reading since its first appearance; it opens a window to the world of medieval Jewish Psalms exegesis that present-day students of the Bible can ignore only to their detriment.

While there is a splendid intellectual biography of Kimhi (Talmage 1975), and portions of his Psalms commentary have been translated into English (bibliography in Cohen 2000: 388–89), the commentary has not received a thorough treatment comparable to Gruber's work on Rashi or Simon's on Ibn Ezra. Part of the reason might be scholarly fascination with Kimhi's overt anti-Christian polemic, which is important but takes up only a small portion of the work.¹⁵ Otherwise, like all of Kimhi's commentaries on the Prophets and Writings, the Psalms commentary offers a master grammarian's running gloss of the text, interweaving text and commentary. As Talmage remarks, Kimhi's commentaries are "liberally interspersed with philosophical interpretations where pertinent" (Talmage 1975: 71), and while his rationalism makes him skeptical of the value of midrash, he adduces midrashic interpretations more frequently and approvingly than one might expect (pp. 72–83).

LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN COMMENTARY

The third phase of premodern commentary is the most difficult to present because of its extraordinary diversity. Predominantly eclectic and homiletical, it tends to be prolix, preoccupied with novelty, and only intermittently rewarding for the modern reader.¹⁶ The blending of literal commentary with snippets of midrash, philosophy, and kabbalah,¹⁷ often with scant regard for internal consistency, can be disconcerting. Nevertheless, there are treasures to be unearthed in this neglected corpus.¹⁸ As a case in point, I conclude by summarizing the commentary on Psalm 19 by a little-known fifteenth-century Spanish exegete, Joel Ibn Shuaib (1568–69: 38b–44a).¹⁹

Psalm 19 juxtaposes two alternative witnesses to God's presence in the world, linking the testimony of the heavens (vv. 2–7[1–6]) to the precepts of Torah (vv. 8–10[7–9]). But what, exactly, do these two entail? What is one supposed to learn from the soundless words of the passage of time (vv. 2–5[1–4])? And how are those “words,” so to speak, related to the teachings of Torah (vv. 8–10[7–9])?

Ibn Shuaib addresses those questions by affirming that five principles of the Jewish faith can be inferred from the motion of the heavenly bodies as described in Psalm 19 and that the selfsame principles are found explicitly and more perfectly in the Torah. Before introducing the specific principles, the psalmist, according to Ibn Shuaib, begins with a general one, namely that “the Torah of the Lord is perfect” (19:8a[7a]). From the standpoint of its capacity to perfect the human soul (“restoring the life-spirit”), he asserts, the Torah far exceeds the heavens.

Next comes the first principle of the faith, the existence of God, indubitably proved by planetary motion, and alluded to by Psalm 19:3[2], “day to day utters speech.” This “utterance” (that is, the elegant perfection of planetary motion) adequately demonstrates the existence of God—the “great and wondrous” daily circuit of the sun providing the exemplary proof. But the Torah manifests that perfection even more forcefully and conclusively. Not only is the Torah's testimony absolutely “sure,” it is also accessible to all, “making [even] the simple wise” (v. 8b[7b]).

The second specific principle of the faith is creation *ex nihilo*. This doctrine is encoded in the verse “the sky expresses his handiwork” (v. 2b[1b]), which refers to the mathematical perfection of the heavens that is ascertainable by astronomical observation. Such precision can be ascribed only to the creator. Yet again, the Torah's witness to this doctrine is superior to that of creation itself, as is proved by verse 9a[8a], “the precepts of the LORD are just, rejoicing the heart.” The Torah's report, unlike that of the astronomers, is “just”—that is, free from doubt or error. Moreover, the Torah's precepts “gladden the heart,” since those who pursue knowledge of God through the Torah achieve true felicity.

The third principle is divine providence, hinted at by the influence of the heavenly bodies over the lower world. That influence is indicated by verse 5a[4a], “their sign shines forth on all the earth.”²⁰ When one tries to ascertain the nature of providence from the heavens by means of astrology, one is prone to failure, either due to inadequacies of perception or because of the profundity of the matter under consideration. The Torah compensates for those two deficiencies: “the commandment of the LORD is lucid,” making the object comprehensible, and, furthermore, it “makes the eyes light up,” thus providing proper and adequate direction for the believer (v. 9b[8b]).

The fourth principle of the faith is exclusive devotion to God (and to no other), which is indicated by the heavens’ “proclaiming the glory of God” at the beginning of the psalm. The heavens, however, are deficient in two respects. First, they have a propensity for misleading people into thinking that they themselves are divine.²¹ They might thereby lead people into error and impurity, whereas “the fear of the LORD is pure” (v. 10a[9a]). Second, the tendency of the heavenly bodies to wax and wane, alternately to appear and disappear from view, is in distinct contrast to the Torah, which “abides forever” (v. 10a[9a]).

The fifth and final principle is reward and punishment, which is indicated by the motion of the heavenly bodies, especially those changes in position and aspect that induce particular effects in the world. Such effects are implied by verse 3[2], “their sign shines forth on all the earth, their message to the ends of the world.” But the stars sometimes lie, since God subverts their influence for the sake of his people; “the judgments of the Lord,” on the other hand, “are true” (v. 10b[9b]). Astral influence, moreover, is amoral, while the Torah’s influence is “altogether righteous” (v. 10b[9b]), affecting the destiny of all people in accordance with their just deserts.

The evaluation of Ibn Shuaib’s commentary poses a challenge for the modern biblical scholar. Certainly it could be dismissed as “eisegesis”—as the commentator reading his religious concerns into the text rather than interpreting what it actually says. The intellectual environment of today, however, calls such a parochial standard into question: The evaluative criteria of modern scholarship do not necessarily take precedence over the values of traditional interpretation. In recent years biblical scholars have been developing a new sensitivity to traditional commentary, seeking to appreciate it on its own terms.

There is nothing innovative about Ibn Shuaib’s ideas as such. The interest of his interpretation lies, rather, in his use of the genre of commentary to “discover” the fundamental Jewish teachings that are encoded in the psalm. His success should be determined according to the considerable elegance and ingenuity he displays in going about his task—in the density and suggestiveness of the interplay between his worldview and the language of the psalm, or, to put it another way, according to the extent to which his interpretive horizon appears (perhaps unexpectedly) to converge with that of the authoritative text. Our ability to appreciate his achievement vindicates two millennia of diligent teaching and learning even as it enriches our understanding of the Psalms.

NOTES

1. Despite the anachronism, I also include Ovadia Sforno (Italy, 1475–1550) in this category.
2. Thus “re-reading” the verse as if it said, “All of them are prayers of David son of Jesse.” The midrashic “read X as if it were Y” formula (*al tiqre X ella Y*) is a homiletical device with no text-critical import.
3. See also possibly 4Q173 (4QpPs^b) on Psalm 127(?) and 1Q16 (1QpPs) on Psalm 68 in Horgan 1979: 226–28 and 65–70, respectively.
4. Especially so in Hasidic interpretation, which falls outside the bounds of this essay. For example, Nachman of Bratzlav (1772–1810): “The essence of the recital of psalms is to say all the psalms about oneself, and to find oneself in every psalm” (1966–67: 102 §125).
5. Pss. 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142. See Childs 1971; Slomovic 1979. For the argument that the superscriptions facilitate readerly identification with “David,” see Gillmayr-Bucher 2003. For an elaborate intertextual reading of these psalms based on their superscriptions, see Johnson 2009.
6. Unless otherwise noted, the commentaries are cited according to Cohen 2003.
7. Sometimes to the historical Temple and sometimes to the future Temple of the messianic era. Cf. Kimhi on Psalm 48:1[superscription] and Psalm 99:9, respectively.
8. With biblical precedent: see 1 Chron. 16:8–36, compiled from Pss. 105:1–9; 96:1–13; 106:1, 47–48; also 2 Chron. 6:40–42, adapting Ps. 132:8–10.
9. From Sunday through Saturday (Shabbat): Psalms 24, 48, 82, 94, 81, 93, and 92, respectively (*Mishnah Tamid* 7:4).
10. On rabbinic ambivalence about the use of Scripture in prayer, see Naeh 2006.
11. On the relationship of the literary form of the midrashic texts to the underlying public teaching, see Heinemann (1970: 24–28).
12. Thus, e.g., Nachman of Bratzlav (1966–67: 102 §125): “The wars in which David petitioned God to rescue him should be interpreted with respect to oneself as the war against the evil inclination and its terrors.”
13. Along with fine editions of the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kimhi, Cohen 2003 includes the commentaries of Isaiah of Terani (Italy, 1165–1240) and Menahem Meiri (Provence, 1249–1316). The former is a straightforward literalist commentary. Meiri’s is much more interesting and deserves greater attention than it has received to date.
14. See also Sokolow 1984, which was in press when the Hebrew version of Simon’s book appeared in 1982.
15. See esp. Kimhi on Pss. 2:12; 7:8[7]; 19:10[9]; 21:1[superscription]; 22:32[31]; 45:18[17]; 72:20; 87:7; 110:7.
16. For Hebrew readers, the best orientation to this late commentary is Walden 1889–97. Walden drew on more than 700 sources and arranged them conveniently around the text of the Psalms.
17. For a compendium of the Zohar’s commentary on the Psalms following the order of the biblical text, see Ashlag 2000–1.
18. A short list of recommended commentaries would include (in chronological order): Mattathias Hayizhari (Spain, 14th–15th century, on Psalm 119); Joel Ibn Shuaib (Spain, 15th century); Joseph Jabez (Spain/Italy, d. 1508); Meir Arama (Spain/Salonika, 1460?–c. 1545); Joseph Ibn Yahya (Portugal/Italy, 1494–1534); Moses Alshekh (Salonika/Safed, 1508–93); Samuel Laniado (Syria, d. 1605); Chaim Katz (Vienna/Jerusalem, 17th century); Azariah Figo (Italy, 1579–1647); Jacob Joseph of Ostrog [Rav Yeivi] (Poland, 1738–91);

Moses Ostrer (Poland, d. 1785); Chaim Joseph David Azulai [Chid"ra] (Jerusalem, 1724–1806); Pinhas Halevi Horowitz (Poland/Frankfurt, 1730–1805 [culled from the author's various writings by his grandson]). Many valuable interpretations are found outside commentaries on Psalms as well, especially in commentaries on other biblical books and collections of sermons.

19. For a discussion of Ibn Shuaib's commentary in the context of traditional interpretation of Psalm 19, see Cooper 1993.
20. Thus REB, consistent with Ibn Shuaib's interpretation in view of the astrological connotation of the word "sign."
21. Cf. Meiri: The reason for juxtaposing the heavens with the Torah in Psalm 19 is so that "one will not go astray and ascribe dominion to the heavenly configurations... , but will know that their motion and agency are by divine command."

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CHAPTER 17

PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

STEPHEN P. AHEARNE-KROLL

THE 27th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* contains a basic list of quotations and possible allusions to scripture in the New Testament. According to the list, quotations and allusions to the Psalms are contained in every book of the New Testament except for 2 and 3 John, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon, and Jude. Regardless of how one might account for these psalmic quotations and allusions in the New Testament, it is indisputable that the Psalms played a major role in the thinking of New Testament authors.

STUDYING THE USE OF PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

I have argued elsewhere that in studying the use of scripture in the New Testament, one must avoid starting with the assumption that a particular author programmatically interpreted a particular book of scripture before writing his work. While this may be the case, it assumes a monolithic view of scripture on the author's part that is untenable when examined closely. In addition, one must not start with the assumption that a particular author's use of scripture fits within a "trajectory of interpretation" in post-biblical Judaism. These supposed trajectories are not ancient phenomena; instead, they are constructed by modern scholars to create a system of thought where none might have existed. In virtually all cases, where a trajectory is "discovered," the data set used to construct this trajectory is selective, contains too few references spread over too long a time period and geographical area to support such a claim, and tends toward circularity. Regarding the last item, a perfect example can be found by comparing Joel Marcus's *The Way of the Lord* (1992) and Margaret Daly-Denton's *David in the Fourth Gospel* (2000),

both of which are very respected works in the field and both of which treat in great detail the use of the Psalms in Mark and John, respectively. Both Marcus and Daly-Denton construct trajectories of interpretation in post-biblical Judaism and early Christianity to assist their understandings of Mark and John's use of scripture. On the one hand, because Marcus is interested in Mark, he excludes all data from Mark in his argument but includes data from John. On the other hand, Daly-Denton is interested in John, and so she excludes all data from John in her argument but includes data from Mark. In reality, one can only responsibly argue that several authors over the course of several hundred years in locations separated by hundreds of miles may have used a particular psalm in particular ways. Any relationship between their usages remains, at best, speculative (Ahearne-Kroll 2007: 9–23).¹

A method for approaching the use of scripture by New Testament authors, and likewise the use of the Psalms, is to treat each reference carefully and independently based on the literary context of the reference in the particular New Testament book and on the context of the scriptural text referred to by the author. This painstaking work avoids the assumption that a New Testament author uses all of scripture or a certain book of scripture in a consistent way. Detailed and independent analysis of each reference is the only way to respect the author's usage and discover the range of possible meanings of that reference in the greater context of the book.

The difficult challenge of determining whether there is a reference to scripture within a text lies at the heart of such a project. The references can span the scope of highly unlikely (usually referred to as a faint echo) to very certain (i.e., a direct quotation of an identifiable passage). The scope usually articulates a commentator's certainty regarding the New Testament author's intent in using a particular passage from scripture in constructing his text. But this is only the beginning of the process of determining the possible meaning of the reference.

Most New Testament scholars appeal to the broader field of intertextuality for guidance on such matters.² While the study of the use of scripture in the New Testament predates the study of intertextuality, the latter has become one of the standard ways of articulating the literary complexity of the use of scripture in the New Testament. This is particularly the case with the study of the Gospels, which are being approached by scholars more and more as complex narratives rather than as loose collections of previously existing traditions, as form critics of previous generations once characterized them. Regarding a scriptural reference in the New Testament as an intertext allows for a certain flexibility and ambiguity of meaning that incorporates the voices of the text, the author(s), and the readers/hearers in the production of meaning. All three voices are considered important in most contemporary hermeneutical theories. Even if a scriptural reference is considered traditional (i.e., considered part of a source for the Gospel in which it is used), scholars who treat the reference intertextually recognize the conscious and creative use of sources by the Gospel writer. In other words, instead of assuming an unconscious or passive handing on of the source material on the part of the Gospel writer, there is the assumption that the author was knowledgeable about the sources and therefore about the scriptural references in those sources and used the

sources purposefully, even if he did not fully determine the meaning of its use. Such an approach to the Gospels and their use of Psalms yields rich possibilities for interpreting the stories of Jesus and the ways that early Christians may have struggled with understanding who Jesus was and how his life and death affected their particular communities.

The process of interpreting the use of the Psalms by New Testament writers does not differ from the use of other books of scripture. Because uniform boundaries of the canon had yet to be formed at the time of the writing of the New Testament books, most Jews, including those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, had a sense of what writings were authoritative without having a sense of canonicity that modern Christians assume. The Psalms were certainly important to Jews of the Second Temple period, and particular psalms were most likely used in temple and synagogue worship. But there is little direct evidence that there was uniformity of belief that the Psalms as a collection were more (or less) significant than the Torah or the Prophets or had certain qualities that other parts of scripture did not have, thus setting them apart as particularly useful or meaningful in certain situations but not in others.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PSALMS FOR ANCIENT JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

One of the main reasons for the attribution of authority to the Psalms in Second Temple Judaism was the widespread belief of Davidic authorship, and this was also the case with the writers of the New Testament as far as we can tell.³ As early as the book of Chronicles, there was a close association between the Psalms and David, and by the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls, David had become viewed as a prolific composer of psalms. The well-known passage from 11QPSa XXVII, 2–11 reads:

And David, son of Jesse, was wise, and a light like the light of the sun, /and/ learned, and discerning, and perfect in all his paths before God and men. And YHWH gave him a discerning and enlightened spirit. And he wrote psalms: three thousand six hundred; and songs to be sung before the altar over the perpetual offering of every day, for all the days of the year: three hundred and sixty-four; and for the Sabbath offerings: fifty-two songs; and for the offering of the first days of the months, and for all the days of the festivals, and for the <Day> of Atonement: thirty songs. And all the songs which he spoke were four hundred and forty-six. And songs to perform over the possessed: four. The total was four thousand and fifty. All these he spoke through (the spirit of) prophecy which had been given to him from before the Most High.⁴

In addition, two passages from Josephus (*Ant.* VII, 305) and Philo (*Plant.* IX, 39) indicate their assent to the tradition of David as psalmist. Davidic authorship is equally important for New Testament authors because of David's special place as part of certain messianic sensibilities of the time and because he was considered a prophet by many

Jews and early Christians. So the Psalms, which were his writings or at least about him, became authoritative sources for articulating the significance of Jesus. Moreover, David himself became an important model for depicting Jesus in the Gospels, with the Psalms contributing significantly to the various ways Jesus was depicted in the stories.⁵ And as Margaret Daly-Denton argues, whenever a psalm is evoked in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, it is likely that the audience would have thought of David in some capacity if they recognized the reference. In other words, evoking the Psalms would have evoked David for early hearers of the New Testament.

Along with the fact that David was associated with the Psalms, the content of the Psalms (especially the language and imagery) was useful in depicting Jesus in the Gospels. Two aspects of Jesus' messiahship that the Gospel writers wanted to articulate were the kingship of Jesus as Messiah, for which David as king *par excellence* was particularly important, and the disconnect between the claims of Jesus' messiahship and his manner of death. What has become known as the royal psalms were especially effective for the former, and what became known as the psalms of individual lament were particularly effective for the latter. The link between Jesus' messianic kingship and David's kingship is fairly clear, especially from those psalms that depict Israel's leader as God's begotten son (Pss. 2:7; LXX 88:27–28; LXX 109:3). Coupled with the belief of Davidic authorship and David as the subject of the psalm, the imagery easily articulates an ancient image the kingship of Jesus as instituted by God. The antiquity of the image would have been emotionally evocative for early Christian audiences (the earliest of whom were Jews), because the image of a royal David as God's son hearkens back to the glory days of Israel's history and to the importance of David to Israel's identity as God's chosen nation. As Israel's divinely appointed king, David entered into a special relationship with God as adopted son, and, as representative of Israel, this relationship with God reinforced the chosen nature of Israel.⁶ In Jesus, God is acting similarly, reinforcing and carrying forward the most favored status of Israel in God's eyes.

Trying to make sense of Jesus' suffering is another matter, however, mainly because messiahship and suffering shameful torture and death were considered fundamentally incompatible. At least this is what most scholars think was a problem for many early Christians regarding their claims about Jesus' messiahship. However, the depiction of David as a tortured, rejected, and suffering king in the Psalms provided a fruitful precedent on which to reflect when trying to understand and articulate the significance of Jesus' suffering and death. It is not simply that scripture predicted Jesus' suffering in the Psalms or other biblical texts; it is that one of the most important figures in Israel's history, and certainly the most important king, also suffered greatly according to the Psalms and yet never lost his status as king or begotten son.⁷ Furthermore, it is not just the fact of David's suffering in the Psalms that is significant but the way David grapples with God in the midst of his suffering that allows the Gospel writers to tell the story of Jesus in such richly human ways. One could argue that Jesus' suffering is so realistically depicted in Mark and Matthew in part because the language and imagery of David's suffering in the Psalms gave the Gospel writers the freedom to juxtapose and hold in tension Jesus' divine sonship with his suffering and rejection as a human being.

Something similar could be said about Paul's usage of the Psalms. Although the genre of Paul's writings is different from that of the Gospels, Paul is trying, by and large, to exhort the hearers of his letters to live a certain way in light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. To move his readers to act, Paul must tell the story of Jesus and its significance in effective and motivating ways. The Psalms contribute to his ability to do this because Paul's understanding of his life and mission (and, consequently, his community's life and mission) is so profoundly conditioned by the suffering of Jesus and the continuing lordship of the resurrected Jesus. For Paul, Jesus' suffering and his resurrected lordship are inseparable, and so the story of Jesus that Paul tells his communities must make these two compatible. Paul's use of scripture, including the Psalms, plays a key role in his rhetorical efforts. The Psalms hold in tension kingship (or lordship) and shameful suffering, neither one cancelling the other out. For many psalms, the idea is that, despite the shameful suffering of the psalmist (i.e., David), there is hope that God's justice (*dikaiosynē*) will prevail in upholding the place of the psalmist and Israel as chosen over all the other nations (see Psalm 71). One could argue that Paul capitalizes on this notion of divine justice to explain God's response to Jesus' suffering, namely, raising Jesus and thereby establishing Jesus' enduring lordship. This is just one line of argumentation that Paul seems to have developed from the Psalms, especially in Romans (Keesmaat 2004: 139–61). But there are other less programmatic ways Paul uses the Psalms that speak to the various ways scripture is used by New Testament authors, as discussed above.

PSALM 2:7 IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Rather than trying to analyze each use of the psalms in the New Testament⁸—an impossible task for an essay of this size and scope—I wish to look at just one psalm verse used by several New Testament authors in their speculation about Jesus.⁹ For the sake of space, I do not go through the detailed argumentation necessary to test whether Psalm 2:7 is alluded to in the places where it is not quoted directly, although this would be a necessary first step in a thorough treatment of the topic. Also important would be a detailed examination of the whole of Psalm 2 in its Hebrew and Greek versions to get a sense of its structure, rhetoric, thematic concerns, and so on. But, again because of space, we will have to forego this step of the process. Instead, I offer a brief sketch of some possible ways that New Testament authors may have used Psalm 2:7 in their speculation and storytelling about Jesus.

As mentioned already, employing Psalm 2:7 as an image for Jesus' divine sonship in a Davidic key ("You are my son; today I have begotten you") was a common usage of the psalm among New Testament writers, but the nuances of meaning produced by the use of this verse varied from author to author. In Mark 1:11, the divine voice from heaven declares, "You are my beloved son; in you I delight."¹⁰ The first part of the verse, most scholars argue, alludes to Psalm 2:7. The image of David in the psalm, however, is not

just that of a human; the psalm declares him to be God's anointed son. Although "still subject to the Most High, . . . [the king] is an *elohim*, not just a man" (Collins and Collins 2008: 15). As the psalm asserts, the king held a unique position on earth as one acting with God's authority and power, a power over all the nations of the earth such that they become the inheritance of the king, who holds their fate in his hands. LXX Psalm 2:9 offers a violent image to describe the power the king holds as God's son: "You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, and shatter them like an earthen vessel." Mark's evocation of Psalm 2:7, then, serves to characterize Jesus in a similar light as the image of David as God's son. And yet Mark tries to temper the violent imagery by evoking within the same verse the near death of Isaac in Genesis 22 (in the phrase *ho huios mou ho agapētos*; "my beloved son") and the servant of Isaiah 42 (in the phrase *en soi eudokēsa*; "in you I am well pleased"), both of which depict less than powerful figures that play important roles in ancient Israelite tradition (Ahearne-Kroll 2012: 49–52). Only in two other places are there clear references to Jesus as God's son in Mark (i.e., 9:7, the Transfiguration,¹¹ and 14:36, Gethsemane). Mark depicts Jesus as God's royal son with literary efficiency, only asserting it clearly three times, two of which involve Psalm 2, thus making the psalm stand out as an important element of the characterization of Jesus in the Gospel.¹²

While it is far from certain that the parallel passage in Matthew (Matt. 3:17) is a clear allusion to Psalm 2:7, it is worth considering.¹³ If Matthew 3:17 does contain an allusion to Psalm 2:7, then I do not think it would be inaccurate to say that Matthew adopts the same basic claims about Jesus as expressed in Mark's use of Psalm 2:7. But literarily, Matthew contextualizes the verse within a much more developed narrative about the origins of Jesus. Read in isolation from the context of the first few chapters of Matthew, his use of Psalm 2:7 in 3:17 looks very much like Mark's usage. However, Matthew includes a more explicit subtext of fulfillment in the baptism that conditions the reference to Psalm 2: it contributes to Jesus' baptism as "necessary to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), that is, fulfilling God's will as described in scripture. When the less immediate context of 3:17 is taken into consideration, then we can see that the reference to Psalm 2:7 contributes to Matthew's programmatic use of scripture to ground Jesus in the traditions of Israel to show that Jesus is God's son.¹⁴ In the first few chapters, Matthew uses formulaic quotations of scripture to narrate the events of Jesus' advent. But he also uses scripture less overtly, such as the clear overtones of the Exodus story, especially by telling Jesus' story through the lens of Moses' life. As Matthew's story approaches Jesus' adult life, Matthew's use of scripture does not stop, and his allusion to Psalm 2:7 in Matthew 3:17, whether adopted from Mark, fits well into his overt and covert use of scripture up to this point in the narrative to show how Jesus and the events of his life "fulfill all righteousness," broadly conceived.

The parallel baptism scene in Luke mirrors Mark's declaration of Jesus as God's son using Psalm 2:7 and tempering it with the same "in you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). However, there is a major quality about Luke's usage of Psalm 2:7 in Jesus' baptism scene that differs from Mark's. First, the theme of Jesus as God's son is very prominent in Luke, including in the Infancy Narrative, which precedes the baptism scene. In particular, Luke configures his version of Jesus' genealogy to highlight Jesus' divine sonship,

repeating the phrase “son of . . .” throughout, all the way to its last line in 3:38, “son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.” Luke’s use of Psalm 2 to depict Jesus as God’s royal son fits into a variegated pattern that narratively builds as the story develops, thus presenting Jesus as God’s son through a number of different images.¹⁵ Psalm 2:7 is an important piece of this narrative pattern, but it is much less prominent than Mark’s rare and clear depiction of Jesus as God’s son.

In Acts 13:33, Luke uses Psalm 2:7 again, but this time in a different way. He quotes the entire verse, unlike in Luke 3:22,¹⁶ and does so in Paul’s speech in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, a speech characterized as a “word of exhortation to the people” (*logos paraklēseōs pros ton laon*). The speech contains a very selective history of Israel’s relationship with their God, culminating in the election of David as king, from whose posterity Jesus came. Luke then offers an apology for the identity of Jesus as God’s promised savior, which includes an appeal to the lack of recognition of Jesus by the residents of Jerusalem and a misunderstanding of the prophets as leading to a fulfillment of the words of the prophets through the condemnation to death of Jesus. But, according to Luke, Jesus’ resurrection by God not only proves the fact that Jesus was God’s savior, but it also implicitly resulted in Jesus’ appointment as God’s son, thus fulfilling God’s promise to “our ancestors” (13:32).¹⁷ Luke then quotes Psalm 2:7, LXX Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10 in verses 33–35, using David as a counterpart to Jesus. David, Israel’s great king, experienced corruption, whereas Jesus, God’s chosen and raised savior, did not, thus fulfilling what was spoken about him through David’s Psalms and through his person as the recipient of God’s promise of salvation.

So, Luke’s use of Psalm 2:7 (and Ps. 16:10, for that matter) in Paul’s speech in Acts 13 serves a deductively logical purpose to “prove” that Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promises through David and the true Son of God through his resurrection. In Luke’s argument through Paul’s speech, Psalm 2:7 functions to establish the “fact” that Jesus is God’s son begotten “today” (presumably through the resurrection) and sets up the argument about his lack of corruption, which puts him in a superior position to David. And all this is to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that was promised to and through David. The use of Psalm 2:7 in Luke 3:22 also functions to demonstrate something about Jesus, namely that he is God’s son. But the rhetoric of the baptism scene relies on its narrative structure rather than on a deductive argument to “prove” Jesus’ sonship and superiority to Jesus. In the baptism scene, Psalm 2:7 is not fully quoted, and it is woven into the storyline of Jesus’ advent. While thematically the two passages are similar in that both treat the divine sonship of Jesus, the persuasive features of the baptism scene rely on the narrative’s visual imagery thus forming the audience’s opinion about Jesus differently than a deductive argument would because of the way the narrative imagery is received by hearers of the story. The rhetorical force of narrative is not based on propositional logic, and so the use of the psalm contributes to a picture of Jesus that forms a perspective rather than to an argument that compels intellectual assent. In short, having God say something to and about Jesus in a narrative using the words of a psalm—something that happens rarely in the Synoptic Gospels—and having Paul say that what was written about David hundreds of years earlier was actually God speaking

about Jesus are two very different statements that would affect the audience very differently in each case.

Hebrews also refers to Psalm 2:7, directly quoting it in two places: Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 (see Steyn 2003: 262–82; Attridge 2004: 199–203). Hebrews as a whole is an extended argument about the nature of Jesus as the supreme high priest over and against traditional Israelite high priests. Through Christ's high priesthood and his self-sacrifice in this role, his followers are perfected and thus allowed access to the heavenly temple where God dwells. This access to God was originally reserved for the high priest once per year at Yom Kippur but only imperfectly in the earthly temple in Jerusalem. According to Hebrews, the imperfect and exclusive nature of the Israelite ritual to approach God has been perfected and opened up because of Jesus' pioneering self-sacrifice. As a result, all his obedient followers may approach God directly. The first direct quote of Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:5 is the first in a long series of scriptural quotations that begins and foreshadows the argument about the nature of Jesus (Wallace 2003:43).¹⁸ In this stage of the argument, the author is trying to demonstrate that Jesus as God's Son is superior to the angels. The quotation from Psalm 2 establishes Jesus as God's begotten Son because God spoke these words about him (not about David), and all the quotations that follow clearly establish the superiority of the Son over the angels. All but two of the quotations are from the Psalms, mostly from royal psalms. This plainly demonstrates that as effective as psalmic imagery is for narratives; it is equally valuable for propositional argumentation, as we saw in Acts 13. At least some ancient followers of Jesus believed that it was God speaking the words of the Psalms even if they were originally about and written by David.

The second Hebrews passage where Psalm 2:7 is quoted (Heb. 5:5) also functions to bolster Hebrews' overall argument. It occurs at the point in the argument when Jesus is introduced for the first time as the high priest. The author uses Psalm 2:7 in its entirety as the basis for claiming that the same God who adopted Jesus as Son was the one who appointed him high priest. It is worth quoting Hebrews 5:5–6 as a whole to get an idea of the author's use of Psalm 2.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest,
but was appointed by the one who said to him,
“You are my son,
today I have begotten you”;
as he says also in another place,
“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Both of these quotations are from the Psalms, the second one being from Psalm 110 (LXX Psalm 109). The first reminds the audience of Jesus' divine sonship and ensures that the same God who spoke the words that established Jesus' sonship also spoke the words that establish him as a high priest of a different order from (and superior to) that of the Levitical high priests. In other words, the first citation of a psalm is the basis of authority for the second citation of a psalm. Unlike in Acts, there is no resurrection that establishes either Jesus' divine sonship or his priesthood; it is simply on God's authority

and through God's will that this happens. The exercise of Jesus' high priesthood through his obedient self-sacrifice is what perfects his followers (by forgiving their sins) and allows them to approach God in the heavenly temple. This whole process is how the author of Hebrews configures salvation, whose basis is justified by his use of the Psalms, with Psalms 2 and 110 at the center of his argument (Attridge 2004:197–99).

Although each of these New Testament authors uses Psalm 2:7 in broadly similar ways, namely to say something about the nature of Jesus as the royal (and adopted) son of God, the particularities of each citation of, or allusion to, the verse is nuanced (sometimes heavily) by the rhetorical and theological purposes of each author.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the one example of the use of Psalm 2:7 in the New Testament, it is very difficult to characterize in full the use of the Psalms in the New Testament. We can make some very general statements to indicate that early Christian writers viewed the Psalms as authoritative—as scripture—and used the Psalms in a number of ways to talk about Jesus' life and express their beliefs about him. The Psalms, along with other scriptural texts, helped these writers to claim Jesus' royal divine sonship, lent imagery for these writers to express the significance of Jesus' suffering, and played a key role in these writers' construction of the history of God's interaction with Israel as told through the lens of their experience of Jesus. In these ways, the use of the Psalms in the New Testament differs very little from the use of the rest of scripture by New Testament writers. The exception to this would be in the particular ways that certain psalms provided an avenue for these writers to understand and express this understanding of the inseparable nature of Jesus' suffering and his lordship after his resurrection. But only detailed analysis of each citation or allusion will do justice to the complexity of the references to the Psalms in the New Testament.

NOTES

1. See especially pp. 13–16 for a discussion of the problems with the construction of the “Suffering Righteous One” in ancient Judaism and Christianity by modern scholars. See also Ruppert 1972.
2. For an excellent recent summary of scholarship on the methodological options for studying the use of scripture in the New Testament, see O'Brien 2010: 20–66.
3. See Mark 12:36 || Matt. 23:43 || Luke 20:42; Acts 1:16; 2:25, 31, 34; 4:25; Rom. 4:6; 11:9; Heb. 4:7 for indications that David was the author of the Psalms.
4. Translation from Garcia Martinez and Tigchelaar 1999: 2.1179. 11QPsalms has been paleographically dated to the first half of the first century CE by James H. Charlesworth and James A. Sanders (*OTP* 2:611–24). For a brief discussion of this text, see Daly-Denton 2000: 70.
5. The use of Davidic characterization from the Psalms in the telling of the story of Jesus has only begun to be articulated in recent scholarship (Ahearne-Kroll 2007; Daly-Denton 2000).

6. For an excellent treatment of royal ideology in ancient Israel with respect to the idea of Son of God, see Collins and Collins 2008:1–47.
7. Similar logic lies behind New Testament authors' claims that Jesus' suffering brings meaning and legitimacy to early Christians' sufferings. See Kelhoffer 2010.
8. For the most thorough survey of the use of the Psalms in the New Testament to date, see Moyise and Menken 2004.
9. For a good introductory discussion of the use of Psalm 2 in early Judaism and the New Testament, see O'Brien 2010: 155–66; Janse 2009.
10. All translations of the original languages are mine unless otherwise noted.
11. A reiteration of Ps. 2:7, this time woven together with a probable reference to Moses by an allusion to Deut. 18:15.
12. For more on Jesus as a royal Davidic figure in Mark, see Matera 1982; Ahearne-Kroll 2007: 137–67. O'Brien has argued that the high priest's question in Mark 14:61 ("Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?") contains a "faint allusion" to Ps. 2:7 (2010: 155–66), but this is doubtful.
13. Jeffrey Gibbs has argued recently that there is no allusion to Ps. 2:7 in Matt. 3:17. Instead, the allusion is to LXX Jer. 38:20 ("Ephraim is a beloved son to me"; *huios agapētos Ephraim moi*), and so Gibbs argues that Matthew portrays Jesus as Servant and Israel in his baptism scene rather than as Servant and King (in combination with an allusion to Isa. 42:1). See Gibbs 2002: 511–26. David B. Capes does not even mention Ps. 2:7 as a possible intertext for the Matthean baptismal scene (1999: 37–49). Maarten J. J. Menken only deals with direct quotations of the Psalms in Matthew and so never discusses the possible allusion to Ps. 2:7 in Matt. 3:17 (2004: 61–82).
14. Commenting on the fact that Matthew changes Mark's "You are my beloved son" to "This is my beloved son," John P. Meier says, "Apparently Matthew saw no point to having Jesus informed of his divine sonship in chap. 3 of the Gospel after the matter was dealt with at length in the Infancy Narrative of chaps. 1–2. Moreover, it is typical of Matthew's Gospel that revelation tends to go public, as opposed to Mark's secrecy about Jesus' messiahship and sonship" (Meier 1994: 188 n.25).
15. By "variegated," I mean that Luke uses several different techniques to indicate Jesus' divine sonship (e.g., quotation of scripture, demons or unclean spirits, Jesus' self-designation, God's voice, and direct or ironic characterization through the words of other characters). For example, the announcement of Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:32, 35; the boy Jesus' use of "my Father" as an epithet for God in 2:49 (cf. 10:21–22; 22:29, 42; 23:34, 46; 24:49); the genealogy in 3:23–38, mentioned above, which follows the baptism scene's use of Psalm 2:7; the temptation of Jesus in 4:1–13, especially vv. 3 and 9 (the whole scene can be understood as the formation of Jesus as God's son in light of the context of Jesus' references to Deuteronomy 6 and 8); the unclean spirit's recognition of him as Son of God in 4:41 (cf. 8:28 for a similar declaration by the Gerasene demoniac); God's declaration at the Transfiguration in 9:35; and the trial scene in 22:10.
16. In the Western text (D), Luke 3:22 reads, "You are my son, today I have begotten you," a direct quotation of Ps. 2:7.
17. Peter Doble notes, "Commentators divide over whether 'today' refers to Jesus' resurrection or whether it points back to Jesus' baptism" (2004: 110).
18. Wallace argues that starting in Heb. 1:1–4, Psalms 2 and 110 frame the exordium, as they do in the list of scriptural citations that follow, and introduce the main claims of Hebrews about Jesus as enthroned son and as divine high priest. See also Attridge 1989: 50.

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CHAPTER 18

THE PSALMS IN THE QUR'AN AND IN THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

WALID A. SALEH

WHO INHERITS THE EARTH?

IN the *Bet Hale Disputation* (c. 720 CE), a Christian disputation that records the conversation between a Muslim commander (Emir) and a Christian monk, the Muslim Emir poses several questions about the truthfulness of the Christian faith, for which the monk has ready answers.¹ This is one of several such disputations that have now been published and extensively studied. Written in Syriac, they offer a robust defense of the Christian faith against the newly forming Islam. What is of interest here is a question (or a statement of fact) raised by the Muslim Emir, that has so far been understood by scholars as boastful military talk to which the monk gives a military response.² However, the matter is actually far graver and more profoundly theological, having nothing to do with military boasting.

Let me quote the issue raised by the Emir: “But here is a sign that God loves us and is pleased with our religion (*tawdīthan*): He has given us authority over all religions and all peoples; they are slaves subject to us.” To this remark the monk states that “you Ishmaelites are holding the smallest portion of the earth. All of creation is not subject to your authority” (paragraphs 21–22). Sydney Griffith, who discusses this debate, does not comment on the nature of the Emir’s claim, whose background can be found in the famous verse in Psalm 37 (“The righteous shall inherit the land, and live in it forever” [v. 29]). The Emir gave a Qur’anic reading of this psalmic verse, a reading that Islamic tradition, more sobered by the vicissitudes of history, would later deemphasize.

It is not insignificant that Psalm 37:29 happens to be the only instance of an explicit verbatim quotation from the Bible in the Qur'an (Q.21:105). The Qur'anic verse states: "and we have decreed in the Book of Psalms (*zabūr*)—after admonition (*dhikr*)—that the righteous shall inherit the earth." It is hard to ascertain what the interjectory phrase "after admonition" signifies; the Arabic is not clear. The term *dhikr* is usually translated "remembrance." Angelika Neuwirth has translated it "after the praise."³ I am taking the term to allude to the reverse of the statement, that it is the wicked, or those who abandon God's covenant, who will be dispossessed.⁴ I argue that the quoting of this psalm verse is of utmost significance to the theology of the Qur'an, a quotation echoed in other Qur'anic verses where inheritance and righteousness are understood as related. The *Bet Hale Disputation* is one of our earliest documents that bears witness to how Muslims understood this Qur'anic verse and what they took it to mean. Indeed, the antiquity of this understanding is clear from the fact that it was soon displaced, and by the time the earliest documented internal Islamic evidence does appear (e.g., Qur'an commentaries), we see a shift in the reception of this Qur'anic verse and an attempt to marginalize what I would consider to be the early widespread understanding. The body of prophetic hadith (reports attributed to Muhammad), which ties conquest with righteousness, is thus a set of archaic reports that, although clearly not from Muhammad, were circulating among the early generation of Muslims.⁵

That Q.21:105 is central in the Qur'an is clear from the other reiterations of this theology of inheritance, where the Qur'an shows a spiritualizing understanding of the formula "inheriting the earth." Q.39:74 is explicit in its juxtaposing inheriting the earth (*awrathanā al-arḍ*) and dwelling in Paradise, leaving no doubt that if such a promise was made earlier to the people of God, it meant an other-worldly salvation. Chapter 39 (*al-zumar*) is clearly Meccan, where salvation is deemed personal and not communal; there is no inkling of earthly victories or dominion for the believers.⁶

Nevertheless, there is in the Qur'an a more worldly understanding of the phrase "inheriting the earth." Q.24:55 is unambiguous in declaring that the kind of inheritance at stake is dominion on this earth: "God has promised those who believe among you and do good deeds that He shall bequeath to them the earth just as He bequeathed it to those before you,⁷ He shall make your religion firm—a religion that He is happy with—and He shall make you safe after being terrorized—you shall worship Me and will not put another God near me—those who go astray after this, those are the corrupt." The word for "make firm" (*tamkīn*) is about earthly dominion. Chapter 24 was composed later, in the Madinan period, when Muhammad was the ruler of the city. The conditions are different here; thus, the Qur'an is able to make a safe bet that Madina is an abode for the believers. And so, according to later Madinan Suras, the Qur'an is reminding believers that they have inherited "their land, abodes and wealth, and lands you have never stepped on before" (Q.33:27).

That *w-r-th* ("inherit") is ultimately political is clear from another cognate, *kh-l-f* ("to come after, to inherit, take over"), which is also used to promise believers custody on earth in a phraseology that echoes the use of the phrase "inherit the earth." This is especially prominent in Q.24:55—"God will make you take over (*yastakhliḥannahum*)

the land just as He had already made previous generations take over the land [presumably the Israelites].” The *kh-l-f* root is a potent root in the Qur'an; humanity was made a *khalifah* (a vicegerent) on earth in the Qur'an (2:30); David the king was dubbed one (Q.38:26), and early Muslim rulers were Caliphs (or *khalifah*) as well.⁸ These two terms show the degree to which the theology of Psalm 37:29 permeated Qur'anic discourse.

There is another term in the Qur'an that played a major role in describing the nature of the early Islamic polity and that eventually came to denote conquests—*f-t-h*. This term, like the two others—to inherit (*w-r-th*) and to take over (*kh-l-f*)—is also semantically flexible: it denotes physical opening, such as the opening of a gate or a sack (Q.6:44; 12:65) but also the gates of heaven from which rain, mercy, and torture pour forth (Q.7:96; 54:11). The verb *f-t-h* also denotes the opening of the gates of Paradise and Hell (Q.7:40; 39:73; 39:71, 72) as well as a more abstract kind of opening, a judgment, a clarification, a separation, or a decision (Q.2:76; 34:26; 7:89; 14:15; 2:89; 7:89). Such abstract uses indicate that the verb has already acquired soteriological meanings in the Qur'an. Conquering (a city) becomes the ultimate soteriological summation of all these usages in the Qur'an: the Day of *Fath* (*yawm al-fath*) in the Qur'an commemorated both conquest and salvation (*qabl* and *ba'd*; cf. Q.57:10). God promises Muhammad a great *fath*, a clear *fath*, after which people convert in droves (Q.48:10; 110:1). Such is the nature of the *fath*: it results in total absolution of sins and assures victory (Q.48:2–3). Mecca was considered the ultimate prize.⁹

The adroit use of these three terms, encapsulating both eternal salvation and earthly success, makes them foundational for understanding the politics of salvation in the Qur'an. Together, they constitute a web of concepts that ties aspects of military success with salvation, where the dominion of God is given to the believers.¹⁰

These theological articulations in the Qur'an are conducted under another fundamental Hebrew Bible dilemma, that of the role of a king for salvation. Nowhere does the Qur'an mention the opening chapters of 1 Samuel. Yet it is clear that Muhammad decided against kingship, and salvation was, even when achieved by the arms of believers, only God's doing.¹¹ The Qur'an bristles with divine anger at the notion that anyone but God achieves victory—“you threw not when you threw, God did the throwing” (of the javelin, Q.8:17). Indeed, the only instance where the Qur'an attempts to revoke its strict rule against miraculous explanations for Muhammad's career is in its attempt to rob the believers of their pride in victory. God apparently sent fighters from Heaven to fight alongside believers (Q.9:26), the only instance of a miraculous claim to Muhammad in the whole of the Qur'an. This was a statement that went too far, and when it first appeared in the Qur'an, it was more circumspect: invisible soldiers they were (Q.33:9). Pride in numbers is useless, and God showed that he would humiliate the believers when they are swollen with arrogance, making them run for cover (Q.9:29). It is God alone who grants victory. Victory is received, not gained, by the believers “when God's Opening [*fath*!] and victory come” (Q.110:1).

So we can see that the Muslim Emir was thus engaging in a complicated theological argument that has a very old lineage: what is the kingdom of God, and what is the relationship of victory to salvation? The significance of the Emir's statements and its

relationship to early Muslim conquests have never been fully appreciated. The Hadith already make a very close link between the early Arab conquests, salvation, and God's pleasure with the Muslims. The evidence from the *Bet Hale Disputation* is of great significance because it is an independent witness to the centrality of Psalm 37:29 via Q.21:105 and how it was understood by early Muslims. The Emir was elaborating on a verse from the Qur'an by tying the success of early Muslim conquests with God's favor and ultimately with the truthfulness of the message of Islam. One does wonder whether the Emir also knew of the Sermon on the Mount (although such a supposition is unlikely), yet he knew for certain how central this verse was for Christians. The monk, regardless of whether the reference of the Emir was to the Psalms or to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:5), would have been fully aware of the point made by the Emir even if he was unwilling to accept it, as was the case. The *earth* is not yet under your command, he emphasizes to the Emir. However, the monk is not disputing the argument that dominion and salvation go hand in hand. This was a disputation that, thanks to Psalm 37:29, shared a common fundamental notion of how God acts: He will grant the earth to His people.

That this theological issue was at the heart of the Emir's reflections is clear from the fact that the Emir comes back to this point again at the end of the *Disputation*, where he states:

While I know your religion is right, and your way of thinking is even preferable to ours, what is the reason why God handed you over into our hands and you are driven by us like sheep to the slaughter, and your bishops and your priests are killed, and the rest are subjugated and enslaved with the king's impositions night and day, more bitter than death? (Griffith 2000: paragraph 36)

I am inclined to believe that although the *Disputation* is fashioned by Christian apologetic concerns, this emphasis on victory as soteriologically meaningful does reflect a peculiar understanding advocated by early Islam. Although the Emir himself is presented as convinced of the Christian truth, he persists, in face of historical reality, in his theology of victory. God, the lord of history, has given a clear sign that Muslims are righteous. If anything, this *Disputation* points to the degree to which Psalm 37:29 was central in understanding the meaning of history to early Muslims.

Given the complete absence of direct quotations in the Qur'an from older named scriptures, apart from a Talmudic citation that the Qur'an seems to imply comes from the Torah,¹² we must take Q.21:105 very seriously. Why did the Qur'an depart from its usual rhetorical style and venture to name both the source and cite the verse? The analysis given above is my answer to this question: the verse, I am arguing, is fundamental to the theology of salvation in the Qur'an and hence the pointed reference to its lineage. The spiritualizing understanding of inheriting Paradise (seen as synonymous to inheriting earth), as presented in several parts of the Qur'an, points to the dire predicament of the early Muslim Meccan community, an understanding that was fully shed and indeed negated later in the Qur'an, where conquest (*fath*), a new term coined by the Qur'an, soon became central.¹³ The prophet who at first disputed being someone who wanted a

wage or sought dominion, was now leading armies, collecting taxes, and issuing judgments.¹⁴ It is in light of this new theology that we can understand the sudden centrality of the notion of *jihād* and its intimate connection to faith.¹⁵

THE PSALMS IN THE QUR'AN

Before continuing to discuss the use of psalmic material in the Qur'an, one needs to ask to what degree was the Qur'an or its author aware of the Psalms as a book. The term used in the Qur'an to refer to the Psalms as the book of David is *zabūr* (Q.4:163, 17:55, "We gave David the Psalms"), a term reminiscent of the Hebrew root *z-m-r*. The root *z-b-r* is already used in Arabic poetry to refer to books or written material, and it is used as such in the Qur'an (in the plural form, *zubur*, Q.26:196). The reference to the book of David as *zabūr* leaves no doubt that it is the book of Psalms that is meant. Because we have a direct quotation from this *zabūr* that turns out to be Psalm 37:29 makes the matter certain. Moses was given the Torah (*tawrāt*), Jesus the Evangelium (*injīl*), David the Psalms (*zabūr*), just as Muhammad has now been given the Qur'ān.¹⁶ Modern scholars have shown affinity between certain chapters in the Qur'an and certain biblical psalms, implying that Muhammad must have been familiar with this book. All this raises the interesting question about the availability of versions, or at least selections, of the Psalms in Arabic.

There has been a reappraisal of the role of the Psalms and their relationship to the Qur'an in recent scholarship. Leading the movement to place the Psalms as pivotal to understanding the compositional nature of some of the Meccan chapters of the Qur'an is Angelika Neuwirth.¹⁷ One should note that the importance of the Psalms for the study of the Qur'an has long been recognized in Qur'anic scholarship; it is, however, an insight that has lain dormant until Neuwirth's pioneering work.¹⁸ Hartwig Hirschfeld was certain that the Psalms imprinted Muhammad's style to such a degree that one could see its influence all over the Qur'an.¹⁹ Heinrich Speyer tabulated the numerous instances where he detected Quranic material drawing upon or resembling the Psalms (Speyer 1961 [1931]: 447–49). He was already building on the insights of Wilhelm Rudolf and others before him (Rudolph 1922). Such correspondences, however, remained without investigation; it was not clear what to make of such resemblances or indeed how one begins to understand what the Qur'an was attempting to achieve by using the Psalms.²⁰ Speyer's work was both a culmination of this trend and a stark illustration of this type of scholarship. He simply listed a Qur'anic verse and its supposed correspondence in the Psalms and left it at that. Beyond stating the obvious, such an approach did not tell us much about the Qur'an. The resemblances between Q.55 and Psalm 136, for example, have been noted from early on, yet it took at least two decades for Angelika Neuwirth to establish a coherent analysis of this relationship. The significance of her work is that she has shown us a way to compare full chapters from the Qur'an to the Psalms, thus allowing for comparisons beyond the mere statement of correspondence, as had been the case

in much scholarship.²¹ Previous scholarship used examples of resemblance to state the obvious. Thus Hirschfeld, after stating that the correspondences between the Qur'an and the Psalms are extensive, concluded that Muhammad, having heard the Psalms, had thought very highly of them and had used them in his preaching (1866: 32).

Angelika Neuwirth highlights several aspects about the psalmic material in the Qur'an. First, it is the early Suras of the Qur'an that are most in conversation with the Psalms.²² The Qur'an, moreover, turns minor rhetorical aspects of the Psalms into major features of its own style. Nature and natural phenomenon are central to the Qur'anic discourse and not limited to one or two Suras. In fact, almost every Sura has a nature section. There is also a radical difference between the texts regarding the use of history and the remembering of the past. According to Neuwirth, "the historical part of the psalm is thus replaced by an eschatological part in the surah" (2011a: 769). "Eschatology in the emerging Qur'an," she asserts, is the most significant discourse and thus "parallels the importance that history enjoys in Jewish contexts" (p. 771). Psalmic material in the Qur'an has to be understood in the new historical context of the Qur'an, not as a mere reproduction of psalmic images and concepts. Neuwirth rightly highlights the polemical emphasis on the Arabness of the Qur'an's new revelatory language and its early liturgical use. The Psalmic material was thus molded to fit this emerging Arabic national religious language.

I would add that what we see in the Qur'an is a mode of monotheistic development in late antiquity made possible because it was so peripheral. Instead of a saint showing up among the barbarian unchristian tribes on the periphery of imperial rule to convert them and translate the Bible into their language, a native prophet appears with a burning proclamation for the nonscriptural Arabs, the *ummiyūn*, the Gentiles who are to join the God of Israel. The new revelation has a shallow historical narrative to draw upon, Neuwirth notes, and it enshrines the notions of Arabic revelation and the future apocalypse into the cornerstone of a new mode of discourse. As such, the Qur'an is profoundly complex: it is a hymn book, a revelation, a polemical argument, and a law book all rolled into one, attempting to give the Arabs a quick push into the complex scriptural heritage already enjoyed by the *ahl al-kitāb*, the "people of the Book." So poignantly was this Gentile status felt that the Qur'an itself invented the expression "people of the Book," keenly aware that the Arabs were not but also keenly hoping that they would soon join their ranks.

Neuwirth's article on Q.78 (as an echo of Psalm 104) and Q.55 (as an echo of Psalm 136) is perhaps the most extensive analysis of this relationship between the Qur'an and the Psalms, a relationship resulting in the remolding of psalmic material in the Qur'an (Neuwirth 2011a).²³ Any work on the Qur'an and the Psalms has to answer now to her analysis and understanding of this relationship. The first volume of her commentary on the Qur'an highlights the centrality of the Psalms to her understanding of the early Meccan chapters of the Qur'an (Neuwirth 2011b).²⁴

The above investigation of Q.21:105 is my own attempt to detail an approach to understanding a psalmic quotation in the Qur'an. In this example, I chose a short quotation, the most famous psalm quotation in the Qur'an, to illustrate my method. The Qur'an was

elaborating on the notion of inheriting the earth, transferring the covenantal promise of the Promised Land into an Arabian context. The promise made to Muslims was tentative at first, tied to the apocalyptic phase of Muhammad's early career, where inheritance was tied to Paradise. While explaining the polemical use of this verse in the Qur'an is not possible, I am inclined to understand it as a promise spoken to the believers as a form of vindication of their faith and not directed against Jews or Christians. Neither do we have in the Qur'an the notion of inheriting the Promised Land as a way of supplementing or superseding Judaism and Christianity. What was at stake was a share in dominion, a desire to be like the *Rūm* up north (the Romans), a sort of a monotheistic dominion for the Arabs. The *Bet Hale Disputation* shows clearly how this changed dramatically due to the early Arab conquests and how this promise made inside Arabia became understood in the wider Near Eastern realm.

QUR'AN COMMENTARY TRADITION AND THE PSALMS

Although the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament did not become part of the Islamic scriptural corpus—despite the fact that the Qur'an builds on them and acknowledges them as scripture—their presence was always felt. Both the biblical material in the Qur'an and Islamized biblical lore assured that the biblical past was a constant in the Islamic imagination. This has to be kept in mind when we study the subsequent history of the Bible (both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament) in Islam. Because much of the biblical material in the Qur'an is terse and referential (i.e., assuming that one knew what the Qur'an was referring to), early Muslim exegetes relied heavily on Jewish and Christian converts to transmit material to Muslims, hence the development of an Islamized biblical lore. This was an extensive corpus of biblical material in Arabic that was tailored to suit the Qur'anic material and Islamic sentiments. Access to the “biblical” past was soon mediated through this Islamized biblical lore rather than through the Bible or through Christian or Jewish literature. This was a conscious decision, because Muslim heresiographers, polemicists, apologists, and historians easily availed themselves of Arabic Bibles, which were soon available thanks to both Christian and Jewish translations. If religious savants wanted to consult the Bible, they could have, and some did, but only sparingly. Thus the Psalms in Islamic history has a bifurcated history. There is first the Psalms as a book habituated in its Christian and Jewish Arabic environment,²⁵ and, second, there is the Islamic use and understanding of this book, or attempts at understanding this book, the topic of this section of the essay.

Early Muslim exegetes were not eager to admit that *zabūr* in Q.21:105 was simply the Psalms, although clearly the Qur'an does mention the term enough to make it clear that *zabūr* did mean the Psalms here. Moreover, the early Muslim exegetes were attempting to sever this verse from any supersessionistic claims, or at least its messianic or salvific

value that associated notions of dominance with true religion.²⁶ I find this a significant development in the history of the reception of this verse, because it is the only instance where Muslim exegetes, had they wished to, had the chance to discourse on the Psalms and discuss issues such as what is this book, what does it contain, and so on. Muqātil (d. 150/767), one of the earliest authors of Qur'an commentaries, glosses *zabūr* in Q.21:105 as the three divine books: Torah, Evangelium, and Psalms (Muqātil 1984: 3.96). This terse gloss is, of course, problematic. Was Muqātil trying to say that the promise of inheriting the earth is found in these three scriptures (which would be technically true)? There is much to recommend this understanding, that *zabūr* meant the totality of pre-Islamic scriptures. Understanding *zabūr* in Q.21:105 as previous scripture, moreover, did not result in any attempt to seek out the exact citation from these scriptures. The term *dihkr*, "admonition," is glossed by Muqātil as the Heavenly Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*), the ur-scripture in Heaven that has everything written on it.

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) attempts to give a uniform reading for this verse and to harmonize the various interpretations he inherited in order to veer the reader toward the meaning that the tradition now wished to import (1968: 17:102–105). Although al-Ṭabarī records several conflicting interpretations (including a reference to one authority who believed that the *zabūr* here was indeed the book of David), he took *zabūr* to mean not just the Psalms but all the books of all the prophets that had copied the Heavenly book. Moreover, he gives his full support to the interpretation that understood this verse to mean that God had proclaimed in *zabūr* that the earth, meaning Paradise, shall be inherited by the believers (17:104).

More interesting is the perfunctory manner in which al-Ṭabarī acknowledges the interpretation that understood this verse to be a promise to the Muslims themselves, that it is they who will inherit the earth: "some have said that it is actually the terrestrial earth bequeathed by God to the believers in this world" (17:105). To al-Ṭabarī the earth is Paradise. He then supplies the interpretation of those who believe that this verse referred to the Jews and cites in support of this understanding with Q.7:137. Finally, only then does he acknowledge that a tradition from Ibn 'Abbās understood this verse to support the minority interpretation that the earth itself will be inherited by the Muslims. It is remarkable how little effort or credence al-Ṭabarī wants to give to a militant understanding of this verse. Indeed, the interpretation presented by al-Ṭabarī is counterintuitive. If the tradition wanted to boast, just as the Emir had done earlier, it is here. Yet, remarkably, al-Ṭabarī opts not to do so. I am inclined to see in this a determined shift away from a military soteriological understanding, a clear attempt to rob the Qur'an of its political agency.

Al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), a contemporary of al-Ṭabarī, is far more willing to preserve older material—he does give us the majority interpretation, which is the same as the one favoured by al-Ṭabarī, but he also treats equally the interpretation that states that the *zabūr* is the book of David.²⁷ Earth, understood to mean Paradise by the majority of interpreters, could also mean the Holy Land, *arḍ bayt al-maqdis*, which will be inherited by the believers, and then he adds, "good believers will always inhabit this area." This is an echo of the earliest interpretation given to this verse, which we find reflected in the

Bet Hale Disputation. Indeed, it is only through reading al-Māturīdī that we can judge that al-Ṭabarī was attempting to downplay the old interpretations. Much later Islamic commentary tradition follows in the footsteps of al-Māturīdī and not al-Ṭabarī.²⁸

None of these exegetes seem to be interested in telling us more about the *zabūr* of David. A rare instance of divergence comes from an early Shiite commentator, al-Qummī (alive c. 260/873), who gives a summary of the content of the book of Psalms. He cites a report on the authority of the Shiite Imams (and also of the Mahdī himself) that *al-zabūr* “has apocalypse (*malāḥīm*), thanksgiving (*taḥmīd*), adoration of the Lord (*tamjīd*), and supplication (*du‘āʾ*)” (al-Qummī 1991: 2:77). This is a rough summary of the content if we understand the word “apocalypse” to mean “battles” in a loose sense. It is not clear how the Imams came to know about the content of the work.

The perfunctory attitude of the religious Islamic tradition to its sources is an interesting situation to assess.²⁹ The hitherto historical judgement was one of regret and censure, if only Muslims had shown more interest in the Bible. Yet, I have come to see the virtue in this apathy. Nothing good comes out of a dominant culture taking an interest in the religious affairs of its minorities, and as historians we should not measure the benefits of any such encounter from the vantage point of the dominant culture. The apathy of the Muslim majority exhibited toward the Bible was a necessary condition for the thriving of Jewish biblical scholarship in medieval Islam. The history of the Arabic Bible is yet to be written, and the downgrading of Arabic and the Arabic Bible after the discovery of Ugaritic in the early twentieth century, as an aid for biblical Hebrew, had a detrimental effect on what was already an endangered field. But the story of the Arabic Bible is a fascinating story, for not only is there an Arabic Bible in this story, but also the Hebrew Bible itself was redefined in the Islamic world, due to the philological revolution that the Arabs brought to the study of Arabic. The discovery of Arabic philology, so early in Islamic history, produced a radically philological culture, where the original language of the text was paramount—not only Arabic as such but Hebrew too was understood to have the same privilege vis-à-vis the Bible as Arabic possesses vis-à-vis the Qur'an.

Translation was thus never confused with the original text. Within this radical notion of ur-languages, a claim over the Hebrew Bible was impossible to muster, and appropriating a translated version could never suffice. Muslims, as a result, stood hamstrung by their own intellectual arrogance; they could never appropriate the Hebrew Bible unless they claimed a mastery over Hebrew, a language they did not care to learn. The Hebrew Bible remained the domain of the Jews, and it is this cultural apathy that allowed the Judeo-Arabic culture a freedom from the otherwise restrictive majority that was utterly prevalent across the cultural sphere. The Arabic Bible is thus a misnomer if it is meant to describe the history of the Bible in the Muslim lands, for the Hebrew Bible itself was habituated in an Arabic philological culture that radically transformed how the Jews, and later Europe, approached the Hebrew Bible. The grammatization of Hebrew is a direct result of this Muslim apathy, for it allowed the Jews to absorb the Arabic philological revolution on their own terms. As such, the very success of the Judeo-Arabic experience was conditioned on Muslims' limited capability to penetrate the cultural domain of the Jewish minority. The Hebrew Bible, in the wake of the philological revolution that

happened in the Near East and which engulfed Hebrew, meant that the Hebrew Bible was no longer a midrashic Bible but an Arabized Bible, studied in the same spirit as the Qur'an was studied.

This cultural situation meant that not only was there no Islamic typological reading of the Psalms, but given that the Hebrew Bible was impossible to appropriate when encountered by Muslims, it remained a Jewish book and was read on Jewish terms. Muslim polemicists did their best to undermine the Hebrew Bible (and the New Testament), but we do have examples of more sympathetic readings. These positive encounters are all the more remarkable because they are encounters of a religious nature and because they happened in a medieval setting. The impact was also significant because it happened in the medium of the Qur'an commentary tradition, *Tafsir*, the religious genre of Islam. I am referring here to the Qur'an commentator al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480), whose use of the Bible to interpret the Qur'an remains one of the most singularly significant Muslim encounters with the Hebrew Bible on the interreligious plane in the pre-Modern period.³⁰

AL-BIQĀ'Ī AND THE PSALMS

Al-Biqā'ī is the first Muslim exegete to inquire after the scriptural origins of the quotation in Q.21:105. He knew where to find it using an Arabic Christian translation of the Psalms from the Septuagint (he gives the Psalms number as 36). Having located it, he understood the enigmatic phrase "after admonition" in Q.21:105 to indicate the location of the quotation in the book of Psalms: God had been discoursing for a while in the Psalms before he declared what he declared. The location al-Biqā'ī stated comes at the end of the first quarter of the book of Psalms. Something strange then happens. Al-Biqā'ī, instead of quoting Psalm 37 (or 36 according to the Septuagint), starts by quoting Psalms 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22, 31, 34, 35, and finally 37, the location of the quotation in the Qur'an. In this sense, the interpretation of the enigmatic phrase "after admonition" is here given in full; it is nothing but the first quarter of the book of Psalms.³¹

This is not the only instance of al-Biqā'ī quoting from the Psalms. Indeed, long before the advent of modern Qur'anic higher criticism, al-Biqā'ī realized that the language and content of certain Qur'anic verses are "reminiscent" of psalmic rhetoric and themes. He copied the Psalms extensively into his Qur'an commentary with the result that the psalmic material was incorporated for the first time in an Islamic genre, as part of God's divine Scripture. When he encountered Q.7:198 ("if you call them [the false Gods] to the right path, they will not hear you. You find them looking toward you but they cannot see"), al-Biqā'ī quotes Psalm 115:3–5. This is an unusual way of doing Qur'an commentary, so unusual that it was never again repeated in the Islamic tradition.³²

A far more radical moment of Psalms quoting in this Qur'an commentary is found when al-Biqā'ī encounters the glorification verses in the Qur'an. Thus arriving at Q. 17:44 ("The seven heavens and the earth and everyone in them glorify Him. There

is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise”), al-Biqā’i gathers a veritable summary of the praise language of the book of Psalms to illustrate that this mode of divine discourse is an old form of speech. He starts first by saying that this verse is often repeated and quoted in the Book of David. He then quotes Psalms 69:35; 68:8–10; 89:11–16; 96:1, 9–12; 97:4–5; 148; and 150:1–3, 5–6. This is not only unprecedented in the history of Qur’anic exegesis, but such equal treatment of the scripture of Judaism is also rare. It is not that Muslims did not admit or grant the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament the rank of Holy Scripture, but rather the ambivalence of this acknowledgment—are these scriptures falsified?—and the polemical setting of this recognition—do they acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet?—have rendered these two texts obsolete on the religious plane for Muslims. It is not that Sufis did not sometimes avail themselves of the Bible, or that sobered historians did not dare to defend their integrity; the Bible simply did not have a place in the interpretation of the Qur’an.

Al-Biqā’i had other occasions to quote from the Psalms, including the famous Psalm 137, which was quoted in full.³³ In addition to quoting the Psalms, al-Biqā’i did discuss the Book of David as a book. In his attempt to articulate the place of David in Jewish history, al-Biqā’i had to address the value and substance of a new scripture for the same religion. This is necessitated by the commentary on Q.17, which according to Muslims mentions the Temple and David. Al-Biqā’i stated that it is precisely because already the Jews had the Torah, a book of law, that the Book of David is entirely homiletical (*mawā’iz*) (1976: 11.446–47). The aim of this style, al-Biqā’i contended, was to prevent people from “strutting on earth with a smirk,” to instil humility; it was a call to be sincere, to be vigilant in judging oneself, and to be charitable to others. It is also a book filled with praise to the Lord (*tasbīh*). The Book of David was, moreover, the only instance in the corpus of Jewish Scripture that explicitly mentions hell and resurrection, which are not mentioned in the Torah (11.447). After summarizing the aim of Sura 17 of the Qur’an, which according to al-Biqā’i was never to rely on any one but God for help (*wakīl*), he quotes from the Book of David with a rough paraphrase of Psalm 144. The extensive nature of the quotations from the Book of David points to an inordinate fascination with this book and a remarkable sensitivity in approaching it. Through al-Biqā’i, the Psalms have been habituated to the Qur’an through the medium of Qur’anic interpretation.

ON ISLAMIC PSEUDO-PSALMS

Recently, David Vishanoff has rekindled academic interest in a genre of Islamic writing that purports to be the true Psalms of David (2011: 85–99; 2012: 151–79). These texts were studied early in the twentieth century but have since been forgotten. Vishanoff has done extensive research on the manuscripts of these texts and on how we should understand this literature. Because they bear little, if any, resemblance to the original Psalms—only the first two psalms are more or less accurately translated—the issue of their significance

has been hard to fathom. The relocation of this literature from a polemical setting—in which these texts were understood to be part of an Islamic discourse on the corruption of Jewish and Christian text, the usual mode of understanding this literature—to an intra-Islamic literature (i.e., as a form of Islamic homiletic writing intended for a purely Islamic context that has little to do with Muslim–Jewish or Christian–Muslim interaction) goes a long way in elucidating this form of writing, the only form of pseudo-biblical writing in Islam. This new understanding offered by Vishanoff shows the degree to which the Bible was more an imagined text in the Islamic realm, whose substantive content was ultimately not an abiding concern for Muslims. A new edition of these texts would greatly add to our understanding of this imagined world of biblical writing. I would also add that when we tell the story of the Bible in Islam, the history of these texts has to be incorporated. The history of the Psalms in the Islamic world, after the introduction of printing in the nineteenth century, is a matter that needs another discussion.

NOTES

1. For the disputation and an initial analysis see Griffith 2000. For the literature on such disputations, see the bibliography listed in Griffith's article.
2. Recently, Gerrit J. Reinink rightly argued that the issue of dominion frames this disputation, although he was not interested in analyzing the reasons behind it or connecting it to Ps. 37:9 (2006: 153–69).
3. For her translation, see Neuwirth 1998: 388–420. Haleem reads, "As we did in [earlier] Scripture" (2004: 208). Although Rudi Paret stated that "Die Deutung des Ausdrucks *min ba'ad al-zikr* is nicht sicher," he translates it in a manner akin to my understanding (1989: 347; 1996: 230–31).
4. The Qur'an is careful about how the covenant (*'ahd*) of God is to be understood—inheritance is only for the righteous regardless of who they are, a Pauline argument that is made scriptural in the Qur'an and placed in the mouth of God. Thus Abraham's pleading for his progeny is rebuffed by God, "the unjust has no share in My covenant" (Q.2:124). This and other places show a distinct sensitivity against arguments of the filial relationship to God, or sonship, as possible venues for God's grace (see the famous Q.5:18, a bristling mockery of the language of sonship in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian liturgy). This polemical setting is presented in a wider context that is arguing for the right of the Arabs to be included in the prophetic history of Israel. That is why I take the *dhikr* here to mean the reverse of the promise, in keeping with the clauses added to the covenantal language in the Qur'an that qualify it. The term *dh-k-r* is not regularly used in negative terms in the Qur'an, but its usage as such is not absent; see Q.26:209.
5. These prophetic traditions are cited in Qur'an commentaries on several verses, including Q.21:105.
6. One would not have expected the root *w-r-th* ("to inherit") to be used as a synonym for entering Paradise (instead of the more commonly used "enter," *d-kh-l*)—see, e.g., Q.19:63; 23:11; 7:43; 43:72. In all these instances, the believers are said to inherit Paradise. The term is rather odd and can only make theological sense if we understand it to be a fulfilment of the psalmic covenantal promise.

7. Cf. Q.7:128, where Moses is telling the Israelites that "God will bequeath earth to whom He wants of His creatures." The Qur'an is fully aware of the covenantal promise to the Israelites (see Q.26:59, a peculiar verse that seems to imply that the Israelites took over Egypt), though any such notion is later removed: the Holy Land is promised to Muslims, as is clear in Q.5:21.
8. On this term, see Qadi 1988: 392–411. I do not share the author's conclusions about the term. The term is already political in meaning in the Qur'an.
9. The hesitation of Chase Robinson to accept the notion of *fath* ("conquest") as Qur'anic is puzzling. That Mecca was the ultimate prize is clear even from the Constitution of Medina—that the city was conquered without a battle does not diminish the achievement or the monumentality of the event or the military nature of the victory. It was only ten years prior that Muhammad was driven out of the city. The turn of events is nothing short of breathtaking. See his otherwise detailed discussion of the term in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* 1:397–401. The scepticism is unwarranted unless we remove references to the Day of *Fath* from the Qur'an, which Robinson does not propose.
10. See also the use of the term *f-l-h*, "success, salvation, victory." It is also an evocative and expansive term that should be grouped with the terms I discussed above. The most illustrative use of this term is in Q.58:22, which culminates a discussion about the party (*ḥizb*) of the Devil, which will lose, and the party of God (*ḥizb Allāh*), which will win. Q.58:14–22 is a good example of the purposeful confusion between victory in this world and entering into paradise. The term *ẓ-h-r* ("to appear, overwhelm, be victorious") is also relevant. It is used in the story of Moses, where the Egyptians were "manifest" in the land. The term is then used three times for Muhammad's new *dīn* (religion), which will overwhelm other *dīns* (Q.9:33; 48:28; 61:9, all in context of conquest and wars).
11. On kingship in the Qur'an, see Saleh 2006: 261–83.
12. This is the famous Q.5:32. On this verse, see Speyer 1961 [1931]: 459; Paret 1989: 120. The issue of the direct quotations in the Qur'an is an interesting one, since we have yet to establish criteria for indicating whether the Qur'an was quoting (or whether the author of the Qur'an was thinking he was quoting). There are other places where the Qur'an claims to be quoting scripture, but these are so apologetically driven that we are not certain to what exactly they are referring. According to the Qur'an, the coming of Muhammad is prophesized in the Torah and the Gospels, but we are not given a verse or a quotation apart from an affirmation that his coming was attested in the Bible (Q. 61:6; 7:157, but see also 48:29). I am thus discounting such instances of what I would call direct quotations. Regardless of the situation, Q.21:105 remains unique in the Qur'an: it names the source and the quotation is verbatim.
13. It is remarkable that the Qur'an does not use military terms common among the Arabs then, such as *gh-z-w* (to "raid," used only in Q.2:156)—although all of Muhammad's campaigns were called *maghāzī*, raids. There is something impermanent about a raid, and the Qur'an clearly wanted conquest—permanence; *fath* was thus preferred. In this sense, the historical vision of the prophetic voice went even beyond the participants themselves. Seeing the armies of his enemies retreat after the ominous siege of Madina for one month, Muhammad is quoted to have said, "Now we will raid them and they will not raid us" (see Saleh 2008b: 181). The language is reminiscent of warring tribes, not of a statesman who will establish an empire. The Qur'an has the model of Rome; the Qur'an's vision was so alien to Arabia that for the first time in the recorded history of the Near East a political vision came out of Arabia.

14. See the various denials in the Qur'an of taking a wage (*ajr*), especially in chapter 26, where Muhammad is distinguishing himself from poets, and Q.88:22, which denies that he is a tyrant. The *Sira* (Biography of Muhammad) has him deny that he wanted to become a king.
15. On *jihād* and holy war, see Donner 2006.
16. This is precisely how al-Ṭabarī understood prophetic history, although he names the book of Muhammad the *Furqān*. His statement comes at the first encounter with the word in Q.4:163.
17. See Neuwirth 1998: 388–420. This argument is fully developed in Neuwirth 2011: 733–78.
18. Perhaps the first and strongest advocate for the centrality of the Psalms in understanding parts of the Qur'an is Hirschfeld 1866.
19. See Hirschfeld 1866: 27, where he states that Psalms was the most influential book on Muhammad after the Torah. Indeed, it influenced the structure of the early Suras such that they resembled the Psalms more than any other form of composition: “Das die Psalmen einen mächtigen Reiz auf sein Gemüth ausübten, ist leicht verständlich, er citirt sie nicht nur, sondern ahmt sie auch nach.” After citing several similarities between the Qur'an and the Psalms, especially Sura 1, whose form he affirms is psalmic, he asserts: “Dies alles verräth eine verhältnissmässig frühzeitig Kenntniss der Psalmen (p. 28).
20. The entry “Psalms” in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* is indicative of the lamentable state of scholarship on the Psalms in the Qur'an. The article has nothing to say about the Psalms in the Qur'an, fails to mention relevant secondary literature, and misattributes Q.21:105 to Ps. 37: 9, 11, 29—it is not the poor or the meek; the Qur'an uses the term “righteous” (*ṣāliḥūn*), a clear reference to v. 29.
21. Hirschfeld noted the resemblance between the initial fifteen verses of Q.16 and Psalm 104. His analysis consisted of showing the similarities between the two. Although duly noted, one is not clear what to conclude from such an analysis (Hirschfeld 1866: 27–32).
22. Neuwirth 2010: 563–64: “So könnte man ihn von seiner Form her in seiner frühen Phase am ehesten mit den Psalmen vergleichen. Wie der Psalter besteht auch der frühe Koran aus kurzen, knapp formulierten Versen in dichterischer Sprache, die inhaltlich wie die Psalmen Gotteslob, Gebete, aber auch Klage eines exemplarischen Frommen formulieren.”
23. At forty-five pages, the article represents a major contribution to the problem. See also her analysis of several other Suras as psalmic compositions in Neuwirth 2010: 398–408.
24. See Neuwirth's index for psalm citations.
25. The study of this history lies beyond the scope of this article.
26. The danger of using victory and military success as a sign of God's favor and grace must have seemed too hazardous for these scholars, given the course of human history. Muslim apologists were at the receiving end of such arguments in the Iberian Peninsula. See the Codex Vindobonensis Palatinus, Vienna A. F. 58, fol. 50a, where a Muslim scholar is at pains to deny that military victory is a sign of God's favor shown to Christians and a clear sign of Christianity being the true faith. His Christian interlocutor was having none of that.
27. Al-Māturidī 2007: 9:332.
28. Indeed, in al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035) we find direct statements that understood the covenantal promise of the Promised Land to be from the beginning between God and the Muslims. This statement is attributed to a Jewish convert to Islam. See al-Tha'labī 2002: 6:313.
29. Joseph van Ess published a monumental work on the Islamic heresiographic “mind set” (2010). This and other works will eventually shift the nature of the debate.
30. For a general assessment of al-Biqā'ī, see Saleh 2008a: 629–54.

31. My first attempt at understanding why al-Biqā'ī quoted so extensively from the book of Psalms here did not take into consideration the phrase "after admonition." See Saleh 2007: 331–47.
32. There is a poignancy in the pioneering work of al-Biqā'ī that still haunts the Islamic tradition. As late as the 1960s, the liberal Tunisian scholar Ibn 'Āshūr was unable to find the location of this verse in the Psalms on his own and had to quote an Italian Orientalist for the citation. He did, to his credit, cite the verse, but his inability to access the Bible is all the more telling. See Ibn 'Āshūr n.d.: 8:162.
33. See Saleh 2007 for more references on these quotations.

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CHAPTER 19

RECEPTION OF THE PSALMS: THE EXAMPLE OF PSALM 91

BRENNAN BREED

VERY few books have impacted the broad array of human cultures as deeply and profoundly as the book of Psalms. From liturgy to architecture, poetry to politics, and medicine to music, the book of Psalms has proven a rich resource for almost every avenue of human life. Reception history is the scholarly activity that attempts to chart and analyze the diverse trajectories of the uses and influences of texts such as the book of Psalms throughout history. Instead of attempting to summarize the reception history of the entire Psalter, this essay offers a sketch of the reception of one particular psalm, namely Psalm 91 (90 LXX), in hopes that readers may catch a glimpse of both the vast depths of biblical reception that remain to be explored and the interpretive upshot of such exploration.

Of great importance to the reception history of the book of Psalms is the fact that the book itself is the product of a long and complicated reception history. Many of the psalms find their origins in the world of ancient Israelite liturgy and thus are the products of a long tradition of performances that were themselves adaptations of older songs and rituals. The redactors who created the Psalter from preexisting poems likely shaped them precisely so that they could be used in a wide variety of circumstances. The very general and open-ended nature of the references to enemies and trials in the lament psalms, for example, allows readers facing quite different problems nevertheless to find that the Psalter elucidates their peculiar situation. As Patrick D. Miller has argued, this structural decontextualization may explain the powerful effect that the Psalter has had throughout the past several millennia: “[The Psalter’s] openness to varieties of application and actualization continues through the history of interpretation into the present” (1983: 35).

Psalm 91, in particular, functions in so many possible “original” contexts that it is difficult to locate the starting point of its reception history. The psalm opens with a

first-person statement of trust in YHWH (91:1–2), then seems to shift to a second-person proclamation of YHWH's protection for the speaker (vv. 3–13) before concluding with a divine promise of salvation for the faithful (vv. 14–16). Many scholars believe that the variety of voices suggests a performative, likely cultic dimension. But who is speaking, what is the nature of the problem being addressed, and what exactly is given to the speaker to solve the problem? Various scholars have suggested that the psalm originally functioned as a purification ritual, a general blessing, an oracular promise of military victory given to a king, or thanksgiving for a recovery from illness, while others argue that it represents a temple entrance liturgy, a request for asylum in the temple, an enthronement ceremony or even a song of conversion to Yahwism (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 428–32).

All of these options seem plausible. Whatever the historically correct original context may be, by the time the psalm was incorporated into the Psalter, the questions of *speaker*, *problem*, and *solution*, among others, were left open. Thus, the psalm invites readers from diverse contexts to help shape the meaning of the psalm by contributing their own answers to these questions. Psalm 91 is not indeterminate, as if readers could say anything they wanted; the text does have a degree of structure prior to a reader's interaction. Yet that structure does not produce the same, single legitimate meaning every time it is read. Rather, the psalm is *underdetermined*, and thus it requires the reader's interaction to produce a determinate meaning.

For example, within the psalm's canonical setting, the calm assuredness of Psalm 91 jostles with the somber note sounded by Psalm 90, thus producing a dialogue responding to the crisis of exile that appears to inform the lament-heavy Books I–III (Pss. 1–89). The initial *speaker* in this case is emblematic for the people as a whole, the *problem* is the crisis of faith produced by the event of Exile and its attendant suffering, and the *solution* is the divine promise of salvation for the people of Israel. Other readers throughout history have arrived at similar conclusions by independent means, including the nineteenth-century German Orthodox commentator, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1966: 151–52). The similarities between these readings, some two thousand years removed from one another, are due to the fact that different readers can actualize similar potentials within the same text.

The psalms, like many other biblical texts, tend to produce reception histories characterized by several more or less distinct hermeneutical trajectories. Psalm 91 is no exception. To organize the myriad options that constitute the reception of Psalm 91, I trace two rather general trajectories: Psalm 91 as an apotropaic amulet and as a prophecy of domination. Along the way, I also note the countertraditions that demonstrate that any one construction of a psalm is but a limited contribution to the never ending effort to (re)read it.

PSALM 91 AND APOTROPAIC PROTECTION

Most readers throughout history have understood Psalm 91 to be a statement or enactment of divine protection from demons. This understanding derives from elements

found in the text itself: some recent scholars have noted the incantatory language of the psalm and its ambiguous references to dangerous elements that could be understood in demonic terms. The phrases “terror of night,” “pestilence that walks in the darkness,” and “noonday devastation” do not necessarily refer to demons, but a reader in post-exilic Yehud might have thought they plainly referred to evil spirits (cf. 91:5–6; Cathcart 2011: 95–98).

By the late Second Temple period, at least some readers understood the text in this manner. At Qumran, a version of Psalm 91 was found in a compilation of psalm-like apotropaic, or evil-averting, texts that may have even performed an exorcistic function. This collection, 11Q Apocryphal Psalms, most likely derives from a nonsectarian source and was thus in circulation beyond the Qumran community. Among several textual variances, this version of Psalm 91 includes a superscription attributing it to David, which draws on the tradition of his apotropaic musicianship (cf. 1 Sam. 16:23; Eshel 2003: 85).

Also, the Old Greek (or Septuagint) translation of Psalm 91 (LXX Psalm 90), produced in the second century BCE in the diasporic community of Alexandria, understood this text to discuss divine protection from demonic forces. Generally, the Greek translation of the book of Psalms seems to function as an “interlinear” translation, wherein the Greek attempts to reflect the Hebrew base-text in a rather wooden manner. There are always, however, glimpses of interpretation that one may find in any translation. Among several interpretive gestures in LXX Psalm 90, including an attribution to David, is the translation of *yšwd šhrym* (“it devastates at noon”) in v. 6 as *damoniou mesēmbrinou* (“evil spirit of noonday”), perhaps understanding *yšwd* (“it devastates”) as a form of *šd* (“demon,” cf. Ps. 106:37; Deut. 32:17). Likewise, the Syriac Peshitta, a major translation carried out in the second century CE, and the early medieval Aramaic Targum use the word “demon” to translate *yšwd*. In turn, the communities that used the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Targum as their biblical texts, including the Western Christians who generally used Jerome’s Greek-based *Versio Gallicana* instead of his Hebrew-based *Versio iuxta Hebraicum* translation of the Psalms, often understood Psalm 91 to have apotropaic or protective powers.

The New Testament, written several centuries after the translation of the Psalms into Greek, refers to Psalm 91 three times. Two of these references are Synoptic Gospel parallels (Matt. 4:6//Luke 4:10–11; Luke 10:19). Because of Jesus’ own self-descriptive use of the Psalter and the alleged messianic, familial, and typological connections between Jesus and David—considered the author of the Psalter by late Second Temple period (cf. Ps. 110:1; Matt. 22:43–44)—the New Testament authors often interpreted psalms as prophetic descriptions of Jesus.

The gospels cite Psalm 91 during Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness and explicitly treat it as scripture (Matt. 4:6//Luke 4:10, citing Ps. 91:11–12). Ironically, it is the devil himself who quotes this antidemonic psalm, but Jesus responds by rejecting its magical use (Matt. 4:7//Luke 4:12). Some scholars have detected a polemical thrust in the devil’s use of this text and Jesus’ rebuke: perhaps the gospels here condemn the common use of Psalm 91 as a magical or exorcistic incantation. In Matthew’s reading, the problem of the text seems to be that one would misunderstand scripture as a magic trick.

Matthew's alternative reading of Psalm 91 may reflect a tradition that stretches well into the Second Temple period, as the psalm's text seems to stress that a person's lived faith, not an amulet or incantation, prompts YHWH's salvific response (91:1, 9, 14–15; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 430). Yet one might also understand 91:2 to be itself an incantation, which would include incantations as a part of one's lived faith. If both of these options are potential meanings of the text, then the gospels' debate between Jesus and the devil dramatizes a tension internal to the psalm itself.

One may find anxieties about the psalm's apotropaic powers also in ancient Jewish discourse. In the Talmud, the psalm is referred to as the "song referring to evil demons" (*b. Šeb.* 15b), the "song for the demons" (*y. 'Erub.* 10:26), and the "song for the stricken" (*y. Šabb.* 6:8), but a particular Talmudic discussion attempts to clarify the extent of the psalm's textual powers. The Babylonian Talmud tells of R. Joshua b. Levi, who recited Psalm 91 every night before retiring to sleep. One Talmudic voice notes a problem: R. Levi also taught that one should not heal oneself by reciting Torah (*b. Šeb.* 15b). In the ensuing discussion a consensus emerges: an apotropaic use of Psalm 91 and thus scripture in general is acceptable, but once harm occurs, scripture may not be used to magically heal the individual. In this way, the apotropaic use of the psalm is both accepted and criticized.

Likewise, some early Christian interpreters understood Psalm 91 to say that an individual's virtue, not the text of the psalm itself, is apotropaic. From this idea, several theologians, including Isaac of Nineveh (7th century CE) and Theodore bar Koni (8th century CE) taught that asceticism and female virginity kept evil forces at bay (Bar Koni 1984: 16).

Although the *Glossa Ordinaria*, the most widely used medieval biblical commentary, straightforwardly refers to Psalm 91 as a "hymn against demons," many medieval and early modern Christian theologians, especially the early Protestants such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, and modern theologians such as Karl Barth cautioned strongly against what they saw as superstitious and magical uses (cf. *LW* 11:210; *CD* III/3: 517). For example, during the Nuremburg plague of 1533, Andreas Osiander—the leading Reformed preacher in the city—heavily criticized the traditional apotropaic understanding of Psalm 91, which had long been seen as a curative (Rittgers 2007: 140–43). Osiander delivered a sermon on Psalm 91 at the height of the plague, when terrified people were abandoning any pretense of caring for their neighbors. Osiander urged the people to repent, turn to God in prayer, and trust that their faith, acted out in love for their neighbors—along with the God-given gift of modern medical practice—was their only recourse. As Osiander argued, Psalm 91 teaches that trust in God casts out fear (Ps. 91:5), which allows people to act in love and kindness toward others during a terrifying event such as the plague. Osiander's sermon was reprinted, translated, and relied upon for centuries by Protestant cities suffering from plague. Not all celebrated Protestant theologians have been so critical of the curative powers of reciting Psalm 91, however. Charles Spurgeon, for example, wrote that a certain "German physician was wont to speak of [Psalm 91] as the best preservative in times of cholera, and in truth, it is a heavenly medicine against plague and pest" (1976: 383).

The anti-apotropaic countertradition could also, however, be used in ethically deleterious ways. In one instance, the Protestant theologian Emanuel Hirsch, a member of the Nazi party, wrote about a pastoral encounter with a woman whose apotropaic understanding of Psalm 91 caused him to stop using the Old Testament altogether, because he saw how “unchristian” was its use (1936: 6–7). Hirsch then used the anecdote to argue that all Christians should avoid the Old Testament, as its Jewish heritage threatened the supposedly pure theology of Aryan Christianity. Hirsch’s argument is flawed in many different ways, but surely one particular mistake is that he understood the psalm to mean only one thing—namely, the dominant apotropaic reading of his time. In the case of Psalm 91, however, the early emergence of both totemic and antitotemic readings underscores the multivocality of the text even in the Second Temple period.

Yet the vast majority of Psalm 91’s reception history follows the apotropaic trajectory first noted in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In rabbinic midrash, for example, one finds the opinion that Moses crafted Psalm 91 while ascending to heaven to defend himself against demonic assault (*Num. Rab.* 12:3; *Midr. Teh.* 91). Medieval Jewish interpreters such as Rashi also understood the adversaries in the poem to be demonic forces, and the medieval Jewish instruction manual for the magical use of psalms, *Shimmush Tehillim*, tells its readers to recite Psalms 90 and 91 over a person tormented by an evil spirit or incurable disease. This practice continued through the seventeenth century, as attested by Hayyim Vital’s magical manuscript, which instructed someone injured by a demon to recite Psalm 91 forward and then backward, and by R. Moses Zacuto (17th century CE), who used the text in an exorcism ritual (Chaies 2003: 211). Surprisingly, this text also found its way into a magical spell to release one from prison—merely by reciting it seventy-two times daily (Trachtenberg 2004: 112–13).

Due to their popularity and constant use in liturgies of many branches of Jewish and Christian faiths, psalms were often inscribed on religious architecture, tombstones, and a wide variety of personal effects. Because of its supposed apotropaic powers, more than eighty objects from the ancient world have been discovered with inscriptions of at least part of Psalm 91 (Kraus 2009: 137–47). Unsurprisingly, Psalm 91 was inscribed on many magical devices, including several Middle Eastern Aramaic incantation bowls that date from late antiquity through the early medieval period. These bowls, which were generally found buried upside down at the corners of client’s homes, bore texts and images that were thought to help repel, impede, or perhaps even trap nearby demonic forces. While many near Eastern cultures created similar magic bowls, Jewish magicians often incorporated biblical texts into their magical designs. On three recovered incantation bowls and one Genizah fragment, the words of Ps. 91:1 are interlaced, word by word, with the text of Deut. 6:4, the famous *Shema Yisrael*, the centerpiece of Jewish prayer (Naveh and Shaked 1985: 184–87). Both Psalm 91 and the *Shema* are traditionally recited before bedtime, so this practice may inform the construction of the bowl (cf. *b. Šeb.* 15b; Harari 2006: 540). Perhaps the interlaced words of Psalm 91 and Deuteronomy 6 were an attempt to confuse and outsmart the demons, who would not have been able to recognize the distorted texts. Likewise, in one Cairo Genizah text, the initial letters of Ps. 91:1–9 are used as a lengthy magical name: one reading the name would not likely know

its source, but the power of the psalm was apparently not dependent upon hermeneutical understanding.

Psalm 91 was also inscribed on door lintels of eight ancient houses in Syria and Cyprus and two fifth-century churches in Ravenna, featured on tombs and sarcophagi in the Crimea, frescoed on a wall of the sacred room adjoining the altar of a church near Petra, and interspersed with references to Egyptian astral deities on several early medieval syncretistic magical tablets (Kraus 2009: 140). Psalm 91 also proved very popular on amulets and rings among ancient Byzantine Christians. Twenty-five metal armbands and six rings, found scattered around the Roman East dating from the sixth to the twelfth century CE, testify to the wide appeal of such a totemic object.

Along with the first verse of Psalm 91, these armbands were inscribed with a variety of invocations and stock images, such as the evil eye, warlike saints on horseback, and the annunciation of Christ. Some of these amulets also bear images of the snake-god Chnoubis (cf. Ps. 91:13) or the Gorgon, which likely referred to the demonic power that could influence human wombs (Spier 1993). In light of the popularity of these bracelets, it is important to remember that the vast majority of individuals who encountered the psalms did not have access to the sorts of lengthy philological studies or detailed readings that constitute the “history of interpretation.” Instead, they focused on the ways in which biblical texts could inform daily life, most of which was consumed with basic survival. In a time before modern medicine and science and with little political stability, people looked to powerful sacred objects such as biblical texts to offer more than just theological wisdom. They needed help—and the reception history of Psalm 91 shows one way in which this need led to a host of creative applications of the biblical text.

The apotropaic use of Psalm 91 also influenced its liturgical adaptations in both Jewish and Christian communities. Because many of the psalms originate and refer to a cultic setting in life, the Psalter proved to be a most helpful resource for later practices of prayer, worship, and ritual. The daily liturgical use of the psalms can be traced from the Second Temple period to the present day. Both Jewish and Christian traditions followed Second Temple traditions of reading the psalms regularly both in private and in community, but Psalm 91 is one of the rare psalms that almost everyone seems to have agreed should be prayed every day. The Talmud refers to R. Levi’s practice of praying Psalm 91 before sleep every night, while the important thirteenth-century commentator R. Meir of Rothenburg and the fifteenth-century Talmudist Jacob Weil even said it before naps (Trachtenberg 2004: 116).

Along with its presumed apotropaic powers, which individuals would need during the demon-plagued night or when sleeping, the references to God’s protection (vv. 1–13) and promises of salvation (vv. 14–16) have long offered worshippers comfort and security. From an early date Psalm 91 appeared in morning Jewish prayers during various holy days as well as regular Shabbat liturgies, including the evening prayer service, or *Ma’ariv*, which occurs just after the conclusion of Shabbat (Gillingham 2008: 44). Jewish funerary practices have also incorporated Psalm 91 in several ways, including the ancient and still continuing practice of the burial procession stopping either three or seven times en route to the graveyard to recite Psalm 91 (Davies 1999: 106). With both

mourners and the deceased occupying a liminal space, one characterized by vulnerability and instability, the comforting and reassuring—and perhaps antidemonic—words of Psalm 91 helped bring peace for many centuries.

In Christian liturgy as well, Psalm 91 has played a key role in bringing comfort to vulnerable worshippers. The use of Psalm 91 as a daily evening song is mentioned by Caesarius and Cassiodorus (6th century CE), and Benedict of Nursia (6th century CE) added Psalms 4 and 134 to create his influential construction of the nighttime prayer ritual of Compline. In the early medieval Western Church, Amalarius (9th century CE) notes in the *Liber officialis* that Psalm 91 and John 3 were readings for Good Friday liturgies (Chazelle 2001: 260). These texts share the motif of a serpent (Ps. 91:13; John 3:14) and thus seem to depict Christ's crucifixion as a subduing of demonic forces.

In the Eastern Church, the early desert monastics understood the reference to “noon-day demon” (Ps. 90:6 LXX) to refer to a spiritual apathy that generally struck midday. Thus the psalm has traditionally been recited during noonday prayers, which are in the Eastern tradition associated with the crucifixion of Christ, a parallel to the use of Psalm 91 in Western Good Friday liturgies.

Even today, the apotropaic understanding of Psalm 91 continues to be exceptionally popular, especially among communities that desire security, peace, and health. In much of the two-thirds world, belief in personal attacks from evil supernatural forces, magical powers, miraculous healings, and ancestral spirits has not waned amid the secularizing forces of modernity as in much of the northern hemisphere. For many modern African Christians, Psalm 91 offers the promise of spiritual and material peace and access to the divine power that can create the conditions for peace. In one instance, a survivor of the Rwandan massacres claimed that, while attempting to hide from a group of men looking to kill her, she read Psalm 91 and held the Bible open over her chest. According to this survivor, her attackers miraculously could not find her even though she stood in plain sight (Jenkins 2006: 108).

While for many North Americans and Europeans such claims stretch the bounds of credibility, the African reading of Psalm 91 follows much of the text quite closely. YHWH's promised deliverance is not naturalistic; Psalm 91 paints a picture of miraculous salvation (vv. 7, 11–12) that straightforwardly contradicts the realm of physical possibility. For those in the pit of despair, hope in the impossible often offers the only possible hope.

PSALM 91 AND THE DOMINATION OF RIVALS

As seen above, Psalm 91 has quite often been understood in terms of personal protection and antidemonic apotropaism. Nevertheless, some interpreters who have focused more closely on vv. 13–16 than on vv. 5–6 have come to slightly different conclusions. While vv. 1–11 promise divine protection for the faithful in light of troubles of many kinds, v. 13 describes the addressee trampling on various dangerous animals, and in v. 15

God promises to honor the addressee. Thus, in addition to divine protection, the end of the poem promises that the faithful will themselves be triumphant and made worthy of esteem. Perhaps these verses merely refer to God's protection in a general sense. Several biblical scholars, however, have argued that the image of trampling upon serpents and lions participates in a larger ancient Near Eastern royal motif of kingly power over the powers of chaos (Weiser 1962: 611). Thus, some have argued that Psalm 91 originally served as a cultic blessing for a king heading into battle. In this context, the references to armor (v. 4), arrows (v. 5), thousands of casualties (v. 7), an encampment (v. 10), and trampling predators (v. 13) cast the entire poem as a discussion of a pitched battle. For many centuries, the royal and military themes brought out by these readings shaped an alternate trajectory of Psalm 91's reception.

In the New Testament, Jesus refers to Psalm 91 in his reaction to the testimony of the seventy disciples sent ahead of him that they had power over demons (Luke 10:17). Jesus claims that he gave the disciples this authority "to tread on snakes" and "the power of the enemy," thus interpreting the disciples' newfound power in terms of Ps. 91:13. While the reference to demonic powers seems very similar to the apotropaic readings highlighted above, Luke's Jesus draws a connection between the power to subdue evil spirits and the legitimation of those who have been divinely entrusted with authority. Similarly, the pseudepigraphical *Testament of Levi*—in what is perhaps an early Christian interpolation—claims that divine authority will be given to select "children" who will then trample on "wicked spirits" (*Test. Levi* 18:12). One can already see here the intertwined themes of power, domination, and theological authority that would continue to inform many readings of Psalm 91 through the centuries.

Early Christian theologians tended to read the Psalms in typological terms as Davidic prophesies of Christ; many of them understood Psalm 91 as a prophesy of Christ routing his spiritual enemies in light of the resurrection. Eusebius (4th century CE) offers a representative gloss: v. 13 refers to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (cf. Matt. 4:6//Luke 4:10), which foreshadows his Passion and the subsequent "attack he made against the hostile powers after he left the body" (Hilmo 2004: 39–40). Antiochian exegetes, in contrast, tended to understand the Psalms as Davidic prophesies concerning Israelite history. Theodoret of Cyrus (5th century CE), for example, taught that Psalm 91 foretells Hezekiah's military victory over the invading Assyrians (Theodoret 2001: 103).

By the mid-fourth century CE, this interpretation of Psalm 91 found its way onto a sarcophagus in Gerona, Spain, in the guise of an image of Christ standing on a lion and a snake (Ps. 91:13; Saxl 1943: 12). The funerary context suggests a reference to Christ's death and resurrection, as mentioned by Eusebius, and may have at times functioned as a response to the failure of the psalm to ward off demons whose presence brought death and (temporary) defeat. Moreover, this image draws from an iconographical tradition of trampling upon enemies that can be traced to ancient Near Eastern images of divine and royal domination. This iconographic constellation of themes proved remarkably popular. By the fifth century CE, the image of Christ treading upon beasts was found on

decorated lamps from various locations around the Mediterranean basin, and within several centuries it was ubiquitous in Western Christianity.

The iconography of Christ treading on beasts was not, however, purely spiritual and theological. According to Eusebius, the emperor Constantine placed an image above the entrance to his palace that depicted the “saving” sign—likely a cross—above images of Constantine and his sons. Below them was a serpent “being pierced by a weapon and cast down into the depths of the sea,” adumbrating both Isa. 27:1 and Ps. 91:13 (Eusebius 1999: 255). Similarly, imperial coins from 327–37 CE depict Constantine’s Roman military standard, topped with the Christian *Chi-Ro* symbol, piercing a serpent. In describing this iconography, Eusebius points out that the serpent refers both to the devil and Constantine’s political enemy, Licinius, whom Eusebius had earlier called “that dragon.” Constantine’s reception of Ps. 91:13 thus conflates the political authority of the emperor with the spiritual authority of Christ and likewise conflates the military enemies of the empire with the spiritual enemies of God. Those who oppose the emperor are explicitly in league with the devil, and those who support the emperor support Christ.

Byzantine Roman emperors showed a great affinity for Constantine’s reading of Psalm 91. In Ravenna, the center of Byzantine power in Italy, several fifth- and sixth-century CE images and inscriptions clearly make this connection. In the archbishop’s chapel, a large mosaic in a lunette above the main doorway boldly depicts Christ dressed in the golden armor and military symbols of a Byzantine emperor, returning victorious from battle. Depictions of Christ dressed as an emperor are rare, and the few known examples all derive their iconography from Ps. 91:13 (Kantorowicz 1997: 72). Positioned within the private bishop’s chapel but above the exit to the secular world, this mosaic stood as a constant reminder of the relationship between Christ and imperial-military authority. Furthermore, the mosaic portrays Christ holding a book inscribed with the text of John 14:6, which signals the theological and political disputes between Orthodox and Arian Christians (Elliott 2009). Justinian I, a Byzantine emperor, captured Ravenna from the Arian Ostrogoths in 540 CE. While the Arians had been rather tolerant of theological differences, Justinian framed his military offensive in terms of defending theological orthodoxy from the advances of heresy, thus demonizing the Arians. The imagery of the Archbishop’s mosaic links not only Christ with emperor; it conflates the emperor’s military domination with the struggle for theological purity.

At times, theology took a back seat to bare-knuckled political uses of this text. For example, Justinian II, a deposed Byzantine emperor who regained the throne in 706 CE, had the usurping general and emperor brought before him during a series of triumphal races in Constantinople’s Hippodrome. Leontios and Apsimaros, whose names sound much like the Greek words for “lion” and “asp,” were “thrown down like slaves” (Kantorowicz 1997: 72). Justinian then trampled them while the crowds in the Hippodrome spontaneously chanted Ps. 91:13.

Carolingian monarchs adopted this interpretive trajectory of Psalm 91 for their own purposes. After the Frankish king Charlemagne led a military expedition to Rome to reinstall deposed Pope Leo III, Leo surprisingly crowned Charlemagne as Roman emperor and defender of Rome in 800 CE, thus stripping the Byzantine monarch of

the title. From that time, the Frankish rulers understood themselves as the military and political defenders of the true orthodox Christian faith. Carolingian iconography quickly adopted the motif of Christ trampling on beasts to promote their newfound ideology. For example, the early-ninth-century Stuttgart Psalter, produced in the royal Carolingian abbey of St. Denis, depicts Christ dressed in armor, holding the cross, and standing on a snake and a lion, evoking the imagery of the Archbishop's mosaic in Ravenna (Saxl 1943: 12).

Many major Gothic cathedrals, such as those at Chartres, Rheims, and Amiens, adapted the trampling motif to sacred architecture by sculpting images of snakes and dragons into the bases of piers supporting the cathedral doors, suggesting that the Roman Catholic Church crushed the forces of evil—and their theological opponents (Bornstein 1982). This was further supplemented by images of national saints, such as the bellicose Bishop Zeno, trampling their rivals in cathedral portals. Many late medieval bishops crafted triumphant tombs depicting themselves as champions “spiking evil’s manifestations beneath their feet in allusion to the seminal text of triumph, Psalm 91:13.” (Binski 1996: 94). Likewise, in 1458 Pope Pius II symbolically tread on captured antipapal conspirators upon his reentry into Rome (Baldwin 1990).

Themes of political authority, theological purity, and military domination also made Ps. 91:13 amenable to Crusader propaganda, as found in the sermons of Odo of Châteauroux, famous for his role in condemning the Talmud (mid-13th century CE) (Cathcart 2011: 97). To meet the demand for rituals associated with crusading, the Catholic Church developed a liturgy of blessing for those setting out for the Holy Land, which included Psalm 91 (Whalen 2011: 262). Yet Roman Catholics in no way had a monopoly on the militant use of Psalm 91. Richard Morrison, humanist scholar and propagandist for Henry VIII, argued that England was the new Israel and as God’s chosen nation Psalm 91 prophesied England’s military victory over Catholic opponents (Sowerby 2010: 105).

Psalm 91, noted both for apotropaic powers and an association with military victory, has proven popular with many centuries of soldiers. Combatants in the American Civil War, as well as American and German troops in World War I, left proof of their fervent devotion to this particular psalm (Holladay 1993: 361; Herwig 2009: 199). Popular stories abound concerning the miraculous events that occurred to American soldiers in various twentieth-century wars. In one such dubious tale, a joint British-American unit in World War I recited Psalm 91 together and did not suffer a single casualty in three successive major battles (Ruth 2012: 35). Today, Psalm 91 can be found inscribed on a wide variety of military paraphernalia, such as dog tags and bandanas.

In recent American political discourse, Psalm 91 has been used both to offer solace to the dead and to promote a fearless mindset in fighting perceived enemies. The memorial service at Eglin Air Force Base commemorating the victims of the Khobar Towers bombing, for example, featured a reading of Psalm 91 intended to bring solace to those who had lost loved ones (Jamieson 2008: 170). In contrast, actor and political activist Chuck Norris urged Americans to aggressively confront “Islamofascism,” which was only possible if they would “remember the God of 911, Psalm 91:1 that is”

(Norris 2010: 78). Although his exegetical skills are wanting, and his political application questionable, Norris nevertheless participates in an interpretive trajectory that stretches back to the Second Temple period. Psalm 91 can signify political, military, and theological triumphalism precisely because certain textual elements in the poem allow themselves to be actualized in this way. It is, after all, quite possible that the earliest use of this poem occurred during a ritual blessing of an Israelite king eagerly desiring the assistance of the deity while departing for battle.

Yet it is equally possible for these military, political, and religious resonances to be construed quite differently. Medieval Jewish readers, in particular, did not often arrive at a military-triumphalist understanding of Psalm 91, likely because Jewish political and religious life has been much more concerned with surviving as a minority than with celebrating dominance over rivals. This did not, however, keep Jewish readers from interpreting Ps. 91:13. In one interesting countertradition, Jewish synagogue artists adapted the Christian motif of Christ treading on the beasts. In medieval Rouen to early modern Krakow, for example, images of dragons, snakes, and lions are found upside down underneath synagogue columns and the spandrels near the *bimah* (a raised platform from which the Torah is read) and the ark in which the Torah scroll is kept (Rodov 2005). These images seem to have eschatological valences, suggesting that evil will continually attempt to threaten the promises offered in the Torah until the advent of the world to come.

In Jewish medieval manuscript illumination, several images depict dragons attempting to bite the shofar and others attempting to inhibit individuals from praying to God. In these Jewish depictions of Ps. 91:13, the symbols of evil are not easily identified with any political or theological rivals, and neither are they pictured as entirely subdued. Evil remains active in the world. This understanding of v. 13 takes into account the whole poem, instead of focusing, as Christians are wont to do, on vv. 13–16, which promise salvation and honor. Verses 1–11 depict a world mired in troubles and threats of many kinds, all of which remain potent—except for the one who has faith. In Jewish synagogue and manuscript art, God's activity, manifest through the Torah and the presence of the community gathered in the synagogue, seems to keep evil forces at bay, but the triumphal victory remains set in the future as a yet-unclaimed event. In this light, Psalm 91 is a song for those dominated, rather than for those who dominate.

For some modern readers as well, Psalm 91 has offered a subversive critique of the urge to dominate others. Max Horkheimer, a twentieth-century philosopher and director of the Frankfurt School, offers one such example. Throughout his life, Horkheimer worked hard to understand the forces of oppression and the possibilities of emancipation, but it was late in his life that his rediscovered Judaism began to influence his thought. Of primary interest to him was the concept of another world of perfect justice, a world of the “wholly other” that beckoned to become a reality. Near the time of his own death, Horkheimer wrote a short meditation on the power of Psalm 91. It was his mother's favorite psalm, because she would pray it often when she lived under Nazi occupation. Horkheimer writes, “It was the expression of her certainty of a divine homeland in the face of the misery and the horror in reality. . . . Such confidence prevailed throughout her

life in spite of a full consciousness of the disaster on the European horizon” (2006: 116). Despite real danger and true fear, the psalm offered Horkheimer’s mother a utopian vision of a world where justice reigns. In his reading of Psalm 91, Horkheimer follows his mother’s footsteps, urging his audience to trust in the Eternal One as a means of opposing the injustices that are rife in this world. Horkheimer writes, “The thought of refuge as it expresses itself in Psalm 91 awakens not merely obedience but the love for that which is other than the world and which gives meaning to life and the suffering in it. Despite everything” (p. 119). Upon his death, Horkheimer had part of the Ps. 91:2 (“In you Eternal One, alone I trust”) inscribed upon his gravestone in the Jewish cemetery in Bern, Switzerland, the home to which his family had fled from Nazi Germany. His parents’ gravestone, nearby in the same cemetery, had long since been engraved with the words of Ps. 91:1.

CONCLUSION

As seen in the above examples, the Psalms interact with almost every facet of human life. It seems that from their very moment of origin, the Psalms have been begging to escape their contexts and find new horizons. To repeat the words of Patrick Miller, “That openness to varieties of application and actualization continues through the history of interpretation into the present” (1983: 35). And, one might add, into the future. Who knows what new and surprising varieties of application and actualization of the Psalms will emerge in the coming years?

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PART VI

INTERPRETIVE
APPROACHES

CHAPTER 20

PSALMS AND THE QUESTION OF GENRE

WILLIAM H. BELLINGER, JR.

The question of genre dominated the academic study of the Psalms in the twentieth century and initiated the modern study of the Psalms. The work of Hermann Gunkel at the turn to the twentieth century opened new paths for the study of these texts. What might be called the Gunkel–Mowinckel consensus of a form-critical approach to the Psalms, with refinements along the way especially from Westermann, held for most of the century (Clements 1976: 76–98). This approach provided readers with a clear way to organize their study of the Psalms and helped guide readers through the poetry of each text. Gunkel’s delineation of literary types of psalms continues to influence how scholars interpret these texts. The context of the form-critical work on psalms has shifted in the twenty-first century, and other issues such as interpretive dimensions of Hebrew poetry and how these texts were collected to shape the Hebrew Psalter have cracked the dominance of the form-critical approach. Nevertheless, the question of genre is still vibrant in Psalms study.¹ This essay provides an account of the form-critical approach to the Psalms, summarizes the literary categories of these texts, and finally articulates some conclusions about the question of genre in contemporary Psalms interpretation.²

HERMANN GUNKEL

The progenitor of form criticism in biblical studies is Hermann Gunkel.³ His work on the oral settings of ancestral stories in Genesis continues to have an impact on Pentateuchal studies. His study of poetic forms also continues to influence the interpretation of the Psalms and other poetic texts in the Hebrew Scriptures. While others have advanced the cause in various ways, Gunkel’s genre categories of laments, thanksgiving psalms, and hymns of praise continue to influence study Bible annotations, commentaries, and other

interpretive studies of the Psalms. Gunkel regarded previous work on the Psalms as too subjective and sentimental. He sought a clear and objective method. He also understood genre as including both literary features and social settings. With the Psalms, that setting related to worship.

Gunkel began by comparing psalms and classifying them according to type. He found fairly consistent form and content in the various types, each one reflecting an institutional setting in ancient Israel's religious and social life. Gunkel thus emphasized the typical in his analysis of these poems. The analysis was not limited to the Psalter but also included psalms in other parts of the biblical canon as well as other ancient Near Eastern psalms. The comparative analysis included matters of vocabulary and literary structure as well as the religious tone of the poetic text. This procedure, in Gunkel's view, provided a broader comparative base to organize a study of the Psalms. Readers could then list together all the hymns, the cries for help, and the wisdom poems, for example. They could thereby study all the examples of each category together and consider individual psalms in the light of the category as a whole. This type-analytical method broke new ground in Psalms study and continues to influence Psalms interpretation.

When Gunkel considered the canonical Psalter, he discovered major and minor types of psalms, based primarily on frequency of occurrence. The major psalms types consisted of hymns of praise, community laments, individual laments, individual psalms of thanksgiving, and royal psalms. Hymns of praise offer adoration to God. Gunkel especially gave attention to the enthronement psalms, which celebrate divine kingship, and the Zion songs celebrating God's presence in Jerusalem, as well as hymns outside the Psalter as sub-categories of praise. The lament psalms are prayers for help in the midst of crisis. Gunkel distinguished between prayer from crises affecting the whole community (such as a military crisis) and those tied to individuals (such as illness). He also understood psalms of trust to develop out of the laments. Psalms of thanksgiving offered praise for deliverance from crisis when deliverance arrived. Gunkel included the royal psalms among the major categories because of the centrality of monarchy in ancient Israel's social and religious life.

Gunkel listed as minor types community thanksgiving psalms, pilgrimage psalms for the journey to the sanctuary, wisdom psalms reflecting the influence of the wisdom teachers, and various kinds of liturgies with a change of voice in the text (e.g., general liturgies, prophetic liturgies, entrance liturgies). Gunkel also suggested that some psalms contain elements of various literary types and so labeled them mixed types. These labels continue to wield influence in contemporary scholarship. The question of genre was for Gunkel about both literary features and *Sitz im Leben*. These genres arose from particular places in the social and religious life of ancient Israel, and the primary institutional background in this case was the cult, the organized worship of the community, primarily in the Jerusalem temple.

While Gunkel charted new territories in the study of the Psalms, he was also a man of his time. He often interpreted the eloquent language of the psalms in terms of a dead ritualism or from an eschatological perspective. He viewed the psalms in the canonical Psalter often as later spiritual imitations of the forms or types of psalms. It was

thus the psalm types rather than the individual texts in the Psalter that derived from the Jerusalem cult. His views of the institutional settings of the Psalms have often been debated, but his work on the literary types opened new avenues of study and interpretation and initiated the modern study of the Psalms. His understanding of genre includes both literary features and social settings, and his categories reflect that understanding. Most studies of the Psalms in the twentieth century begin with a classification of the Psalms according to type. Such genre analysis continues to be a vibrant part of Psalms scholarship.

SIGMUND MOWINCKEL

Gunkel's student Sigmund Mowinckel extended the work of his teacher in the area of the institutional settings from which the Psalms arose. Mowinckel argued that the Psalms, not only the psalm types, originated in the worship of ancient Israel. The poems exhibit worship language, and Mowinckel took this language to reflect the reality of ancient worship rather than a "poetic fiction." For Mowinckel, the key to the interpretation of the Psalms and to the import of form-critical work is the notion of *Sitz im Leben*. The setting in the ancient community's social and religious life provides the context for the texts' impact. From the worship language of the Psalms, Mowinckel sought to understand their background in a living worship setting. Such worship could have great impact, and so Mowinckel rejected the view that personal religion and the religion of corporate worship were somehow separated. Thus, Mowinckel explored the Psalms in relation to festivals and rituals and where these texts could fit in such settings.

Ancient Israel's cult, with its primary connection to the Jerusalem temple, was central to ancient Israel's religion, helping the community both to understand and enact faith. Mowinckel understood worship to be a dramatic event with the vibrant sights and sounds of processions and rituals and sacrifices. Certain acts accompanied the music and words of the Psalms, central texts for these festal occasions. The cult was central in preserving and making it possible for the community to remember its faith tradition. The faith history was dramatically reenacted in the cult, and the congregation could participate in that formative process and thus come to terms with its significance. A text such as Deut. 26:20–26 illustrates this function of cult. In the act of cultic memory, succeeding generations could participate in YHWH's liberation of the people from Egyptian oppression as part of the dynamic preservation of the faith tradition. In preserving and nurturing this narrative, the cult was central to this ancient lived faith.

Various psalms refer to acts of worship and reflect, in Mowinckel's view, the living worship of the ancient cult. Mowinckel tied most of the Psalms to the preexilic Jerusalem cult and its personnel. He was certainly influenced by comparative ancient Near Eastern texts and their religious significance. Mowinckel is also remembered for his construction of the fall festival in ancient Israel's cult (see also Brueggemann 1988: 1–28; Tate 1990: 504–509). He argued that the festival was a renewal of YHWH's

kingship. The festival is often termed an enthronement festival because YHWH is dramatically enthroned in victory again over the forces of chaos. Creation and order are thus restored again for the year to come. This work demonstrates the generative power of the cultic setting and the difficulty of reconstructing those settings.⁴ His lasting influence on Psalms interpretation, however, is the connection between the Psalms and cult. It is clear in his work that genre relates both to literary patterns and to social settings for texts. While the specifics are often debated, most contemporary Psalms interpretation countenances a connection between these texts and worship.

CLAUS WESTERMANN

The form critic Claus Westermann deemphasizes the matter of *Sitz im Leben* and, in turn, emphasizes the literary form of the Psalms and the relationships between the forms. He understands the primary psalm categories to be that of lament and praise. Further, he takes the psalms of thanksgiving and the hymns of praise to enact two different means of praise. What has come to be labeled as thanksgiving Westermann calls narrative or declarative praise; it narrates or declares to the congregation a divine act of deliverance from trouble. The lament psalms usually conclude in a positive way and often that takes the form of a vow of praise. The narrative or declarative psalms of praise fulfill such vows and offer praise and thanksgiving for deliverance from the crisis at hand. These psalms offer the worshipper's testimony or confession of how God has come to deliver. The laments or pleas and the narrative psalms of praise both relate to a crisis, the one as a plea for help in the midst of the crisis and the other as a response after the crisis has passed. Such praise is related to the broader descriptive praise in the psalms often labeled as hymns of praise, which describe YHWH as creator and redeemer. In this way, Westermann connects the various psalm categories to each other and to movements in life as part of the community of faith. He understands the life of faith in the Psalms to move between the poles of plea and praise, and the direction to be from plea to praise. His work is a significant refinement of Gunkel's categories of psalms.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In the matter of *Sitz im Leben*, contemporary interpreters of the Psalms appear to be more cautious in constructing ancient institutions such as Mowinckel's account of the cult of ancient Jerusalem. In a shift of emphasis in various ways, the proposals of Erhard Gerstenberger have received more attention recently. His view is very different from that of Mowinckel. He associates many of the Psalms with the extended family or with synagogue settings in early Judaism, in a time after the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century (Gerstenberger 1988: 5–34). That is a considerably different perspective on the setting of

the Psalms but certainly argues for the importance of such settings in studies of the various types of psalms.

A number of interpreters in the latter part of the twentieth century have emphasized the broader social dimensions of the settings in which the Psalms originated. Walter Brueggemann has studied the psalms of praise with particular attention to their social dimension (Brueggemann 1988). He is concerned with the connection between the psalms of praise and ancient Israel's monarchy. Brueggemann argues that the royal establishment used the articulation of the good life in the psalms of praise as a means of social control while Israel's truest praise bears witness to the YHWH who liberates from oppression. Norman Gottwald is a leading proponent of the use of social science in biblical interpretation. He has applied these concerns to Psalms interpretation, in particular reading the lament psalms from a context of socioeconomic oppression (Gottwald 2002: 522–41). He is particularly concerned with the connection between *Sitz im Leben* and ancient Israelite societal structures. An emphasis on the social dimension of the setting of the various psalm types has become important in recent decades.

The volume edited by Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi seeks to reformulate genre analysis for contemporary scholarship. The volume reflects a number of recent issues in questions of genre. In it Martin Buss reexamines the notion of form criticism, with special attention to ways in which Gunkel formulated the task (2003: 312–25). Gunkel was a remarkable reader of texts who saw the connections between texts and life settings in the community. He was able to read texts in connection with other phenomena. Gunkel's understanding of genre included the language of texts but in relation to life settings and religious content. Buss's definition of form criticism is thus "a procedure that gives simultaneous attention to human life processes (social and psychological), to human thoughts and feelings, and to linguistic formulations. It explores how these relate to one another, not indeed rigidly, but also not in a way that is altogether arbitrary." (2003: 316). With this definition, linguistic form, content, and *Sitz im Leben* are all necessary in formulating genre. Buss continues attention to the social dimension of the setting from which texts derive. Another issue raised in the volume is the connection between the typical and the unique in the analysis of genre (Melugin 2003: 46–64). Gunkel's articulation of genres emphasized the typical. More recent interpreters have considered the unique poetic artistry of each psalm in the interpretive task.

Another set of categories proposed by Walter Brueggemann has influenced many popular treatments of the Psalms (Brueggemann 1980). The categories move in the direction of *Sitz im Leben*, but they are not about institutional settings, such as the pre-exilic Jerusalem cult, but rather about settings in the life of faith. Such settings are contexts in which psalms could function constructively for the person of faith. The categories reflect the spirals through which the pilgrim of faith moves. The first category is psalms of orientation: life is properly oriented and thus makes sense to the person of faith; traditional wisdom perspectives would fit here. Some descriptive hymns fit this category. In Psalm 1, the righteous prosper and the wicked do not. In the narrative revealed in Psalm 30, vv. 7–8[6–7] also illustrate this setting in which life fits the effort put into it. In that narrative, however, things immediately change and the predicted

sense of life falls apart. Psalms of disorientation bring to expression the anomalies challenging traditional ideology that life brings the appropriate rewards. The laments articulate this perspective of the difficulties of the life of faith. Psalm 13:2–5[1–4] provides a parade example. The person of faith envisioned in the Psalms does not stay in the despair of disorientation, however. A new orientation that accounts for the experience of trouble and woe is possible as newness breaks into the life of faith. The psalms of thanksgiving speak of this movement as trouble has now yielded to the hope of praise and thanksgiving. Brueggemann also places the enthronement psalms with their new song in this category. This kind of categorization has not displaced Gunkel's literary categories, but it carries impact for many readers of the Psalms by providing a typology geared to functions in the pilgrimage of faith.

Harry Nasuti's treatment of genre in Psalms study focuses on the typologies of Brueggemann and Westermann to seek a fuller understanding of genre (Nasuti 1999). He affirms the centrality of questions of genre for the interpretation of the Psalms and suggests that attention to the history of the Psalms' reception may provide clues for a broader analysis.

PSALM TYPES

This brief account of the study of psalm genres since Gunkel can provide a helpful context for a review of the various types of psalms. The major category distinction between the texts in the Psalter comes down to psalms of praise and psalms of lament.

The psalms of praise exhibit some variety but they typically begin with some kind of call to praise. In the standard hymns of praise, the call is often in the imperative, calling the community to offer praise.

Praise the Lord, all you nations!
 Extol him, all you peoples!
 For great is his steadfast love toward us,
 and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
 Praise the Lord! (Psalm 117)

The call to praise is typically followed by a reason for the praise, and the psalm often concludes as it began with a renewed call to praise. It is this basic style of the call to praise followed by a reason for it that typifies the praise of God in the Psalms. In Psalm 117, the reason for praise is introduced at the beginning of v. 2 with the particle *ky*, "because." Some texts give greater place to the call to praise, and others focus on the reason for the praise. The various reasons include God's saving history with the ancient congregation, God's blessing in creation, the reign of God, and the divine presence with the community in worship and in instruction. The form of the body of the hymn of praise varies considerably and can be quite lengthy. The call to praise is often in the imperative and the reason predicated for the praise is often in participial form. The description may

also use a relative clause. Psalm 146 well illustrates these forms typifying the body of the hymn. Verses 6–7a characterize YHWH as both creator and savior with the relative clause:

who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The next lines of the psalm, continuing through v. 9, further the description of YHWH in the participial form.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The familiar opening verse of Psalm 46 illustrates the articulation of the reason for praise by way of titles or epithets for YHWH: “The LORD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 98:6 describes YHWH as “King.” The reasons for praise constitute the praise of God in the Psalms and at the same time bear ancient Israel’s witness to God’s presence and activity in the world. This form of hymnic praise with its initial call to praise followed by a reason for the praise poses implicitly the question of whether the congregation will offer praise to YHWH. The reason purposes to convince the community to do just that.

Westermann’s insight that psalms often labeled with the term “thanksgiving” provide a variation on the theme of the praise of God suggests that these psalms be included in this broad category of psalms of praise. The basic form of an introductory call to praise followed by a reason in the body of the psalm followed by a renewed call to praise stands, but the specifics of the parts change. The call to praise takes a different form as a statement of purpose to offer praise and thanksgiving, illustrated in the beginning of Psalm 34.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

The beginning of Psalm 92 provides another example.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High.

The body of the psalm articulates the reason for praise in the form of a narrative recounting prayer in the midst of crisis and divine deliverance from trouble. With striking poetic imagery, Psalm 30 includes the paradigmatic example.

You hid your face;
 I was dismayed.
 You to, O LORD, I cried. . . .
 You have turned my mourning into dancing.

(vv. 8b[7b], 9a[8a], 12a[11a])

These psalms that praise YHWH in the form of confessing how YHWH has come to deliver from trouble include articulations of crises from individuals and from the community.

The other major category of psalm is the lament or prayer in the midst of trouble.⁵ Again, most interpreters distinguish between prayers of individuals and prayers of the community. Community laments come from crises such as military defeat or famine. Some have attempted to group the individual prayers according to *Sitz im Leben* as defined by the crisis giving rise to the lament. Some prayers understand the crisis to be self-inflicted and so emphasize penitence. A much larger portion of the laments comes from a position of complaint in which there is an expectation that YHWH can and should change things (Broyles 1989). Gunkel emphasized illness as one of the crises that is basic to the human story and so central to the background of these prayers. Others have suggested a legal background and seen a number of these laments as prayers of people who have been falsely accused (Schmidt 1928; Beyerlin 1970; Bellinger 1984). It is, however, difficult to identify the crises with much confidence because of the open poetic language.⁶ There are likely a variety of crises behind these prayers. They likely relate to ritual settings in which the one offering the prayer seeks divine help in the midst of trouble and woe.

The laments typically open with a plea addressing the divine and then portray a crisis. This element is often labeled the lament proper or the complaint. Psalm 13 pictures the crisis with a series of questions.

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
 How long will you hide your face from me?
 How long must I bear pain in my soul,
 and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
 How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (vv. 2–3[1–2])

Psalm 6 uses poetic images to paint the portrait of one on the verge of death from illness, with bones “shaking with terror” (v. 3[2]). Psalms 74 and 79 vividly portray the destruction of the temple as a community disaster. Enemies are frequently part of the problem, although it is difficult to identify them with any precision. These portrayals of trouble are more than descriptions; they seek to make the crisis vividly present for the congregation who hears the prayer and for the divine one addressed.

The complaint leads to a petition for help. The purpose of the prayer is to seek the promised help of the covenant God who comes to deliver, as ancient Israel’s faith tradition affirms. The prayer may be for healing or for justice in the face of oppression from the forces of evil. The petitions persistently plead with YHWH to answer and to bring the petitioner through the crisis at hand. The petitions use persuasive language often

in the form of motivations for YHWH to answer. Psalm 13:4–5[3–4] suggests that the speaker will die and the enemies prevail should YHWH not answer. The hope for a way forward is the divine presence. The prayers fairly consistently come to a positive conclusion with an expression of certainty that YHWH hears the prayer or with an expression of trust in YHWH. Often there is a vow of praise or a word of praise offered to the one who comes to deliver. Psalm 13 again illustrates such a conclusion in vv. 6–7[5–6].

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 6 concludes in a similar vein with a clear word that enemies have been rebuffed by the divine response. The Psalms typically return to the creation and covenant traditions for affirmations of the God who does not leave ancient Israel alone but comes to deliver and is present to bless, even in the midst of crisis.

Beyond the two major categories of praise and lament, two other categories have occasioned considerable discussion in Psalms scholarship. Gunkel included the category of royal psalms in the major psalm types because of the importance of the Davidic king in Jerusalem, even though he listed few examples of the type in the Hebrew Psalter. Because of a fluidity between individual and community in the Psalter, Mowinckel supported the view that the speaker in some of the prayers represented the community and so there has been a tradition of reading some of the laments as royal prayers (Birkeland 1955; Croft 1987). The emphasis on the royal psalms demonstrates the significance of *Sitz im Leben* in form-critical scholarship on the Psalms. Royal psalm is not a literary category but one arising from settings in the life of the Davidic king.⁷ Most contemporary interpreters would agree that the king plays a part in the Psalms, but the definition of that part and its significance is less than clear. A number of the psalms usually classified as royal are prayers associated with battle settings (e.g., 20, 21, 89, 144) and connected in a variety of ways to the lament tradition described above. Other royal psalms are often associated with royal coronations but could also be associated with the tradition of the praise of God in the Psalms (e.g., 2, 18, 45, 72, 110, 132). The category of royal psalm does not currently appear to be in the ascendancy.

The other category that has occasioned great debate is that of wisdom psalm. Most interpreters who use the category do not identify a large number of psalms with it, but they argue that these texts exhibit distinctive features associated with ancient Israel's wisdom tradition as evidenced, for example, in the book of Proverbs. Some features are literary such as beatitudes, "better than" sayings, similes, and warnings. Others are thematic, such as an emphasis on the "fear" of YHWH and instruction for daily living. A number of interpreters have argued for the presence of wisdom psalms and wisdom elements in the Psalter. Others have raised considerable caution about the category because of problems of definition. The traditional wisdom books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes vary considerably in form and setting, and it is difficult to construct an institutional setting from which wisdom psalms came. Wisdom seems to be more of an

approach to life than a literary category (Van Leeuwen 2003). Crenshaw treats the issue fully and raises considerable caution about the category of wisdom psalms (2001: 87–95).

In addition, some psalms often categorized as wisdom texts exhibit connections with the praise of God in the Psalms by reflecting on a well-ordered creation and a God who is present with the community to instruct (e.g., 1, 112, 127, 128, 133). Others raise questions about life and exhibit connections to the tradition of lamenting (e.g., 32, 37, 49, 73, 78). The extensive meditation on the torah in Psalm 119 also betrays connections to the lament tradition.⁸ The category of wisdom psalm also does not appear to be in the ascendancy. Still, even Crenshaw opines, “Some psalms resemble wisdom literature in stressing the importance of learning, struggling to ascertain life’s meaning, and employing proverbial lore” (2001: 94). In addition, those who attend to the shape of the Hebrew Psalter as a whole have suggested that wisdom elements have influenced the Psalter’s final form (Wilson 1985; McCann 1993). So while the genre category wisdom psalm appears to be problematic, many interpreters would agree that the Hebrew Psalter betrays connections with the wisdom tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief survey of the history of form-critical scholarship and of the literary types of psalms suggests a number of conclusions. First, the context of form-critical work has changed. The question of genre has been central to the study of the Psalms for the last century and remains so. As with most historical-critical efforts, interpreters are in the twenty-first century more modest in their claims; decisions about literary types in the Psalms are held more tentatively. The lines between categories are dotted rather than solid lines, and more than one answer to the question of genre is possible. The culture of pluralism has had an impact on the use of type analyses in Psalms study. Multiple readings are possible when it comes to genre. For example, a psalm relating to a crisis could reasonably be read as a lament or an expression of trust or a psalm of thanksgiving. What is clear in the twenty-first century is that all the possibilities need to be explored fully. The question of *Sitz im Leben* also continues to be important in Psalms study today, although it is often articulated in a broader way. Attention to the social dimensions of such settings has come to the fore in such works as Brueggemann’s appropriation of Mowinckel’s generative cultic proposal for the background of psalms of praise (1988). The other primary example is Gerstenberger’s proposal for the pastoral setting of many laments in the context of extended family rituals in early Judaism (1988). Form-critical work is still formative for most Psalms interpretation.⁹ What has changed from Gunkel’s day is the *Sitz im Leben* in which scholars carry out this work. Form criticism does not dominate the scene of Psalms study in the way it did fifty years ago. Questions of the shape and shaping of the Hebrew Psalter and poetic analyses and reception history are now also part of the interpretive landscape.¹⁰

Second, Claus Westermann's essential insight of the distinction between praise and lament continues to hold promise for understanding the Psalms. The discussion above suggests that the distinction between praise and lament is the crucial one for interpreters. In our current context, that may be the best route in explicating the types of psalms; there are basically two: praise and lament. Interpreters have often distinguished various types of praise or lament or distinguished royal psalms or wisdom psalms. In our context, however, the basic impulses of praise and lament may well provide the form-critical base needed for interpretation. Even so, the analysis above affirms the relationships between lament and praise in the Psalms. Creative interpreters need to keep before them both basic psalm types.

Third, the connections between form-critical analysis and other approaches to the Psalms are important. Wilson has maximized the categorization of royal psalms in his study of the editing of the Hebrew Psalter (1986). The distinction between individual laments and community psalms of praise was essential to Westermann's early article on the shaping of the Psalter (1981: 250–58). Brown has importantly seen the connection of poetic images to the shape of the book of Psalms as a whole (2002). The interplay of literary types with these other questions holds promise for further exploration.

Fourth, exploration of literary types in the book of Psalms needs to attend to the place of readers. Readers generate literary categories.¹¹ They do so in honest conversation with ancient texts and settings. The interpretive task is more art than science. The type-analysis of Psalms is not a heavy-handed imposition of a category on a text but an attempt to integrate the dimensions of a text to articulate its structure, genre, and setting to aid in the interpretive task. The categories are not from some objective historical list bequeathed by the ancients but are generated by careful, informed, and self-aware interpreters. Such interpretive judgments provide great help to readers. A tentative label of a literary type for a psalm leads readers to expect certain movements as the psalm progresses. The key to interpretation is how the text meets and changes those expectations. Readers need to know what type of text they are interpreting and in what direction it is moving so that they can read in more informed ways (Campbell 2003: 31). Critical analyses of the literary types of the Psalms are central to these tasks.

NOTES

1. Crenshaw 2001 demonstrates the shift. He begins not with the question of genre but with the question of the various collections that comprise the Psalter. Brown 2002 illustrates the import of poetic studies.
2. In this essay, I use the terms "genre," "form," and "literary type" interchangeably.
3. As examples of Gunkel's work on the Psalms, see Gunkel 1967; Gunkel and Begrich 1998.
4. For alternate reconstructions, see Kraus 1966; 1986; Weiser 1962.
5. I retain the traditional form-critical label of "lament" as the broader category. Some would suggest a shift to "plea" or "complaint."
6. Anderson speaks of both "conventional monotony" and "confusing variety" in the descriptions of the enemies in these psalms (1965: 18–21).

7. See Johnson 1955; Bentzen 1955 for reconstructions of royal rituals in ancient Israel.
8. See, e.g., vv. 8, 22, 41, 42, 49–51, 69–70, 81–88, 107, 110, 121–126, 145–150, 169–170. The psalm's conclusion approximates a vow of praise.
9. Antony F. Campbell, S. J., can claim as consensus: "In psalms, lament and complaint are distinguished from thanksgiving or praise, individual from communal, and we are aware of royal psalms and others" (2003: 27). He characterizes such interpretive work as art rather than science.
10. See Wilson 1985; Brown 2002; Gillingham 2008.
11. Note Edgar V. McKnight's quip: "Readers make sense" (1985: 12, 133).

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CHAPTER 21

PSALMS OF THE TEMPLE

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ASSUMPTIONS about the setting of a literary work powerfully affect interpretation. In Early Judaism, psalm pray-ers might well infer from the frequent mention in the superscriptions of King David as author or protagonist that the Psalms were largely his personal responses to events and therefore were suitable for the ups and downs of any individual's life. Modern scholarship has imagined other settings. In the early twentieth-century, Hermann Gunkel focused on the formal and recurring features of the poems and classified them into genres still used today—laments, thanksgivings, hymns, and the like. Gunkel sought also to locate the genres in the life of the folk rather than in institutions such as the temple.

Only in the third decade of the twentieth century did a sustained interest in the communal and cultic setting of the Psalms gain ground, sparked largely by the Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel and his important works *Psalmestudier* (1921–24) and *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (English translation 1962). Influenced by the new interest in primitive religion and the liturgical movement, Mowinckel attended to the temple setting of the Psalms. Although some scholars initially embraced Mowinckel, criticism of his seminal positions (e.g., a New Year Festival and enthronement of Yahweh) hindered acceptance of his approach. Interest in his approach has waned over the years, pushed aside by other topics such as the theology of the book of Psalms. In recent years, however, some scholars have shifted their attention away from the purely historical study of Israelite religion to the study of *worship* in the Bible. The shift has reawakened interest in the communal and liturgical function of the psalms and their significance in the worship of the Jerusalem temple.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEMPLES AND THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE

Many conceptions about temples in the civilizations that influenced the Bible held true also for the Jerusalem temple. Among them was the belief that the temple was the earthly house of the deity and a replica of the god's heavenly palace. The same Hebrew word, *hēkāl*, can mean "palace" and "temple." The human servants of the god's temple had their "angelic" counterparts in the heavenly world, and earthly temple ceremonies imitated those taking place on a grand scale in the heavenly palace. Since the main deity of a city or land was frequently regarded as a king, the rituals carried out in his earthly house were designed to express his royal sovereignty on Earth as well as to respond to his need for housing, food, and clothing. The god installed the human king on his throne as his client, and that king was ultimately responsible for maintaining the god's temple and implementing divine justice in the god's territory.

In the form of an image or symbol, the god lived in a special room of the temple. The god's servants, the priests, followed a daily regime that included feeding and clothing the cult image and carrying out ceremonies on feast days. On certain feasts, the image of the deity might be carried in procession to visit other temples in the land. A defining characteristic of the temple was its holiness. "Holy" as applied to an ancient temple differs from the well-known concept of holy popularized in the twentieth century by Rudolf Otto, the German scholar of religion, who defined holy as numinous, a mystery that is both terrifying and fascinating (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*; Otto 1958). Rather, "holy" meant that the temple was the god's property—a space belonging to the god, set apart from all that was "profane." Profane space was what was "outside the temple," from Latin *pro*, "in front of," and *fanum*, "temple." Priests had the task of safeguarding the holiness of the temple complex by distinguishing between holy and common, pure and impure. Such a concept of holiness made the ancient temple unlike a church, where the faithful customarily gather to pray and participate in ceremonies. The ancient temple building was exclusively the god's house; only his servants could enter it and serve within. Temple holiness did not, however, mean that the laity were excluded, watching from outside. Ordinary people participated in worship in the court encircling the god's house; outdoor space was considered part of the palace as it is even today in Mediterranean domestic architecture. There could be several courtyards to which different classes of persons were admitted. The temple complex might also include a large garden with trees of all kinds displaying the broad outreach and marvelous fertility bestowed by the deity. In short, the temple was the deity's house and court where, like an earthly king, the god was served and given honor by his staff and people.

Though the Jerusalem temple shared many features of ancient temples, its worship was distinctive, for it took its color from the god who inhabited it—Yahweh, the God of Israel. In striking contrast to the prevailing polytheism of the time, Yahweh was worshipped as the sole powerful deity in the universe, without the pantheon and female

consort found in comparable religions. Israelite religion had another defining characteristic: It was aniconic. These two defining features, along with a third—that Yahweh is primarily known through his works, especially the exodus—are perfectly caught in the First Commandment given at Mount Sinai:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (Exod. 20:1–4)

One of these features deserves comment—the aniconic tradition. In spite of it, Israel found a way of embodying the divine presence. Instead of an image—the default ancient Near Eastern mode of divine presentation—Yahweh was believed to be enthroned *invisibly* upon the golden cover of the ark of covenant. The ark rested in the Holy of Holies, a dark, windowless room in the temple, twenty cubits square. The cover of the ark was flanked by two cherubim, composite animals that guarded thrones. Because it was a throne, the ark represented the presence of Yahweh the king (Num. 10:35; 14:44–45; 1 Sam. 4:4–6; 2 Sam. 11:11; 15:29; Ps. 132:8).

Do the psalms provide any evidence that processions of the ark took place? The evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive. There is only one explicit mention of the ark in the Psalms (“the ark of your might” in Ps. 132:8), but there are unmistakable allusions to it in the mention of “might” and “glory” in Psalm 78:60–61: “He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh... and delivered his might to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe.” 1 Samuel 4:21–22 is also clear: “[The wife of Phineas] named the child Ichabod, meaning, ‘The glory has departed from Israel,’ because the ark of God had been captured.” “Might” and “glory” in Psalms 96:6 and 105:4 may also refer to the ark, for both psalms are quoted by 1 Chronicles 16:11, 27 in its liturgy for the procession of the ark to its new home in Jerusalem.

Some scholars have argued that King David’s transfer of the ark from its resting place in Kiriath-Jearim to its new resting place in Jerusalem, described in 2 Samuel 6 and celebrated in Psalm 132, reflected an annual ceremony. In Mowinckel’s view, Psalm 132 was the text of a procession reenacting Yahweh’s entry into Jerusalem when David established the worship of Yahweh enthroned upon the ark. Psalm 132 seems to presume that the transfer described in 2 Samuel 6 was a liturgical act in which the king played an essential part. Taken together, the two texts suggest a ritual periodically celebrated.

Before leaving the topic of the ark, another psalm must be discussed—Psalm 24. The psalm reflects a liturgical ceremony in which the first stage is a proclamation to worshipers of Yahweh’s victory (vv. 1–2) and the second stage (vv. 3–4) a ceremony of admittance to the celebration of only those who have been always loyal. Only the truly loyal can enter the temple precincts to share the fruits of the victory (“blessing” and “vindication” [vv. 5–6]). The final stage of the ceremony (vv. 7–10, “Lift up your heads, O gates!”) is puzzling. Fortunately, an Ugaritic text (CTA 2.i.27–28) provides some background. In the Ugaritic text, an officiant in the assembly of the gods invites the gods to welcome an approaching deity into their midst: “Lift up your heads, O gods, from the tops of

your knees, from your royal thrones.” The psalmist appears to have adapted an originally polytheistic scene by personifying the gates of the temple as if they were courtiers welcoming the victorious Yahweh to his palace. Choruses extend the joyous moment through a series of rhetorical questions and answers. Though Psalm 24 is too brief to have served as a libretto for a complex ceremony, it is very likely based on such a liturgy. The poetic sketch enables pray-ers outside the temple context to participate in the scene.

An important participant in ancient temple cults was the king, and Israel’s cult was no different. Palace and temple were closely connected, though the relative importance of each could vary. In Egypt, the temple site was usually vast, whereas the nearby palace was small and only a temporary residence. In Mesopotamia and Syria, on the other hand, the temple was an annex to the palace and served as a royal chapel for the devotions of the king and his household. Some scholars have argued that the Jerusalem temple was a royal chapel also, since the kings were so central to its operation. For example, David bought the land for it, Solomon constructed the building, and subsequent kings endowed the temple and drew from its treasury.

It is clear, however, that the Jerusalem temple was primarily a *national* sanctuary where king *and* people offered public worship to Yahweh, the God of the nation Israel. The temple was the heir to the wilderness Tabernacle and the Tent of Meeting, where Yahweh “met” the people, albeit through their representatives. David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem in order to unite all the tribes, and Solomon’s great temple dedication prayer has in view “all Israel,” both those listening to Solomon and generations to come (1 Kgs. 8:1–5, 13, 46–53). When Jeroboam founded an independent kingdom in the tenth century, he set up alternative temples at Dan and Bethel so that the northern tribes would no longer make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and experience themselves as one with the southern tribes.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in addition to his obligation to support the temple financially, the Davidic king had an important liturgical role. The role was grounded in a dual relationship. On the one hand, Yahweh was the king’s patron, and it was his duty to honor his patron with rituals and ceremonies. On the other hand, the king represented the people to God. Since his role was so thoroughly representative—of God to the people and of the people to God—the king was not in rivalry with priests whose duties in the temple differed from his. The king’s role was liturgical, and the Psalms amply attest to it.

Several psalms reflect the king’s coronation, a rite that is detailed in 1 Kings 1:32–48 and 2 Kings 11:10–12. Psalms that may well reflect a coronation or its anniversary are Psalms 2, 21, 72, and 110. Psalm 2:7–8 actually cites a decree of installation: “I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my son; / today I have begotten you, Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, / and the ends of the earth your possession.’” Psalm 110 is a collection of divine decrees, each of which could be considered suitable for inaugurating a king’s rule, such as verses 1–2: “The LORD says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand / until I make your enemies your footstool.’ The LORD sends out from Zion your mighty scepter. / Rule in the midst of your foes.” In these psalms an officiant cites venerable decrees summoning the king to rule in Yahweh’s name. Psalm 89:2–38[1–37] prefaces a lament for the Davidic king’s defeat and links the installation of

the king to the very creation of the universe; kingship was part of the original arrangement of the cosmos: “I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; / your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. You said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one, / I have sworn to my servant David’” (vv. 3–4[2–3]). Other psalms—18, 20, 45, 101, 144:1–11—also celebrate the divine choice of a ruler to exercise Yahweh’s reign on Earth.

One of the king’s duties was military—to defend Israel and Zion from attacks by enemy kings. It is not surprising that several psalms pray for divine help for the king as he exercises this serious responsibility. In Psalm 20, the king is the recipient of the prayers of the community as he goes forth to war:

May [the LORD] send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.
May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices....
May we shout for joy over your victory (*yěšû’āh*)
and in the name of our God set up our banners....
Now I know that the LORD will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty
victories by his right hand.

(vv. 3–4[2–3], 6–7[5–6])

Psalm 18 is an impressive affirmation of the Davidic king as representative of Yahweh’s sovereignty: “You delivered me from strife with the peoples; you made me head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me” (v. 44[43]). Such high hopes could lead to bitter disappointment if the king did not return victorious. Psalm 89 is an example of the profound shock the community experiences when the king does not return to the temple as victor: “You have removed the scepter from his hand, and hurled his throne to the ground. . . . Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (vv. 45[44], 50[49]).

Closely tied to the theme of the king as Yahweh’s leader is the theme of Zion, the mountain dwelling of Yahweh and the residence of his earthly lieutenant, the king. Higher than all mountains, abundantly watered, its radiance visible to the nations, Mount Zion was ever safe from enemy attack. These motifs appear in Psalms 46, 48, and 76. They can be fully understood only if one knows their implied narrative. A battle involving the total universe took place at the holy mountain on which Yahweh now dwells in his palace, Zion. Yahweh and his heavenly army fought against forces symbolizing chaos and disorder. The battle raged, shaking even the mountains, the pillars on which the earth rests. In polytheistic accounts in extra-biblical literature, the enemy was often portrayed as the chaotic and disorderly Sea, the opposite of order and life. In the biblical Songs of Zion, the enemy usually appears in more “historical” terms as massed earthly kings, human agents of the cosmic forces, raging against Zion, as in Psalm 48:5–8[4–7]: “Then the kings assembled, / they came on together. As soon as they saw it, they were astounded; / they were in panic, they took to flight; trembling took hold of them there, / pains as of a woman in labor, as when an east wind shatters / the ships of Tarshish.”

In the end, of course, Yahweh vanquished these evil forces and creates an orderly and beautiful world. A biblical way of expressing the victory is by the Hebrew verb *mālak*, which is best translated “he became king” (see below). The verb implies a succession of actions: Yahweh defeating his enemies, issuing the decrees by which the universe will henceforth operate, building his palace, and being enthroned therein. The temple becomes a memorial of the world-establishing victory and inspires awe as shown by the extraordinarily concrete affirmations in Psalm 48:10–15[9–14]:

We ponder your steadfast love,
 O God, in the midst of your temple.
 Your name, O God, like your praise, reaches to the ends of the earth.
 Your right hand is filled with victory....
 Walk about Zion, go all around it,
 count its towers, consider well its ramparts;
 go through its citadels,
 that you may tell the next generation that this is God,
 our God forever and ever.

In the Bible, divine kingship is achieved through an act; it is not inherited. Through their implied narrative, the Songs of Zion affirm the kingship of Yahweh.

THE TEMPLE SETTING OF CERTAIN PSALMS

Psalm superscriptions contain tantalizing allusions to liturgy—for example, “for remembrance / memorial offering” (Psalm 38), “for the dedication of the temple” (Psalm 30), “according to Lilies” (a melody?, Psalm 45)—but it is impossible to draw solid conclusions from them. The detailed instructions on sacrifices in Leviticus 1–16 make no mention of accompanying psalms, which has led many scholars to conclude that all sacrificial worship in Israel took place in silence, with “no sound but the bleating of the sheep.” Only later, so the theory goes, would the practice of fixed prayer at specific times have developed. Eventually the temple itself came to be designated “a house of prayer” (Isa. 56:7). Yet non-mention of songs and psalms does not prove their absence. Leviticus rituals direct the correct performance of sacrifice; they are not descriptions of temple liturgy. The fact is that many psalms actually refer to liturgical action; examples will be given.

Several psalms prove that songs accompanied sacrifice and other ceremonies: Psalms 4:6[5]; 27:6; 54:8[6]; 65:2–5[1–4]; 66:13–16; 81:2–4[1–3]; 107:22; and 116:17–19. Psalms 27:6 and 107:22 clearly show that singing accompanied sacrifices: “Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, / and I will offer sacrifices in his tent with shouts of joy; / I will sing and make melody to the LORD” (27:6); “And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, / and tell of his deeds with songs of joy” (107:22). Psalm 65:2–5[1–4] is another example: “Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; / and to you shall vows be performed, O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.... Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. / We shall be satisfied

with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.” Visiting the temple is mentioned in Psalms 5:8[7]; 23:6; 27:6; 53:10[9]; 63:3[2]; 65:5[4]; 73:17; 84:3[2], 5[4]; 95:2, 6; 100:4; 118:19–20; 132:7; 134; and 135:2. Allusions to *processions* are abundant: Psalms 24:7–10; 42:5[4]; 48:13–15[12–14]; 68:25–28[24–27]; 118:26–27; 122:1–2; 132:8. Psalm 118:26–27 is an example of the people blessing God, presumably in songs, in the course of a procession: “We bless you from the house of the LORD. / The LORD is God, and he has given us light. / Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.” Psalm 68:25–27a[24–26a] stands out for its vivid description: “Your solemn processions are seen, O God, / the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary—the singers in front, the musicians last, / between them girls playing tambourines.” Oracles have been mentioned in connection with the coronation of the king (Pss. 2:6, 7–9; 60:8–10[6–8]; 62:12–13[11–12]; 89:20–38[19–37]; and 110), but there are oracles that are also addressed to non-royal individuals (Ps. 12:6[5]) or to the people (Pss. 60:7–9[6–8]; 62:12–13[11–12]; 81:7–18[6–17]; 91:14–16; 95:8–11; 108:8–10[7–9]). And finally there are benedictions of the people pronounced or sung by a temple officiant (Pss. 115:15–16[14–15]; 118:26; 128:5; 134:3).

Many psalms mention a congregation taking part in the prayer (e.g., 20, 21, 45, 91, and 110), and some presume two choirs or a choir with a cantor (e.g., 15, 24, 118, 120, 122, 123, 131, 132, and 134). Certain verbs denoting human response—customarily translated into English as “rejoice,” “give thanks,” “meditate,” and the like—describe not only the interior attitude but the exterior expression: “shout joyously,” “lift up your voice in praise,” and so on. Musical instruments of all kinds are mentioned frequently—string, wind, and percussion instruments. Two common types of lyre mentioned are the *kinnôr* (fourteen times) and the *nēbel* (eight times), both associated with joyous songs. “On the willows there we hung up our harps (*kinnôr*). For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’” (Ps. 137:2–3). Among the wind instruments are the “flute,” “horn,” “trumpet,” and “ram’s horn.” Among the percussion instruments are cymbals and drums. Though we have no “objective” description of temple worship in the Psalter, Sirach portrays the beauty and liveliness of temple worship c. 180 BCE (e.g., Sir. 50:12–21; cf. 2 Chron. 29:20–36, especially v. 30.). In summary, all the evidence points to popular, even noisy, performance of psalms and ceremonies in worship.

THE PSALMS IN THE THREE PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS: PASSOVER, PENTECOST, AND INGATHERING

Israel’s three major feasts were all pilgrimage feasts (Hebrew *ḥag*; cf. Arabic *ḥajj* and *hijjat*, “pilgrimage”); adult males were obligated to journey to Jerusalem. Passover and Unleavened Bread occurred in early spring, Pentecost at wheat harvest seven weeks

later, and Ingathering (also called The Feast, or Booths) in early fall (Exod. 23:14–17; 34:18–26; Lev. 23:1–44; Deut. 16:1–17). Passover commemorated in a special way the exodus from Egypt (cf. Exod. 12–13). Hence psalms of the exodus-land taking were sung then, among them presumably Psalms 23, 105, 114, 135, 136, and 147. Psalms 113–118, known in Judaism as Hallel (= praise), were songs of thanksgiving and joy for redemption, and they were sung at Passover and other feasts. Psalms 113–114 were sung before the Passover meal, and Psalms 115–118 were sung after it (cf. Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). Pentecost (also called First Fruits and the Feast of Weeks) became for some Jewish groups a Feast of the Law by the second century BCE and for mainstream Judaism by the second century CE. Its connection to law-giving may be much earlier, however, since Exodus 19:1 begins with Israel's stay at the foot of Mount Sinai on "the third new moon," which can be interpreted as Pentecost. Associations with the law would have made Pentecost an appropriate moment for the covenant renewal ceremonies of Psalms 50 and 81; the two psalms indict the people for violating the covenant and urge repentance and recommitment.

The third and most important pilgrimage feast was Ingathering, a time for giving thanks for summer fruits and nuts. It was this feast that Mowinckel proposed as the occasion of his New Year Feast and Enthronement Festival. The evidence for the New Year Festival requires comment. According to Exodus 23:16, the feast occurs "at the end of the year"; according to 34:22, it occurs "at the turn of the year." The first phrase seems to refer to the end of the year, but, like the second phrase, can refer to the New Year that begins as the old ends. The relevance of this "turn of the year" feast for the interpretation of psalms depends on whether there was a pre-exilic New Year Festival in which Yahweh was enthroned as king. According to Mowinckel, in the early monarchic period Israel celebrated an annual festival involving a reenactment of Yahweh's enthronement like that at the New Year Festival in Babylon. An original seven-day autumn New Year Festival later developed into three separate celebrations.

The New Year Festival was the original context of the classical enthronement psalms celebrating Yahweh's kingship—Psalms 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, and 100. Other psalms show some influence (e.g., 15, 23, 29, 33, 46, 48, 76, and 132). Some scholars do not accept the translation "Yahweh *has become king*" for Hebrew *mālak* in the enthronement psalms, as in Psalms 47:9[8]; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1, on the grounds that the translation implies that there was a time when Yahweh was not king. Hence, they render "Yahweh *is king*" (NRSV) or "Yahweh *reigns*." But the translation "Yahweh *has become king*" is a liturgical exclamation comparable to the Christian Easter declaration "Christ is risen!" It is not a literal report. Syntactically, one can translate either "Yahweh is king" or "Yahweh has become king." 1 Kings 15:33 shows both meanings of *mālak* (my translation): "In the third year of King Asa of Judah, Baasha son of Ahijah *became king* over all Israel at Tirzah; he *was king* twenty-four years." Another undisputed instance of the verb in the sense of enthronement is 2 Kings 9:14 (my translation): "and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, 'Jehu *has become king*.'" Though many scholars seem to have lost interest in the enthronement festival, the evidence for it is solid, and the feast is extraordinarily important for understanding psalms of enthronement and of kingship (Roberts 2005: 97–115).

Though many of the psalms treated above allude to the temple as they celebrate national events, a great number of psalms presuppose small-scale settings and rites or no rites at all. The largest formal category (nearly one-third of the psalms) is the individual lament, which strictly speaking requires the presence of only the individual and one officiant. “Songs of trust” such as 23, 27, and 91 are highly personal and even private. “Instructions” such as 49 and 73 respond to troubling faith problems and do not demand a congregation. It is not clear where such psalms originated and what occasions, if any, generated them. Did the priests offer private services such as that recorded between the priest Eli and the suppliant Hannah in 1 Samuel 1? Perhaps such services were offered at the temple, but we do not know. Or such psalms might be purely literary pieces that gradually were attracted into the great prayer book known as the Psalter.

Temple rituals influenced the personal prayer of ordinary people. Temple activity became democratized in two senses: Ordinary prayer became oriented to the temple, and temple prayer became a template for ordinary prayer, somewhat in the manner of monastic piety affecting lay piety in the Christian Middle Ages. An example of temple influence upon personal piety is the prayer of Daniel, the pious hero of the book of Daniel (composed c. 165 BCE). He prays toward Jerusalem three times a day in synchronization with the oblations in the temple: “[Daniel] continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously” (Dan. 6:10; cf. 9:21). The rabbis later declared that every Jew must pray twice daily (morning and afternoon), since prayer corresponded to the Tamid sacrifices and was no less obligatory than the Tamid itself. Passages in the psalms declaring that prayer is superior (Pss. 30:7–10[6–9]; 69:31–34[30–33]; 51:17–18[16–17]) or equal (Pss. 119:108; 141:2) to the sacrificial cult are probably petitions to God to accept prayers that do not include sacrifices. Sirach equated right living with sacrificial worship: “The one who keeps the law makes many offerings; he who heeds the commandments sacrifices a peace offering” (Sir. 35:1; cf. vv. 2–11, and Rom. 12:1). The Palms became a prayer book for the people.

THE TEMPLE AS THE MEMORIAL OF CREATION AND ITS LITURGY AS THE FURTHERING OF DIVINE ORDER

Ancient Near Eastern temples were closely associated with creation, and it is that close association that makes the temple liturgy (including the psalms) an important means for furthering the creator’s orderly designs. The construction of the god’s palace did not establish divine order definitively, but it did found a center where the god could rule the human community and receive their service.

The link between creation and the temple is well attested in the ancient Near East. In a Mesopotamian prayer titled after its first line, “When Anu created the heavens,” the gods fashion the universe of Earth, heavens, and sea and at the same time create the material for their temples (reed marsh and forest), the priest-god to lead the rituals, and the king to organize the people. In the words of the prayer, “the god Kusug, high priest of the great gods, [is] to be the one who completes their rites and ceremonies” and “the king to be their provider.” The temple was the place where the gods received the services and goods for which they created the human race (Clifford 1994: 59–61). In another Akkadian prayer,

[The gods] found a wise means for providing for the support of the gods. They prepared, in the land, a pleasant dwelling, And the gods were installed (?) in this dwelling: Their principal temple. Then they entrusted (?) to the king the responsibility (?) of assuring them regular choice offerings. And for the feast of the gods, They established the required food offering! The gods loved this dwelling!” (Clifford 1994: 61)

The most famous Mesopotamian linking of creation and temple was the great epic *Enuma elish* in which the young god Marduk attained the authority once held by the older generation of gods—Anu, Enlil, and Ea—by defeating the monster Tiamat, who launched an attack on the whole universe. Marduk’s victory and resultant kingship were enshrined in his temple Esagil, which expressed his newly attained supremacy in architectural form. The other gods built the temple for him, which was their way of acknowledging his sole kingship (Clifford 1994: 82–89).

In Egypt, the site of creation was the primordial mound, which represented new life. The conception arose from the experience of new life emerging from the hillocks left behind as the annual Nile flood receded. Various temples claimed to represent the primordial mound in their precincts. Within the temple, creation was thought to be renewed each day. The king’s role was important, for he represented the god and his life-bringing actions. In imitation of the creator, he ascended the stylized primordial mound, represented by the stepped throne. Each time the king seated himself on it—especially at enthronements and the Sed feast—he repeated the creation symbolically (Clifford 1994: 105–7).

Especially relevant for the biblical conception are the Ugaritic texts from Syria, which provide a northern sample of Canaanite culture from before 1200 BCE. In these texts, the old high god El once held authority and lived in a majestic tent that expressed his status; the young storm-god Baal had no house. But when Baal defeated Sea, who had threatened them all, El and the assembly of gods allowed Baal to build a palace for himself to symbolize his victory and royal state. After its completion, Baal manifested his kingly power in thunder, lightning, and rain. The Ugaritic texts show how close the connection was between the storm-god’s victory and the palace that symbolized that victory.

Several biblical texts likewise regard the mountain as the site of creation and the temple as the symbol of creation. Psalm 93:3–4 describes Yahweh’s victory over chaotic Sea,

though modern translations do not always catch the viciousness of the battle between the storm-god Yahweh and Sea or its cosmic scope:

Flood raised up, O LORD,
 Flood raised up its voice;
 Flood raised up its roaring.
 More powerful than Mighty Water's thunders,
 more powerful than Sea's waves,
 powerful on high is the LORD! (author's translation)

The psalm then extols Yahweh's powerful decrees and the temple enshrining his victory: "Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore." A Qumran manuscript (4QPs^b) permits a different rendering, "Your house is a holy dwelling (*nwh qdš*)," the same phrase that concludes Exodus 15:13, "you guided them by your strength to your holy dwelling." Psalms 46, 48, and 76 similarly portray Mount Zion as the place where Yahweh won the victory that made the orderly world and the place where he built his temple as its memorial.

A biblical text that spells out the implications of creation and temple worship is Genesis 1, a text of the Priestly tradition. It must be admitted that the text of Genesis 1 mentions neither temple nor king, contrary to many cosmogonies that include them as constitutive of the universe. One can argue that Genesis 1 refers to the Jerusalem temple and its worship *proleptically*, affirming that Israel's worship was already there in the world created in Genesis 1. Though the Israelite Sabbath was instituted only at the exodus (Exod. 16:23), it was already there in the beginning, hidden in God's creation rhythm in Genesis 1—working six days and ceasing from work on the seventh. Genesis 1 similarly grounds another aspect of Israel's identity and worship—its dietary laws. Dietary laws ensured Israel's holiness in the sense of its separateness from other nations. The divine command, "You shall be holy because I am holy" runs like a refrain through Leviticus 11, the fullest and most rationalized treatment of Israel's dietary laws. The basis of Leviticus's classification of edible animals is already found in the Genesis 1, which classifies life forms according to their locomotion through their proper domain: birds flying through the air with their wings, fishes swimming through the waters with their fins and scales, and animals creeping on the land with their many legs or (one may suppose) four legs.

Of these anticipatory references to Israel and its worship, the most important is to the Tabernacle (the forerunner of the Jerusalem temple). God's commands in the seven days of creating the universe foreshadow the seven speeches of Moses in Exodus 25–31, which lead to the creation of the Tabernacle. Of varying length, each speech is initiated by a divine command, recognizable by its introduction, "YHWH spoke to Moses" (Exod. 25:1–30:10; 30:11–16; 30:17–21; 30:22–33; 30:34–38; 31:1–11; 31:12–17; Clifford 2013: 17–22).

In Genesis 1, God declares the universe he has created to be "good" or "very good" seven times. The creation is not static. Rather, it is the opening stage of an unfolding drama that will be at once marked by human rebellion and divine activity. The historical drama will not cease until once again the universe is declared very good. It will be

what it was at the beginning—wholly defined by God’s intent. Hence Genesis 1 is not only protology; it is also eschatology. In Genesis 1, only one creature can participate consciously in the great drama—humanity, male and female. Only humanity is the center of a web stretching backward and forward through all seven days, linked to every life form, yet alone conscious of the God who waits expectantly on the seventh day for the universe to respond in praise and obedience.) *Adam* (“humankind”) is active, exercising the vocational duties that in other cosmogonies are assigned to priests and kings. In Jon D. Levenson’s words, “It is through the cult that we are enabled to cope with evil, for it is the cult that builds and maintains order, transforms chaos into creation, ennoble humanity, and realizes the kingship of the God who has ordained the cult and commanded it to be guarded and practiced” (1988: 127; see also Balentine 1999: 81–147). It is no wonder that all worship (including psalms) became oriented to the temple, even if every psalm did not originate there.

With the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, psalm pray-ers could no longer orient themselves to an existing locale and liturgy. Temple became text as an earthly institution was transformed into a metaphor for the place where God graciously chose to dwell and hear prayer. Pray-ers could be sure of God’s presence no matter where they prayed. Christians tended to locate that presence in Christ.

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CHAPTER 22

NON-TEMPLE PSALMS: THE CULTIC SETTING REVISITED

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BASIC classifications and definitions in Psalms research have been in constant flux: “genre,” “form,” “cultus,” “life situation,” to name a few, have received quite different interpretations over time and across cultural regions. Without presupposing fixed traditional theories, we can profitably start by assuming some basic affinity between psalms and ancient Israel’s cult and agreeing that there are four main dimensions of “cult”: place, time, act, and person (see Haran 1995 [1978]: 1–5). Old Testament research in the past few decades has heavily emphasized central and uniform Israelite institutions, ignoring social and religious plurality (Kraus 1962; Rowley 1967; Haran 1995 [1978]).¹ Only slowly have new avenues in Old Testament cult studies fostered a broader view of multilayered religious developments in Israel (van der Toorn 1996; Gerstenberger 2002), which has also opened up new perspectives on the genesis and use of Psalm poetry.

Consequently, we should add a fifth parameter to the concept of “cult”: social setting (*Sitz im Leben*). After all, different groups of people bring forth religious rituals, including supplications and hymns, meditations and teachings. Neither words nor rituals generate themselves, nor are they the exclusive property of individuals. Rather, they are the creation of people in communication and interaction, given a determined social structure, even if a gifted person should shape and transmit established discourses. And within any particular community, most certainly in regard to its religious ceremonialism, certain idiosyncratic patterns of speech and ritual inevitably develop (cf. Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 1–7).

The Second Temple was, indeed, a focal point of ritual (liturgical) development in ancient Israel. Many psalms focusing on Zion, Jerusalem, the Ark, and the Davidic dynasty are clearly aligned to worship in this unique temple. The Deuteronomic centralization Law (Deuteronomy 12) looms behind the spiritual significance of the holy site, where Yahweh or Yahweh’s “name” has been imagined to “dwell” among the people of Judah. Without a political “corset” (a socio-religious novelty!), the confessing faith community rebuilt, by permission of the Persian overlords, the sanctuary, which had served

primarily dynastic purposes in monarchic times. Congregational needs and interests, handled by leaders such as Torah experts, Levites, priests, and prophets helped organize worships, feasts, pilgrimages, Sabbaths, customs, and—as far as possible—civil life. 1 Kings 8:23–53 refers to worship (prayer) programs for Jews scattered through the known world. The “house of prayer,” Yahweh’s temple, was supposed to be open “for all the people” (Isa. 56:7), which certainly implies not only sacrificing but also hymn-singing and supplication.

Yet making temple liturgies the exclusive ground for the cultivation of psalms is, admittedly, one-sided. There have been other settings for diverse genres of psalms outside temple precincts, because the religious life of emerging Judaism was by no means limited to temple worship. One need only point to the emergence of synagogal meetings, precisely because the temple was so distant to many believers; they were also much more opportune for Torah-based communities. On another point: There always had been in ancient Israel, just like in other religious bodies, rites of passage and healing that were naturally independent of larger-scale public worships at a regional or state sanctuary. Furthermore, given different “life settings” for various communications with the divine world, we have to allow for a certain interchange of motifs and texts among the distinct ceremonies and places of worship. Only logical rigidity, untouched by real-life procedures, would strictly, and therefore artificially, limit particular genres to only one and the same type of worship agenda. Each category of psalms originating from non-temple situations may have had phases or occasions that were also included in temple worship, the contours of which we do not really perceive very clearly. Still, we may be certain that some genres of psalms at some stages of their tradition were not part of temple rituals. Such is the focus of this essay.

INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINTS AND THANKSGIVINGS

The long history of biblical psalm traditions can be illuminated by comparison with ancient Mesopotamian genres of sacred songs. Most notably, there have been prayers of supplication and thanksgiving, originally tuned to the suffering and eventually to the saved individual and his or her small group (family, neighborhood). They were part of healing and rehabilitation rituals as known from many cultures and historical epochs (Cunningham 1997; Gerstenberger 1980). The Psalter has preserved a large group (thirty to forty specimens)² of such “individual complaints” slightly varying in composition, style, emotional involvement, and thematic outlook. A basic thread and a specific situation, however, are easy to recognize in this poetic genre: Some anonymous patient in danger of perishing is pleading with God to be saved from illness, false accusations, and bad luck (see Gunkel and Begrich 1998 [1933]: 121–21; Gerstenberger 1988; Gerstenberger 2001; Miller 1994: 55–134). The sufferer may hint at his domestic environment (e.g.,

“bed” in 6:7[6]; 41:4[3] and “visitors at home” in 41:7[6]), or express his longing for the holy city (e.g., 5:8[7]; 42:5[4], 7[6]). Abhorrent physical conditions may have made him or her incapable of visiting a shrine and, at the same time, because of cultic uncleanness, prohibited him or her from attending (22:7–9[6–8]; 38; 88).

Although there may have been occasional supplications in personal affairs at local, regional, and even central sanctuaries (e.g., Hannah at Shiloh in 1 Sam. 2:1–10), these probably were exceptional cases or retrospective narrative constructions. At least terminally sick people would not be able to travel to a distant shrine. And evidence for house calls made by shamanistic healers abounds from antiquity to the present. The Old Testament reports Elijah’s successful ritual over the deceased boy of the poor widow (1 Kgs. 17:24), and Elisha does the same to the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs. 4:18–37). The Aramean general Naaman is, of course, able to move himself to the prophet’s house (2 Kings 5), but he expects healing right there, not at a local sanctuary. Other instances of “house-calling” by the healer (i.e., man of God, incantation specialist, shaman) include the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 38:1, 2, 21) and the messenger of Yahweh in Job 33:23–28. If there is a need, however, to involve a temple priest for any reason (e.g., diagnosis, purification, exorcism, etc.), the burdened person has to be taken to a shrine (e.g., Num. 5:11–31; Lev. 13:2–8).

More explicit testimony to the role of the healer, to the forms of discourse, and to the efficacious words used on such occasions is found in numerous Mesopotamian “incantation” texts. They contain, for example, supplications very similar to the Old Testament “individual complaints.” Sometimes those are explicitly marked as “to be recited by the patient” (Gerstenberger 1980: 81–82). This is to say, the formulaic compositions with invocation, hymnic trust, complaint, supplication, and vow were in the possession of the healer who “makes his client recite them,” probably line after line. But not only does this structural parallelism with Hebrew complaint psalms call for attention—Babylonian incantations also offer precise descriptions as to how to stage the supplication ceremony (Cunningham 1997; Maul 1994: 37–113). Ritual ordinances begin with the diagnosis of the patient and his surroundings by the expert (Akkadian *āšipu*, Sumerian *mašmaššu*). Nils Heessel (2000) has edited and discussed the extensive cuneiform diagnostic texts. The Mesopotamian specialist had to observe painstakingly every ominous phenomenon while going to and visiting with his patient; every person was considered an integral part of his or her environment. The collections of incantations proper, which orient the ceremony of supplication, describe the preparation of the place (on or near the living quarter, next to the river, etc.), offerings of incense, foodstuffs, purification rites, and, as mentioned above, the recitation of a personal prayer, which was so important for the ceremony as a whole.³ Hebrew psalmists certainly never copied Babylonian supplications, but we may safely assume that—if the traces of healing rituals in the Old Testament are true indicators of the actual proceedings—ancient Israel practiced similar rites outside any temple precincts and other sacred institutions. The original social setting of individual complaints in the Psalter thus becomes the backdrop for that genre’s scholarly and kerygmatic interpretation (Gerstenberger 1988b: 20–32; Gerstenberger 2003: 84–99; Gerstenberger 2007: 81–92).

Some further support for this view on the generative force of “life settings” may come from worldwide anthropological observations. Healing and rehabilitation rituals are usually kept separate from important holy places. The locale of such prayer and exorcist ceremonies in a small circle of family members is quite private. Shamanistic experts prepare ad hoc an adequate sacred space due to circumstances and possibly due to lack of wider public or priestly interest. They determine proper times, offerings, prayers, ablutions, and all the paraphernalia needed for the cure of the sick. Two examples include Navajo medicine men or women performing varied rituals for ailing people in their proper *hogans* (log cabins) with the patient sitting on a sacred sand painting (Kluckhohn 1942: 45–79; Reichard 1944; Spencer: 1957; Griffin-Pierce 1992) and Afro-Brasilian religious communities such as Macumba or Candomblé often incorporating consultation and treatment of mental sufferers into the ecstatic dance performances of their mediums.⁴ In the latter, the benevolent saints (*orixás*) speak directly through the spirit-possessed dancer, who also performs purifying and invigorating acts. Healing rituals all over the world from time immemorial follow similar patterns. Ancient Israel has not been excluded from such elementary procedures to save the seriously ill and those who suffer from bad luck, divine punishment, human discrimination, demonic possession, or any other calamity on the personal level. American Indians and African ghost healers practice some curing ceremonials of this sort just as Asian shamans. We may legitimately regard such rites designed for personal survival as some of the oldest prehistoric and enduring expressions of religious faith. While the numina approached for salvation from threatening death changed in history and across cultural boundaries, the basic pattern of supplication persisted over millennia. A central part of the ritual for desperate people was the personal prayer. Even today, for example, in casual pastoral care for the sick, biblical complaint psalms for the individual or modern equivalents can serve as the liberating and comforting prayer in personal crises. Dogmatic statements and sweeping collective confessions usually cannot help in times of danger. Only the deepest strand of personal faith—quite distinct from official religion—existing apart from “temple” and other large-scale religious institutions is able to provide spiritual sustenance. Personal prayer is the core of all religious practice.

In the course of Israelite history, the old individual complaints, administered by healing experts, became stripped of much of their ritualistic wrappings. Supplications (and their attendant form elements), along with commenting superscriptions (e.g., authors, melodies, performing notes, etc.), were incorporated into the psalm texts and the final Psalter. One phrase in a psalm heading recalls an earlier life setting: “Prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before Yahweh” (Psalm 102). Without a doubt, the setting of supplicatory prayers was changed in the faith community after the exile. Quite probably, though, some kind of concern for the individual survived in the new congregation. We do not know about specific ceremonies for the suffering, however, in early Jewish congregations. May we surmise prayer sessions of a patient with his rabbi or elder? Some adaption of old individual texts to new communal structures transformed personal prayers into congregational laments (e.g., Psalms 12, 102). Whether or not the Second Temple was made the locale of curing is hard to determine. The temple program

for supplications (1 Kgs. 8:31–53) does serve mostly collective concerns. Just the foreigner is mentioned in the singular (vv. 41–43). Individual sufferings such as ill health are not mentioned in this text. Jesus is depicted in the gospels as pursuing his healing office everywhere but in the temple. The Passion reports draw on complaint psalms, but the way to the cross does not touch the temple precincts. It is a relief to learn from the Psalms that faith retains its own niches of cultic action that must remain unadulterated by large, anonymous organizations.

Much the same social configurations valid for individual complaints we could elaborate for individual thanksgivings. They are portrayed already in Psalms 22:23–32[22–31] and 107:4–32 as private affairs, not bound to the temple, although the “paying of vows” with attendant sacrifice was a sacred matter, requiring a linkage between the family cult and local sanctuary (see 2 Sam. 15:7). Some personal thanksgivings seem to be embedded in a larger congregational setting from the outset (e.g., Psalms 32, 116, 118). We may not be too sure about these allocations, though. Private feasting certainly was part of the ceremonial duties of a person saved from death. In the same vein, we could perhaps trace “individual psalms of confidence/trust” to original family settings (e.g., Psalms 16, 23, 62). On the whole, careful analysis has to be done in order to determine each text’s tradition through the centuries. All of the psalms in the Psalter, to be sure, ended up in that final collection that we now have, and the whole mixed composition of prayers, songs, and teachings certainly served the Judean faith community of the Second Temple period, albeit in different functions, that is, in multiple life settings. Psalms destined to be used in temple worship must be distinguished from those earmarked for synagogue assemblies, which we find portrayed first in Nehemiah 8. Both communal affairs, however, are distinct from family-oriented, casual rites for individual persons.

DIDACTIC PSALMS

Another large group of biblical psalms hardly has any affinities to temple worship and its sacrificial system. Neither do the pertinent exemplars of this group betray any vestiges of priestly thinking (e.g., purity, sin, ablutions, atonement, etc.). I am referring to the so-called “wisdom” or “didactic” poems of the Psalter.⁵ There are about thirty to thirty-five of them, all showing a reflective mood, a pedagogical impetus, even though the subject matters are very diverse: human conditions (e.g., transience, anxieties, piety), Torah orientation and praise, historical education, and ethical instruction. Prominent examples of this wide-ranging category are Psalms 1, 9/10, 19, 25, 33, 34, 37, 39, 49, 73, 78, 90, 111, 112, 119, and 139. The common denominator of these very variable compositions is, indeed, their setting in educational communication. Intellectually, didactic psalms are connected with the overarching phenomenon of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature (Crenshaw 2010). Some scholars see them rooted in scribal schools or in the academies of their specific cultural environments. Some also consider popular wisdom to be a possible fountainhead of proverbs, fables, contest literature, skepticism, and so

on. Hebrew wisdom psalms have largely remained an unsolved riddle as far as their origin and use are concerned.⁶

Spirituality, theology, and didactic intent of the relevant psalms befit a religious community that had neither the chance nor the political ambition of concurring with worldly powers on a state level. Personal and collective faith in the sole and sovereign God was the backbone of the Israelite community, which developed only after the loss of Judean statehood. Babylonian armies had overrun the tiny territory of Judah, burned the city and temple of Jerusalem, done away with monarchy and state religion, and driven several thousands of the Judean elite into captivity. There, on foreign territory, the deportees were able to reorganize themselves, now under the exclusive leadership of their God and God's Torah. As political autochthony vanished, religious authority became the paramount organizational principle. "No human being is governing over us; God is our ruler" (cf. Judg. 8:22–23; 9:8–15; 1 Sam. 8:1–18). A theocratic zeal emerged in the new congregation. Scribes, Levites, and priests—that is, the religious elite—came to constitute the leadership of the downtrodden people. The exiled Judeans invented, so to speak, a congregational or "ecclesiastic" form of social organization, apparently for the first time in human history. The Zoroastrian community, which is transparent in the oldest parts of Avesta, probably took a similar development (Gerstenberger 2011: 427–68).

The Torah psalms (1, 19, 119) fit particularly well into this picture. Torah proved to be the foremost visible instrument of unification. Forming their identity as a people of the revealed word of God (Sinai event), the emerging Jewish community adhered to that very foundation of their faith. One of the most powerful theological metaphors was the "covenant" between YHWH and representatives of the people of God—Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, or the people themselves. Everyone able to understand is visualized to listen to the stipulations of that covenant, and YHWH in person is understood to proclaim to them (through the liturgical speaker):

Gather to me my faithful ones,
 who made a covenant with me by sacrifice....
 Hear, O my people, and I will speak,
 O Israel, I will testify against you.
 I am God, your God. (50:5, 7)

Righteous and wicked ones are reprimanded because of their conduct and admonished to do better (vv. 8–23). Torah is instruction in the ways of God (see Psalm 119; Reynolds 2010) and therefore the essential knowledge in personal and communal ethics. The historical narratives of the Pentateuch would give depth to Israel's longstanding traditions and, at the same time, exemplify life under Torah. Historical psalms do the same thing to the community; they can be sung in worship (cf. Psalms 78, 105, 106, 136; Deuteronomy 32). Seasonal feast days, all in commemoration of historical salvific events instead of mere agricultural blessings (cf. Exodus 23, 34; Deuteronomy 16; Leviticus 23, 25), and Torah-ordained circumcision would fortify the sense of unity, identity, and election.

A whole group of didactic psalms is concerned with personal piety and questions of righteous life, human destiny, sin and forgiveness, and transience of existence (8, 37, 39, 49, 71, 73, 90, 139). YHWH believers who took on their faith by conscious decision in favor of Israel's unique God and against concurring deities⁷ lived under surveillance of the ever-present deity and had to account for their everyday behavior. Their faithfulness was measured by their actions, and their welfare depended on their ethical and cultic performance. Small wonder that the social order of the community and human relations were also at stake, in particular the problems of justice, discrimination, and oppression of the weak ones (cf. 9/10, 37, 71, 73). Concerns for justice, equity (even within the parameters of a specific class society over predominant patriarchal and hierarchic structures), and world order permeated all ancient Near Eastern cultures and religions. They were entrenched in social teachings at all social levels and consequently also deeply impressed on all conceptions of royal leadership.

Furthermore, there was a strong longing in the dispersed communities to go home to Judah and Jerusalem. City and temple became great symbols of common history (46, 48, 74, 87, 132) without necessarily including the sacrificial system of temple service. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem and its sacred space to celebrate annual or triannual festivities became common (120–134). The pertinent psalms betray a community not in direct contact with the temple in Jerusalem but centered on local life and its personal and congregational hopes and anxieties. Individual correctness (“righteousness”) and corporate obedience to YHWH (“cultic orthodoxy”) were the goals of the community’s aspiration. The sacrificial cult at the central sanctuary meant little to distant congregations as far as their daily affairs were concerned. More and more, the revealed ordinances of God, written on scrolls, became the visible center of weekly worship and private study (Ps. 1:2). A truly literate piety and concomitant exegetical discourse among leaders and members of the confessional community slowly emerged. Didactic psalms played an important role in teaching situations (see Deut. 31:19–22, 30). They became equal to the words of Torah (Deut. 31:24–27).

All the different categories of psalms just mentioned may have grown from pedagogical enterprises in the newly formed congregations. If we accept the notion that the main worship service in the Jewish diaspora was a Torah-centered ceremony, as in Nehemiah 8:1–8 (Torah-reading, praise of God, interpretation of Torah, responses and prayers of the congregation), we recognize a clear emphasis on catechetical instruction. Torah, the prime orientation for Jewish communities, was read aloud for hours, and the audience endorsed the leader’s effort with a solemn “Amen, amen” and with prostration (v. 6). Besides the main worship service, there may have been specific occasions of the “Sunday-school” type, which served the education of young people and the fortification of adult faith. After all, later Jewish tradition witnesses not only to Synagogue worship but also to a family instruction and the “house of study” (*Beth Midrash*), a religious school predecessor of today’s Yeshivah. We may surmise, also on account of biblical testimony (see below), that some sorts of Torah instruction were practiced outside regular services already in post-exilic Judaism. The Sabbath became a common symbol of

faith as laid down in the Decalogue and other important Pentateuchal texts. Weekly meetings of learning and fraternization on the Sabbath day apparently started in the Persian period; they would build up and strengthen Jewish identity. To teach and memorize Torah, in order to make it ever present (Deut. 5:1; 6:4–9; 11:18–21; 17:18–19; Josh 1:8; Ezra 7:25) and, for that matter, sacred songs, as in Deuteronomy 31:19–22, was the main ingredient of religious education at the time. This meant that, for the assemblies of Jews from the beginning, learning about Torah and Israel's history (i.e., memorizing sacred texts) was an essential part of their religious obligation. They constantly had to know more about and penetrate deeper into the spirituality of their ancestors and the ways of YHWH. In this fashion, pedagogical features of propagating Torah were inherent in all meetings and worship services of the faith congregation. The holy alliance between YHWH and the people had to be borne in mind and practiced without ceasing. Contact with the Jerusalem temple was important, but it was subordinated to synagogue assemblies and Torah instruction. Didactic psalms surely played an important role at many occasions in this religious, confessing community. Confession to YHWH and studying YHWH's will, therefore, were not limited to just the main Torah worship services.

One could well argue that in the emerging Jewish worldwide community, synagogue life became paramount, in most cases, for sheer reasons of distance from the Jerusalem temple. But at the same time there is quite a noticeable shift in the community away from the sacrificial cult toward a Word-oriented, decision-marked, ethically founded spirituality, which had been developed principally by those Judeans living in close contact with Mesopotamian and Old Persian cultures and religions (Gerstenberger 2011). Torah itself, at crucial points in the history of the people, particularly in the Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic view, seems to have led toward ultimate confidence in Word and obedience rather than sacrifice (Deut. 5:1; 6:4–9; 11:18–21; 17:18–19; Josh. 1:8). This attitude reverberates explicitly in the didactic psalms. "I will not accept a bull from your house. . . . If I were hungry, I would not tell you. . . . Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Ps. 50:9, 12, 14).

The great speeches and interventions of leaders like Moses (Deuteronomy 29–31), Joshua (Joshua 24), Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:21–40), Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 9; 10:10–11; Neh. 13:15–31), all calling for an unambiguous turn to YHWH, the Lord of chosen Israel, were decisive in this regard. They glorified the exclusive God; they demanded an unshaken decision for him and a full reliance on his promises. Obligation to exclusive veneration of the unique God and full commitment to his ordinances of truth, justice, and social responsibility are also visible in the oldest parts of Avesta, the Zoroastrian holy tradition, which came into being simultaneously during the Persian period on the basis of contemporary patterns of thought. Thus, synagogue worship (Neh. 8:2–8) was geared toward listening to and learning Torah. The didactic psalms ostensibly fell into line. They show a remarkable affinity with the new spirituality of emerging Jewish diaspora life, centered in Torah synagogue worship. Other psalms, notably general hymns and glorifications, biblical tradition places in temple settings (cf. Neh. 9:5–15; Psalm 106; 1 Chron. 16:7–36), which seemingly did not preclude their use in synagogue meetings.⁸ Prophetic traditions fell in line with this appreciation of the Word of YHWH being the

only guide for a just life. The messengers of YHWH became preachers and interpreters of covenant and Torah (e.g., Deut. 18:15; 34:10; Jer. 11:1–8).

Of course, we would like to know much more about the real-life situation of those psalms, which most clearly reflect the mentality, anxieties, and hopes of the early Jewish congregations. The papyri of the Jewish Elephantine community, for example, do not offer much insight into its own spiritual life, nor that of Jewish congregations in Jerusalem, Samaria, or Babylon (see Porten 1996), nor do the contemporaneous Babylonian/Persian archives of Nippur and Babylon, containing only business and legal documents. They give testimony to the relationship between Mesopotamian Jews, descendants of deportees, and native businessmen. We do not have outspoken descriptions of schools, worship services, casual liturgies, and their pedagogical elements or practices outside the Hebrew Scriptures. And within the canonical writings, as we have seen, they remain dim. Beyond the scarce vestiges mentioned already, we may add a few observations. Parents in their homes certainly had a hand in education from the beginnings of the confessional faith community. “When your son asks you . . .” is a frequent question reported in the Old Testament (Exod. 13:14; Deut. 6:20; Josh. 4:6, 21; cf. Exod. 13:8–9). Parents have to communicate the divine ordinances, in particular the exodus tradition, which to this very day is told and dramatized in Jewish homes (Exodus 5–15). Educational responsibilities for the parents are basic (e.g., Proverbs 1–9), pertaining to ethical instruction rather than salvation history. Scribal schools, not explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament, took care of literate and literary skills as well as the transmission of sacred texts. They operated, in all likelihood, near the temple and in “academic” schools, whenever they started to function among early Jewish settlements. Ezra, the “scribe of the law of the God of Heaven” (cf. Ezra 7:6, 10, 21; Neh. 8:1, 4, 13; 12:36) is the prototype of the learned rabbi, and he must have studied his profession. The narrators of Ezra/Nehemiah presuppose some educational institution. The synagogue service of Nehemiah 8, already pointed out, reflects reading, interpretation, and acclamation of Torah. That is as far as we go, but details of particular instructional processes or institutions are unattainable.

PSALMS, CULT, AND TEMPLE

The spiritual life of ancient Israel as witnessed by biblical writings throughout its age-long and multifaceted formation (from about 10th to 4th centuries BCE) is very rich and complex indeed. There has never been a uniform and fixed code of faith or ethics, because social stratification (family, village, tribe, states, parochial organizations) was so diversified. To declare one determined stratum of ancient Israelite traditions the “center” or “normative thread” of the canon reflects the modern desire for uniformity of faith and doctrine but does not do justice to the

pluriform testimony of the Hebrew writings (Gerstenberger 2002).⁹ Songs and prayers have been present in each and all of these literary layers and conglomerations. They were always “cultic” in the sense of pertaining to some religious ritual. Psalms, we may suggest, are by their very nature dependent on their ceremonial wrappings. Whoever even reads the Psalms puts them into some context of attitudes, concepts, gestures that promote human approach to the divine. The temple service, originally dedicated to paving regular sacrificial avenues to God, pretending to keep up the order of society, if not the world, in all likelihood drew on traditions of psalm-singing and playing music (Shehata 2009; Mowinckel 1962), but large and central sanctuaries with their cultic performances were not the sole possessors of songs and prayers. On the contrary, one of the most powerful streams of psalmic tradition, the individual complaints and thanksgiving, unfolded outside the temple of Jerusalem, namely inside or close to private homes with the aid of shamanistic practitioners (e.g., “men of God,” “seers,” “prophets,” etc.) in ancient times. The ritual of supplication for the suffering person performed by a healer, preserved, so to speak, the original theology of “primitive” man: that of an intimate relationship with a personal deity to whom small groups of humans were allied in a parental relationship. This original theology survived, thanks be to God, despite all the superimposed constructs of state and imperial theologies with their anonymous structures and ideological premises, which could not wipe out living faith in a direct relationship with the divine. Although personal, familial religion reached out toward local and regional shrines and, finally, found a refuge within the faith community of emerging Judaism and later in Christian and Muslim religions, it did preserve the freedom of personal faith.

The second breakaway from overarching temple theologies in Israelite history was the formation of an entirely new model of religious community, which though quite different from archaic familial beliefs was largely dependent on them. To establish and stabilize their existence in a foreign and often hostile environment, the early Jews created a Holy Scripture on which to build their community. Their belief and mentality was intimately connected to and impressed by the parochial structures of a strictly confessional association of a religious minority in a vast empire of Persian provenance. Connection to the central sanctuary at Jerusalem was maintained as if by an umbilical cord. But pre-eminent in all problems of daily life was divine guidance through learned rabbinic interpretation of written sources. The tensions between temple and synagogue have always been felt. Yet the people of God moved on, as a rule, along the commandments of the revealed Word. The new genre of Psalms that we call “didactic” gives clear witness to the new type of religion that was born in those years of discovering Torah. They testify to a faith based on strict norms of ethical behavior, placing human relations into the center of concern, vanquishing chauvinisms, and, to a certain extent, priestly bigotry.¹⁰ A liberated synagogue community led the way into modern times of separation of church and state and the autonomous growth of confessional religion. The didactic psalms signal that new era.

NOTES

1. For a critical overview, see Diebner 1985: 5–28.
2. Lists of individual complaints and thanksgiving vary (Gerstenberger 1988: 11–16).
3. Take, for example, the great prayer to Ishtar in *ANET* 384–85. It includes all the essential form-elements of a Mesopotamian supplication—hymnic appellation, petition, complaint, praising vow—all in repetitive, liturgical arrangement. Many similar prayers are attested in the vast cuneiform literature.
4. The rites of Candomblé, Macumba, and Umbanda religions are discussed, e.g., by Berkenbrock 1999; Bastide 2001; Pröschild 2009; Capone 2010.
5. See also the essay by Diane Jacobson in this volume.
6. Cf. Mowinckel 1962: 2.104–25 (“The Learned Psalmography”). Any connections between didactic poems and worship practices have been largely denied. Exceptions include Perdue 1977; Dell 2004: 445–58; Gerstenberger 1988a: 86–89.
7. Deuteronomy 29–31; Josh. 24:14–18; Isa. 63:7–64:11; Pss. 5:3[2]; 71:4–6; 84:4[3]; 115:4–7; 135:15–18.
8. Asaph and Korah, prominent in Chronicles as temple singers, allegedly left groups of their songs to the redactors of the Psalter (50, 73–83, 42–49, 84–85, 87–88). These collections are a mixture of temple-related, family-oriented, and didactic psalms.
9. See also the essay by Marc Brettler in this volume.
10. The continuing attachment to sacrificial puristic theologies is apparent in the priestly layers of the Old Testament, generating sustained tensions in Jewish-Christian traditions. See the essentially “Western” enlightened treatment of Psalms with, e.g., Brueggemann 2005; Brown 2010.

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CHAPTER 23

THE SHAPE AND SHAPING OF THE PSALTER: PSALMS IN THEIR LITERARY CONTEXT

J. CLINTON MCCANN, JR.

EACH psalm is a separate poem, but interpreters have noticed for centuries that there are relationships among them. For instance, there are collections assigned to individuals—David (Pss. 3–41, 51–72, 108–110, 138–145), the sons of Korah (Pss. 42–49, 84–85, 87–88), Asaph (Pss. 50, 73–83). Other groupings share the same superscription (120–134, Songs of Ascents), the same beginning and/or ending (see “Praise the LORD!” in 104–106, 111–113, 115–117, 146–150), or the same theme (93, 95–99, the enthronement collection). The ancient rabbis noticed the four doxologies (41:14[13]; 72:18–19; 89:53[52]; 106:48) that seem to divide the Psalter into five books, concluding that, as Moses has five books, so does David. Their conclusion implies that they recognized the existence of intentional editing.

In the more recent history of biblical scholarship, even as form criticism and the identification of life settings prevailed, there were at least sporadic attempts to consider the relationships among psalms as evidence of intentional editing. As biblical studies moved generally beyond form criticism to more literary and canonical approaches in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the study of the Psalms began to change. A major turning point was the 1985 publication of Gerald H. Wilson’s *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*. While some scholars continued to argue that the doxologies were simply the conclusions to their respective psalms, Wilson argued persuasively that the five-book arrangement is intentional and purposeful. Further, he concluded that Books I–III (Psalms 3–89), which are dominated by prayers for help and in which almost every psalm has a superscription, came into form earlier than Books IV–V (Psalms 90–150), which contain significantly more songs of praise and significantly less superscriptions. Wilson also pointed out that Books I–III are characterized by royal psalms at the “seams”

of the books (Psalms 2, 72, 89), giving Books I–III a messianic orientation with a tragic dimension. After rehearsing the promises to David and his descendants (vv. 2–38[1–37]), Psalm 89 concludes with the rejection of the monarchy, as a voice recounts the failure of the Davidic covenant (vv. 39–46[38–45]) and as an imagined Davidic survivor of exile painfully asks God what has happened to God’s loving commitment (vv. 47–50[46–49]), poignantly pleading with God to remember (vv. 48[47], 51[50]). According to Wilson, Books IV–V respond to this crisis. At the core of Book IV, the enthronement psalms proclaim that God reigns, and Psalm 107 begins Book V by thanking God for deliverance (Wilson 1985: 199–228; Wilson 1986: 85–94).

Some scholars still claim that the Psalter is a random compilation of smaller collections without any purposeful editorial shape. However, Wilson’s conclusions have been widely accepted, and the past twenty-five years have seen an explosion of studies of the editorial shape and shaping of the Psalter. In this chapter, I assume the correctness of Wilson’s basic conclusions: that the Psalter has been purposefully shaped, that Books I–III took shape first and have a messianic orientation, and that Books IV–V respond to the crisis articulated in Psalm 89. Building on this basic foundation, I offer a reading of the Psalms that takes seriously the shape and shaping of the book. This chapter has some resemblance to Nancy deClaissè-Walford’s essay in this volume, since her discernment of a meta-narrative also assumes purposeful editing. While she emphasizes narrative effects, I focus on how the shape of the Psalter invites readers to attend to crucial aspects of its content, aspects that might be called keywords, concepts, themes, or affirmations.

As one would expect, the introduction to the Psalter is very important. There is virtually unanimous agreement that Psalm 1 was either written or chosen to introduce the Psalter, and there is a growing consensus that Psalms 1–2 form a paired introduction, due to their framing by “Happy” (1:1; 2:12), as well as the repetitions of “meditate” / “plot” (1:2; 2:1), “path” / “way” (1:1, 6; 2:12), and “perish” (1:6; 2:12). Psalms 1–2 perform their introductory function by anticipating the crucial words, concepts, themes, and affirmations that occur throughout the Psalter, often in key locations. After considering Psalms 1–2, I proceed book by book to point out how the shape and shaping of the Psalter invites attention to the crucial dimensions of its content. In short, my focus is on the literary shape of the Psalter itself as a major context for interpretation.

THE INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALTER: PSALMS 1–2

Psalm 1 is usually labeled a Torah psalm. The Hebrew word *tôrâ* occurs twice in verse 2 (“law”; CEB “Instruction”). The effect, in part, is to orient the reader and pray-er of the Psalms to expect to learn something about God and God’s will from the psalms themselves, as one might expect more readily to do from the Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy).

In short, the psalms, which originated as liturgical materials, have become *tôrâ*, “instruction.” While the word *tôrâ* is reminiscent of the material in the Torah, it can also mean God’s will in the broadest sense. Thus, what is commended from the very beginning of the Psalter is a life fundamentally oriented to God and lived in conformity to God’s will.

Because there is a focus on God’s will in verses 1–2, it is noticeable that Psalm 1 employs in verse 5 a word that is virtually a one-word summary of God’s purpose for the world. This word is usually translated “judgment,” but it can be rendered as “justice” (*mišpāṭ*), as the CEB does: “And that’s why the wicked will have no standing in the court of justice.” In the Psalter, justice will prove crucial (see below on Books IV–V).

The appearance of “justice” in Psalm 1 is also noteworthy because it suggests how Psalm 1 anticipates and is related to Psalm 2. At first sight, Psalms 1 and 2 seem completely unrelated. But because the earthly king was the human figure entrusted with the enactment of God’s justice in the world (see Psalm 72), it makes sense that the king becomes the focus of attention in Psalm 2, a royal psalm. In any case, the effect of the juxtaposition of Psalms 1 and 2 is to highlight and hold together the two key concepts of *tôrâ* and kingship. As suggested above, this messianic orientation is reinforced by the appearance of royal psalms at the ends of Books II and III (Psalms 72 and 89).

Tôrâ and kingship are also related in other parts of the canon, especially Deuteronomy 17:14–20, which stipulates that the king will possess a “copy of this law [*tôrâ*]” (v. 18) to read daily (v. 19; see Ps. 1:2). Some scholars detect Deuteronomic influence at the beginning of the Psalter, and this is quite possible. In any case, it is not surprising that *tôrâ* and kingship appear together later in the Psalter (see below on Books I and V).

While the focus is on the king in Psalm 2, it is clear that the king is God’s “anointed” (v. 2—the Hebrew is traditionally transliterated as *messiah*) and God’s “son” (v. 7). Thus, the king’s authority is derivative. In the final analysis, Psalm 2 is a proclamation of God’s sovereignty. This is especially evident in verses 10–12, where the powerful of the earth are commanded to “Serve the LORD” (v. 11). This imperative occurs only once more in the Psalter, and it is significant that the location is found in Psalm 100:2, immediately following the enthronement collection that explicitly and repeatedly affirms that God is king or that God reigns (see below on Book IV).

God, the heavenly king, appoints God’s son, the earthly king, on Zion (v. 6). Not only does Psalm 2 anticipate the Zion songs featured later in the Psalter (46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122, 132, 137), but the pairing of Psalms 1 and 2 also means that *tôrâ* and Zion are associated as the Psalter begins (see below on Books I and V).

While the primary introductory effect of Psalms 1–2 is to highlight and link *tôrâ* and kingship, both human and divine, there are two other words or concepts here that resonate throughout the Psalter. First, the word “happy” (*ʾāšrê*) occurs over twenty more times and in several key places. Indeed, it is accurate to conclude that the Psalter constructs a composite portrait of people who are “truly happy” (1:1; 2:12, CEB). The occurrence of “happy” in Psalm 2:12 is connected with “refuge,” a second word that figures prominently in the Psalter, especially in Books I–II.

That happiness belongs to those “who take refuge in” God (Ps. 2:12) highlights another important feature of Psalms 1–2. Refuge is necessary because God, God’s will, God’s messiah, God’s place, and God’s people (who are called “the righteous” in 1:5–6 and repeatedly in the prayers for help) are persistently opposed. This is already the case in Psalm 1 (see “the wicked” in vv. 1, 4–6) and Psalm 2 (see vv. 1–3), and it continues to be the case throughout the Psalter, even nearly to the very end (see Psalms 144, 149). The virtual omnipresence of enemies affects how one hears and interprets major concepts and themes like *tôrâ*, human and divine sovereignty, happiness, and refuge.

BOOK I: PSALMS 3–41

The movement from introduction (Psalms 1 and 2) to Book I is marked by the first superscription (Psalm 3), which mentions David and is the first of thirteen superscriptions to cite a specific episode in David’s life. Of the thirty-nine psalms in Book I, all mention David in the superscription except Psalms 10 and 33, neither of which has a superscription. Even though it is probable that none of the psalms actually originated with or had anything to do with David, it is important that the editors of the Psalter invite readers to hear and interpret them in relation to David. The effect is to reinforce the messianic orientation of Books I–III.

A majority of the psalms in Book I are prayers for help (usually called individual laments or complaints). This is also the case with the Davidic collection (Psalms 51–72) in Book II, and eleven of the thirteen episodes mentioned in Davidic superscriptions involve some threat or crisis, usually the presence of enemies. Thus, David is regularly portrayed as a suffering messiah. This reality perhaps prepares the reader for the shocking news concerning the rejection of the monarchy and the failure of the Davidic covenant in Psalm 89. Furthermore, in the larger perspective of the Psalter, the existence of a suffering messiah (and the pervasive suffering of “the righteous,” who normally are the pray-ers in the body of the psalms assigned to David) suggests that sovereignty, happiness, and refuge are not mutually exclusive with suffering.

Because a majority of the psalms in Book I are prayers for help, it is noticeable that beginning with Psalm 15 and continuing through Psalm 24 there is a sequence of psalms that are not primarily prayers. Psalms 15 and 24 are entrance liturgies, both posing the question of temple entrance and thereby recalling Psalm 2 and its reference to Zion (see 15:1, which, like 2:6, mentions “holy mountain,” and 24:3, which mentions “the LORD’s mountain”). Worshippers entering the temple are those who honor God by doing God’s will (15:2–5; 24:4)—that is, those who have been shaped by God’s *tôrâ* or “instruction” (see 1:2). Although the word *tôrâ* does not occur in Psalms 15 and 24, the surrounding literary context has been shaped to call attention to the centrality of *tôrâ*. Note the chiasmic structure bounded by Psalms 15 and 24, as follows:

- Psalm 15 entrance liturgy
 Psalm 16 psalm of trust
 Psalm 17 prayer for help
 Psalm 18 royal psalm
 Psalm 19 Torah psalm
 Psalms 20–21 royal psalms
 Psalm 22 prayer for help
 Psalm 23 psalm of trust
Psalm 24 entrance liturgy

The chiasm directs attention to the center, where, as in Psalms 1 and 2, *tôrâ* and kingship are found together. At the very center of the chiasm, life-giving *tôrâ* is central (see especially 19:8–15[7–14]). It is likely that the editorial shaping is evidence of a torah piety that promised assurance to those who committed themselves to seek God's presence in the temple. But it is also likely that entrance to the temple became understood symbolically to represent any direct experience of God's presence. In this case, the editorial shaping suggests that to be instructed by God, to do God's will, is a direct experience of God's presence. As Jerome Creach concludes, "Torah became a source of security for the righteous that fulfills the role once reserved for Mount Zion and its temple.... Torah became for the righteous a surrogate for Zion in its role as the connecting point between heaven and earth" (2008: 135; see also Brown 2010: 97–107).

The chiastic structure of Psalms 15–24 also has the effect of associating *tôrâ* with refuge. Psalms 16, 17, and 18 each contain the word "refuge" (16:1; 17:7; 18:3[2], 31[30]). This is probably not coincidental. In any case, "refuge" is clearly a keyword and major concept in Book I.¹ Creach even suggests that because of the prominence of "refuge" as a word and concept, especially in Book I, the editors of the Psalter added to an original form of Psalm 2 what is now its final line ("Happy are all who take refuge in Him") in order to alert readers to the upcoming significance of the concept (Creach 1996: 17–18).

In Psalm 2:12, refuge is associated with happiness, and it is worth noting that the concept of happiness is mentioned again in the two closing psalms of Book I. In 40:5[4], happiness derives from trusting God, and since trust is virtually synonymous with taking refuge in God, 40:5[4] recalls 2:12. In 41:2[1], happiness derives from caring for the poor—in short, from doing God's will, thus recalling 1:1–2. In terms of Wilson's identification of royal psalms at the seams of Books I–III, one must admit that Psalm 41 is not a royal psalm; however, attending to the needs of the poor is the primary function of the king (see 72:1–7, 12–14), so Psalm 41 has clear resonance with the royal psalms. In any case, the mention of happiness in Psalms 40–41 echoes Psalms 1–2; in fact, the mention of happiness in Psalm 41 is an anticipation of things to come. The concluding psalms of Books II–IV also mention happiness (see 72:17; 89:16[15]; 106:3), as does Psalm 146:5, which appears in the opening psalm of the Psalter's concluding collection,

Psalms 146–150 (Weber 2008: 195–96). But already in Book I, the Psalter is well on its way toward offering a portrayal of happiness that comes from entrusting life to God and doing God's will.

BOOKS II–III: PSALMS 42–72 AND 73–89

One of the obvious literary features of Book II is the double conclusion at the end of Psalm 72, where a doxology (vv. 18–19) is followed by the note that “The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended” (v. 20). (Even though Psalm 72 is attributed to Solomon, it is normally considered part of the Davidic collection that starts with Psalm 51.) This was undoubtedly intended to be some sort of editorial marker, but it is unclear whether it is meant to signal the conclusion of Psalms 51–72 or of a more extensive Davidic collection that begins with Psalm 3. If the latter, then another literary feature of Book II comes into view—that is, the seeming interruption of a sequence of Davidic psalms by a Korahite collection (Psalms 42–49) that begins Book II.

While the positioning of the Korahite collection at the beginning of Book II can be viewed as coincidental, this is not likely, given the fact that another Levitical collection, the psalms of Asaph (73–83), begins Book III. A complicating factor is that the outer parameters of these two Levitical collections—42 and 83—mark the beginning and end of the Elohist Psalter, a portion of the Psalter in which the divine name Elohim is clearly preferred over the divine name YHWH, which is more frequently attested elsewhere.

The origin, character, and purpose of the Elohist Psalter is still being debated, but a new consensus seems to be emerging that Psalms 42–83 were originally an independent collection formed by the two Levitical collections around a Davidic core (Psalms 51–72). The number 42 is attested in ancient Near Eastern collections of poetry, and it seems to have symbolic significance there and in portions of the Hebrew Bible. Drawing on these facts, Joel Burnett suggests not only that the Elohist Psalter was originally independent but also that its purpose was to lament the destruction of the temple in 587 BCE and to express hope for renewal beyond the crisis (2007: 108–113). In this regard, it is significant that both the Korahite and Asaph collections begin with complaints voiced by individuals concerning absence from the temple (Psalm 42) or the absence of divine favor (73), followed in both cases by communal laments that seem to have the destruction of the temple in view (44, 74). The Asaph collection also contains most of the other communal laments in the Psalter (79, 80, 83), and both Levitical collections contain Zion songs (46, 48, 76) that celebrate Jerusalem's desirability, strength, and pivotal significance. Psalm 83, the final Asaph psalm, concludes with a plea for God to deal with national enemies and to assert God's world-encompassing sovereignty.

What Burnett suggests about the Elohist Psalter is congruent with Wilson's conclusions about Books I–III—that is, both assume the failure of the Davidic covenant that came with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, a crisis that begged for a

response. This congruence is to be expected, since, according to Burnett, at some point Psalms 3–41 were combined with Psalms 42–83 to form a larger collection. To this combination of the first Davidic collection and the Elohist Psalter was added an appendix, Psalms 84–89, to form Psalms 3–89 (or perhaps 1–89). In the appendix, the Zion interest of the Elohist Psalter is reinforced by Psalms 84 and 87, both Zion songs. Conversely, the tragic reality of Zion's destruction is reinforced by Psalm 89, which clearly assumes the disappearance of the Davidic dynasty.

The Elohist Psalter would have had a Davidic, messianic orientation due to its Davidic core, and this orientation would have been enhanced when Psalms 42–89 (i.e., the Elohist Psalter plus appendix) were subsequently divided into Books II and III. This editorial move probably involved the addition of a Davidic superscription to Psalm 86, so that David is represented in each of Books I–V (although only once in Book III and twice in Book IV). It may also have involved the separation of Psalm 50 from the rest of the Asaph psalms, so that both Asaph and Korah are represented in Book II as they are in Book III (since the appendix contains four Korahite psalms).

The division of Psalms 42–89 into Books II and III would also have enhanced a Davidic orientation, because it created the situation in which both books end with a royal psalm. As Wilson points out, this means that royal psalms appear at noticeable seams of Books I–III. Plus, Psalms 2 and 89 form an envelope-structure for Books I–III, calling particular attention to the sharp contrast between the Davidic king in Psalm 2, who is promised world-encompassing authority (vv. 9–11), and the king in Psalm 89, who has been rejected and poignantly laments, questions, and pleads for divine help (vv. 39–54[38–53]). It is precisely this contrast that begs for a response, which comes in Books IV–V.

Before turning to Books IV–V, it should be noted that Psalms 72 and 89 not only recall Psalm 2, but they also echo major themes of Psalm 1. As suggested above, the word “happy” (1:2; 2:12) occurs in the final psalms of Books II, III, and IV and is also connected in each case with doing God's will (as in Psalm 1), including “justice” (see 1:5). In Psalm 72, the nations will call the Davidic king “happy” because he does God's will, which is communicated by the key words “justice” (vv. 1, 2, 4), “righteousness” (vv. 1–3, 7), and “peace” (vv. 3, 7 [NRSV “prosperity” in v. 3]). In Psalm 89, the “happy” are those who acclaim God's presence (v. 16[15]), which is represented by God's throne, which is founded on “righteousness and justice” (v. 15[14]). One major dimension of the crisis of exile was the loss of the Davidic king, the earthly agent for enacting God's will (72). Appropriately, the response that comes in Book IV involves the coming of God as king “to establish justice in the world with righteousness” (96:13; 98:9 [my translation]).

Although it is perhaps editorially coincidental, the portrayal of God in 96:13 and 98:9 marks the fulfillment of the prayer that concludes Psalm 82: “Arise, God! Establish justice on earth, for you claim all the nations” (82:8 [my translation]). Immediately prior to this petition, God had sentenced the gods to death (vv. 6–7) for failing to do justice and righteousness (vv. 2–4). The gods, says God, will “fall like any prince” (v. 7). It is revealing that such a turn of events is never communicated in the Psalter. As it turns out, it is the Davidic king who, in essence, will “fall like any prince.” Thus, Psalm 82 anticipates

both Psalm 89 (perhaps indicating a link between the Elohistc Psalter and its appendix) and Psalms 96 and 98, which participate in the response of Book IV to the crisis articulated at the end of Book III.

BOOK IV: PSALMS 90–106

Given that Psalm 89 mentions the rejection of the Davidic king and the failure of the covenant, it is not surprising that the beginning of Book IV offers the reader a pre-monarchical frame of reference. Psalm 90 is the only psalm attributed to Moses, who led the people prior to the time they possessed any of the things they lost in 587 BCE—land, temple, and monarchy. This “Prayer of Moses” even echoes Moses’ intercession for the people following their making of the golden calf (see “turn” in 90:13; Exod. 32:13), an episode explicitly mentioned in the concluding psalm of Book IV (see Ps. 106:19–23). The editorial effect is to portray Moses praying again for the people in the critical situation of exile. Bereft of land and temple, the people have a perpetual “dwelling place” in God, according to Moses (v. 1), and his prayer concludes with a plea for a daily experience of God’s “steadfast love” (v. 14), which is precisely what was missing in 89:49. As Book IV proceeds, it features Moses. He is mentioned six times, including three times in Psalm 106, perhaps forming an intentional envelope structure with the superscription of Psalm 90 (see 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32). Elsewhere in the Psalter, Moses is mentioned only once (77:21[20]).

The first mention of Moses in the body of Book IV is Psalm 99:6, and Psalm 99 is the conclusion of the enthronement collection that dominates Book IV. Psalm 93 initiates a series of seven psalms with no superscriptions, a situation that suggests a sort of inseparable unity among Psalms 93–99. The unifying feature is the content. In each psalm except Psalm 94, God is either described or proclaimed as “king” (93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1). It is not clear why Psalm 94 is an exception. Its address of God as “judge of the earth” (v. 2—the phrase could also be translated “establisher of justice on earth”) certainly coheres with the portrayal of God in the rest of the collection, especially Psalms 96–99, which mention “justice” (see below). The description of God as “rock of my refuge” (v. 22) recalls Psalms 90–92. It is possible, then, that Psalm 94 performs an interlocking function, binding Psalms 90–92 more closely to the enthronement collection.

The repeated message of the enthronement collection—God is king—is clearly Mosaic in character, recalling the culmination of Moses’ and the people’s song in Exodus 15:18, “The LORD will reign forever and ever.” So it is appropriate that Moses is mentioned in Psalm 99:6, and it is not surprising that Samuel is mentioned too, since he was also an articulate spokesman for God’s kingship (see 1 Sam. 8:4–10). The message pointedly addresses the crisis articulated in Psalm 89. Although the Davidic king has been rejected, God is still king as God has been all along. Because this message comes through loudly and clearly in the enthronement collection, Wilson concludes that Psalms 90–106 “function as the editorial ‘center’ of the final form of the Hebrew Psalter” (1985: 215).

The core of the enthronement collection consists of Psalms 96–99, all of which feature the concepts of justice and righteousness (96:13; 97:2, 6; 98:2, 9; 99:4). This pair of words summarizes what God wills for the world. Because justice and righteousness are what the earthly king was supposed to do, Psalms 96–99 recall Psalm 72 (especially vv. 1–7) at the end of Book II, as well as Psalms 82 and 89 in Book III. But the focus on God’s will also recalls Psalm 1 (see “justice” in v. 5), and the mention of Zion and “holy mountain” in Psalm 99 (vv. 2, 9) recalls Psalm 2. Some scholars define the enthronement collection as Psalms 93–100, and 100:2 (“Serve the LORD” [RSV, CEB]) recalls 2:11, especially since this phrase occurs only in these two verses in the Psalter. God reigns without the earthly king.

Wilson and others have concluded that Book IV’s response to Books I–III is intended to deflect attention away from the Davidic monarchy in order to commend trust and hope solely in God’s reign. Clearly attention to David decreases dramatically in Book III, which contains only one Davidic psalm, and David gets only slightly more attention in Book IV, which contains two Davidic psalms (101, 103). But David does receive some attention, and Psalm 101 is almost universally categorized as a royal psalm. For some interpreters, this means that the editors of the Psalter had not given up hope for a restored Davidic monarchy. This issue is still being debated, and we return to it in the discussion of Book V.

The last superscription in Book IV occurs with Psalm 103 and mentions David, so it may govern Psalms 103–106. If so, David is portrayed first as submitting himself to—that is, blessing (103:1–2, 22; 104:1, 35)—the God who has revealed the divine self to Moses (103:6–18) and who is the sovereign over all creation (103:20–22; 104:1–35). And then David is portrayed as thanking God for all that God has done in the story of Israel (105–106), despite the people’s sinfulness, which is a recurrent theme of Psalm 106. Like Psalm 89 at the end of Book III, Psalm 106 at the end of Book IV clearly portrays the rupture of exile (vv. 40–43), but whereas the imagined Davidic voice in Psalm 89 pleads for God to remember (vv. 48, 51[47, 50]), Psalm 106 affirms that God has already remembered. Indeed, God “remembered his covenant” (v. 45; cf. the broken covenant in 89:39); however, God’s memory is on behalf of the whole people, not David. God’s remembering is motivated by God’s “steadfast love” (v. 45), which was lacking in 89:50[49]. This bodes well, and it strongly suggests that Book IV is indeed a response to the discouraging conclusion to Books I–III. Even so, Psalm 106:47 ends Book IV with the people’s plea to be gathered from among the nations. There is more to be said and done, and Book V continues the response.

Before turning to Book V, we need to notice one other point. Like Psalms 41 and 72, which conclude Books II and III, Psalm 106 makes a statement about happiness (v. 3), which again is associated with God’s will, as in Psalm 1. More specifically, happiness derives from doing justice and righteousness. The bad news is that the monarchy did not measure up (Psalm 89), and neither did the people (Psalm 106). The good news that Book IV has articulated is that God “is coming to establish justice in the world; he will establish justice with righteousness” (96:13; 98:9 [my translation]). The phrase “is coming” translates not as a future tense but as an active participle indicating present

and continuing action: God is making and will be making God's presence known in the world in order to establish justice and set things right. In Psalms 96 and 98, all creation responds joyfully to this good news, which is the foundation for the continuing response of Book V. It brings the Psalter to a conclusion with a chorus of universe-encompassing praise (see Psalms 146–150).

BOOK V: PSALMS 107–150

Book IV leaves the people in exile, praying to be gathered “from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name” (106:47), and the thanks begins in Psalm 107. To be sure, Psalm 106 begins the same way that Psalm 107 does, namely with an invitation to give thanks for God's goodness and steadfast love. But whereas the people's sin becomes the dominant theme in Psalm 106, the people's thanks becomes the repeated theme in Psalm 107 (see vv. 8, 15, 21, 33). This shift suggests that the editors of the Psalter were envisioning a restoration that they perhaps viewed as already in progress.

How might the editors of the Psalter have understood the shape of this restoration? In considering this question, note that the collections in Book V represent major dimensions of Israel's pre-exilic life. Recalling the exodus is the collection usually known as the Egyptian Hallel (113–118; see especially 114:1 and 118:14, which quotes Exod. 15:2); recalling the centrality of Zion is the collection of the Songs of Ascent (120–134; see especially 122, 126, 132–134); and recalling the crucial role of the Davidic monarchy are the two collections attributed to David (108–110; 138–145). Undoubtedly, in the post-exilic era, there were people who longed for a deliverance from Persian domination that would match the exodus from Egyptian oppression, and there were people who longed for and expected a revival of the Davidic monarchy. The temple was rebuilt on Zion, and it functioned again after 515 BCE as a place of worship and destination for pilgrims. Perhaps these longings, expectations, and realities are reflected in the content and shape of Book V.

But the overwhelmingly dominant structural feature of Book V is the massive Psalm 119, a Torah psalm in which the word *tôrâ* occurs twenty-five times, along with several synonyms also repeated numerous times. Its length alone—176 verses—makes it stand out, but there are other considerations as well. Erich Zenger, for instance, has suggested that the collections in Book V are arranged around Psalm 119 in a chiasmic pattern, as follows:

Psalms 108–110	Psalms of David (monarchy)
Psalms 113–118	Egyptian Hallel (exodus)
	Psalm 119 Torah
Psalms 120–134 (137)	Songs of Ascent,
	plus appendix (Zion)
Psalms 138–145	Psalms of David (monarchy) ²

The chiasm draws attention to the central element, Psalm 119. In terms of message, this shape suggests that David, exodus, and Zion find their ultimate orientation and destination as witnesses to God's "instruction," God's will. In short, everything revolves around *tôrâ*.

The highlighting of *tôrâ* at the heart of Book V recalls a similar structural feature of Book I, in which the chiastic arrangement of Psalms 15–24 centered attention on Psalm 19, another Torah psalm. Because Psalm 19 is surrounded immediately by royal psalms (18, 20–21), it is significant that many interpreters view Psalm 118 as a royal psalm. While it does not mention the king, the speaker in Psalm 118 seems far more exemplary and important than any ordinary Israelite or Judean. If so, the juxtaposition of Psalms 118 and 119 may again intentionally link *tôrâ* and kingship, as was the case in Psalms 18–21, as well as in Psalms 1–2. In any case, the highlighting of *tôrâ* at the hearts of Books I and V means that Psalms 19 and 119 form a *tôrâ* inclusio for the Psalter (Grant 2004: 121–88).

Psalm 119 also recalls Psalm 1 (see "happy" in 1:1 and 119:1), so that all three Torah psalms—Psalms 1, 19, 119—stand out structurally in the Psalter. In considering the role of the Torah psalms in the Psalter, James L. Mays notices the positioning of these three psalms; he considers their juxtaposition with Psalms 2, 18, and 118 and points out that there are echoes of *tôrâ*-centeredness in fourteen other psalms (18, 25, 33, 78, 89, 93, 94, 99, 103, 105, 111, 112, 147, 148). All this leads him to the following conclusion: "Those who are at work in the final shaping and arrangement of the Psalter are completely committed to torah as the divinely willed way of life" (1994: 134).³ Commitment to *tôrâ* is the source of true happiness (1:1–2; 119:1), which, as the persistent opposition to the righteous demonstrates, is not incompatible with suffering. Given the disappearance of the monarchy, *tôrâ* itself becomes the indispensable guide for the enactment of the justice and righteousness that God wills. Given the dispersion of the people in the post-exilic era, *tôrâ* itself offered a direct experience of God's presence—in Creach's words, "a surrogate for Zion" and "The Ultimate Refuge" (Creach 2008: 135). It is certainly not coincidental that Psalm 119 stands between a psalm that concludes by portraying the approach of a festal procession to the gates of the temple (118:19–20, 26–27) and the Songs of Ascents, which feature the centrality of Zion (and were probably used by pilgrims to Jerusalem). In sum, one may enter Zion, into God's presence, through *tôrâ*.

As suggested above, this *tôrâ* piety is grounded in the conviction that lies at the heart of Book IV (and the Psalter as a whole, according to Wilson)—God reigns, and God is now and will be making His presence known in the world to establish justice (96:13; 98:9). Does this mean that the editors of the Psalter had abandoned hope in the reestablishment of the Davidic monarchy? Perhaps not—after all, there is a stronger Davidic presence in Book V than in Books III and IV, including Psalm 110, a royal psalm, at the end of the first Davidic collection in Book V, and Psalm 144, which is often categorized as a royal psalm and stands near the end of the second Davidic collection. Furthermore, Psalm 132, one of the Songs of Ascents, is a royal psalm.

Even so, the editors of the Psalter seem to have intended to dampen hopes for a restored monarchy. Psalm 110 promises the king not a renewed royal rule but an unexpected priestly status (110:4). Psalm 132 appears to be the most positive about a

Davidic renewal, but even it may be citing David's past glory as a way of expressing confidence that God will summon some concrete earthly agency through which to accomplish the divine will. As a rereading of Psalm 18, a royal psalm, Psalm 144 does not feature a triumphant David. Rather, "the hand of aliens" (vv. 7, 11) prevails, and the promise of happiness (v. 15) is directed to the people as a whole, not to David. This direction is followed and reinforced in Psalm 149, which recalls Psalm 2, providing another envelope structure for the Psalter. In Psalm 149, the authority over nations, including the power "to do among them the justice that is written" (v. 9 [my translation]), belongs not to the king but to all God's "faithful ones" (vv. 1, 5, 9). A king is explicitly mentioned in 149:2; but it is clearly God, not a Davidic ruler. The whole people of God have become the new agency for the enactment of God's will in the world.

The final psalm in the Davidic collection begins by addressing God as "my God and King" (145:1), and the first psalm in the concluding Hallelujah collection (Psalms 146–150) ends with an affirmation of God's reign (146:10). It also includes a warning not to "trust in princes" (146:3). Thus, Psalm 146 recalls the heart of Book IV—God reigns. At the same time, it echoes the very beginning of the Psalter. Happiness derives from dependence upon God alone (146:5; see 1:1–2; 2:12), "who does justice" (146:7; see 1:5), and "the way of the wicked he brings to ruin" (146:9; see 1:6; 147:6). Because God reigns, the individual psalmist (146:1–2) joins Zion and all Israel in praising God (147:1, 7, 12; 149:1–3, 5–6). Praise embodies both liturgical and existential submission to God and to God's will. Because God's sovereign claim is aimed at nothing short of universe-encompassing justice and righteousness (see 96:10–13; 98:7–9), the psalmist ultimately joins heaven, earth, every creature, and all creation in bringing the Psalter to a conclusion with a crescendo of praise (148:1–12; 150:6). To be sure, opposition to God and to God's will is evident at the end of the Psalter (see 144:7–8, 11; 149:7–9) as it was at the beginning (see Psalms 1–2) and throughout. But amid the pervasive opposition, the persistent commitment to God and to God's will—*tôrâ*, "instruction"—means that the Psalter appropriately bears in Hebrew the name "Praises." To take the editorial shape of the Psalter seriously means that such God centeredness and *tôrâ* directedness constitute at least one major context for interpreting the Psalms.

NOTES

1. See 2:12; 5:12[11]; 7:2[1]; 11:1; 16:1; 17:7; 18:3[2], 31[30]; 25:20; 28:8; 31:2[1], 20[19]; 34:9[8], 23[22]; 36:8[7]; 37:40.
2. Zenger 1998: 77–102. For a different and more recent proposal, see Hossfeld and Zenger 2011: 2–6. Hossfeld and Zenger propose that Psalms 107–136 represent a "compositional arc" that forms "a grand literary-fictional 'liturgy of thanksgiving'" celebrating the end of the exile and the beginning of the restoration of Zion and the people (p. 2).
3. This chapter of the book was originally published in Mays 1987: 3–12.

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CHAPTER 24

THE META-NARRATIVE OF THE PSALTER

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THE book of Psalms is approached by many who study it as an anthology, a collection of laments and hymns that evinces no particular order of arrangement. Individual psalms are read and interpreted as discreet units with little or no attention given to the psalms that surround them. Such an approach is certainly justified; each psalm is a self-contained unit with an individual meaning and message.

This approach, moreover, has a strong historical legacy. Text-, source-, form-, and redaction-critical approaches to the biblical text developed largely during the Enlightenment, when scholars privileged the study of individual psalms and psalm types over the study of the Psalter as a whole. Hermann Gunkel and his student Sigmund Mowinckel devoted a great deal of their careers to studying the book of Psalms. Gunkel applied the form-critical method, categorizing each psalm by its *Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben*. Building on the work of Gunkel, Mowinckel attempted to describe how and where each psalm in the Psalter was used in the cultic life of ancient Israel. Both wrote virtually nothing about the “shape” of the Psalter as a whole or about connections between individual psalms and groups of psalms. Gunkel wrote:

No internal ordering principle for the individual psalms has been transmitted for the whole. To be sure, sometimes related psalms stand together in the collection of the Psalter.... More commonly, however, no internal relationship can be discovered between neighboring psalms. (1998: 2 [italics original])

Gunkel’s type classification became, and continues to be, the blueprint for many scholars. Introductions to the Psalter, both past and present, typically “rearrange” the book in order to group and study various individual psalms according to their genres. While commentaries by necessity treat the psalms in their canonical sequence, many devote little or no attention to links between adjacent psalms or to the placement of psalms within the book as a whole.¹

THE CANONICAL APPROACH

What has come to be known as the canonical approach to biblical interpretation was championed in the mid-twentieth century by Brevard S. Childs. He encouraged a movement away from dissecting the biblical text and toward studying it in the form in which it was preserved as a literary whole. He maintained that it was useless to try to discover the underlying layers of traditions that make up the text because those who compiled and transmitted it deliberately obscured the layers in a process Childs called “actualization,” the purpose of which was to keep the text from “being moored in the past” (1979: 79).

James A. Sanders shared Childs’s interest in studying the final form of the biblical text. He disagreed, however, with Childs’s assertion that it was useless to try to understand the layers of traditions that constitute the text. Sanders asserted that biblical texts are grounded in historical settings, that those settings can be discovered, and that they are important for understanding the canonical shape of the texts. He believed, though that scholars had been looking in the wrong places for those historical settings. Gunkel looked at the individual oral settings of the psalms; Mowinckel examined cultic settings for the psalms; and redaction critics looked for the “individual genius” who brought together the individual psalms to form the book of Psalms (see Barton 1996: 45–60). Sanders’s focus instead was on communities of faith. He writes:

The text cannot be attributed to any discreet genius, such as author or editor or redactor, in the past. It can only be attributed to the ancient communities which continued to find value in the received traditions and scriptures, generation after generation, passing them on for the value they had found in them. (1984: 29)

The canonical method has encouraged readers to examine the “shape” of the biblical text and ask questions about a deliberate, rather than random, ordering of the material within each book and about the connectedness between books. In his influential dissertation, Gerald H. Wilson proposed that the psalms located at the “seams” of the book of Psalms and the placement of untitled psalms at key junctures provided insight into the shape of the Psalter (Wilson 1985). Expanding on Wilson’s work twelve years later, Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford provided further insight into the psalms placed at the beginning of each book (deClaissé-Walford 1997).² In his introduction to a collection of essays devoted to the topic, J. Clinton McCann, Jr., noted that scholars are increasingly aware that “the purposeful placement of psalms within the collection seems to have given the final form of the whole Psalter a function and message greater than the sum of its parts” (1993: 7). Clues about the ordering of the psalms are evident throughout the Psalter in what may be called footprints—footprints of the community of faith that shaped the book into its final and fixed form.

THE “SHAPE” OF THE PSALTER

The Dead Sea discoveries and the Septuagint indicate that a number of “editions” of psalm collections circulated until quite late in the life of ancient Israel. More than thirty fragments of Psalms scrolls have been discovered among the Dead Sea documents; two significant finds come from Caves 4 and 11. The extensive fragment from Cave 4 contains portions of Psalms 6–69, which are largely presented in the same order as the psalms in the Hebrew Bible. The fragment from Cave 11 contains thirty-nine canonical psalms interspersed with other poetry. The order of the psalms on this scroll is: 101–103, 109, 118, 104, 147, 105, 146, 148, 121–132, 119, 135–136, 145, 154 (attested elsewhere only in the Peshitta), “a prayer for deliverance,” 139, 137, 138, Sirach 51:13–30, “an apostrophe to Zion,” 93, 141, 133, 144, 155 (also only in the Peshitta), 142, 143, 149–150, “a hymn to the creator,” 2 Samuel 23:7, a prose statement about David’s compositions, 140, 134, and 151 (see Flint 1997).

In the Septuagint the psalms appear in the same order as they do in the Hebrew Bible, but Psalms 9 and 10 are grouped as a single psalm (Psalm 9), as are Psalms 114 and 115 (Psalm 113); Psalm 116 is divided into two psalms (Psalms 114 and 115), as is Psalm 147 (Psalms 146 and 147); Psalm 151 appears at the end of the book. In addition, psalmic superscriptions are longer and occur more often than in the MT.

The details of the process by which the Psalter achieved the form preserved in the Hebrew Bible is lost to the pages of history. But in light of the editorial arrangements noted above, we might ask, why these 150 psalms and why in this particular order? What factors influenced the ancient Israelite community that shaped the book in its final form to order the psalms as it did? Modern scholars are not the first to ask. The Midrash on Psalm 3 states:

As to the exact order of David’s Psalms, Scripture says elsewhere: *Man knoweth not the order thereof* (Job 28:13). R. Eleazar taught: The sections of Scripture are not arranged in their proper order. For if they were arranged in their proper order, and any man so read them, he would be able to resurrect the dead and perform other miracles. For this reason the proper order of the sections of Scripture is hidden from mortals and is known only to the Holy One, blessed be He, who said, “*Who, as I, can read and declare it, and set it in order?*” (Isa. 44:7) When R. Joshua ben Levi sought to arrange the Psalms in their proper order, a heavenly voice came forth and commanded: “Do not rouse that which slumbers!” (Braude 1959: 1.50)

While the goal of modern scholars is not to “resurrect the dead and perform other miracles,” they are attempting to “rouse that which slumbers” and discover more about the Psalter’s shape and shaping.

The Psalter itself provides some clues about its shape and shaping. First, many of the psalms appear to have been part of smaller, already existing collections before they were incorporated into the book, including:

Davidic Collections	3–41; 51–72; 108–110; 138–145
Korahite Collections	42–49; 84–85; 87–88
Elohistic Collection	42–83
Asaphite Collection	50; 73–83
Enthronement Psalms	93; 95–99
Songs of Ascents	120–134
Hallelujah Psalms	111–118; 146–150

Second, the superscriptions of individual psalms, while relatively late additions, may provide clues about their composition and interpretation. Seventy-four of the psalms in the Hebrew Psalter are ascribed to David; two are ascribed to Solomon; twenty-five are ascribed to Korah, Asaph, Ethan, and Heman, described in 1 Chronicles 15:16–19 and 2 Chronicles 20:19 as musicians in David's and Solomon's courts; and one is ascribed to Moses. Psalms 120–134 are identified as "Songs of Ascents," and thirty-six psalms have no superscriptions.

Third, some psalms apparently come from early in the life of ancient Israel, such as Psalms 3 and 48, and some seem clearly to be from Israel's later life, such as Psalms 1 and 137. Fourth, the Psalter is divided into five books: 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–150, each of which concludes with a doxology (41:14[13]; 72:18–19; 89:53[52]; 106:48; 150:6). The similarities among the doxologies—especially the first four—and the fact that the word "amen" occurs in the Psalter only in the doxologies suggest that they were purposefully shaped and added to the book at the same time, although there is no evidence of when this may have occurred. The five-book division of the Psalter is an early tradition. The *Midrash Tehillim*, which contains materials that dates to as early as the first century BCE, states in its commentary on Psalm 1:

As Moses gave five books of laws to Israel, so David gave five Books of Psalms to Israel, the Book of Psalms entitled *Blessed is the man* (Ps. 1:1), the Book entitled *For the leader: Maschil* (Ps. 41:1), the Book, *A Psalm of Asaph* (Ps. 73:1), the Book, *A Prayer of Moses* (Ps. 90:1), and the Book, *Let the redeemed of the Lord say* (Ps. 107:2). Finally, as Moses blessed Israel with the words *Blessed art thou, O Israel* (Deut. 33:29), so David blessed Israel with the words *Blessed is the man*. (Braude 1959: 1.5)

The Dead Sea Psalm scrolls are divided into five books, even though the individual psalms included within the five books differ from the Masoretic book of Psalms. The Septuagint also divides the Psalter into five books.

Fifth, the distribution of psalm types and superscriptions provide clues to the shape of the book. With regard to psalm types, the reader observes an overall "movement" from lament psalms in the first portion of the Psalter to hymnic psalms in the latter portion of the Psalter.³ The distribution is as follows:

- In Book I, twenty-four of the forty-one psalms (59%) are laments; eight (20%) are hymns.⁴
- In Book II, twenty of the thirty-one psalms (65%) are laments; six (19%) are hymns.

- In Book III, eight of the seventeen psalms (47%) are laments; six (35%) are hymns.
- In Book IV, only four of the seventeen psalms (24%) are laments; five (29%) are hymns.
- In Book V, ten of the forty-four psalms (23%) are laments; twenty-three (52%) are hymns.

The number of psalms with superscriptions is significantly more in the first three books of the Psalter than in the last two books:

- In Book I, thirty-seven of the forty-one psalms have superscriptions (93%).
- In Book II, thirty of the thirty-one psalms have superscriptions (97%).
- In Book III, all seventeen psalms have superscriptions (100%).
- In Book IV, only six of the seventeen psalms have superscriptions (35%).
- In Book V, twenty-six of the forty-four psalms have superscriptions (59%).

In addition, psalms attributed in their superscriptions to David are greater in number in Books I, II, and V than in Books III and IV.

- In Book I, thirty-seven of the forty-one psalms are attributed to David (93%).⁵
- In Book II, eighteen of the thirty-one psalms are attributed to David (58%).
- In Book III, only one of the seventeen psalms is attributed to David (6%).
- In Book IV, two of the seventeen psalms are attributed to David (12%).
- In Book V, fourteen of the forty-four psalms are attributed to David (32%).

Each of these phenomena—already existing collections, the content of the superscriptions, the dating of individual psalms, the five-book division, and the distribution of psalm types and superscriptions—contributes to an understanding of how communities of faith heard, preserved, and handed on the songs of ancient Israel and eventually shaped them into the book of Psalms.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS FOR THE “SHAPING” OF THE PSALTER

A brief recounting of the time period in which the Hebrew Bible in general and the book of Psalms in particular were shaped into their final forms is also helpful. In 597 BCE, the army of the Babylonian Empire carried Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, and many of his subjects into exile (2 Kings 25). A decade later, the army sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The nation of Israel, ruled for centuries by a succession of Davidic kings, appeared to be at an end. But its story continued. In 539 BCE, Babylon fell to the Persian Empire, a new power in the East led by Cyrus II. In the following year, Cyrus issued an

edict that allowed peoples held captive by the Babylonians to return to their homelands.⁶ Sometime after 538, a number of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem and began the process of rebuilding the city and the temple. By 515, a temple once again was standing (Ezra 6:15–16).

The Persian government allowed the Jewish people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and to resume their religious practices, so long as those practices did not conflict with Persian law. Temple and cult were restored, but the nation-state of Israel ruled by a Davidic king was not. Except for a brief time of independence under Hasmonean rule (from 141 to 63 BCE), the Jewish people lived continuously as vassals, first to the Persians, then the Greeks, and then the Romans. Under the same circumstances, most of the other small Near Eastern nation-states disappeared from history. But Israel did not. The post-exilic community found an identity and structure for existence that extended beyond traditional notions of nationhood. King and court could no longer be the focal point of national life. Temple and worship took center stage, and YHWH, rather than a Davidic king, reigned as sovereign over the new “religious nation” of Israel.

Post-exilic Israel redefined nationhood and found a way to remain a separate and identifiable entity within the vast empires of which it found itself a part. The major source of identity for the post-exilic community was its stories. The people looked to their written traditions for answers to the existential questions “Who are we?” and “What are we to do?” and shaped their traditions into a document that provided answers to these questions. The Hebrew Bible in general and the Psalter in particular serve as hermeneutical rationales for Israel’s post-exilic survival. According to the Psalter, what is that hermeneutical rationale?

THE STORY OF THE PSALTER

An overview of the story of the Psalter is as follows: It begins in Book I with the story of the reign of King David. Solomon's reign is recounted in Book II. Book III tells the story of the divided kingdoms and their eventual destructions by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Book IV relates the struggle of the exiles in Babylon to find identity and meaning in a world of changed circumstances. Book V celebrates the return to Jerusalem and the establishment of a new Israel with God as sovereign.

More specifically, Book I (Psalms 1–41) opens with words encouraging fidelity to the Torah:

Content (*ʾašrê*) is the one...
 (whose) delight is in YHWH's *tôrâ*,
 and (who) meditates on his *tôrâ* day and night. (1:1–2)

The book continues with words of warning to the nations and their rulers to recognize the God of Israel as king over all:

Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
 be warned, O rulers of the earth.
 Serve YHWH with reverence,
 with trembling kiss his feet. . . .
 Content [*ʾāšrê*] are all who take refuge in him. (2:10–12)

With these opening psalms, readers enter the Psalter with two admonitions: Diligently study and delight in the Torah, and acknowledge God as sovereign.

The remaining thirty-nine psalms in Book I are “of David.” They provide insights into every facet of David’s life—the king, the human being, the warrior, the parent, God’s servant. The majority are laments (59%), calling on God to act on behalf of the psalmist against enemies and oppressors. The book ends with Psalm 41, an individual hymn of thanksgiving. It begins with the wisdom word “content” (*ʾāšrê*), the same word with which Psalm 1 begins and Psalm 2 ends:

Content (*ʾāšrê*) are those who consider the poor;
 YHWH delivers them in the day of trouble.
 YHWH protects them and keeps them alive;
 they are called content (*ʾāšrê*) in the land. (41:2–3[1–2])

Book I tells the story of David’s reign, and its *ʾāšrê* ending reminds the reader of the dual message of the introduction to the Psalter—Torah Piety (Psalm 1) and God as king (Psalm 2).

Book II, like Book I, includes numerous psalms of lament. But, unlike Book I, not all of them are attributed to David. The Korahites, temple singers during the reigns of David and Solomon, mix their voices with David in singing the laments of Book II. Fifteen psalms of David appear in the middle of the book (51–65). Fourteen are laments, and eight of the fourteen are connected, in their superscriptions, to particular events in David’s life. These psalms remind readers that David’s life was one of turmoil and strife, but they also depict a person who loved God and strove to serve God with fervor.

The only untitled psalm in Book II is Psalm 71, an individual lament, which may be interpreted as the supplication of an aged person for God not to forsake. Verses 6 and 9 read:

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
 it was you who took me from my mother’s womb.
 My praise is continually of you. . . .
 Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
 do not forsake me when my strength is spent.

In its position in Book II, Psalm 71 may be regarded as the words of an aged David at the end of his reign (see 1 Kgs. 1:1–2:11). Psalm 72 follows, one of only two psalms in the Psalter ascribed to Solomon (see Psalm 127). Brevard Childs suggests that the canonical placement of Psalm 72 indicates that the psalm “is ‘for’ Solomon, offered by David” (1979: 516). It reads, in part,

Give the king your justice, O God,
 and your righteousness to a king's son.
 May he judge your people with righteousness,
 and your poor with justice . . .
 May there be abundance of grain in the land;
 may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
 may its fruit be like Lebanon;
 and may people blossom in the cities
 like the grass of the field. (vv. 1–2, 16)

Book II ends: “The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended” (72:20).

The first psalm in Book Three is superscribed “A Psalm of Asaph.” Like the Korahites, Asaph was a temple singer during the reigns of David and Solomon.⁷ Fifteen of the seventeen psalms in Book III are attributed either to Asaph or to the sons of Korah. Only one psalm, Psalm 86, is attributed to David. With the close of Book II, then, David moves into the background. The focus shifts to David's descendants, who will determine the future of ancient Israel.

Psalm 73, like Psalm 1, is classified as a wisdom psalm. In Psalm 73, the psalm singer looks at the world around him, sees the wicked (*rěšā'im*) prospering, and questions whether conventional theology and mores still hold true in life. For the psalmist, there seems to be no reasoned connection between righteousness and reward, wickedness and punishment. In fact, Psalm 73 could be called “The Little Job of the Psalter.” The psalmist muses:

As for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
 my steps had nearly slipped.
 For I was envious of the arrogant;
 I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
 For they have no pain;
 their bodies are sound and sleek.
 They are not in trouble as others are;
 they are not plagued like other people . . .
 The scoff and speak with malice;
 loftily they threaten oppression.
 They set their mouths against heaven,
 and their tongues range over the earth. (vv. 2–5, 8–9)

In despair, the psalmist enters the sanctuary of the Lord and there finds order in the seeming chaos of life.

Indeed, those who are far from you will perish;
 you put an end to those who are false to you.
 But for me it is good to be near God;
 I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
 to tell of all your works. (vv. 27–28)

Psalm 73 signals a turning point, a new chapter in the Psalter's story. David's reign has ended, and Solomon's reign will end with the nation divided into two rival kingdoms that will be in constant conflict with one another and the nations around them. Community laments and community hymns dominate Book III. The voice of David the individual gives way to the voice of the community of faith, which is attempting to make sense of all that is going on.

O God, why do you cast us off forever?
 Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?
 Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago,
 which you redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage.
 Remember Mount Zion, where you came to dwell. (74:1–2)
 Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
 and put away your indignation toward us.
 Will you be angry with us forever?
 Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
 Will you not revive us again,
 so that your people may rejoice in you? (85:5–7[4–6])

Near the end of Book III, the reader encounters Psalm 88, an individual lament but a lament like no other in the Psalter. Psalms of lament typically consist of five elements: (a) an invocation, in which the psalmist calls on the name of God; (b) a complaint, in which the psalmist tells God what is wrong; (c) a petition, in which the psalmist tells God what the psalmist wants Him to do; (d) words of trust, in which the psalmist outlines the reasons for trusting that God can and will answer the psalmist's petition; and (e) words of praise, in which the psalmist celebrates the goodness and sovereignty of God. Psalm 88 is almost wholly composed of complaint (vv. 4–19[3–18]). Invocation (vv. 2[1], 10[9], 14[13], 15[14]) and petition (v. 3[2]) are brief lines within the song, and words of trust and praise are missing completely. The psalm ends:

Your wrath has swept over me;
 your dread assaults destroy me.
 They surround me like a flood all day long;
 from all sides they close in on me.
 You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;
 my companions are in darkness. (vv. 17–19[16–18])

Psalm 88 is followed by a royal psalm, which concludes Book III. As Psalm 88 is a lament like no other in the Psalter, so Psalm 89 is a royal psalm like no other. It begins, as do other royal psalms, praising God for the provisions to the king of God's choosing:

I will sing of your steadfast love, YHWH, forever;
 with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations . . .
 You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
 I have sworn to my servant David:
 'I will establish your descendants forever,
 and build your throne for all generations.'" (89:2[1], 4–5[3–4])

For thirty-seven verses, the psalm singer offers words of praise, thanks, and wonder. But the psalm takes a sudden turn in verse 39[38]:

But now you have spurned and rejected him;
 you are full of wrath against your anointed.
 You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
 you have defiled his crown in the dust. . .
 You have removed the scepter from his hand,
 and hurled his throne to the ground. (vv. 39–40[38–39], 45[44])

The closing doxology of Book III is both abrupt and terse: “Blessed be YHWH forever. Amen and amen.”

In 587 BCE, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took a major portion of Judah’s population into captivity. The nation of Israel was no more; Davidic kingship was ended; the people were exiled. Book III of the Psalter ends with the community of faith lamenting and asking questions of its God: “Who are we? Who will lead us? Who will help us to survive in this new reality?”

Book IV opens with Psalm 90, whose superscription is “A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God”—the only psalm in the Psalter so designated. Moses says to God:

Turn, YHWH! How long?
 Have compassion on your servants!
 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
 so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. (90: 13–14)

The words recall for the reader Moses’ words to God in Exodus 32:12. Just as Moses admonished God to “turn” and “have compassion” on the Israelites during the Golden Calf incident at Sinai, so Moses asks God to once again “turn” and “have compassion.” The Targum, in fact, titles Psalm 90 “A prayer of Moses the prophet, when the people Israel sinned in the desert.”

Outside of Book IV, Moses is mentioned only once in the Psalter (77:21); within Book IV he is referenced no fewer than seven times (90:1; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32).⁸ In the story of the Psalter, Moses intervenes with God on behalf of the people just as he did in the time of the wilderness wanderings. God will, at the behest of Moses, “turn” and “have compassion.” Enthronement psalms, which celebrate God as king over the people rather than a king of the Davidic line, lie at the center of Book IV (93, 95–99). Just as the people had to rely on God, not an earthly king, to provide for them during the wilderness wanderings, the people in exile must rely on God, rather than a Davidic king, to provide for them.

Book IV ends with two psalms that recount the history of God’s dealings with the Israelites. Psalm 105, a community hymn, recounts God’s provision, protection, and sustenance for the people throughout their history. Psalm 106, a community lament, recounts the same historical events but details the Israelites’ unfaithfulness to God’s goodness. As God ruled as sovereign over the Israelites before the days of King David (see 1 Samuel 8), so God can be sovereign once again. The message at the end of Book IV

is to remember the past but not follow in the paths of disobedience and unfaithfulness that past generations trod.

The end of Book IV is very different from the end of Book III. Whereas Psalm 89 hurls questions to God about why the people are suffering in their present situation, Psalm 106 offers a simple petition:

Save us, YHWH our God,
And gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise. (v. 47)

In 539 BCE, the Persian army, under the leadership of Cyrus II, captured Babylon, the capital city of the Babylonian Empire. In the following year, Cyrus issued a decree allowing captive peoples to return to their homelands, rebuild, and resume their religious practices. But the repatriated peoples would remain part of the vast Persian Empire, subject to Persian law. For the Israelites, Cyrus's decree meant that they could rebuild their temple and resume their religious practices, but they could not restore their nation-state under the leadership of a Davidic king.

Book V opens with Psalm 107, a community hymn celebrating God's graciousness in delivering people from various perilous circumstances. It begins:

O give thanks to YHWH, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of YHWH say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south. (vv. 1–3)

Verses 33–41 outline the beneficence that the sovereign God bestows on the faithful community. The people, consequently, dwell in safety, establish a town, plant a vineyard, reap a harvest, are blessed with children and cattle, are defended against the enemy, and have their future secured. The psalm closes with these words: "Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider YHWH's steadfast love" (v. 43).

With Psalm 108, David, who has been virtually absent from the Psalter (in superscription attributions) since his final words in Book II (72:20), returns. Psalms 108–110, 122, 124, 131, and 138–145 are "of David." In the center of Book V, with psalms of David forming an *inclusio* around them, are psalms used in various celebrations and commemorations in Jewish life: Psalms 113–118, the Egyptian Hallel, recited during Passover; Psalm 119, a wisdom acrostic about Torah piety, recited during the Feast of Pentecost; and Psalms 120–134, the Songs of Ascents, recited during the Feast of Booths (Sukkoth). In the story of the Psalter, then, David, who led the people in festival celebrations in the past (e.g., 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 15, 25), once again leads the people in praise to the God who created, sustained, and guided them throughout their history.

If the story of the Psalter is the story of Israel's struggle for survival and identity in the aftermath of the Jerusalem's destruction, the exile, and the return to the land, then how does the reader construe David's reappearance in Book V? Psalm 145, the last psalm in the book before the five-fold doxological ending, provides the key. Its superscription reads, "Praise. Of David," and it is a masterful alphabetic acrostic that celebrates the kingship of God over the community of faith and all creation. David begins the celebration by declaring: "I will extol you, my God the King (*hammelek*), and bless your name forever and ever" (v. 1). The community of faith joins David in verse 4, "One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." In verse 10, all creation is called upon to add its voice to the praise God: "All your works shall give thanks to you, YHWH, and all your faithful shall bless you." The psalm closes with the words: "My mouth will speak the praise of YHWH, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever" (v. 21). David, the great king, acknowledges God as king and calls on Israel and all creation to join with him in celebration. The conclusion of the Psalter, five doxological psalms, brings the praise of God as sovereign to its climax:

YHWH will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations. (146:10)

Praise YHWH! Sing to YHWH a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.
Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. (149:1–2)

CONCLUSION

What is the shape of the book of Psalms? Its five books narrate the history of ancient Israel, the history recorded in the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and a number of the prophets. Books I and II (1–72) chronicle the reigns of Kings David and Solomon. Book III (73–89) tells of the dark days of the divided kingdoms and their eventual destructions. Book IV (90–106) recalls the Babylonian exile during which the Israelites had to rethink their identity as the people of God. Finally, Book V (107–150) celebrates the community's restoration to the land and the sovereignty of God over them. Ancient Israel—emergent Judaism—survived in the many worlds of which it found itself a part in the course of its history, because it found in its past a way to make sense of the present and future.

The story of the shaping of the Psalter is the story of the shaping of survival. The Psalter was, along with the other texts that make up the Hebrew Scriptures, a constitutive document of identity for post-exilic Israel. Within that collection of texts, the community found a structure for existence and identity that transcended traditional concepts of nationhood. The story of the Psalter gave the people a new rationale for existence, a new

statement of national identity. With God as sovereign, the people could survive as a distinctly identifiable entity within the vast empires that governed them—Persian, Greek, and Roman.

NOTES

1. There are, however, a few exceptions: e.g., Tate 1990; McCann 1996: 639–1280; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005; Hossfeld and Zenger 2011; and Mays 1994.
2. A number of scholars have subsequently contributed to the conversation on shape and shaping. See especially Parrish 2003.
3. Claus Westermann proposed such a movement (1980: 10–11). Walter Brueggemann prefers the language of “obedience to praise” (1991: 63–92).
4. The remaining psalms are classifiable as, e.g., wisdom, royal, enthronement, and creation. For a full discussion of psalm types, see deClaissé-Walford 2004: 19–29.
5. Psalm 10 does not have a superscription but is firmly linked to Psalm 9. See, e.g., Kraus 1988: 188–89. Likewise, Psalm 33 has solid linguistic links to Psalm 32. See Wilson 1985: 174–75.
6. For the text of the so-called Cyrus Cylinder, see *ANET* 316. Ezra 1:2–4 and 6:35 include two portions of the restoration policy.
7. 1 Chron. 6:39; 25:1, 2 and 2 Chron. 5:12 state that Asaph was a descendant of Levi, part of one of the great families or guilds of musicians and singers in pre-exilic Israel. See Nasuti 1988.
8. Marvin Tate characterizes Book IV as a “Moses book, which has the exodus and wilderness traditions in mind” (1990: xxvi).

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CHAPTER 25

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ICONOGRAPHY AND THE PSALMS

JOEL M. LEMON

INTERPRETING LITERARY IMAGERY WITH AND THROUGH PICTURES

SCHOLARS have long noted the unique power of psalmic imagery, how the Psalms can conjure vast tableaux through which ancient Israel's poets illustrate the drama of human life with God. From the darkest fears of death and abandonment to the most exuberant worship of the Creator, the Psalter derives much of its rhetorical power from its deployment of literary imagery. William P. Brown observes rightly that the primary "point of contact" between a psalm and its reader comes through the ways that the psalm "paints" its imagery, "the constellations of images that evoke and invite exploration, negotiation, and appropriation through the exercise of the interpreter's informed imagination" (2002: 10–11).

In many cases, these ancient poems present imagery that seems to be largely accessible to its modern readers, even to those who do not have much insight into the ancient contexts from which the Psalms emerged. One must only consider the long and rich reception history of texts such as Psalm 46 or Psalm 23 to appreciate the Psalms' ability to express essential human experiences and emotions through literary imagery. Biblical scholars are left to consider the question of *how* this imagery affects those who read and hear the Psalms and whether ancient readers would have experienced the imagery in the same ways.

Literary criticism of the Psalms explores how images are woven together within the fabric of poetry, how psalms present their messages through structural and grammatical-syntactical means (e.g., parallelism). Scholars employing *iconographical* approaches to the Psalms explore the structure of texts slightly differently. By

juxtaposing the literary imagery of the psalms with artistic—expressly pictorial—imagery from ancient Israel and the larger ancient Near East, the interpreter attempts to understand the images of the Psalter in their fullest historical context. These interpretations highlight the fact that the psalmists composed within a world of images. Thus, to apprehend the depth and complexity of the literary images of the Psalms, one must attend to the larger imagistic world that the Psalms inhabit.

Othmar Keel sought to sketch the contours of this imagistic world in his groundbreaking 1972 monograph, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. In this work, Keel argues forcefully that ancient Near Eastern art provides the reader of biblical texts—and particularly the reader of the Psalms—with unmatched insight into the ways that literary imagery conveys meaning in its historical context. Keel puts it quite simply: “Iconography compels us to see through the eyes of the ancient Near East” (1997 [1972]: 8). And when the modern reader looks through those eyes, strange worlds do indeed appear.

Encountering this ancient imagery can have wildly disorienting effects, whether one is walking through a museum or paging through a book of Near Eastern art. One comes face to face with the profound foreignness of the ancient world, with its myriad gods, bizarre hybrid beasts, and (especially in the case of ancient Egyptian art) human forms routinely pictured in impossible postures. In this ancient context, the modes of representation are often markedly different from our own. Keel’s most important contribution to the historical-critical project has been to highlight this fact and thus situate the imagery of the Hebrew Bible, and particularly the Psalms, firmly within its own representational world.

Keel created, in effect, a new mode of analyzing the biblical text via ancient Near Eastern art, which he dubbed the “the iconographical approach” (1997 [1972]: 8).¹ Keel organized the imagery of the ancient Near East into several fundamental representational conceptions: creation, the king, death, enemies, temples, the divine realm, and communication with that realm. As he mapped this larger conceptual world, Keel showed the numerous connections between pictorial imagery and the literary imagery of the Psalms. In this way, for example, images of Egyptian gods and goddesses shielding other gods (and kings) with their outstretched wings (see Fig. 25.1 below) become a source for understanding the literary imagery in Psalm 91:4 (see Keel 1997 [1972]: 191): “With his pinions he will cover you, / and under his wings you will find refuge.”²

The publication of Keel’s seminal volume marked the beginning of a period of remarkably productive research from Keel, his students, and his colleagues, centered at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. These scholars, whose work largely appeared in the series *Orbis biblicus et orientalis* (OBO), have come to be known as the Fribourg School. Keel’s interests originally focused on the intersection of ancient art and biblical text.³ Yet the work of the Fribourg School soon extended into penetrating studies of ancient Near Eastern art as an end in itself, as well as studies of the history of religions to which the iconography gives witness.⁴

In recent years, thanks to the gains made by the Fribourg School, many biblical scholars consider ancient Near Eastern iconography a critical source of data for understanding the background of biblical imagery.⁵ Correspondingly, interpreters have devoted

further attention to questions of theory and method. One could distill these many questions into three rather simple ones: How does one interpret ancient Near Eastern images in their own right? How do these images serve as a resource for larger historical enterprises such as religio-historical research? And finally, related integrally to both of the prior questions, how does the imagery of the ancient Near East serve as aid to interpreters of literary imagery within biblical texts?

Several recent studies have invested much energy in addressing this final question, and many of these have taken metaphor theory as their starting point.⁶ Martin Klingbeil has explored the interrelationship between the aspects of God in the Psalms as “warrior” and “god of heaven” and how these literary images relate to the various representations of warrior gods and gods of heaven in ancient Near Eastern iconography (Klingbeil 1999). Brent Strawn has tracked the myriad ways that images of lions in the ancient Near East intersect with the leonine metaphors in the biblical text (Strawn 2005). Most recently, Izaak de Hulster has identified the background of three discrete metaphors within Third Isaiah, drawing heavily on Persian period iconography (de Hulster 2009).

Surveying these and other studies, one notes that ancient Near Eastern imagery works toward a number of interpretive goals. First, one can explore iconography to enrich one’s understanding of a particular lexeme or literary image. The works of Klingbeil, Strawn, and de Hulster serve as prime examples of this tack. Second, scholars can engage iconography to elucidate larger units of text through an investigation of the “iconic structure” of a pericope such as a psalm.⁷ Such studies explore how discrete literary images within a text come together into constellations of imagery, which the interpreter then compares with constellations of pictorial imagery from the ancient Near East. My own study of six psalms containing the image of Yahweh’s wings illustrates such an approach (LeMon 2010). Third and finally, iconography can provide insight on large (and theologically significant) themes that run across the Psalter. As mentioned earlier, Keel’s seminal monograph *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* exemplifies this concern for elucidating larger psalmic themes. More recently, Brown’s study of psalmic imagery has brought a particularly sensitive theological reading of the Psalms into conversation with the imagery of the ancient Near East. His goal is to uncover a “theology of metaphor” by examining the historical and imagistic context of a wide swath of psalmic themes (2002: 14). For both Brown and Keel, ancient Near Eastern iconography provides the key to interpreting the full scope of the Psalter’s imagery.

CASE STUDY: PSALM 76 AND THE ICONOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE

In order to illustrate the various ways that pictorial material can enhance the exegetical process, I present here a case study that shows how scenes of violence in ancient Near

Eastern iconography can shape one's reading of psalmic texts. The following discussion suggests (a) how iconography can elucidate a particular literary image in Psalm 76:6[5]; (b) how this image works in concert with others to create a constellation of images within the text (i.e., the psalm's iconic structure); and (c) how iconography deepens one's understanding of the Psalter's larger rhetoric of violence, of which Psalm 76 plays an important part.

As a song of praise, Psalm 76 pictures a majestic theophany in which God's glory manifests itself through extensive martial imagery. The text highlights the power and reputation of God over all other military forces and personages. Yahweh destroys the implements of warfare (v. 4[3]) and in judgment intimidates earthly powers as he saves the oppressed (vv. 9, 13[8, 12]).

Amid these images of utter domination, the psalmist paints a stark contrast between a victorious God and his defeated and humiliated foes in verses 5–8[4–7]. Verses 5 and 8[4, 7] focus on extolling God and bracket a depiction of the fallen enemies of God in verses 6–7[5–6]. Rather than portraying the explicit acts of violence that God inflicts upon the enemies, the psalmist describes the *state* of the enemy—vanquished, stunned, plundered—after the intervention of Yahweh. In other words, to show God's dominance, the psalmist opts to picture a battlefield strewn with carnage rather than the battle itself.

Within this description, a singular image appears in verse 6[5], which NRSV renders this way:

<i>štwllw 'byry lb</i>	The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil;
<i>nmw šntm</i>	they sank into sleep;
<i>wl' mš'w kl 'nšy hyl ydyhm</i>	none of the troops was able to lift a hand.

Modern translators have typically understood the second colon of this verse to indicate simply that the enemies were somehow unable to use their hands, neither to protect themselves nor to execute violence (see also CEB, NJPS). *HALOT* suggests that this text is the only occasion where the *qal* of *mš'* has this particular idiomatic sense. Notably, all of the other occurrences of *mš'* in the *qal* carry a relatively straightforward sense, meaning simply “to find” (*HALOT* 619–20). Given that this alleged idiom is unattested elsewhere, one wonders whether a more viable reading is to translate the phrase literally, namely that “the troops were not able to *find* their hands” in verse 6b[5b]. But what would such a translation signify?

One important and as yet underutilized resource for addressing these textual questions comes through an analysis of the iconography of violence, especially images of the aftermath of battle that appear throughout the ancient Near East in a variety of media. Such images depict with frequency the disarticulation of enemy bodies, particularly soldiers cutting off the hands of their subdued enemies. One such artistic representation of cutting off the hands of fallen enemies appears on a painted chest found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (1333–1323 BCE) (Fig. 25.1; Carter and Mace 1923: 273, pl. LIII).



FIGURE 25.1 Painted Wooden Chest from the Tomb of Tutankhamun. Photo credit: Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY. Used with permission.

Each surface of the chest celebrates the king's victory over various powerful forces, both human and animal. On one side, the king rides in a war chariot with bow drawn. Before him lie dead and dying Asiatics, strewn about in a chaotic jumble. Notably, the king is not pictured directly in the act of killing the enemies. Rather, his violence is implied, for even though Tutankhamun maintains an aggressive posture by threatening to shoot, the battle before him is already won. The artist pictures foot soldiers in acts of explicit violence,⁸ as they wade through the numerous foes lying before the king's chariot. Three of these troops spear the fallen enemies while three others slice off their hands.

Disarticulated hands also play an important role in the reliefs from Medinet Habu commemorating Ramesses III's defeat of the Libyans (Fig. 25.2). In one of these monumental reliefs, Ramesses III sits in his chariot facing his ministers. Clearly, the fighting has concluded, for his ministers lead trains of bound, captured Libyans before him in four registers. At the beginning of each register is a heap of severed hands or phalli removed from the battle dead. One Egyptian places the body parts in a pile before the king while a scribe stands behind tallying the numbers.

The inscriptions that accompany the image confirm that cutting off hands and phalli had the clear practical function of keeping accounts of those killed in battle (see

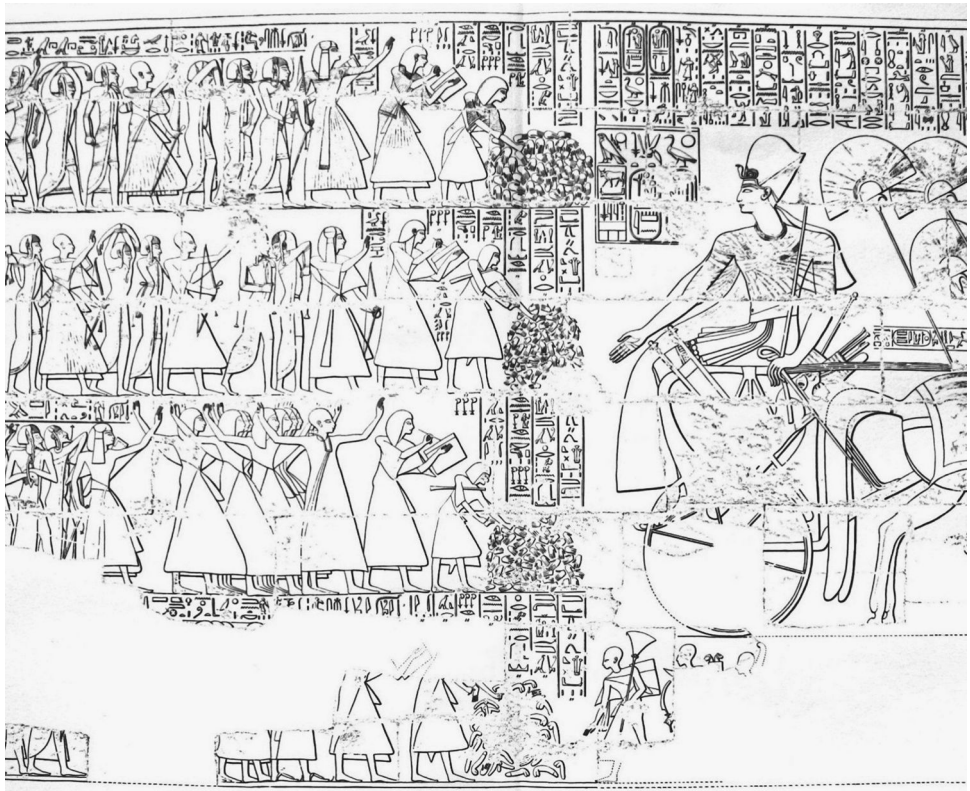


FIGURE 25.2 South Wall, Second Court, Great Memorial Temple of Ramesses III (1198–1166 BCE) at Medinet Habu. After Nelson 1930: pl. 23. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Edgerton and Wilson 1935: 14–16). Yet there is also a grotesqueness to these images that makes them particularly powerful propaganda. The king announces as much in the inscription above him, which reads in part:

Rejoice ye to the height of heaven, for my arm has overthrown the Tehenu, who came prepared, their hearts confident, to lift themselves up (in rivalry) with Egypt. I went forth against them like a lion. I threshed them, made [them] into sheaves. (Edgerton and Wilson 1935: 15)

The king has turned his enemies into gruesome heaps of flesh, as if human bodies were grain to be beaten and cut to pieces. The phalli and hands, bodily manifestations of the enemy's power and manhood, are now rendered impotent and utterly useless as they lie in front of the king. In short, the disarticulation of the enemy bodies attests the king's dominance.

The art of the Neo-Assyrians also depicts the cutting off of hands of the defeated enemies, with similar propagandistic effect. One clear and particularly brutal example of such disarticulation comes from the Balawat Gates, dated to the reign of Shalmaneser III in the latter ninth century BCE (see Schachner and Wolff 2007). These enormous doors were made of rows of timbers held together by a series of bronze bands. Each of the bands portrayed a scene commemorating victories of Shalmaneser III. The lower register of Band 10 of Door C depicts Neo-Assyrian soldiers marching behind the king in his chariot (Fig. 25.3).

A minister stands before the horses gesturing to a city that has been besieged and conquered. Heads of the enemies ornament the walls of the city as flames leap out from the parapets. Between the king's retinue and the city, enemies appear in various states of subjugation. One enemy kneels, begging for mercy. Another's throat is about to be slit. A third has his hands and feet cut off. A fourth is impaled, again with disarticulated hands and feet.

Taken together, all of these images of violence encourage a reappraisal of the standard interpretation of Psalm 76:6b[5b]. The widespread motif of the enemy's severed hands in ancient Near Eastern art warrants a literal interpretation of the phrase *wě lō'-māšē'ū kol-'anšē-ḥayil yēdēhem*. In fact, "none of the mighty men are able to find their hands" because the hands have been severed, in accordance with common battlefield practices



FIGURE 25.3 Band 10, Door C of Balawat Gates. 9th century BCE After Andreas Schachner, *Bilder eines Weltreiche: Kunst- und kulturgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den Verzierungen eines Tores aus Balawat (Imgur-Enlil) aus der Zeit von Salmanassar III, König von Assyrien* (Subartu 20. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 302, Taf. 10. Line drawing by C. Wolff. Used with Permission.

that stretched from Egypt to Mesopotamia. As such, the psalmist is painting a picture of enemies who are utterly humiliated and defeated, now incapable of threatening God or God's people.

The immediate literary context supports interpreting this particular literary image in light of the iconography of violence in the ancient Near East. Verse 6a[5a] pictures despoiled enemies, strong men who have already been vanquished and are now plundered and lying unresponsive. The verb *šll*, "to plunder" in the *qal* usually takes as its accusative a nation or valuable items (e.g., Ezek. 26:12; Hab. 2:8). But here, as the verb appears in the *hithpael*, the soldiers themselves are the ones plundered, suggesting that they have been stripped of their possessions, namely weapons and clothing. The stripping of the enemies as a way of both shaming and plundering them is a common iconographical motif throughout the ancient Near East. In the image from the Balawat Gates, for example, one observes the enemies of Shalmaneser III, particularly the second, third, and fourth enemies, as partially or completely stripped as they are stabbed, dissevered, and impaled.

Taking the iconography of violence into account, verse 6[5] presents a composite picture of the enemies:

The stouthearted are plundered; they sank into their sleep.
None of the mighty men were able to find their hands.

The enemies are subdued and stripped, their bodies lying vulnerable on the ground. They are also missing their hands, a definitive sign that any threat they pose has been overcome. Verse 7[6] also contributes to this picture by describing chariotry immobilized and imperceptive; it appears that the sleep of death has overcome them as well.

<i>mg'rtk 'lhy y'qb</i> <i>nrdm wrkb wsws</i>	At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, Chariot and horse lay stunned
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In the iconography of violence sampled above, the chariot serves as an unambiguous sign of ultimate power. Each of the scenes portrays the king in his chariot. From this position of authority, the king oversees the violence that proceeds from him and its clear results on the disintegrated bodies of the enemies. In Psalm 76:7[6], even the chariot, that symbol of royal military strength, cannot withstand the glory of God.

In sum, verses 6–7[5–6] present a constellation of images in which God's enemies appear in a vanquished state. This type of portrayal finds congruence with numerous scenes of the aftermath of battle in ancient Near Eastern art. Both art and text inscribe the power of the ruler on the subdued and severed bodies of the enemy. The foregoing analysis began by probing the iconography of the ancient Near East for the most appropriate interpretation of a specific lexeme (*ms'* in v. 6[5]). The inquiry then moved to the immediate literary context of the image. In the process, numerous points of connection emerged between the iconography of violence and Psalm 76:6–7[5–6], especially when one considered both text and art to comprise constellations of images, particularly

images of dead and humiliated enemies. The iconography of violence can also inform one's understanding of the literary shape of the psalm, what one might call its iconic structure. Furthermore, the iconography of violence can shed light on the larger rhetoric of violence against the enemies in the Psalms.

In the ancient Near East, kings often commissioned representations of a battle and its aftermath to commemorate their dominion over their foes. This common aspect of royal iconography served to inspire awe and fear by highlighting the grotesque, especially the dead and disarticulated bodies of the enemy.⁹ It would seem then that Psalm 76 presents a textual reflex of this common iconographical trope. Indeed, those who observed the iconography of royal violence and those who heard and sang Psalm 76 would have received a similar message: The ruler receives glory because of and through violence against the enemies. Notably, in Psalm 76, the violence functions to exalt God's power (vv. 2[1], 5[4], 8[7], 11–13[10–12]) rather than the king's. In fact, the psalm suggests that, as a heavenly king, God's violence inspires fear in the hearts of those otherwise powerful earthly kings and princes (v. 13[12]). One can probe further by asking the question: *How* does the psalm picture the violence of God? Correspondingly, how do these images of God's violent actions compare with the various modes of representing the king in the ancient Near Eastern iconography of violence?

In each of the images discussed above, the king stands at some remove from the actual inflicting of deadly blows against the enemies or maiming their dead and dying bodies. In fact, the king's violent activities are often hidden from view. Alternately, when violent acts are portrayed explicitly, they are executed by the foot soldiers of the king serving as his representatives. In the chest of Tutankhamun, for example, the king is pictured drawing his bow with an arrow slotted, an image that highlights the king's potential for violence. With the taught bowstring and extended arm, this portrayal of the king's body holds the viewer in a moment pregnant with anticipation of the violence that he is about to exact. The viewer expects the arrow to fly and sink into a body of the king's enemy. In a sense, the viewer actually participates in the king's violence through the act of imagining the subsequent moment of the kill.

The constellation of images also conveys the results of the king's violence. Arrows stick out of enemies' bodies. The observer assumes that they flew from the king's bow, but again the deadly violence of the king is implicit rather than explicit. As extensions of the king's power, other actors are pictured doing the dirty work of violating the integrity of enemy bodies.

A typology of representational violence emerges from this analysis of Tutankhamun's chest. The king is pictured in a posture of *potential* violence, while his troops, dogs, and even horses are pictured through *kinetic* violence. These two categories of violent representation come via analogy with the physical sciences. In that context, "potential" and "kinetic" designate two types of energy. In ancient iconography, potential violence is marked by a figure poised to kill, maim, or otherwise wound an enemy body. In fact, Tutankhamun with flexed bow is a development of the canonical Egyptian presentation of the king in the smiting posture, wherein the king rears back his hand with mace, sword, or spear menacingly over his enemy.¹⁰ Representations of the king with bow

drawn and arm upraised anticipate the violence that will befall the enemy in the very next instant but come short of picturing the exact moment of the kill.

In contrast, kinetic violence is a representation of the victim and assailant in that very moment when the assailant violates the integrity of the victim's body. This kinetic violence may come especially through piercing or severing weapons but also via the assailant's body itself, especially his fists or feet. In the case of Tutankhamun's painted chest, the kinetic violence occurs where the king's foot soldiers spear the bodies and slice off the hands of the Asiatics. The king's dogs, moreover, pierce the heads of the enemies with sharp teeth. Compared with other representations of violence, these images leave little to the imagination. They highlight the breach of one body by another, accentuating the power of the assailant over his enemy through an explicit and gory display.

A third mode of representation, *resultative* violence comes via a grammatical analogy. This type of violence pictures the outcomes of violent activity on the enemy body, the resultant state of the enemy rather than the explicit action that caused the trauma. When the death blow eludes representation but is presumed as a prior activity, the observer again participates in the violent imagery through an act of imagination, in this case imagining how the trauma occurred and who brought the pain and/or death to the enemy. Because images of resultative violence often appear within larger constellations of images, the violent actor is often implied, usually through proximity. However, the images rely primarily on the broken body of the enemy to highlight the domination of the assailant. On Tutankhamun's chest, the resultative violence appears in the chaotic jumble of Asiatics before the king. The arrows sticking out of their dead bodies in proximity to the king with drawn bow suggests to the observers that the king is the one who has killed this horde, even single-handedly, for none of the other figures in the scene are pictured with a bent bow.

Notably in the other two iconographic examples cited above, neither portrays the king engaged in kinetic violence. The gruesome specter of heaped body parts before Ramesses III is instead a clear example of resultative violence. Interestingly, the inscription above attributes the violence solely to the king, but the iconography does not represent the king in the act of cutting off phalli and hands. Likewise, in the band from the Balawat Gates, numerous disarticulated bodies show the king's domination of the enemy, but the image does not represent the violence against the enemies proceeding explicitly from the king's body.

These three examples suggest a pattern that is indeed evident in the ancient Near Eastern iconography of violence. In fact, ancient Near Eastern art pictures the king's dominion over enemies primarily through representations of potential violence and resultative violence. Put differently, the king may appear standing over defeated enemies (resultative violence) or rearing back his hand to prepare to strike a blow (potential violence), but rarely does one see the king's body portrayed in the instant of violating the integrity of an enemy body.¹¹

It may seem odd that so many examples of ancient Near Eastern art would obscure or mask explicit representations of royal violence, even as the images support and celebrate the violence of the king. One explanation may be that representations of kinetic violence

have a *peculiarly* strong power over their observers. By way of analogy, we might consider Michel Foucault's discussion of the precarious social position of the executioner in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France (Foucault 1995: 32–69). He observes how the one who metes out the violence of the state is constantly susceptible of receiving shame rather than honor for his ostensibly just killing. Foucault describes the acts of state-sanctioned violence as chaotic moments, when the public's allegiance and sentiments can shift (rather violently) toward the one suffering punishment and against the executor of punishment. Foucault writes:

The executioner may have been in a sense the king's sword, but he shared the infamy of his adversary. The sovereign power that enjoined him to kill, and which through him did kill, was not present in [the executioner]; it [i.e., the sovereign power] was not identified with his [the executioner's] own ruthlessness. (1995: 53)

Foucault suggests that the violence of the king is mediated through this executioner, thereby protecting and shielding the king from the potential shame that comes through acts of violence and from the psychic discomfort and indeed horror that accompanies the witnessing of such acts. It is difficult to control the reception of an image of a body in pain; that is to say, it can be politically dangerous to represent the king at the very moment of the kill. The observer, as one who experiences pain (sometimes at the hands of the state), is susceptible to identifying more with the suffering victim/enemy than the assailant (Foucault 1995: 63). We may say then that in the ancient Near East—and later too—the safest way of representing royal power while also preserving the honor and power of the king is to limit the explicit (i.e., kinetic) representations of the king inflicting violence on the body of another.

In addition to this Foucaultian approach to the iconography of violence, one can also understand the patterns of representation in the ancient Near East by considering the ways that these images both obscure and reveal violent acts, thus prompting observers to imagine violence in different ways. In fact, representations of potential and resultative violence force the observers to participate in the acts of violence through their imaginations in ways that images of kinetic violence do not. For images of kinetic violence, the actual moment of violence occurs within the iconographic scene. For images of potential and resultative violence, the act of violence occurs instead *outside* of the represented scene and *inside* the observer, that is, within his or her imagination. When a constellation of images implies the deathblow but stops short of depicting it, the observer internalizes the deadly power of the king, forced to imagine the moment that has immediately preceded it (resultative violence) or the moment that will occur in the next instant (potential violence). These images of the king's violence can communicate the power of the sovereign with particular immediacy and powerful effect.

Turning again to the Psalms, one wonders whether and how the constellation of literary images in Psalm 76 reflects these iconographic patterns of representing violence against enemy bodies. The violent imagery in verses 6–7[5–6] falls within the category of resultative violence when one applies the typology of violence to the psalm's rhetoric.

These verses are concerned primarily with portraying the state of the defeated enemies. In verse 6a[5a], the psalmist places the stripping/plundering of the enemy in the passive voice along with the oblique phrase: “They sank into their sleep.” Likewise the description of the enemy bodies missing hands in verse 6b[5b] does not indicate the actor who performed this gruesome task. The subject of verse 7[6] is the state of the horse and chariot. God’s rebuke is associated with violence, but again the text portrays such violence elliptically rather than explicitly. In sum, Psalm 76:5–6[4–5] presents images of stunned or dead enemies whom somehow God has mastered, but the nature of that mastery is ambiguously left to the imagination.

Violent imagery also appears in verse 4[3]: “There he shattered the flaming arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war.” This imagery best accords with the category of kinetic violence. Yet God’s kinetic violence here is actually directed not at enemy bodies but at weaponry, which functions rhetorically as a metonym for the enemies. Thus, rather than stating in explicit and gory detail the ways that God shatters enemy bodies, the psalmist has used a literary device to encourage the reader to associate God with violence against the enemy body within his or her imagination. So here again the psalm portrays God in a way that is entirely consistent with iconographic depictions of kings: Although rulers are associated with violence, indeed glorified through violence, the king is not pictured explicitly inflicting violence against enemy bodies.

Similar modes of obscuring God’s violence against enemy bodies obtain in many other psalms. Psalm 46:9–10[8–9], for example, depicts God’s kinetic violence, but as in Psalm 76:4[3], the violence comes not against the enemies but against the technologies of combat. Several other cases present God’s violence explicitly, but the acts are aimed at architectural features: Psalm 107:15–16 describes God shattering doors, and Psalm 80:13[12] describes God breaking walls. Neither of these texts explicitly describes God’s violence against enemy bodies. Other oblique images of divine violence picture God as the actor but are unclear about the nature of God’s violence (e.g., 36:13[12]). In many instances, the violence is mediated through God’s messengers (e.g., 35:5–6) and aspects of nature (50:3; 83:14–16[13–15]). The passive voice provides another way for the psalmist to associate violence with God’s justice and power without stating outright that God acts violently against enemy bodies (e.g., 37:28; 109:13).

A discussion of violence against enemies must also include the well-attested trope of the enemies falling prey to the forms of violence they themselves intended for others, such as the wicked being ensnared by their own traps (e.g., 9:16–17[15–16]; 57:7[6]; 141:10). These passages distance God from explicit acts of violence against the enemies even as they celebrate the acts of violence as God’s immediate manifestations of justice (see especially 9:16–17[15–16]). In these texts, the enemy becomes his own executioner, susceptible to the shame that can come both to the victim and the assailant.

To be clear, there are occasions in which the psalmists describe God acting with kinetic violence or, similarly, petition God to do so (e.g., 139:19). Yet these texts are the exception and should be considered as such. The dominant modes of picturing the violent God are through elliptical and impressionistic images. Thus, the Psalms correspond quite closely with the representational patterns of ancient Near Eastern iconography. By

evoking divine violence without describing it explicitly, the psalmists create the impression of a powerful God while leaving the explicit details of God's violence to be filled by the imagination of the reader/hearer. This pattern may provide a way of protecting God from the volatility of explicit images of the violation of the integrity of an enemy body, even the potential shame that the executioner can suffer. The Psalter's elliptical images of God's violence may also be effective rhetorically because of the ways that they require one to participate in God's violent acts through the process of imagining. In this way, the notion of divine dominion becomes even more immediate and arresting as the text forces one to create internally an otherwise unrepresented image of God's violent actions against the enemy body.

This case study on the iconography of violence has shown the value, promise, and methods of situating the Psalms within the representational world of the ancient Near East. In sum, iconographic material rewards the biblical interpreter's careful attention by (a) giving insight into discrete literary images, (b) revealing the iconic structure of psalmic pericopes, and (c) elucidating themes that stretch across the entire Psalter through a number of genres. To be sure, interpreting texts through images (and vice versa) carries its own unique challenges, so there is ongoing need for methodological reflection.¹² Yet iconographical approaches provide an invaluable tool for those seeking to understand how the book of Psalms paints its images.

NOTES

1. To be sure, other scholars before Keel noted that ancient art can play some role in interpreting Psalmic imagery. Hermann Gunkel, for example, attended quite closely at times to the pictorial background of the Psalms in his commentary. See his discussion of Psalm 110:1 in light of Egyptian iconography portraying subdued enemies literally under the pharaoh's feet (1926: 482).
2. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
3. See especially Keel 1977a; Keel 1977b; Keel 1978.
4. The volumes are too numerous to include here, but for a representative example see Keel and Uehlinger 1998. See also the four volumes of *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* (Keel and Schroer 1985; Keel, Keel-Leu, and Schroer 1989; Keel, Shuval, and Uehlinger 1990; and Keel 1994a). Two other significant multivolume works are in progress (Schroer and Keel 2005–; Keel 1995–). Important Internet-based resources for ancient Near Eastern iconography include the Bibel + Orient Datenbank Online and the *Iconography of Deity and Demons in the Ancient Near East: An Iconographic Dictionary with Special Emphasis on First Millennium BCE Palestine/Israel*.
5. Note, for example, the important role that iconographical material plays in the extensive Psalms commentary currently published by Hossfeld and Zenger 2005; Hossfeld and Zenger 2011.
6. Keel's own reflections on the methods of iconographic exegesis should not be overlooked, particularly as they appear in Keel 1992; Keel 1994b.
7. Here I am reappropriating the phrase "iconic structure" from Brown 2002. For a thorough discussion of this terminology, see LeMon 2010: 16–20.

8. Of course one must acknowledge the difficulty of any definition of the term “violence.” For the sake of this argument, I am delimiting violence here as follows: acts of an assailant that forcefully intrude upon the bodily integrity of another, specifically actions that entail severe physical pain and/or death.
9. For a discussion of the use of the enemy body in the iconography of ancient Mesopotamia, see Bahrani 2008.
10. For a discussion of the emergence of this motif and its development, see Davis 1992 and Hall 1986, respectively.
11. In ancient Near Eastern art, the king and/or the enemies are sometimes depicted in theriomorphic form, e.g., the king as sphinx or the enemy as a lion. In these cases, the king is often pictured killing the enemy. But, in fact, the physical bodies of the enemies and/or the king appear in mediated or symbolic form.
12. Space has precluded a thorough discussion of iconographic methods and theory. For the most recent treatments of the critical issues, see de Hulster 2009 and LeMon 2010.

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CHAPTER 26

RHETORIC OF THE PSALMS

ROBERT L. FOSTER

THE book of Psalms ends with a “pentafold” summons to praise: Hallelujah . . . Hallelujah . . . Hallelujah . . . Hallelujah . . . Hallelujah! All the joys and sorrows laid bare throughout the Psalter move by fits and starts, psalm by psalm, toward this climactic finality. The whole of the Psalter prepares participants to respond in kind to such exultant proclamation. Will those journeying through the Psalms arrive at the end ready to act on the command? Do the individual voices and the collective choruses successfully move the Psalter’s participants to respond? Can the psalmists overcome the obstacles that would prevent or frustrate responsive praise?

These questions help frame a macro-level rhetorical analysis of the Psalms; they indicate how the structure and artistry of the Psalter as a whole moves participants (i.e., readers, listeners, singers, pray-ers, etc.) to ultimately heed the emphatic command to praise.² Of course, persuasive aims are readily evident among individual psalms, which I divide simply into “prayers” (psalms intending to persuade YHWH to act) and “proclamations” (those intending to persuade a human audience; see Foster 2008a: 75–76). In between the expansive book and its distinct collections, the editors of the Psalter organized the Psalms into five books ranging in length from seventeen psalms in Books III and IV (73–89; 90–106) to forty-four psalms in Book V (107–150). In this essay, I employ rhetorical criticism to investigate how individual psalms and the five books contribute to the Psalter’s larger persuasive aims.³

The grail of a rhetorical study’s quest is to convince its readers of the Psalter’s persuasive aim through a comprehensive analysis of psalms, collections, and ultimately the book as a whole. This short article does not fulfill that quest but rather intends to offer a more modest contribution, namely a proposal about the persuasive ends of the Psalter via a study of those psalms located at the seams of the five books.⁴ We will, moreover, explore closely the contents of Book III (73–89) in order to attend to what I see as the chief impediment to the Psalter’s overall aim, an impediment that may prevent participants from responding to the emphatic exhortation to praise mandated in the final Hallelujah psalms (146–150).

Attending to the rhetorical contours of the book of Psalms gives due consideration to the Psalter’s editorial artistry and its role in shaping the participant’s experience. While

the editors of the book of Psalms began with the image of the straight path of justice in Psalm 1 and ended with a resounding summons to praise in Psalm 150, they also facilitated a generative tension between voices that laid the threat to praise at the feet of sinful Israel and voices that questioned YHWH's compassion and faithfulness. In so doing, the editors have ensured that those who participate in the Psalms do not come prematurely to the end but consider every voice before praise reaches its symphonic climax (Psalms 146–150).

THE ONE PATH TO PRAISE

Psalm 1 depicts two distinct ways of conduct, though not in a manner that would suggest the viability of both. As the entrance to the Psalter, Psalm 1 puts the participant on *one* path to praise. The path that leads to praise follows the Torah, upon which the person “meditates” day and night (v. 2). Turning away from questionable company to embrace Torah conjures an idyllic setting: a tree transplanted by streams, bearing fruit in season, whose leaves never wither (v. 3). That same person receives a welcome into the assembly of the just, in no small measure because embracing Torah produces a just life (vv. 5–6).

Perhaps more importantly, the path of Torah “meditation” and observance allows YHWH to know the participant. “For YHWH knows (*yôdēa*) the way of the just (*ṣaddîqîm*), but the way of the wicked will perish” (v. 6). How can YHWH receive praise from a person whom YHWH does not know? Conversely, the person whom YHWH does not know travels a path with those who will perish. This alternate path cannot end in praise; the person's end in nonexistence makes praise nonexistent.

Psalm 1 serves as the major premise of the book of Psalms: The life that accepts the call to praise begins with responsiveness to Torah. Only the just know and are known by YHWH. The evidence of knowing and being known by YHWH includes both the justice exhibited by the one who embraces Torah and the evidence of blessing accrued to the just person (vv. 1, 3). The onus lies on the individual, the person who enters this path by choice and exhibits proper devotion to Torah, to justice, and to YHWH. YHWH responds in kind with proper devotion to the individual. A combination of the person's just actions and YHWH's attentiveness to that person will lead the individual safely to praise, so the Psalter claims.

THE LEAF BEGINS TO WITHER

However, those who participate in the Psalms sense as early as Psalm 3 an approaching arid summer in which the streams begin to run dry. By the end of Book I (Psalm 41), the confident tone established in Psalm 1 is subdued, altering both the expectation of the

blessed life and the way of the just. Things begin well enough in Psalm 41: The one who considers the poor is deemed blessed (v. 2[1]). But within the avowal of YHWH's blessing we find a concomitant abatement: Psalm 41 defines blessing in terms of deliverance on the day of trouble and sustenance on the sickbed (vv. 4–5[3–4]). Trouble and sickness seem hardly like “leaves” that never wither.

This adjusted view coincides with an attenuated vision of the just life. Considering the plight of the poor serves as a fine example of justice in light of Torah (e.g., Deut. 1:16–17; 10:18; 24:12–13, 17). But then the psalmist confesses sin (41:5[4]), to which she attributes her current plight. Nevertheless, this awareness of sin and its consequences does not lead the speaker to conclude that she thereby has no standing before God. She maintains her integrity, trusting that sustenance on her sickbed (and in the face of troubles) testifies that YHWH continues to uphold her integrity. The two ways of Psalm 1 intersect in the life of our psalmist.

Psalm 1 keeps the just within the assembly of the just, but in Psalm 41 the person outside the assembly, lying at home on a sickbed, is given voice. Lamentably, she does not enjoy the blessedness of solitude. Rather, the speaker encounters at every turn the presence of the enemy, who does not let her suffer in peace.⁵ Her pain compounds as illness encounters taunting that encounters betrayal from a once bosom friend (v. 10).

In the end, the psalmist is concerned not about delighting in Torah but about whether YHWH delights in her (v. 12[11]). The rhetorical point of Psalm 41 lies in the speaker's plea for mercy (vv. 5, 11[4, 10]). This passage envisions the moment when healing and payback come from YHWH. The psalmist trusts that enemies and illness will prove temporary and that she will dwell before YHWH forever (v. 13[12]).

Twin realities threaten the future of praise: sin and its consequences. Corresponding realities maintain the possibility of praise: the just conduct of the individual and the mercies of God. The leaf may fade, but the stream still runs to nourish and produce the fruit of justice. The psalmist trusts YHWH to watch over the way of the just person who cares for the poor. The face (*pnh*, v. 13[12]) of YHWH guarantees the future of praise.

Taunting enemies resound throughout the shared world of Psalms 41 and 42–43 (42:10–11[9–10]; 43:2).⁶ We read in Psalms 42–43 of a life spinning further out of YHWH's orbit, desperately seeking reentry. The speaker fears never seeing the face (*pnh*) of YHWH again (42:3[2]), which means never again entering the courts of praise (42:5; 43:3–4). Divine presence defines the speaker's thirst, whose distance from God underlies the recurrent expression of painful longing to be before the face of God (42:3[2], 6[5], 15[14]; 43:5).

Psalms 42–43 address not the assembly or YHWH but rather the soul: “Why are you downcast, O my soul, why so dispirited within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God” (42:6[5], 12[11]; 43:5). The speaker works desperately to convince the thirsty soul that she will return with the festive throng to the house of YHWH, ascend the holy mountain in joyous song, and offer praise to YHWH upon the lyre (43:4).

How does the soul distanced from YHWH's presence find hope in renewed praise? The speaker remembers YHWH in the mountains (42:7[6]) as well as the former pilgrimages to YHWH's temple (42:5[4]). There, in the mountains, the speaker experiences the overwhelming faithful love of God and receives in the night the gift of God's song (42:9[8]).⁷

The speaker, thus, is not the only one with a song, and YHWH's presence is not confined to the *holy* mountain. YHWH roams freely throughout the land, pouring out steadfast love and singing over the one far from the house of praise. These gifts on the mountains apparently incite the psalmist to request vindication, defense, deliverance, light, truth, and a leading back to God's dwelling place (43:1–3). The recalled experiences in the mountains and in the temple transform the psalmist: Her repeated request seems more confident: "Why are you downcast, O my soul, why so dispirited within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God" (43:5). The heart no longer needs convincing but stands convinced that praise will come at the right time because, indeed, YHWH meets the psalmist who lives far from the sanctuary. The psalmist remains within the orbit of YHWH's steadfast love and song and has every reason to believe she will be ready to respond to the summons to praise in due time.

A ROYAL SOLUTION?

As Book II ends, the psalmist offers participants another reason to maintain hope that praise will burst forth at the end of the journey. In this case, the hope resides in the rise of a king who exercises justice for the people of the land. In Psalm 72 we gain a clearer sense that doing justice depends on YHWH granting that ability to the individual. The vision of the just person who delights in Torah and acts justly (Psalm 1) comes to focus in the life of the king. Psalm 72 catalogues a number of people dependent on the king for justice: the poor (*ānī*), needy (*ēbyôn*), innocent (*šedek*), and powerless (*dal*).⁸ And the king depends on YHWH to answer the psalmist's prayer—and perhaps the prayer of the needy—to give the king the ability to establish justice (vv. 2–3).

If YHWH answers the psalmist's prayers, the whole land flourishes; the network of king–land–people all share in abundance. Psalm 72 represents a new beginning with a more abundant harvest than the one indicated in Psalm 1. The king who does justice will reign over Israel's expansive territory, with rulers of other nations in submission and gold from far countries brought in tribute (vv. 8–11, 15). The people of the land will experience *shalom* on the mountains and justice in the hills (vv. 3, 7). The land will produce abundant grain, waving on the mountains, fruit like that found in Lebanon, and vegetation flowering even in the city (v. 16).

If YHWH answers the prayer of Psalm 72:1–3, we can easily imagine a people, and even the land, ready to respond in amplified praise. Still, these people are not just any people; they are Israel's poor, needy, innocent, and powerless. They seem much like those who asked for mercy and healing and deliverance in Psalms 41 and 42–43. And we see

a potential hindrance to future abundance: It depends on the king, who depends on YHWH answering prayers. As goes the king, so goes the people. Before, the people prayed directly to YHWH for mercy, deliverance, healing, light, and truth. Now prayers ascend to YHWH on behalf of the king (72:15b). If the king falters, or YHWH proves unresponsive to prayers on the king's behalf, then everything suffers, including praise of YHWH.

Book III represents the boiling point of the Psalter. Anger language appears more frequently in Book III than in any of the other books within the Psalms.⁹ At the far end of Book III, Psalm 88 stands as the only individual lament in the Psalter without a statement of trust. At the center of Book III, in Psalm 81, we read an appeal intended to overcome what appears to be the most basic threat to finishing the Psalms in praise, namely the people's refusal to listen to—and so respond to—YHWH. It is as if the verdant promise of Psalm 72 fails to bring spring rains.

Psalm 73 begins with a confident conclusion: God is good to the pure in heart. But this claim precedes a series of struggles that are endured in order to reach this conclusion. Perhaps the speaker read Psalm 1, whose ideology does not reflect the real world. Far from the wicked being blown away like chaff (1:4), the wicked experience *shalom* (73:3), a *shalom* intended, according to Psalm 72, for the poor, needy, innocent, and powerless. The corollary to God doing good to the pure in heart is, according to Psalm 1, the wicked without standing in the assembly and perishing (1:5, 6). In contrast, Psalm 73 sees the wicked at ease, apparently exempt from the troubles present to the rest of humanity (v. 5). In their prosperity the wicked become proud (vv. 6, 8, 9), and in their pride they strike the people of God (v. 10), believing that God will never know (v. 11). Are the poor and needy, the innocent and powerless the ones the wicked target? Moreover, does the speaker number herself among the marginalized because of the affliction she suffers (v. 14a) and the rebuke she receives every morning (v. 14b)? How do the just endure their trials while watching the wicked receive the *shalom* that the innocent deserve?

The dissonance proves unbearable until the psalmist enters the sanctuary and comes to understand that while YHWH lets the wicked enjoy flattery for the time being, they will in due time be swept away, suddenly, like a bad dream (vv. 16–20). In the sanctuary YHWH's plans for the wicked are revealed, putting the speaker finally at peace (v. 24). Perhaps not as quickly as the speaker would like, the wicked will indeed perish, to be blown away like chaff (cf. 1:4). Ultimately, the speaker finds security in YHWH, her rock and possession (73:26).

The fulcrum of Psalm 73 lies in verses 13–14. The psalmist asserts that YHWH is good to the pure in heart (v. 3). But then the psalmist thinks of herself as pure in heart, with hands washed in innocence (v. 13). If YHWH does good to the pure in heart, then why does the speaker endure blows and verbal abuse (v. 14)? The psalmist must enter the sanctuary and see clearly that her days of abuse at the hand of the wicked will end. She is concerned not simply that the wicked flourish but also that she suffers at their hand, while God apparently looks on in silence. God's silence threatens the future of praise. Only when the speaker enters the sanctuary does the hope of praise find its resurrection, hope that YHWH's silence is only apparent and that the wicked will receive their just due, and so will she.

Sometimes YHWH is like a stream nearly run dry; at other times YHWH comes like a raging fire ready to consume the whole forest. What happens when the wicked multiply and the innocent are diminished? According to Psalm 74, the Temple falls along with the wicked, who are swept away (vv. 7, 10, 18, 22). The emaciated (*daq*), the poor (*‘ānî*), and the needy (*‘ebyôn*) suffer shame and still find it difficult to praise YHWH (v. 21). Without question, the people sin, in keeping with the story Israel knows of its own past (Psalm 78). Yet amid indiscriminate devastation that touches both the wicked and the just, rich and poor, the question arises, “Has God’s anger stifled compassion” (77:10[9])?

Psalm 81 answers the question with a firm “No.” YHWH has not forgotten compassion. The blame, rather, falls on the people who refuse to listen. If the people would only listen, then God would deliver them from their enemies (81:14–15[13–14]). But to what do the people refuse to listen? Ironically, in a book headed toward the “pentafold” summons to praise, the people turn a deaf ear to the commands to shout joyously to God (v. 2[1]); to take up a song on cymbal, lyre, and harp (v. 3[2]); and to blow the horn on the feast days (v. 4[3]). In the end, the people cannot respond to the manifold summons to praise because they fail to follow the commands of Torah. They do not remember blowing the trumpet on the festival days as a statute and judgment for them (v. 5[4]). By failing to give God praise, they have refused the most basic command to have no other gods before YHWH (vv. 9–10[8–9]; see Exod. 20:3).

So the psalmist seeks to persuade the participant to return to YHWH alone, to offer YHWH praise. The participant must remember the command (v. 6[5]) and how YHWH delivered the people in the desert (vv. 7–8[6–7]). And the person must know that God will deliver the people from present struggles with their enemies (v. 14[13]) and sustain them as YHWH did when they sojourned in the desert (v. 16[15]).

One line proves particularly striking at the end of the brief recitation of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt: “I tested you at the waters of Meribah” (v. 8[7]). The line stands out because it runs counter to the story known from Exodus 17. The reason the people called the place “Meribah” derives from the fact that the people sued (*ryb*) YHWH. When they came to a place devoid of water, the people charged YHWH with leading them into the desert only to let them die. Exodus 17 concludes the experience: “And [Moses] called the name of the place ‘Massah’ and ‘Meribah,’ because the children of Israel brought a lawsuit against and tested YHWH saying, ‘Is YHWH with us or not?’” (17:7).

Psalm 81 reverses the testing: YHWH is the one who tested Israel. Recalling the story of the desert land devoid of water, the psalmist implies that YHWH tested Israel to see whether they trusted in YHWH’s presence among them in a difficult place. This, then, is the crux of the matter according to Psalm 81: The people do not listen to YHWH (v. 9[8]). “Listening” dominates the second half of the psalm (vv. 9[8], 12[11], 14[13]), affirming that Israel did not listen to YHWH then and do not listen now. Had they listened, they would have attended to YHWH’s presence in Torah (v. 5[4]) and received YHWH’s care for them (vv. 11[10], 15[14], 17[16]), consonant with the assurances of Psalm 1.

At the center of the Psalms, the participant encounters an outrageous circumstance, like ground that refuses nourishing rains. If the ground refuses the rain, then we expect to find trees that do not bear fruit. Thus in Psalm 82 we read of the failure of justice

within the divine council. As in the Prophets, idolatry and injustice are intertwined in Psalms 81 and 82. The people refuse to obey the command to have no other gods before YHWH (Psalm 81) and so do not bear the fruit of justice required by YHWH (Psalm 82). Although Psalm 86 offers words of hope, reciting the liturgical affirmation of God as slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (v. 15), just two psalms farther lies the darkest of all the prayers in the psalms, Psalm 88.

Book III ends on a clear note of doubt, unconvinced by Psalm 81 that the problem of the future of praise lies with the people. Rather, the final psalmist in this section finds YHWH guilty. The “royal solution” invoked in Psalm 72 unravels at the behest of YHWH.

Again, things begin well enough as Psalm 89 affirms YHWH’s steadfast love and faithfulness (vv. 2–3[1–2]), made manifest in YHWH establishing David’s seed forever and founding his throne for generation after generation (vv. 4–5[3–4]).¹⁰ After the initial pause (*selah*), the psalm reaffirms both assertions. Verses 6–14[5–13] recite God’s greatness and faithfulness in and above all things: in the council of the gods (vv. 6–9[5–8]), in the earth (vv. 10–13[9–12]), with YHWH’s throne established in justice (v. 15a[14a]), with steadfast love and faithfulness before YHWH’s face (v. 15b[14b]). The lengthier recitation recalls YHWH’s selection and promise to David, leading up to the second pause in the psalm (89:16–38[15–37]). The people delight in and praise YHWH because YHWH has given them David as their Messiah (89:16–21[15–20]). Not only will David vanquish his foes (vv. 23–24[22–23]), but YHWH will keep covenant with David and his descendants (vv. 29[28], 34[33]), establishing David’s throne forever (vv. 30[29], 37–38[36–37]).

Then we face a sudden turn, like an elaborate story setting up the punch line, but no one laughs. The pause in verse 38[37] gives the psalmist a chance to catch his breath before launching into a less lengthy, but no less strident, accusation against YHWH. When YHWH swept away the Temple, YHWH swept away the king’s throne, a repudiation of the covenant (v. 40[39]). The king’s enemies rejoice and not the people (v. 43), casting David’s throne to the ground (v. 45[44]). A short breath and the psalmist raises the problem of divine wrath that continues to burn (v. 46[45]). One more breath and we move from abstraction to personalization, as the psalmist reveals his own descent in David’s line while enemies mock YHWH and the king (vv. 51–52[50–51]). God’s steadfast love and faithfulness (*hesed* and *ʾēmûnāh*) promised to David and his descendants have disappeared (v. 50[49]).

We find the rhetorical aim of Psalm 89 at the very end: the request for YHWH to remember. Has YHWH forgotten the short span of a person’s life (v. 48[47]) and the scorn, derision, and taunts the Messiah endures (vv. 51–52[50–51])? We presume the psalmist wants YHWH to answer “No” and to respond in faithfulness and steadfast love by keeping covenant with David. “Covenant” appears only seventeen times in the Psalter, with four of these occurrences in Psalm 89. Outside Psalm 89, “covenant” in the Psalter never refers to the Davidic covenant, making its use here all the more striking. The people’s future depended on YHWH giving justice to the king (72:1). What happened to the people reflects the demise of the king. In Psalm 89, YHWH’s wrath has consumed even YHWH’s *hesed*.

MERCIES NEW EVERY MORNING

So is the real threat to praise the people's unwillingness to follow Torah or YHWH's failure to keep covenant? In either case, how will the threat be overcome? Psalm 90 places the blame on YHWH. All the power lies with YHWH to act decisively as the psalm spins out of control from the confident declarations in the opening verses to the final pleas stacked on top of each other.

Psalm 90 uses language from the previous song to formulate a profession of faith: "YHWH you have been our refuge from generation to generation. . . . From everlasting to everlasting you are God" (vv. 2–3). These twin affirmations of YHWH as refuge and as existing from *’ôlām* to *’ôlām* introduce the real trouble in the psalm. YHWH's everlasting nature ironically creates a discord between YHWH and humanity. The fact that a thousand years pass before YHWH like a night watch seems to account for YHWH's ability to sweep away humans like the morning grass, which rises and quickly fades (vv. 4–7). Moreover, YHWH's presence as a lasting refuge makes it difficult to comprehend God's wrath, which makes the short life of humans one of unremitting toil and struggle (vv. 8–11).

YHWH's anger boils over into Psalm 90: "Wrath" and "anger" appear four times in four verses (vv. 8–11). For our psalmist the answer to the question in Psalm 77 ("Has YHWH in anger stifled his compassion?" [v. 10(9)]) appears to be "Yes." Psalm 90 does not deny human sinfulness. To the psalmist, however, the real problem lies with God keeping the people's sins perpetually in sight: "You have set our iniquities before you, / our secret sins in the light of your countenance" (90:8).

The psalmist's initial request heads toward a solution that will draw the people into praise: Teach us to number our days aright (v. 12). Yet this supplication seems only half-hearted, more an acknowledgement of human frailty than a solution. What the psalmist desires most is YHWH's return or, to put it another way, that YHWH extend compassion to his servants (v. 13). "Servant" signals human dependency on God. Rhetorically, the term (later paired with "children" [*bānîm*] in v. 16) urges God to see that all that the "servants" have in the world comes from their master's hand. Soon the psalmist layers one request on top of another: fill us with steadfast love . . . give us gladness and joy . . . make us glad . . . let us see your works and your honor . . . let the favor of Adonai our God come upon us (vv. 14–17). The psalmist fully sees the God's wrath and anger, but his requests indicate trust in YHWH's compassion.

And so we return to where the psalm began, with YHWH acknowledged as a lasting refuge. Though this constancy in the past initiates the psalmist's struggle with YHWH's wrath, it also opens the way to resolution. The psalmist holds out hope that YHWH will prove to be a refuge *in this generation*. Like the farmer in a time of drought, the psalmist still believes in the coming rain.

Psalm 106 affirms the desperate hope of Psalm 90. With its broad focus on Israel's past sins, it is easy to view the psalm negatively. Yet the requests at the beginning and end of

the psalm, as well as the turning point in each story, give the psalm's participants hope of reaching the goal of resounding praise. In fact, Psalm 106 opens in anticipation of the Psalter's final "penta-fold" call to praise. Yet the psalm remains only anticipatory because YHWH has not yet answered the twofold prayer: "Remember me when you show favor to your people" (v. 4) and "Save us YHWH our God and gather us from the nations" (v. 47). The two requests are intimately related; both are anchored in Israel's past experience, which witnesses to YHWH's goodness and steadfast love (v. 1), fair judgment and social justice (v. 3).

Alongside these affirmations, the psalmist also professes the people's sin, past and present (v. 6). Yet the recitation of past sins offers the opportunity for the psalmist to affirm the various ways YHWH has shown goodness, steadfast love, and justice. A clear sense of the people's history with God offers hope of their restoration in the land of Israel.

Psalm 106 retells four stories of sin from Israel's past and God's resolution of the dire consequences. The first narrative tells how Israel's ancestors lived in rebellion in Egypt, perhaps alluding to idolatry. Yet YHWH saved the people, bringing them through the sea, which covered their enemies (vv. 6–12). Yet when the people made it through the sea, they rebelled against YHWH in various ways, craving flesh to eat, rebelling against Moses, and—most threatening to proper praise—molding a calf idol at Horeb (vv. 13–22). But Moses interceded on the people's behalf, saving them from YHWH's wrath (v. 23). As they started to enter the land, the people again committed idolatry, attaching themselves to Baal of Peor (vv. 24–29). In this instance, Phinehas intervened to stop a plague sent by YHWH, and YHWH considered Phinehas just for stopping the plague (vv. 30–31). And when they entered the land of Canaan, they tested YHWH just as they did at Meribah, with their mistrust of YHWH's presence again evidenced by heinous idolatry (vv. 32–39).¹¹ Although YHWH in anger gave them over to their enemies, YHWH remembered the covenant and relented whenever the people cried out, extending to them mercy (vv. 40–46).

The psalmist recalls history to remind participants of the way between YHWH and Israel. Yes, Israel sins and threatens the prospect of praise by turning to idolatry, and, yes, YHWH responds in anger or wrath, posing an additional threat to praise. But YHWH always finds a solution, whether by responding to Moses' intercession or Phinehas' actions or listening directly to the people's cry. Rain comes in due season with YHWH. The people have every reason to believe that YHWH will attend to their prayers and to the intervention of their leaders.¹² One may reasonably hope, then, that the people will come to the end of the Psalter prepared to give YHWH due praise.

Apparently the editors of the five books of the Psalter took note of this expectation. Though Books I–IV end with some variation of "Blessed be YHWH, God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting," only Psalm 106 adds a closing "Hallelujah!" (v. 48). YHWH has always made a way for salvation and will do so again, in turn making a way for praise. By echoing verse 1a, the editorial "Hallelujah" is a fitting response to the beginning of Psalm 106 and all that the psalm tells of YHWH and Israel.

Psalm 107 extends the confident tone of Psalm 106, beginning with the summons, “Give thanks to YHWH, for he is good; his steadfast love is *’ôlām*” (v. 1). Of particular interest are those to whom the psalmist extends this charge. The imperative targets those redeemed by YHWH from the oppressor’s hand, whom YHWH has gathered (*qbs̄*) from the nations (vv. 2–3). The language connects with the imagery of Psalm 106, including the promise that YHWH will gather (*qbs̄*) the people from among the nations (106:47). The future of praise arises from Israel’s redemption from captivity.

Psalm 107 outlines four discrete scenarios of distress and YHWH’s response. Two phrases recur in this series of descriptions. The first reports that in times of trouble people cried out to YHWH, who saved them (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28). The second refrain, “Let them give thanks to YHWH for his steadfast love and wondrous deeds to the children of *’ādām*,” reinforces the opening command and explains why people should respond with thanksgiving.

Scenes one (vv. 4–9) and four (vv. 23–32) describe trouble within the natural order/disorder, things that happen *to* people, danger on land and sea: starving in the desert wasteland and being tossed about on the high seas. But YHWH hears the cries of those in desperate circumstances, satisfying the hungry and calming the waves. Scenes two (vv. 10–16) and three (vv. 17–22) describe those who bring trouble on themselves by rebelling against YHWH and acting foolishly in their sin. In prison and near death’s door, they cry to YHWH, who heals them and breaks their bonds.

The key to praise then is that YHWH hears the cries of people in trouble, whether occurring in the natural course of life or as the product of sin. In the psalm’s final cohortative, the psalmist urges those whom YHWH answers to not only give thanks to YHWH (v. 31) but to offer a “Hallelujah” in the assembly/congregation (v. 32). In Psalm 107, the way that YHWH answers the cries of those in distress leads inexorably to thanksgiving and a call to praise.

The last instructions in the psalm, however, take a different turn. After several verses reflecting on how YHWH reverses the fortunes of humanity, the psalm ends with these words:

Let the upright see and rejoice
and all the guilty cover their mouths.
Who is wise and will guard these things?
Let them understand YHWH’s steadfast love. (vv. 42–43)

How should we understand the instruction to the guilty to cover their mouths? On the surface it seems that the instruction tells the wicked to fall dumb before YHWH’s judgment so that they “stop their evil talk and surrender in fear” (Hossfeld and Zenger 2011: 109). But perhaps we should take this more positively so that those who understand their sinfulness *and* reflect on the way that YHWH reverses fortune—in their case healing and deliverance from prison—should come to a silent awe. How ironic would it be if silence was, for some, the most fitting Hallelujah?¹³

THE ONE PATH TO PRAISE REVISITED

In one sense, Psalm 1 was wrong. The way of the wicked does not perish. The problem of the two ways introduced in Psalm 1 finds its resolve in the faithful love of YHWH to the upright *and* to the sinner, to the just *and* to the unjust. The Psalter presents these two ways, and in the middle we find that both Israel's sin and YHWH's anger threaten the prospect of praise. However, as the Psalms progress, we find that YHWH ensures praise by responding in love to the people's cries as YHWH has done in the past. Indeed, there is one path to praise, but it does not emerge from Torah but from the one who has given Torah, the one whose steadfast love continues the relationship of Israel and YHWH.

Thus the Psalter ends in a "penta-fold" summons to praise. The final exhortation ends in the sanctuary and in the abode of heaven (150:1), both sites of YHWH's habitation (Alter 2007: 515). Those participating in the Psalter find themselves again in the holy place ready to praise YHWH for mighty deeds, which in previous psalms refer to YHWH's delivering humans in times of distress, including those brought on by sin. The last psalm matches the mounting enthusiasm of the penta-fold summons by enlisting a host of instruments with which to offer YHWH praise. YHWH's steadfast love enlists all that breathes to exhale in symphonic praise (v. 6).

NOTES

1. More accurately, a fivefold *pairing* of praise commands, since the summons to praise both opens and closes each of the last five psalms.
2. Thus I employ what Rolf Jacobson calls the canonical approach to the rhetorical situation of the Psalms. For an overview of the positions, see Jacobson 2008: 3–18.
3. I regard rhetoric as the artful use of language to persuade an audience toward a particular end. Rhetorical analysis frequently focuses on compact units of text, though some have attempted studies of lengthier units. See, e.g., Alter 1985; Foster and Howard 2008b; Gitay 1981; and Möller 2003. Although Alter does not claim to conduct rhetorical analysis, I have included him because his book attends to the artistry of Hebrew poetic conventions and to book-length texts, including the Psalms.
4. Psalms 1 and 41; 42 and 72; 73 and 89; 90 and 106; 107 and 150.
5. Verses 3[2], 6[5], and 12[13]. Ironically, the psalmist seems most sure of the presence of the enemy, while YHWH's presence, manifest in deliverance and healing, remains an uncertain response to prayer.
6. Gerald H. Wilson outlines briefly the reasons to regard Psalms 42 and 43 as a unit (1985: 407–8).
7. For this connection of the waves and breakers with YHWH's *hesed*, see Brown 2008: 72.
8. This series of terms does not so much distinguish different kinds of need as indicate the totality of neediness.
9. Regarding seven keywords related to anger and wrath in the Psalter (i.e., *'ānap*, *'ap*, *'ēš*, *ḥēmāh*, *za'am*, *'ābar*, *'āšan*), thirty-six of the total ninety-nine instances occur in Book III.

- More to the point, these words relate to YHWH's anger toward Israel twenty-seven times in Book III of the forty-two instances in the Psalms.
10. Parallel terms of 'ôlām, kûn, banāh, and lēdōr wādōr.
 11. I write "heinous" because of the reference to sacrificing children.
 12. I interpret the prayer, "Remember me," as the psalmist's belief that he stands with Moses and Phinehas in intervening on Israel's behalf.
 13. More in keeping with Qoheleth's instruction to keep silence in the house of God (Eccl. 4:17-5:5[6]).

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CHAPTER 27

POETIC ATTACHMENT: PSYCHOLOGY, PSYCHOLINGUISTICS, AND THE PSALMS

BRENT A. STRAWN

PSYCHOLOGICAL study of the Psalms could pursue a seemingly endless number of possible routes for several reasons. One reason is the sheer range of subjects that might be investigated psychologically, including at least the following three: the authors of the Psalms, the Psalms themselves, and the readers of the Psalms.¹ A second reason is the large array of psychological topics that bear on these poems. A very partial listing would include the full gamut of human emotions, including anger, grief, happiness, trust, confidence, despair, and gratitude, as well as a whole host of human practices such as disclosure, thanksgiving, religious activities of various sorts (including prayer, worship, praise, etc.), and so forth. Finally, the Psalms are a highly diverse corpus, which means, among other things, that a psychological probe of one psalm will not necessarily obtain for another psalm. Each individual psalm, each with its own psychological elements, must be subjected to its own (psycho)analysis.

Complicating these three considerations is the fact that each overlaps and intersects with the others, thereby multiplying the studies that could be offered and the approaches that might be taken in any psychological study of the Psalms. So, for instance, one could apply the psychology of gratitude to the psalmic texts, to their (implied) authors, to their readers, or to all of the above in some combination. To make matters still more complex, psychology is a highly differentiated field. Studying the psychology of gratitude in the Psalms will look different in a psychoanalytic mode, then, than when it is seen through the lens of positive psychology (Brown 2012: 95–115).

Given the superabundance that emerges from cross-fertilizing psychology and the Psalms, any such investigation requires focus. In what follows, I introduce psychology and psycholinguistics and their application to the Bible before focusing my attention on

the Psalms as seen through attachment theory and relational psychoanalysis and what that interface means for the psychology of God in the Psalms.

INTRODUCING PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOLINGUISTICS (AND THE PSALMS)

Before Sigmund Freud (1956–1939), “biblical psychology” was largely a study of the biblical concept of the soul (Greek *psychē*; Hebrew *nepeš*), usually with extensive reference to systematic theology (Delitzsch 1869). This kind of “*psychē*-ological” approach goes back to the earliest Christian authors, but modern psychology changed everything. Although Freud was not the first to discover the unconscious, he was the first to “excavate” it to such depths and to win wide acclaim for his understandings thereof. Freud’s therapeutic techniques (especially free association, transference, and dream interpretation), along with his theories of sexual development (especially the Oedipus complex) and instinctual drives (especially the repetition compulsion, pleasure principle, and death instinct), gained worldwide acceptance, in large part because they proved both heuristic and insightful. Though psychology began to fracture even before Freud died, the entirety of the field owes an incalculable debt to him.

The size and scope of modern psychology is vast, dictating that one must be specific about what type of psychology one is engaging or using. In what follows, I focus on those areas of psychology most closely related to clinical and developmental psychology, especially in the post-Freudian psychoanalytic modes of the British Object Relations School and other relational approaches. Insofar as this essay deals with written texts that can be read and that had and continue to have an oral life (whether spoken, prayed, or sung), the field of psycholinguistics is also pertinent. Before proceeding further, both psychoanalysis and psycholinguistics need additional introduction.

Psychoanalysis

The term “psychoanalysis” refers to the theories of mental structures, mental disorders, and the correlate psychotherapy pioneered by Freud. Psychoanalytic readings of literary works followed hard and fast on Freud’s breakthroughs, partly because Freud used literature to illustrate his theories (especially Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*) and partly because literary critics, in turn, employed Freud’s insights in studies of literature (Jones 1910: 72–113). Similar applications were made to the Bible in short order not only by biblical scholars but also by psychologists. The most famous of the latter is probably Carl Jung’s *Answer to Job* (2010 [1958]).

Early psychoanalytic readings of the Bible are now seriously outdated due to the explosion of knowledge and, consequently, increased (sub)specialization in psychology.

Unfortunately, biblical scholars' knowledge of the latest developments in psychological research has often been deficient, though that has begun to change in recent years (Rollins 1999; Kille 2001; Ellens and Rollins 2004; Rollins and Kille 2007). It remains true, however, that far too many psychological readings of the Bible are dependent on perspectives that have been largely transcended or considered obsolete for years. While Freud remains foundational, the most recent psychological work is far from his earliest formulations. Given the many advances since Freud, it is clear that there can be no one "psychology of the Psalms," especially a classical Freudian one. The post-Freudian developments that are most pertinent for a study of psychology and the Psalms are ego psychology, self-psychology, Object Relations theory, relational psychology, and attachment theory, all closely related in the history of psychoanalytic thought (Mitchell and Black 1995).

Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics is the study of mind and language, encompassing everything from language acquisition to language production, storage, and comprehension, whether in speech or writing (Garman 1990). In light of the psychoanalytic focus of this essay, we might note the way mental processes and language are profoundly interconnected in Freud's theories (e.g., via parapraxes or free association in therapy [Freud 2003 (1901)]) and in Jacques Lacan's later revision of Freud. Lacan argued that the unconscious itself is structured like a language, which means that psychotherapy can be seen as a kind of linguistic/textual analysis (Lacan 2006: 6–48). It also means that literature, properly interpreted, can be used to illustrate major psychological concepts such as the unconscious, and that, vice versa, "one can use psychoanalytic psychology to study details of poetic lang[uage]" (Holland et al. 1993: 997).

Unfortunately, psycholinguistic studies of the Psalms are practically nonexistent. The little that does exist has been focused on the mechanics of Hebrew poetry, especially parallelism (e.g., A. Berlin 2008: 67–72; Greenstein 1974; Greenstein 1983) and thus is not concerned exclusively, nor always explicitly, with the Psalms. Study of the listener's/reader's perception of the parallelistic line has received particular attention, especially audience expectations for the second line in light of the syntax of the first. The more difficult (or incomplete) the parallelism is between these lines, the more effort is required of the audience; this makes the poetry more engaging. Simpler structures, by contrast, can lead to an audience losing interest (Greenstein 1983: 54).

Previous psycholinguistic studies of biblical poetry have thus dealt primarily with matters of sentence processing. While that is not unimportant, it does not approach the deeper questions that concern psychoanalysis. For example, according to Fromm, "different kinds of *psychic attitudes*... find expression in the Psalter... [that is,] the subjective state of mind, the 'mood,' in which each psalm is written" (1991 [1966]: 202–3). What are these attitudes, states of mind, or moods evident in the ancient psalmists and their poetry? Or again, according to Chiel and Dreher, "Something happens psychologically

and physically when we find deeply personal words to ask for help from a God in whom we can believe" (2000: 18). What is this "something" that happens, and how does it work? These deeper questions relate to both psychoanalytic theory and psycholinguistics because the psychological work of the psalm(ist) is represented in and happens *through language*. It is precisely the poetry of the Psalms that makes "something" happen. Psalmic poetry is the way the relationship between God and Israel is formed, enacted, and worked out. Clearly these issues go far beyond syntax and sentence processing.

In some ways, Walter Brueggemann was the first to investigate these deeper psychological subjects in the Psalms. In a breakthrough essay, Brueggemann (1980: 3–32; cf. Brueggemann 1984) suggested that the main psalm genres are reflective of (originally or compositionally) and in turn may generate (through reading or praying) seasons of human life that are characterized by

- trust and security: the season of *orientation* corresponding to the hymns of praise;
- abandonment and distress: the season of *disorientation* corresponding to the laments; and/or
- resolution and transformation: the season of *new orientation* corresponding to the songs of thanksgiving.²

In the next section, I use relational psychoanalytic psychology, especially insights from attachment theory and Object Relations, to shed light on (a) the ancient "psychic attitudes" or "seasons of life" reflected in the Psalter and (b) how the Psalms "do something" psychologically, even now, when we take them up.

RELATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, ATTACHMENT THEORY, AND THE PSALMS

Perhaps the most important development in post-Freudian psychoanalytic thought was the move away from Freud's perspective that children are driven by instinctual drives like sex and aggression to the view that human beings are driven by relational needs.³ Building on the work of Melanie Klein, the major figures of the British Object Relations school—W. R. D. Fairbairn, D. W. Winnicott, Michael Balint, John Bowlby, and Harry Guntrip—posited that children were wired for human relationships. These thinkers believed that infants were configured for "harmonious interaction and nontraumatic development," but this was often "thwarted by inadequate parenting" (Mitchell and Black 1995: 114). As Bowlby famously asserted at a meeting of the British Psychoanalytic Society, where the discussion was once again on the aggressive, destructive infant, "But there *is* such a thing as a *bad* mother!" (Mitchell 2000: viii).

Post-Freudian psychology has therefore paid significant attention to the parent-child relationship and on how parenting—whether good, bad, or in between—impacts

human development. A central conclusion has been that, as a child matures, she learns patterns of relating via her relationship with her primary caregiver(s).⁴ This caregiver(s) and other persons/entities are often called the “objects” that the child (the subject) “relates” to, hence the name of the Object Relations school.

The Parent–Child Relationship

The child’s relationship to the primary caregiver(s) begins already at preverbal stages.⁵ Children bond with their parents “through whatever forms of contact the parents provide,” and it is these forms that “become lifelong patterns of attachment and connection to others” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 115). A crucial point is that bad or painful parenting will be internalized by an infant in the same way that good parenting is. The baby cannot evade bad parenting—it is the only kind available. Moreover, the ineffective caregiver is the baby’s main (indeed, at first, its only) “object.” The child *must* bond with this object and maintain attachment with it at all costs, since this relationship is the very means of the child’s survival.

According to Bowlby, human attachment is entirely akin to intergenerational imprinting in animals (famously, ducklings).⁶ In the attachment process, infants learn affect regulation and relational patterns that remain consistent throughout the course of their lives (Mikulincer and Shaver 2008; Thompson 2008). But what is a “good” attachment versus a “bad” one? And how does each impact subsequent patterns of relating in the child-turned-adult?

These are large questions, each with a huge research literature. The discussion that follows is brief and presented with an eye toward the dynamics at work in the Psalms. First, then, the characteristics of mothers who provide good attachments include

- (1) they are “tuned-in” to their children’s needs; (2) they hold their infants for long periods of time; (3) they engage in more direct communication with their children than do other parents; [and] (4) they engage in emotional communication with their children. (Sylvia 1993: 58)⁷

It is clear from this listing that emotional attunement and mirroring, along with parental care for the child’s needs, are essential (Winnicott 2005 [1971]: 149–59). Another factor in the mother’s capacity to provide a secure attachment is the type of attachment she herself experienced when she was a child. Attachment relations perpetuate themselves over time and intergenerationally in a family, whether for good or ill (Bowlby 1988: 15–18, 126–29; Karen 1998: 361–78). And, again, the effect of these early attachments and relations manifest in nonfamilial relationships—indeed, in any and all interpersonal situations (L. Berlin et al. 2008; Karen 1998).

Children with good attachments manifest fewer problems, such as separation anxiety; they have more confidence and are more self-reliant; and they demonstrate the ability to give and receive care from others (Sylvia 1993: 39; Thompson 2008).

The quality of an attachment can be witnessed in parent–child interaction. Secure children

engage in direct communication with their mothers both when they are content and when they are distressed, whereas children with insecure attachment relations only engage in direct communication with their mothers when they are content. Thus, children with insecure attachment relations are cut off from direct relations with an attachment figure precisely when they need it most: when they are distressed. (Sylva 1993:38)⁸

In brief, the ability to enter into healthy relationships throughout life depends in no small way on the trust and security learned during one's earliest days. This means that much depends on what Winnicott called the "good-enough mother" (2005 [1971]: 13–18).⁹

The good-enough mother manages the baby's needs, but these needs extend beyond feeding and cleaning. Above all else, a baby needs love, which includes maternal responsiveness to the infant's experience. Winnicott described the early days of a child's life as one of "subjective omnipotence" in which the infant is the "all-powerful center of all being" (Mitchell and Black, 1995: 126; Winnicott 2005 [1971]: 11, 63–64, 120–23). During this time, the infant's desires seem to make things happen:

If he is hungry and desires the breast, it appears.... If he is cold and starting to feel uncomfortable, it becomes warmer. He controls the temperature of the world around him.... The mother "brings the world" to the infant without delay, without skipping a beat.... [H]er responsiveness is what gives the infant... the belief that his own wish creates the object of his desire. (Mitchell and Black 1995: 126)

One might protest that no mother

in her right mind would be willing or able to provide such an experience for another person, no matter how adorable, for very long. But this is just the point. In Winnicott's view, the mother is not in her right mind. The state of primary maternal preoccupation is a constructive kind of temporary madness that enables the mother to suspend her own subjectivity to become the medium for the development of the subjectivity of the infant. (Mitchell and Black 1995: 126)¹⁰

Sooner or later, the mother's fulfillment of the child's every wish and need fails. This happens as a matter of course and is both natural and expected. The child learns from and develops with this process "if," as Winnicott says, "all goes well" (2005 [1971]: 14). But if the mother fails consistently and miserably, when the infant's needs are most acute, then all does *not* go well. The mother is *not* "good enough." In this scenario, and over time, a "false self" may develop in the child. This is a splitting off of the child's real needs that are truly felt but inadequately met or altogether rejected by the caregiver. The child must deny these feelings and needs lest he or she jeopardize attachment to the caregiver.

Although the good-enough mother also recedes, she is not absent when she is needed most (like the *not* good-enough mother) but exactly when she is *not* needed. Her benevolent, nonintrusive absence is what Winnicott called the “holding environment.” This is “a physical and psychical space within which the infant is protected without knowing he is protected” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 126; further Winnicott 2005 [1971]). Again, “if all goes well,” what the child eventually learns when the good-enough mother fails to “bring the world” to the baby, is that he is, in fact, *not* omnipotent; neither are his desires omnificent. Rather, the mother is an “other,” an external object (in truth, another subject)—a real being who exists outside the child’s control.

This slowly dawning realization has enormous implications, among which is that the infant who . . . has of course been quite helpless and dependent all along, begins to *feel* dependent for the first time. There is a gradual awareness that the world consists not of one subjectivity, but of many. (Mitchell and Black 1995: 127)

This is the best case scenario. But a child who experiences inadequate mothering during the crucial window of the first five years of life can fail to attach adequately, which leads to emotional insecurity. Indeed, Bowlby believed that *all* types of anxiety could be traced to “detachment, a deactivation of the fundamental and central need for attachment, around which emotional experience is organized” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 137; see Bowlby 2000 [1976]; Dozier et al. 2008). So the child with an insecure attachment and a not-good-enough parent will experience significant relational problems. Certain aspects of the self and maturational processes will never come about if the appropriate facilitating environment is absent (Winnicott 1965). The “kernel of genuine personhood” will be suspended. In its place will be a false self, forced to adapt to a deficient environment until a better, healthy holding environment can be found—one that facilitates a more “authentic subjective experience” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 129). In the worst case scenario, psychopathology is the result.

The Therapeutic Process

This leads directly to a consideration of the therapeutic process. In contrast to Freud’s emphasis on bringing the unconscious to conscious awareness, relational psychoanalysis believes that insight alone is insufficient: “No one can give up powerful, addictive ties to old objects unless she believes that new objects are possible, that there is another way to relate to others. . . . [S]he must begin to believe in new, less constrained patterns of relatedness” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 122). Therapy offers a kind of “second chance” by nurturing a patient’s developmental needs. Deficits in one’s maturation—developmental “derailments” due to inadequate parenting or poor attachment—can be addressed and redressed in the *between* of the therapeutic relationship, which is to say, in the midst and course of the therapist–patient relationship (B. D. Strawn, forthcoming 2014). Among Object Relations theorists, Guntrip may have gone furthest in characterizing psychoanalysis as “replacement therapy” in which the analyst operates “in loco parentis” so as

“to provide the missing interpersonal medium necessary for the growth and development of a healthy self” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 137; see Guntrip 1969: 350). In this perspective, the relationship between the patient and therapist recreates (and thus repairs) the relationship between the baby and mother: “The analyst, like the good-enough mother, . . . and the analytic situation provide a holding environment in which aborted self-development can be reanimated, safe enough for the true self to begin to emerge” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 133).

This true self emerges, then, by (re)learning how to relate appropriately to other objects. Some believe it is the therapist’s capacity to offer interpretations to patients (if not the interpretations themselves) that helps them do this—in part by realizing the limits of their own subjectivity. In Winnicott’s opinion, however, it was the therapeutic “frame”—“the reliable structure” of the analysis—that facilitates these developments. Either way, change comes not simply from new awareness (*contra* Freud), but in a new and “changed capacity for relatedness, an ability to connect with the analyst in new ways” (Mitchell and Black 1995: 122–23).

Seen in this way, the therapeutic process allows the patient to be “re-parented”—reattached, as it were—only this time better: more rightly, more securely. As Bowlby puts it: “[T]he therapist’s role is analogous to that of a mother who provides her child with a secure base from which to explore the world” (1988: 140). This “surrogate mothering” is a developmental necessity after inadequate parenting and is profoundly helpful given the importance of attachment figures throughout the lifecycle (Mikulincer and Shaver 2008). The new, secure attachment, along with the accompanying patterns of relating that have been learned in the safe environment of therapy, can then begin to “work their magic” in all areas of a patient’s life.

Attachment, Relationality, and the “Psalmic Process”

Attachment theory and relational psychoanalytic psychology have cast significant light on the human psyche and the therapeutic process. The therapeutic point is truer of something like Object Relations than attachment theory because the latter is more of a foundational approach to human development, which, for various reasons, proceeded on an independent track from other psychoanalytic thought and thus never developed into a full-blown clinical theory.¹¹ The more obvious therapeutic outcomes of Object Relations theory explain why it has been effectively used in theology and in biblical studies, including the study of the Psalms (Brueggemann 1986; Brueggemann 2009; Janzen 2012: 61–90), with attachment theory less so.¹²

There are, of course, many points of convergence between attachment theory and relational psychoanalytic thought (Wallin 2007; Hall 2007: 14–28). So, while having proceeded somewhat independently of one another, these two approaches nevertheless share much in common and can be seen as closely related and mutually informative. Moreover, the foundational (even biological) nature of attachment theory means that it is often, if not always, operative, even when it is not explicitly present, undergirding studies that traffic more overtly in other types of relational psychoanalysis. As

an example, it could be argued that Brueggemann's typology of the Psalms (1980: 3–32; Brueggemann 1984), though not primarily formulated within a psychological framework, is thoroughly supported by, if not dependent on, insights from attachment theory. The seasons of orientation that are marked by trust and security reflect secure attachment, whereas seasons of disorientation, which are haunted by fear of abandonment and other anxieties, reflect attachment under threat. New orientation, characterized by resolution and transformation, can be seen as the therapeutic redress of disorientation—a point made with explicit reference to Winnicott by Brueggemann in a later study (1986: 57–71).

This is just one highly significant way that the Psalms can be seen via relational psychoanalysis and attachment theory. Many others could be mentioned; indeed, a number of elements in the Psalms are cast in a fresh light, if not, in fact, “explained” by this interface. At least three significant topics deserve mention.

1. The first is *the relationality of the psalmist, especially the relationship between (and the attachment of) the psalmist and God*. If prayer is “primary speech” (Ulanov and Ulanov 1982), then the God–human relationship in the Psalms is the most primal, most foundational relationship. As Psalm 22 puts it:

But you are the one who pulled me from the womb,
placing me safely [*mabṭiḥi*] at my mother's breasts.
I was thrown on you from birth;
you've been my God since I was in my mother's womb. (vv. 10–11[9–10], CEB; cf. 71:6)

God is portrayed as a midwife in verse 10[9], the one ultimately responsible for the psalmist's secure attachment to the mother (*mabṭiḥi* from *ḥbṭh*, “to trust”). In verse 10, the psalmist then suddenly claims to have been “thrown upon” God, not the mother, from birth—a stunning assertion since newborns are often placed directly on their mothers for nursing (so v. 10[9]), a situation that helps the mother by controlling bleeding and causing the uterus to contract and helps the baby by regulating its temperature. The shift from God-as-midwife (v. 10a[9a]), to the mother (v. 10b[9b]), then back to God (v. 11[10]) reveals that the Divine Midwife is more encompassing, more foundational, more a mother than the psalmist's own mother, with the poet's relationship to God antedating birth, if not conception (cf. 139:13–16).

The primacy and ultimacy of the God attachment is nicely portrayed in Psalm 27. Here the poet begs God not to hide from him, not to turn him away in anger, not to neglect him, and not to abandon him (*wē'al-ta'azbēnī*, v. 9). That God should not and would not—perhaps even could not—do these things is suggested by the psalmist's claim that God has been “my help” and “the God of my salvation.” In verse 10, the psalm moves from the threat of divine abandonment to the locus of parental attachment, asserting confidently that God's care is incomparable to all others, even that of his primary caregivers:

Even if my father and my mother abandoned me [*‘āzābūnī*],
the LORD would take me in. (v. 10, author's translation; cf. Isa. 49:15)

Psalms 22 and 27 are lament psalms, showing that relationship with and attachment to God are not solely the purview of the Songs of Trust, though they are surely operative there as well (see below). Indeed, it is quite significant that these elements are on display in the laments because communication in the midst of distress is proof of a good, secure attachment. It is exactly here, when the psalmist is in distress and danger, that she needs benevolent attention. And it is exactly because of the good attachment that she is able to say as much.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the dominant metaphors for God in the Psalms reflect security and trust—God as rock,¹³ for example, or God as refuge,¹⁴ or even both together (along with yet other metaphors conveying security)—and that these are found at key junctures in the Psalter (Brown 2002: 15–30; Creach 1996). So, while the psalmists frequently lament divine abandonment (e.g., 10:1; 13:2[1]; 22:2[1]; 27:9; 42:10[9]; 44:25[24]; 74:19; 77:10[9]), the articulation of pain and frustration (including frustration with God) in these psalms serves an important two-fold function: It maintains attachment with God on the one hand and, on the other, prevents the denial of true emotions that would, if split off, result in the construction of a false self. The psalmist may worry about separation anxiety, for example, but in her constant address to God, manifests nothing of the sort. Furthermore, not only is such honest disclosure a reflex of secure attachment and a primary means to maintain such, it is also the case that the Psalms demonstrate that these practices actually “work” in the resolution of anxiety, distress, and pain. Lament is, in a word, “an avenue toward attachment” (Snow et al. 2011).¹⁵

Put this way, one sees that it is not simply the *articulation of pain* that is crucial in the Psalms but equally so the *experience of God* and the *(re)attachment to God* that takes place within them. The structure of the lament psalm, by means of its presentation of honest complaint and its characteristic turn to praise, underscores God’s trustworthiness. In so doing, lament psalms show us “the path leading to an alleviation of suffering,” becoming “one of the most powerful witnesses to the experience of God’s activity in the Old Testament” (Westermann 1981 [1965]: 267; cf. Capps 1981: 82). Lament can and will be *moved through*, eventually, even if it takes some doing.¹⁶ Such “doing” is clearly worth doing, and it is work done *by the psalmist, with and before God, in the course of the psalm*. This work is what I call the “psalmic process.”

The psalmic process reveals that a primary way to “move through,” to alleviate suffering, is by expressing and mourning the negative feelings one has; this opens up space for the emergence of new possibilities, even positive feelings (cf. Pollock 1989; Capps 1981: 56; Fromm 1991 [1966]: 208). Just as in therapy, then, one might say that a psalmist is re-parented in the course of a lament psalm. This re-parenting may be with reference to God in the face of anxieties caused by others (preeminently, the enemies), but it could be accomplished by the psalm itself in those cases when the problem is divine in origin, leading to the psalmist to “cling to God against God” (Westermann 1981 [1965]: 273). Either way, the rapid change of mood that so often happens in the lament psalms may feel “abrupt”; it may even feel “like a miracle” (Fromm 1991 [1966]: 219), but it is hardly unexplainable. One might continue to affirm that it is miraculous, of course, but it is a miracle that emerges *in the midst of* and *precisely by* the relationship and attachment between the psalmist and her God, all facilitated by psalmic poetry.

The Psalms are thus not only a witness to the divine–human relationship but an instantiation of the same—a locus where God and humans meet, back then and there and here and now. As Nasuti puts it, the Psalms are “a primary site” of the encounter between God and humans, and they “continue to be one of the most effective ways that both God and humanity work to ensure that their relationship continues” (2011: 48).¹⁷

2. A second topic that benefits from the interface with psychology is *the troublesome problem of imprecation*. A number of useful studies exist that have attempted to account for imprecation, even appropriate it, but the larger concern is not simply the horrifying things the psalmist occasionally *wishes* against her enemies, but also the horrifying things she *says* about others more generally, not to mention about God. These latter statements are as troubling theologically as the enemy curses proper. Are statements about God’s furious anger that has left its marks on the psalmist’s body (see, e.g., 38:2–4[1–3]) true to the psalmist’s experience? The poetry suggests as much. If so, do these sentiments reflect an insecure attachment? Do they indicate, at least in these particular psalms and for these particular poets (or poetic moments), that God is a *not-good-enough* parent, such that what one encounters here is evidence of an unhealthy relationship that has culminated in the psalmist’s current plight? Is the psalmist’s flailing attempt to remain in contact with this not-good-enough God (see, e.g., 38:16[15], 22–23[21–22]) a pathological trait after all?

Not necessarily. When viewed through Object Relations theory, the psalmist’s most brutal sentiments—wherever they are directed, at God or others—can be seen as analogous to the infant’s (or analysand’s)¹⁸ feeling of “subjective omnipotence.” In this painful speech, which typically reflects moments of profound need (Zenger 1996) and which are thus entirely comparable to the urgency of an infant’s needs, the psalmist is the “all-powerful center of all being,” free to say whatever he pleases. Continuing the analogy, the “parent”—usually God, but in some instances the poetic composition itself—exists to gratify the psalmist’s every need. And so, as per Winnicott (2005 [1971]: 115–27), the psalmist uses the other objects, including the God-Object, “ruthlessly.”

But infants must mature and so must patients. Psalmists too. Just because the psalmist *wants* God to make her enemies dissolve into slime like a snail (58:8[7]) does not mean that God will, in fact, do that. God’s stance toward the psalmist’s enemies could be entirely otherwise—as likely marked by mercy as by wrath (Davis 2001: 27; Capps 1981: 71). Part of what happens in the psalmic process, then, is that the psalmist *develops*. She realizes that God is a real Other who exists outside of her omnipotent control. This applies to her “use” of the God-Object but also to her experience of other objects as well, like her enemies, whether she despises them or stands in fear of them. Speaking of Psalm 6 (but the point holds for many psalms), Fromm notes that “logically”—or perhaps better *psychologically*—“when the despair is overcome, the fear of the enemies also ceases. But it does not matter particularly whether fear of enemies is part of the picture; what matters is the change that takes place within the poet’s heart” (1991 [1966]: 210).

This change can be seen as real development, as *maturation*. But let me be clear: I am not suggesting that in lamenting, or even in cursing, the psalmist *is* immature—and certainly not in some infantile way. To the contrary, the importance of the God–human

relationship via the psalmic process (especially in lament) was the first topic mentioned above. The dark circumstances that lie behind lament and its most despairing cousin, imprecation, are both real and dire (Zenger 1996). They must not be trivialized. That granted, it is precisely the psalmic process that enables one to move from despair to hope, from petition to praise. The poetry of the individual psalms and of the Psalter as a whole thus provides a therapeutic frame, a holding environment wherein “all the distracting emotions with which the minds of [humans] are wont to be agitated” are “drawn to the life,” (re)presented, and worked out (Calvin 1993 [1563]: xxxvi–xxxvii).¹⁹ Theologically, of course, it is ultimately God, the Divine Good-Enough Parent, who provides this holding environment wherein the psalmist is cared for appropriately and exactly when needed most (precisely in the laments and their shift to praise). And yet this God remains a real “object”—external to the psalmist—and thus, as part of the maturational process, sometimes fails (no doubt intentionally) to “bring the world” to the psalmist. Again, this is not to denigrate lament in the least but rather to showcase how it is a path to psychological and theological maturity and depth. The most immediate effect of the maturational process of lament and the facilitating environment provided by God and the Psalms may well be that the psalmist feels more and more dependent on her God.²⁰

3. The third topic that deserves mention is the therapeutic benefit, often publicly proclaimed by the psalmists themselves, of the dynamics of relationality and attachment at work in the psalmic process. The psalmists develop and mature—they are transformed—in the course of these poems. So too are later readers when we pray the Psalms for ourselves and let ourselves be affected by them. The point here is not simply that the psalms heal (Swenson 2005) but that the psalmic process is one that is publicly available to others (cf. 22:23–32 [22–31]) in a way that most psychoanalytic therapies are not. This is due, on the one hand, to the private and thus confidential nature of so much clinical psychology. On the other hand, it is also due to the nature of the Psalms as literary artifacts, available for (re)use and (re)reading (Fisch 1990: 118, 127). Indeed, (re)use and (re)reading is quite likely given (a) the Psalms’ canonical status, and (b) their formulation as prayers to God that can and even should (given their canonicity) be re-uttered in formal and informal contexts. In these ways, the therapeutic benefits of the psalmic process are not only made known to other pray-ers and readers—they are actually offered to them.

This offer and, should it be accepted, the subsequent therapeutic benefits, are not just possible outcomes; they seem, rather, to be the intended goal of the psalmic process. This is evident across the Psalter in the repeated and extensive testimony to God’s faithfulness (e.g., 9:11–13[10–12], 19[18]) but is perhaps clearest in the Songs of Trust. Psalm 131, for example, moves from the psalmist’s personal trust in God—portrayed as altogether similar to the trust of a child in its mother—to an imperative for Israel to hope in YHWH:

LORD, my heart isn’t proud; my eyes aren’t conceited.
I don’t get involved with things too great or wonderful for me.
No. But I have calmed and quieted myself,

like a weaned child [*gāmûl*]²¹ on its mother;
 I'm like the weaned child [*gāmûl*] on me.
 Israel, wait for the LORD—
 from now until forever from now! (vv. 1–3; CEB)

Or we might consider Psalm 62, which affirms God as rock and fortress (vv. 2–3[1–2]), then moves to complaints about enemies (vv. 4–5[3–4]) before returning to the posture of waiting for God, who is again recognized as rock and refuge (vv. 6–8[5–7]). But despite the similar formulations in vv. 2[1] and 6[5] in some English translations (e.g., NRSV), they are not the same:

Only in God do I find rest [*'ak 'el-'ēlōhim dūmiyâ napšî*];
 my salvation comes from him. (v. 2[1]; CEB)
 I must find rest in God only [*'ak lē'lōhim dōmmî napšî*]
 because my hope comes from him! (v. 6[5]; CEB*)

Verse 6[5] uses an imperative, demonstrating that the poet's trust is the result of a hard-fought victory, which, while based on God's past benevolences, is not yet complete. Trust, that is, even in a Song of Trust, is an ongoing struggle (Miller 2004a: 237–49).

But then, like Psalm 131, the psalmist suddenly addresses any who will hear, though the talk is now of all people, not just Israel:²²

All you people: Trust [*biṭḥû*] in him at all times!
 Pour out your hearts before him!
 God is our refuge! (Ps. 62:9[8]; CEB)

What is striking here is how the psalmist next contrasts the secure base found in God with all other possible attachments that are comparably *insecure*: human beings, violence, robbery, wealth (vv. 10–11[9–10]). It is clear, then, that life with God in the Psalms consists of a struggle over trust, that is, a struggle over proper attachment. Which base is most secure and how does that primary relationship affect all others? This struggle continues for the psalmist (so v. 6[5]'s imperative after v. 2[1]'s statement) and for others, too, who must be exhorted to trust in God (v. 9[8]), especially in light of and perhaps because of the many other possible “objects of desire” that are available (vv. 10–11[9–10]; cf. 146:3–4). For her part, the psalmist ends where she began, testifying to her personal experience and knowledge of God's faithfulness:

God has spoken one thing—
 make it two things—that I myself have heard:
 that strength belongs to God,
 and faithful love comes from you, my Lord—
 and that you will repay
 everyone according to their deeds. (62:12–13[11–12]; CEB)

* The translation is altered slightly.

Attachment in Psalm 62, and in the many other psalms like it, has gone public and in more than one way. The psalm is thus as much a “testimony to others as it is an expression to God. . . . Those who hear this testimony to the source of hope and salvation are encouraged to learn from this prayer, to find an attitude of faith in its words that is indicative for all” (Miller 2004a: 245).

What we learn, then (and again), is that the very act of trusting in God, the pouring out of one’s distressed heart or afflicted soul or dying body before God, “is itself an act of trust” (Miller 2004a: 245–46), which serves to (re)attach the psalmist to God, strengthen his confidence, and facilitate the same for others. The poetry becomes not only a holding environment for the psalmist but a holding environment for all who would share his faith.

It should be stressed that this is not purely a matter of the lexical or semantic *content* of the psalm, though it is certainly involves that (*poetics*, as it were). No, it is equally the case that “something happens” within the psalmic process itself (hence, *psychopoetics*). According to Miller, the expression of trust in Psalm 62 “is precisely *in prayer*” (2004a: 245), which means that it is the psalm itself that provides the “analytic frame” wherein trust is not only talked about but actually experienced. Among other things this indicates that the change that occurs in so many psalms wherein the psalmist moves from discouragement to joy, petition to praise, need not be prompted by an external word, as the predominant interpretation of that shift (which holds that it is the result of a priestly oracle) would have it. Perhaps such external agents existed and were used in psalmic contexts; we simply do not know. What we *do* know—or rather, what we have at hand and in heart—is that these poems provide evidence of both the words and the process(es) by which people form and/or reform attachments, by which they mature and develop, all done *coram Deo*: before, with, and under God. A final word on the psychology of the God who everywhere hears, authorizes, and undergirds the Psalms and the psalmic process is thus in order.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GOD IN THE PSALMS

Much of the above discussion bears directly on the psychology of God as presented in the Psalter. This is yet another massive topic that cannot be done justice here. It must suffice to say that the preceding considerations demonstrate, among many other things, that God is a good-enough parent in the Psalms, one who is empathetically attuned to God’s children (Israel, the psalmists) and who appropriately mirrors their pain. Indeed, in the Object Relations perspective, God is yet still more: the Divine Mother who, in the construction of some psalms at least, is temporarily insane, putting her subjectivity entirely on hold in order to attend in thoroughgoing fashion to the psalmist’s every wish and need—within reason, to be sure.²³ In a word, God is attached to God’s children, the psalmists (and vice versa); the poetry evidences as much. Here again, the poetry proves to be a primary locus wherein this divine–human (re)attachment and relationality take place.

But, just as the good-enough mother eventually recedes, so too does God. God does *not* grant every wish of the psalmist (certainly not her every curse), and the psalmist learns in this process that God is, in fact, not “only” an object but, in truth, another subjectivity, indeed the supreme Subject (cf. 22:4[3] with 22:7[6])—a Subject who is not subject, so to speak, to the psalmist’s every desire, not even her every prayer. God’s recession could be interpreted negatively as a kind of disappearance, even neglect, but the psychological theory presented above indicates that it is better understood as God producing an effective holding environment in which the psalmist can mature and develop, all the while without breaking attachment to her Primary Caregiver. God has neither disappeared nor lost interest. Quite to the contrary, God is actually *more than* good enough in the Psalms: consistently available, willing to listen, and standing at the ready to address the most acute needs of the psalmist in prayer and petition, and, yes, even lament and curse (see, e.g., 25:8–9; 103:3–14, 17–18; 137:7; 146:6–9).

CONCLUSION

One might wonder, in conclusion, how the deep psychological and theological work described above could happen within the compass of what are relatively brief poetic compositions. In truth, this should actually come as no great surprise. Clinical psychology is largely though not exclusively a matter of language—hence, the crucial role language plays in psychoanalysis and psycholinguistics. Psalmic poetry, too, is largely though not exclusively a matter of language—hence, the importance of affect and effect in poetry (not simply semantic content), both of which are enabled by the language but transcend it at the same time. So it is that the psalms can give us, even in their brief but highly dense form, profound insight into the workings of God with humans and the workings of humans with God.

This is at once theological anthropology (the human viewed theologically) and a kind of “anthropological theology” (the deity viewed with reference to the human condition).²⁴ And, while the potential pathways intersecting psychology and the psalms remain seemingly endless, the ultimate point of this essay is a therapeutic one. The Psalms, when explored through attachment theory and relational psychoanalytic psychology, are seen not only as *evidence* of a therapeutic process but *as* that very process itself. The Psalms, in a word, create healthier individuals and can be employed toward that end. They provide working models that others might emulate in how to remain attached to God despite the problems that come one’s way—and, for the psalmists, the problem that comes is often the problem *of God*. Whatever the case, these working models are not only presented, they are encouraged, even exhorted.

In the final (psycho)analysis, what is presented and what is exhorted in the Psalms is nothing short of theological, poetic attachment: *attachment to God by means of poetry*. That is just one of the many gifts—but certainly among the most important—that the Psalms, when studied with the help of psychology, offer us.

NOTES

1. The psychology of God according to the Psalms (see Section 4) could be considered a fourth subject insofar as God is not so much a character in these poems as a poetic and psychological construction (perhaps better: a *projection* [Freud 1950 [(1912–13)]]); and the Psalms are prayers such that God is deemed their ultimate reader.
2. Brueggemann stresses that his typology is not intended to be mechanistic or cyclical. Furthermore, it is a typology of *function*, which means that the seasons of life are not entirely coterminous with the literary genres. Much depends on *who* prays the psalms, *when* they are prayed, and *how* they are prayed.
3. It is not impossible to integrate relational and drive theories (see Tyson and Tyson 1990). Even so, the fundamental conviction since Freud is that it is the *real* relationships of childhood that shape us, not internally driven fantasies about those relationships (Wallin 2007: xi).
4. The talk is typically of the mother, since the issues involve the child at very young ages (Stern 1985), but one should not underestimate the important roles played by the father and other important figures (e.g., siblings).
5. The initiation (and maintenance) of the relationship in pre- and nonverbal ways might, on the face of it, indicate that this theory is not applicable to literary artifacts like the Psalms. This concern is belied by the crucial role of language in the understanding and constitution of the psyche, in therapy, and in the attachment process, even when the infant is preverbal. See further below.
6. The evolutionary biological basis of attachment theory provides empirical support both for it and for the relational psychology that depends on it (see further Karen 1998: 87–125; Mitchell and Black 1995: 136). The theory's utility has also received support from cross-cultural studies (see van Ijzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz 2008; Karen 1998: 129–42).
7. Cf. Bowlby 1988: 123–26.
8. Relying on Bowlby 1988: 131–32.
9. This figure is “not necessarily the infant's own mother” (Winnicott 2005:13).
10. See Winnicott 1975 [1956]: 300–5.
11. This is true despite Bowlby's not infrequent discussion of therapy (e.g., 1988: 137–57). The preposition in the title of Wallin 2007 is nevertheless telling: *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, not *Attachment Psychotherapy*, nor *Attachment Therapy*.
12. But see Sylva 1993: 33–95 for the Psalms; more generally, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2008 (with literature).
13. Pss. 18:3[2], 32[31], 47[46]; 19:15[14]; 28:1; 31:3–4[2–3]; 42:10[9]; 61:2; 62:3[2], 7–8[6–7]; 71:3; 78:35; 89:27[26]; 92:16[15]; 94:22; 95:1; 144:1–2.
14. Pss. 2:12; 5:12[11]; 7:2[1]; 11:1; 14:6; 16:1; 17:7; 18:3[2], 31[30]; 25:20; 28:8; 31:2–3[1–2], 5[4], 20[19]; 34:9[8], 23[22]; 36:8[7]; 37:39–40; 43:2; 46:2[1], 8[7], 12[11]; 52:9[7]; 57:2[1]; 59:17[16]; 61:4–5[3–4]; 62:8–9[7–8]; 64:11[10]; 71:1, 3, 7; 73:28; 91:2, 4, 9; 94:22; 118:8–9; 141:8; 142:5; 143:9; 144:2.
15. For healing of insecure attachments, see further Karen 1998: 394–408; L. Berlin et al. 2008: 343. For the healing that comes through honest disclosure, see Pennebaker 1990.
16. This “movement through” need not be limited to the space of one (lament) psalm but may be an ongoing process, both “psalmically” (across two or more psalms) and psychologically (in the everyday world). Among other things, this means that even Psalm 88, which does

- not end in praise, or other atypical movements in the lament structure (Villaneuva 2008), are not proof to the contrary but may be further evidence of the point at hand.
17. Cf. Fisch (1990: 111, 118, 124, 126), who calls poetry that both reflects and facilitates such an encounter “covenantal discourse.”
 18. See Mitchell and Black 1995: 134 for a striking example of how Winnicott facilitated this feeling in therapeutic situations.
 19. Calvin called the Psalms “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul.”
 20. Note the recurrent formula, “I am poor and needy” (40:18[17]; 70:6[5]; 86:1; 109:22). See further Brown 2010: 140; Miller 2004b: 237–49.
 21. The connections to nursing are of obvious significance from a psychoanalytic perspective, but it is also fascinating to note the use of the same root ($\sqrt{gml}$) in descriptions of God’s care of the psalmist (e.g., 13:6[5]; 18:21[20]; 103:10; 116:7; 119:17; 142:8[7]).
 22. But see the LXX, which reflects “all you congregation of the people.” I retain the MT, supported by Jerome, but the public sense of the witness is not in doubt in either reading.
 23. There are obvious connections at this point to feminist treatments of the Psalms (see the essay by Melody D. Knowles in this volume), but insofar as Yhwh is typically depicted as a male in the Hebrew Bible, there are also clear implications for fathering (cf. B. A. Strawn 2008).
 24. See further Janowski 2009; Brown 2010: 135–56; Miller 2004a; Miller 2004b.

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CHAPTER 28

FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE PSALMS

MELODY D. KNOWLES

THE *Midrash Tehillim* to Psalm 18 records that “R. Yudan taught in the name of R. Judah: All that David said in his Book of Psalms applies to himself, to all Israel, and to all the ages” (1966 [1891]: 135). In his letter to Marcellinus, Athanasius also took a comprehensive view of the Psalms. For him, the Psalter covers “all human life” to the extent that “nothing further can be found in humanity (*en anthrō*)” (1857: par. 30, col. 41).

These and similar sentiments are repeated throughout academic discussion on the Psalms (e.g., Sarna 1993: 4; Mays 1994: 1). But are they correct? Does this “all human life” contained in the Psalms for “all the ages” include the lives of women as well as men? This question is especially critical because of the formative function the Psalms aims to exert on its readers. In the same letter to Marcellinus, Athanasius wrote that the Psalter possesses a “peculiar marvel” that distinguishes it from all other biblical books because, while other books simply command acts such as repentance and thanksgiving to God, the Psalms “teach what one must say” when repenting or giving thanks (1857: par. 10). Given the attention that feminists attach to “voice” as a metonym for full personhood (e.g., Gilligan 1982; Belenky 1986), what kind of gender experience is assumed or suppressed or valorized within these texts that teach one how to pray? And, given the theological assumptions inherent in such words “one must say,” a related question concerns the kind of God these words construct, a deity that may or may not be sympathetic to women and their experience.

These basic issues emerge while reading through the lens of feminist biblical criticism, a perspective that begins with the experience of women and seeks to expose and critique the patriarchal assumptions and justifications of androcentric hegemony inscribed in biblical texts.¹ Because of this fundamental perspective, feminist criticism can employ a variety of methods, including historical criticism, literary criticism, rhetorical criticism, and so on. Also, because feminist criticism self-consciously foregrounds the experience of the interpreter, it is never a purely consistent reading strategy: Looking at and for gender inevitably leads one to see other key components of identity such as race, class, religious background, and driving concerns, such that many

contemporary feminists claim multiple identities (postcolonial feminist, ecofeminist, mestiza feminist, etc.).

In this essay I enact this methodological amalgam by analyzing some of the feminist work already done with the Psalms alongside supportive material from less predictable sources and point to avenues for further study using three focal questions to structure the material. The first question has to do with the images of God presented throughout the text: Who is God in the Psalms? The second has to do with the representation of women: Who and where are women in the Psalms? Both questions have their own history of development within the feminist interpretation of the larger biblical canon, but this essay aims less to chart this history than to marshal and evaluate its resources to aid a closer investigation of the Psalms. The third question has been less frequently examined within Psalms studies, but, as I attempt to show, it plays a particular role in the investigation of the Psalms and the development of female literacy within the Western world: What is the history of women's use of the Psalms? Investigating these three lines of inquiry can help flesh out the fundamental, but often overlooked, question that began this essay: Does the "all human life" that both Athanasius and Rabbi Judah recognized in the Psalter include the lives and interests of women?

GOD IN THE PSALMS

Male images and metaphors for God clearly predominate in the Psalms. Throughout the Psalter God is named as father (e.g., 68:6[5]; 89:27[26]; cf. 103:13), king (e.g., 5:3[2]; 24:10; 29:10; 44:5[4]), judge (e.g., 7:12[11]; 94:2 [both marked as grammatically masculine]), and YHWH of Hosts (e.g., 24:10; 46:8[7]; 84:2[1], 4[3], 13[12]). These largely patriarchal and militaristic images for God, voiced by a human who is most often a male warrior himself and fixated on his adversaries has led David Clines to argue that it is mistaken to consider the text "human and humane rather than indefeasibly masculine" (2008: 1). Rather, in his reading the Psalms were written from a male perspective and pre-occupied with the concerns of men. YHWH is an "arch-killer" avenging worshippers motivated by male honor and shame who seek the destruction of their seemingly omnipresent foes (e.g., "When my enemies turned back, they stumbled and perished before you"; 9:3). The evidence leads Clines to suggest as possible inscriptions for the book of Psalms: "God will make a man of you" and "God helps you kill people."

Can women pray to a God so clearly styled as male and supportive of male concerns, even to the point of violence, without themselves supporting patriarchy? Can women find in the God prayed to in the Psalms a true hope and refuge, a God for their particular praise and lament?

Although clearly not as numerous, female or feminine aspects are also present in the depiction of God in the Psalms, and these have often been a starting point for feminist scholars to rethink the identity of the divine. In Psalm 22, God, like an attentive midwife, aids the birth and new life of the psalmist: "You are the one who took me from the womb; you kept me safe upon my mother's breasts" (22:10[9]; see also 71:6; Claasens

2006: 166–75). The language of God’s creation of the mountains in Psalm 90:2 features the root *hwl*, a term used most frequently to describe women giving birth (Isa. 45:10), occasionally to describe God’s creative work (Prov. 8:24, 25; Deut. 32:18), and never applied to men (Foster 1994: 93–102). God’s “compassion” and quality of being “merciful” are terms derived from the word for “womb” (*reḥem*) and enumerated throughout the Psalms (145:8; 86:15; 78:38; 103:8, 13).² Disputed images include reference to God’s “wings” (more likely related to a winged sun disk rather than a female vulture)³ and “breasts” (“Shaddai” refers not to mountains per se but rather to “wilderness”).⁴

As striking as these images may be, they are not entirely without problems for feminist interpretation. Although womb and birthing imagery might allow a woman to relate to or read her own life into the God of the Psalms (or complicate a too-easy identification of God as male), female attributes and affinities cannot be confined to what is biologically sex-specific. Further, naming and associating behaviors (e.g., compassion) as feminine runs the danger of composing an essentialized femininity that conforms to socially prescribed behaviors and attributes—reifying “feminine” into a construction that constricts women instead of understanding it as a cultural performance.⁵

Alongside an examination of the female or feminine aspects of God, the goals of feminist interpretation are also served by a reevaluation of the male metaphors as well. Images of the divine king and father can reflect and authorize a hierarchical system that, as Judith Plaskow puts it, “both fosters and mirrors the tendency to conceptualize all difference in terms of graded separations” and that judges women to be inferior (1990: 132–33). Yet in addition to *undergirding* hierarchical social structures to the detriment of women, feminists such as Letty Russell (1987) have highlighted the need to ask whether such male metaphors for God might also *undercut* such structures.

This is certainly at play when looking at male imagery for the divine in the Psalms, because it often occurs in contexts that redefine power relations in ways perhaps surprising to a contemporary audience. In the Psalms, the divine judge and king often takes particular care of the disenfranchised, especially widows, orphans, and strangers. As “judge of the world,” YHWH is called upon to mete out punishment to those who “kill the widow and the stranger, (and) murder the orphan” (94:2, 6; cf. 146:7, 9; 10:16, 18). Although this redefinition of power is not as prevalent in association with “Lord of Hosts” imagery, Psalm 84 pictures the altars of YHWH the “king” and “LORD of Hosts” providing a home for the sparrow and swallow. This redefinition of power within individual psalms is amplified by the detection of a pattern identified by Susan Gillingham in which several psalms are deliberately placed side by side in order to hold together models of authority and vulnerability (2006: 25–49). The God who establishes the king on his “holy hill” to rule over the nations (Psalm 2) answers the helpless and besieged individual from the same “holy hill” (Psalm 3; cf. Psalms 72 and 73, etc.). In Gillingham’s reading, this pairing is a deliberate attempt to redefine social power structures and emphasize that God acts benevolently on behalf of both the mighty and the meek.

This redefinition of power within the Psalms is significant because of its implications for the moral obligations of the powerful toward the widow, orphan, and stranger. In an economic system that privileged men through the handing down of the family’s parcel of land, undivided, from father to son as an inalienable *naḥālā*, and with no evidence for

dowries consisting of enough movable goods to sustain a person for any length of time, widows and the landless in ancient Israel faced destitution (Hiebert 1989: 125–41, especially 137). By portraying YHWH as one invested in the plight of the powerless (either in the role of a missing male relative for vulnerable widows or of taking special care of the social and economically invisible members of society such as orphans and clients), the Psalms reflect a male-centered society while at the same time construing power as interest for and with the weak.

In a text that both reflects and subverts the hierarchy assumed in the metaphors of king and judge, it is perhaps not surprising that other male metaphors used for God can be unstable. In Psalm 46, YHWH, as Lord of Hosts, breaks the weapons of war. The designation of God as father, used rarely in the Psalms (89:27[26]), is strained by the divine title “Father of orphans” (68:6[5]). Indeed, the comparison between YHWH and a parent of either sex is opposed in Psalm 27:10: “My father and my mother have forsaken me, but YHWH will take me up.”

Considering these male metaphors that, at times, break beyond our predetermined categories and assumptions about power, alongside female images such as midwife in Psalm 22 and the nonhuman images for God such as rock and fortress, the divine image in the Psalms is styled masculine in a context that reveals the inadequacy of one-sex symbolization and points to a sense of unknowability. Paradoxically, this unknowability (communicated by multiple and unstable metaphors) is met by another profile of the divine that pervades the Psalms: God’s intimate involvement in both the public and private areas of humanity. In the genre of prayer, God is presented as being concerned with both the outcomes of war and growth in the womb. Alongside thanksgiving for military victory (“All nations surrounded me; in the name of YHWH I cut them off!” [118:10]), God is praised for reversing infertility (YHWH “gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children” [113:9]). In a memorable picture of proximity and care, Psalm 139:13 portrays God as active in the womb: “You formed my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”

In the language of poetry and prayer, God in the Psalms is both masculine and feminine as well as neither. In a similarly capacious way, God is the one who kills the enemy and knits together a child. Feminists must continue to struggle with the preponderance of male imagery for the divine and with the portrayal of God destroying the nations. Yet the metaphors for God in the Psalms destabilize any sense that a single metaphor or gendered symbolization is literal or adequate. In their multiplicity and complexity, the Psalms present divine ciphers that are loaded but always incomplete, ready to be reappropriated with contemporary concerns in mind while always resisting complete interpretation.

WOMEN IN THE PSALMS

As with female imagery for God, women themselves appear rarely in the Psalter, and their limited appearances usually reflect either the status quo of the ancient patriarchal-agrarian society and/or the need to balance a poetic line. In Psalm 50:20

reference to a woman assists the rhythm (“You sit and speak against your kin; you slander your own mother’s child”), and in 128:3 the “fruitful wife” manifests her husband’s blessedness. The ancient division of labor, with men working outside and women indoors, is seen in 144:12: “May our sons in their youth be like plants fully grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the building of a palace” (Meyers 2000a: 301–2). In one of the only psalms with a sustained female presence, the woman about to marry a prince is charged to “forget your people and your father’s house” and bidden to “bow down” to her new lord and husband in a prayer inscribing patriarchal marriage relations (45:11–12[10–11]).⁶

There are also a few references to women as participants in public worship: “Praise YHWH . . . young men and maidens (*bētûlôt*)” (148:7, 12), and “maidens (*‘ālāmôt*) playing timbrels” process together with other cultic functionaries in 68:26[25]. It may also be that the superscription of Psalm 46 (“According to *‘ālāmôt*”) should be read as an additional indication of female cultic singers.⁷ Nonsanctioned religious practices involving women are also present when 106:35–38 represents the community sacrificing their sons and daughters to the idols of Canaan.⁸

This very restrained place of women in the *contents* of the Psalms is intensified by the *superscriptions* that associate particular texts with men such as David (e.g., Psalm 3: “A Psalm of David [*ldvd*], when he fled from Absalom, his son”).⁹ With the traditional understanding of *ldvd* as an indication of authorship, earlier generations moved the character of David from a somewhat incidental figure within the texts of the Psalms (he is mentioned in the body of only six psalms)¹⁰ to the author of seventy-three psalms. The Septuagint includes even more Davidic superscriptions and also attempts to solidify authorship with the gradual replacement of *to(i) david* with *tou david*, a trend culminating with the superscription of Psalm 151 in the LXX: “This psalm is an autograph of David” (*idiographos eis david*; Pietersma 1980: 213–26).

Although the decidedly male content and encroaching Davidic authorship of the Psalter begins to strain any notion of the applicability of these texts for all women, some ground is regained by reading particular psalms as prayers of ancient women. Locating *women in the Psalms* is thus expanded to *hearing their voice in prayer*. Kathleen A. Farmer has suggested parallels between the prayers of women recorded in the narratives (Miriam, Deborah, Judith, and Mary) with the psalms of thanksgiving or, as she calls them, “Psalms of reversal by and for survivors” (Farmer 1992: 147–48). Erhard Gerstenberger argues that Psalms 127, 128, and 131 (“family hymns”) may reflect pre-Yahwistic domestic traditions in which the house cult devoted to family gods was administered by women (2001: 47). According to Maria Häusl, Psalm 17 can be read as the prayer of a childless woman in which the innocent sufferer (grammatically unmarked gender-wise) asks for protection from God (2002: 205–22).¹¹ Finally, Gottfried Quell solved many of the grammatical issues in Psalm 131:2 by simply construing it as a prayer said by a woman: “My soul is like the weaned child that is *with me*” (*italics mine*; 1967: 173–85; see also Knowles 2006: 385–89).

A more sustained approach for recovering voices of women throughout the Psalms is modeled in two separate monographs by Ulrike Bail (1998) and Beth LaNeel Tanner (2001;

individual laments preserve separate voices together, and neither totally subsumes the other. Without making explicit claims for a feminist interpretation of the Psalms, Mandolfo (2007) employs this method as a reading strategy by which to hear the voice of Daughter Zion in the book of Lamentations, thereby modeling its promise for emancipating the subverted voices of female characters within the biblical corpus.

Clearly no catalogue of women in the Psalms can present a full record of the spiritual life of ancient women, or even the sum total of prayer for contemporary life (recall Athanasius' "what one should say"). In addition, texts from the ancient world obviously reflect their own historically conditioned aspects of gender, economic, and labor conditions (i.e., women often working inside, concerned with biological fertility, etc.) and can also promote certain stereotypes (i.e., women often working inside, concerned with biological fertility, etc.). These time-bound aspects also include the presentation of women vis-à-vis the cult. Psalms 68:26[25]; 148:7, and so on present striking possibilities for inscribing ancient women as cultic actors. And by broadening the focus from a single woman with her child to the entire nation of Israel, Psalm 131 presents a female model of piety that could be taken up by the larger public cult ("O Israel, trust in YHWH" [v. 3]). Yet even with these prayers, the Psalter includes no details to deny the likelihood that women were routinely excluded from the divine presence in the public cult—they might have prayed to YHWH, but there is nothing to indicate that they could pray in all of the same areas where men could (Wegner 2003: 451–65).

Similarly, the recognition that the Psalter may preserve female voices presents its own advances and perils. Hearing psalms as the prayers of ancient women allows the reconstruction of a "counter-voice" that expresses alternative theological views (Mandolfo 2002; 2004: 27–51), the sorrow of victims of sexual violence (Tanner 1998; 2001: 283–301; Bail 1998), or the words of women silenced by the constrictions of patriarchy (Farmer 1992: 152). But the attempt to hear women's voices within these texts is not a straightforward exercise, and overreach may be counterproductive. Even Psalms 17 and 131 do not necessarily provide evidence of female authorship. Because the specific details linked with the speakers' experience are stereotypical and public (the entreaty for a child in Psalm 17, the avoidance of "high matters" and affirmation of humility in the company of a weaned child in Psalm 131), it is impossible to distinguish whether the text was written *by* a woman or whether it simply attributes a quotation *to* a woman (Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes 1993: 6–11). One might also argue that in its valorization of humility, docility, and childlikeness, Psalm 131 could have been written by someone, either a man or a woman, intent on teaching women such behavior, creating a psalm *for* women to reinscribe patriarchal ideals.

Clearly there is promise in a variety of methodologies to find women in the Psalms, from the small-scale approach of textual criticism to the broad scope of intertextual and dialogical criticism. Contemporary translations and paraphrases that forefront the voices of women in prayer can also further this project.¹⁴ But care must be taken since the recognition of a female voice carries with it no guarantee that women who pray the Psalms will construe their reality within feminist parameters free from patriarchal constructs and expectations. And the broader concerns that animate postcolonial feminists—for example, the portrayal of peoples in distant lands and the gendered

ramifications of the text's treatment of "the nations"—remain largely unaddressed within the academic literature on the Psalms.¹⁵ Clearly more reconstructive work needs to be done and the results of such work evaluated in the light of feminist concerns.

WOMEN'S USE OF THE PSALMS

Focus on the text as a resource for reconstructing the ancient voices of women and images of God is a fairly standard procedure in feminist biblical scholarship. Yet the Psalter's particular character as a collection of prayers to be said by the reader makes it distinctive within biblical literature, as does its demonstrable use by women in the Western world even in contexts where the Bible was not regularly accessible to the laity. Obviously, the full details of this phenomenon cannot be unpacked in a few pages of a short essay, but this final section includes a snapshot of the Psalter's use in a particular time and place to point to its central place in the construction of the religious and literary lives of Western women.

With the growing influence of St. Benedict's rule, cloistered women and men read through the entire Psalter weekly and, in tenth-century Europe, developed an additional set of prayers and readings from the Psalms to be read at eight set times throughout the day. Called "The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary," this devotional work began to circulate as an independent volume and, joined with other devotional material, formed the core of the Book of Hours (*Horae* in Latin, also called "Prymers" in English).¹⁶ The *Horae* soon became the standard book of popular devotion in Western Europe during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, probably the most commonly available book during that time.

The significance of these *Horae* lay in their psalms-rich content and demonstrable use by women. Along with prayers and hymns, most *Horae* included at least fifty different psalms, and some were bound together with the entire Psalter.¹⁷ Evidence that women (both within and outside the cloister walls) used these *Horae* is indicated by ownership inscriptions, patron portraits, and feminine grammatical forms in the prayers.¹⁸ Although they were originally produced mainly for the aristocratic luxury market, more affordable versions also became available via mass production and the printing press.¹⁹ Even some who could not afford the cheapest versions were expected to memorize the contents: daily recitation of the "Little Office," the seven Penitential Psalms, and the Psalms of the Passion was a regular requirement of the poor living in almshouses throughout pre-Reformation England (Duffy 1992: 221).

The centrality of the Psalters and the *Horae* in prayer came to play a formative role in the basic education of both girls and boys. Already in the fifth century, Jerome advised Paula's young granddaughter to "learn the Psalter first" before reading the rest of the Bible.²⁰ To facilitate literacy in later periods, the *Horae* and Psalters regularly included a page containing the alphabet (some now smudged with small, tell-tale fingerprints) or glossed the Latin text with interlinear vernacular translations.²¹ The Psalms thus became the vehicle of literacy for generations of girls in the Western world.

Given the ancient proliferation of Davidic superscriptions, it is significant that readers of the *Horae* were often presented with visual imagery that provided a female lens through which to interpret the biblical texts. Illustrations from the life of David (as well as Jesus) were standard features of course, but so were those from the life of Mary and other women. For example, the de Brailles Hours opens each daily office with a full-page depiction of a scene from Christ's Passion and illustrates the decorated beginning letters of the Psalms and prayers (the historiated initials) with scenes from the life of Mary (Donovan 1991: 42–50; Wieck 1988: 60–88). Other *Horae* are decorated with the story of Susanna or Helena's discovery of the true cross,²² and the Gradual Psalms often depict Mary climbing up fifteen steps to the temple (Scott-Stokes 2000: 9). Given that the *Horae* include no page numbers or indices, the visual elements literally help the reader find their place in the text (Dückers 2009: 75–99). And, like the Psalter itself, that "place" can be navigated through the lives women and men throughout the ages.

This essay began by asking whether "all human life" can be found in the Psalms and whether women's voices can join with the prayers "one must say" while resisting androcentric agendas. The results of analyzing the divine images, women's portrayal in the Psalms, and women's use of the Psalms are obviously mixed. Clearly, the Psalms embrace certain aspects of women's lives and interests, including their victimization and vulnerability. Women have indeed found their voice and experience in these texts, and methods such as historical, textual, and literary criticism, as well as the fields of art history, gender studies, and popular religion promise even a more profound recovery of these ancient and contemporary voices.

Yet they are not sufficient resources for reconstructing the daily lives or cultic practice of ancient women, nor do they provide enough material to reconstruct a model of female religious actors adequate for contemporary feminist concerns. Instead of assuming (or hoping?) that the texts reflect a universal experience or piety, the goals of feminist interpretation require that the results of such recovery be evaluated from the different vantage points of feminist perspectives. There is great potential in the Psalms for feminist concerns, but just as they have been used to resist patriarchal values, they have also been used to support and reconstitute such values. There is therefore a risk that the recovery of women in the Psalms and presenting the texts as conducive for the spiritual lives of women may be used to reinscribe patriarchy and an imperialistic agenda on the reconstructions of the past and the liturgical resources of the present. Vigorous and ongoing feminist evaluation of the construction of God in the Psalms, their depiction of women, and their uses and reception remains an urgent task.

NOTES

1. According to Phyllis Trible, feminist criticism is "a critique of culture in light of misogyny" (1978: 7). See also Exum 1995: 65–69.
2. Although men, women, and God exhibit compassion throughout the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs. 3:26; Gen. 43:30; Ps. 103:13), Trible points out that the adjectival form, "merciful" (*raḥûm*), is applied only to God (1978: 38). See also Winter 1983: 531–35; Schroer 1998b: 173–76; Schroer 1995: 60–80, esp. 70.

3. God's *kēnāpayim* ("wings") are referenced in Pss. 17:8; 36:8[7]; 57:2[1]; 61:5[4]; 63:8[7]; 91:4. For discussion, see LeMon 2010; Schroer 1998a: 264–82.
4. From the root ŠDY. See Knauf 1995: 1416–23.
5. See, as merely one example of many who have made this point, McFague 1989: 139–50.
6. According to Nancy Bowen, the text is "a song of, by, and for patriarchy" (2003: 53–71, esp. 56).
7. Noted by Farmer 1992: 145–52, esp. 146. For a contrary view, see Brettler 2000: 298. Note also that Albert Pietersma has suggested that "it is not impossible" that the Greek translator of Psalms 52 and 87, who rendered *ʾl mhl̄t* as *hyper maeleth* in the superscriptions, intended to refer to Maeleth (*mhl̄t*), the daughter of Ishmael in Gen. 28:9 (2005: 443–75, esp. 454, 461–62).
8. Less obvious examples include that of Carol Meyers, who suggests that the sense and syntax of Ps. 22:23[22] (where "my brothers" [*ʾehā*] is set in parallel to "congregation" [*qāhāl*]) indicates that the cultic audience for the speaker's praise of YHWH includes both men and women (Meyers 2000b: 297).
9. For a recent discussion, see Rendtorff 2005: 53–64.
10. Pss. 78; 89; 132; 18:52[51]; 122:5; and 144:10.
11. The biggest hurdle of this interpretation is interpreting the "enemies" in vv. 9–14 as the "social aspect" of the entreatant's need.
12. Tanner also reads Psalm 109 in light of the stories of Leah and Rachel (1998: 283–301).
13. Mandolfo discusses Psalm 7 (2002: 35–41; Mandolfo 2004: 33–46).
14. See Hopkins 2002, who refers to Western women's experience with obesity, the *han* of Korean women, and the suffering of black women to explicate various psalms (74–75, 112–113). See also Rienstra 1992: xv–xvi; Winter 1991.
15. Dube 2000 draws attention to the Bible's portrayal of people in distant lands as one aspect of postcolonial biblical interpretation. See also Kwok 2005 and McKinlay 2004.
16. The standard work on this development is Bishop 1918: 211–37. See also Leroquais 1927; Leroquais 1943.
17. For a chart listing the Psalms in the Hours of the Virgin according to the Use of Sarum, see Donovan 1991: 176–82. For the similar Roman Use, see Wieck 1988: 159–62. Other *Horae* include additional offices such as the Office of the Dead with twenty-two psalms (Wieck 1988: 166–76).
18. For numerous examples, see Duffy 2006: 1–64.
19. Duffy estimates that there were 57,000 printed copies in circulation in England in the two generations prior to the Reformation, some of which cost only a few pence (1992: 209–32).
20. Quoted by Abelard 2003: 124.
21. See, e.g., the Bolton Hours fol. 13^r and the fourteenth-century "Hunter" primer in Orme 2001: 248–49. There are also extant orders for such volumes: In 1403 Isabeau of Bavaria ordered an "a,b,c,d, des Psaumes" (cited in Bell 1982: 742–68, esp. 756). The feminine form in the prayer that closes an Anglo-Saxon glossed Psalter from Salisbury indicates that it was used by women learning to read Latin in a convent. See Sisam and Sisam 1959.
22. See the offices of the Passion in the De Bois Hours (New York, PML MS M. 700); Smith 2003: 85–95, Figs. 34, 366; Donovan 1991: 115–25.

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CHAPTER 29

KINGSHIP IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

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MOST scholarship on the Psalms has been devoted to literary genre and theology, with a fairly recent interest in accounting for the arrangement of the Psalms in their present order. Less attention has been given to the way social and political practices and institutions are viewed in the book. Given that psalms are poetic, rife with hyperbole and metaphor, it is not surprising that they are not deemed to throw much light on Israelite institutions apart from the cult. Given also that the Psalms are virtually undatable, other than to recognize that some are evidently postexilic, it is thought to be pointless to trace Israelite social history within individual psalms or in the final form of the collection.

What I propose to do is to examine how the practices and institutions of kingship are viewed within the final form of Psalms and to compare the emerging portrait with what is said of Israelite kings in other strata of the Hebrew Bible. The only presupposition I entertain about date—and it is a crucial presupposition—is to accept the widely held view that the present book was edited in post-exilic times, while incorporating individual psalms and subcollections of uncertain date, reaching back as far as the united monarchy and possibly even tribal times. Thus, I am examining the view of Israelite kingship entertained by the compiler(s) of the finished book, a view that was likely also held by many contemporaries and carried some weight in the devotional and liturgical practices of the restored Judahite community.

I choose the following psalms as testimony to the attitude toward kingship: Psalms 2, 18, 20–21, 45, 72, 89, 110, 144, and 146. I take these to be “royal psalms” in that they clearly feature the king as their subject matter, quite apart from judgments about whether or not they were actually used in cultic ceremonies. Many other psalms have been regarded as featuring the king either as speaker or as spoken of, but apart from the above compositions and a few isolated references, there is no agreement as to whether the king is in view within any of these disputed texts. It is from these ten psalms that we derive the book’s testimony to the practices and worth of kingship as they are viewed in retrospect from a post-exilic standpoint.

I take up this study in three segments: (a) kingship themes and topics in royal psalms, (b) the trajectory of kingship in the Psalms, and (c) how the Psalter's view of kingship compares with the outlook on kingship in other strata of the Hebrew Bible.

THEMES AND TOPICS IN THE ROYAL PSALMS

The royal psalms treat the functions and practices of kings under three categories: first and foremost, military leadership; second, the securing of peace and justice in Israel proper; and third, the strained but unbreakable bond between God and king.

The King as Military and Diplomatic Leader

Engagement in warfare is cited in virtually all the above psalms as the principal activity of kings. There are ardent appeals to God for the safety and success of the king in battle, sometimes compressed into the urgent outcry, "Give victory to the king!" After the enemy king has been defeated, he is dethroned or made a vassal, and his land is consigned to permanent domination by the victor, sometimes grandiosely expressed as dominion to the ends of the earth. Tribute is required from defeated lands variously in the form of produce of field and flock, precious metals, or treasured spices. Treaties established with friendly states are solidified by diplomatic marriages. It is sometimes claimed that the defeated rulers and their subjects will actually become worshippers of Yahweh.

The King as Upholder of Domestic Peace and Justice

The king is charged with ruling justly by exemplifying and, where necessary, enforcing equity in state and society. In particular it is his duty to see that the poor and needy are provided for to the extent of righting wrongs done to them. This is a form of noblesse oblige and is largely taken for granted as a royal prerogative. The faithful exercise of social justice is even asserted to be a precondition for the king's military and domestic achievements. For example, an abundant harvest hinges on the king's faithful discharge of his duties. Moreover, the king sometimes asserts his innocence of wrongdoing as the mark of his legitimacy, so much so that the Israelite king deposed by the neo-Babylonians protests that God has ignored his virtuous reign by not only upending his rule but extinguishing the house of David altogether.

The Bond Between God and King

There is an intimate bond between God and king that requires fidelity from both parties. It is incumbent upon the king to worship and obey Israel's God, and it is incumbent

upon the deity to protect and prosper the king and his people. This bond is sometimes seen as a covenant between the two and sometimes as an adoption of the king as “God’s son.” The relationship between God and the king is so “tight” that God promises unending reign to the dynasty of David. There is no comparable bond between God and the monarch in the northern kingdom. This sets up a tension between an apparent *unconditional* promise to the king on the one hand and a promise *contingent* on the behavior of kings on the other. Is the dynasty of David granted the throne irrespective of morality or ritual, or does fulfillment of the promise depend on the just rule and ritual fidelity of each king who comes to power? In an effort to bridge the gap between these opposing views, one psalmist asserts that particular Davidic monarchs may err, and, if so, they will be individually punished, but their misdeeds will not abrogate the original promise. At his investiture, the king is anointed and showered with blessings and prayers that are to be periodically renewed. The king is said to preside at sacrifices and offerings, and in one psalm he is hailed as a priest king.

The Trajectory of the Royal Psalms

The royal psalms are spread throughout the book rather than grouped together. There is no “run” of royal psalms in the way that there are runs of laments and clusters of psalms attributed to Korah, Asaph, and those called “Psalms of Ascents.” It has been suggested that Psalms 2 and 89 formed the bookends of what was a prior compendium of songs, later expanded by the addition of Psalms 1, 90–150. A careful examination detects an editorial decision to arrange the royal psalms in a trajectory in Psalms 1–89 (Books I–III) that is replicated in Psalms 90–150 (Books IV–V). In both parts of the Psalms, this trajectory posits the king as starting off with high status and great power but descending by stages to a loss of status and power, even to the point of establishing the king’s irrelevance to Israelite society and religion. Let us trace this trajectory over its two-fold course.

Psalm 2 trumpets an exceedingly lofty view of kingship, to the point of declaring him to be the adopted “son of God” and picturing him as already triumphant over the nations and able to put down rebellions against his rule. Psalm 18 elaborates the high view of Psalm 2 by stressing the righteousness of the king in adhering to the divine will but stressing that the embattled king can prevail against his enemies only by the direct help of God. Psalms 20 and 21 form a pair: the one praying for the king’s victory in battle and the other giving thanks for victory achieved. Psalm 45 describes a royal wedding that seals diplomatic relations with other kingdoms and secures dynastic succession by the expected birth of many sons.

Thus far, an unalloyed celebration of kingship has prevailed, but now a darker mood enters in, at first problematically and then emphatically. Psalm 72 is an impassioned prayer that the king will rule justly by serving the poor and needy so that agriculture will prosper and he will be able to conquer nations. However, that the king will actually rule justly in order to sustain his power is far from certain, so he must be prayed for continually to “shore up” his resolve. In a communal lament, one of the prayers of the people implores God to grant help “to the man at your right hand,” doubtless a somewhat

veiled reference to the king who has been too weak to cope with an emboldened enemy (80:18[17]). In Psalm 89, the deposed king accuses God of breaking the covenant with him by delivering him into the hands of his enemies. Although it is tempting to read the condemnation of the failure of the *ēlōhim* to do justice in the earth in Psalm 82 as a reference to failed kings rather than to worthless gods, it would require further research to defend such a position.

Thus, the sequence of psalms in 1–89 moves in a downward course from zenith to nadir as the supremely confident king who rules the world and easily puts down rebellions against his regime (Psalm 2) shades off into to a king who has prevailed against his foes only after a fierce struggle to achieve victory (18, 20–21), morphs into a king who has to share the world with competing kingdoms and who shrewdly marries foreign princesses in order to strengthen his position in international affairs (Psalm 45), passing on to troubled prayer that the king will actually rule justly (Psalm 72) and defend his people (Ps. 80:19[18]), ending with the traumatized king deposed at the overthrow of the Davidic dynasty in 586 BCE, bitterly protesting that this unforeseen turn of events is an inexplicable violation of the covenantal promise (Psalm 89). In this way, the compendium of psalms in 1–89 ends with the overthrow of a dynasty that has been repeatedly assured of its longevity.

Upon entering Psalms 90–150, we encounter a different prevailing mood. Psalms 1–89 feature many laments that cast a rather somber mood over the whole collection. In Psalms 90–150, however, laments recede as thanksgiving songs and hymns abound, culminating in a string of praise songs in Psalms 145–150. The upbeat character of the collection as a whole is palpable. However, in spite of the differing moods, Psalms 90–150 contains a royal trajectory paralleling the downward spiral of kingship in Psalms 1–89 but with a surprising conclusion that reflects a coming to terms with the loss of kingship so poignantly and indignantly voiced in Psalm 89.

Psalm 110 launches this second trajectory with an exuberant celebration of the king's military victories analogous to Psalm 2. The psalm is cast in the form of a coronation encomium that pictures the king sitting at the right hand of God with his enemies serving as his footstool. This elevation of the king to divinely decreed authority expresses as intimate a relation between God and king as does the adoption declaration of Psalm 2. That the king is described as "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (110:4) draws on a tradition found also in Genesis 17:18–20, where the king of Salem (Jerusalem?) by the name of Melchizedek entertains and blesses Abram, who has defeated a coalition of four kings. In Psalm 110, the effect of this rhetorical ploy is to demonstrate that the priestly authority of Melchizedek and the military skill of Abram are now combined in the person of the Israelite king. However, this high view of the king is not sustained. In fact, it is noteworthy that the so-called historical psalms end their recitals of Israel's primary narrative with the entrance into Canaan, with no reference to the monarchy (Psalms 105–106).

Near the close of the book, the king in Psalm 144 appears once again, this time beleaguered in battle and praying desperately for divine aid. His prayer for help is interrupted by an aphoristic reminder of the frailty of humankind, implying that the king is not simply, or at all, the "son of God" but in essence a mere "son of man." The emphasis is not on

betrayed dynastic longevity but on the brevity of every king's reign whose days are "like a passing shadow" (v. 4). The closing verses, severed from royal agency and spoken by the community at large, ask for the fecundity of people, crops, and herds, once a responsibility of the king but no longer.

Psalms 146 is not generally regarded as a royal psalm, but it repeats the warning in Psalm 144 about the fragility and transience of kingship even more emphatically by the opening admonition, "Put not your trust in princes!" What follows is a recital of the measures of social justice, once the province of the king, that are now taken up by God alone, claiming in effect that God has no further need of a king to establish justice in the community. Instead, in 148:11 we find "kings of the earth and all peoples," alongside children, youth, and the aged, among those who lavish praise on God. For all practical purposes, as far as the conclusion of the book of Psalms is concerned, the Israelite king is demoted to the powerless status of the kings of the earth, who, according to 149:8, are to be made captive to the one true "King," namely the Lord God of Israel. When the final psalm exhorts, "Let everything that breathes praise the LORD," that includes all past, present, future kings, and would-be kings.

In sum, each of the two trajectories of kingship concurs in tracing the growing obsolescence of kingship. The great difference is that the end of kingly rule is experienced as a severe loss in Psalms 1–89, whereas the eclipse of kingship in Psalms 90–150 is seen as a relief from rulers who have failed in their duties to the extent of outliving their usefulness as agents of divine rule.

This perusal of the emphatic decline of kingship in the Psalms suggests an explanation of the opening of the book of Psalms with praise of those who keep the Law or *tôrâ* (Psalm 1), immediately followed by the ringing exaltation of the king (Psalm 2). This is a particularly jarring juxtaposition of the two modes of Israel's identity and survival: Law and Kings. On this understanding, the structure of the Psalms reflects the underlying tension and frequent open conflict that mark the relations between advocates and practitioners of these two fundamental Israelite institutions. That the first psalm is an introduction to the whole collection serves to mark the supreme status of the Law as capable of prospering without a king and the secondary status of kingship as absolutely subordinated to the Law, a dependence the kings of Israel largely failed to accept. Accordingly, the sprawling praise of the Law in Psalm 119 anticipates the decline and exhaustion of the Israelite monarchy. The law-observant speaker in Psalm 119 declares, "Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes (v. 23)," and "Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words" (v. 161).

KINGSHIP IN THE PSALMS COMPARED TO KINGSHIP ELSEWHERE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

In the biblical narratives, the high view of kingship in Psalms 2 and 110 accords more or less with the high view of the reigns of David and Solomon, the former praised as the

paradigm of kingship and the latter celebrated for building the temple, also honored as the paragon of wisdom. A similar laudatory view of kings applies only to a select few later monarchs, chiefly Hezekiah and Josiah. On the other hand, the great majority of the kings of Israel and Judah are judged deficient. When we look beneath the surface of the reigns of David and Solomon, it is nonetheless easy to see that the flaws of later failed kings were foreshadowed by David's bloody path to the throne and by Solomon's harsh demands on his subjects and his lapse into idolatry toward the end of his reign.

The specific virtues and vices of kings in Psalms and the historical books are for the most part not identical. For instance, idolatry is not charged against any of Israel's kings in the Psalms, but idolatry is one of the chief sins of the kings whose reigns are described and evaluated in the books of Samuel and Kings. By contrast the military prowess of the kings in Psalms is not a prominent feature of the historical record as Samuel and Kings tells it. David is the big exception. It is true that the rulers reviewed in the books of Kings had their share of battles, sometimes winning and sometimes losing, without singular praise of their accomplishments in battle. Hezekiah and Josiah are praised for their religious reforms, while the kings in Psalms are not credited with religious reforms of any sort. To be sure, kings are pictured in Psalms as competent and faithful in the discharge of their duties until the suspicion of Psalm 72 arises and their lapses are cited at the very end of the book, when Psalms 144 and 146 indict kings with ineffectiveness in office. The failings of kings in Psalms are not so much sins of *commission* as they are sins of *omission*. In particular, they have failed to establish social justice in their jurisdiction, which makes them vulnerable to conquest by foreign kings. This is a weakness set forth in greater detail in the prophetic books, wherein kings are rebuked for not restraining the injustices of rapacious landlords and merchants, and in some cases claiming that the kings themselves were involved in the profit gained by squeezing the vulnerable peasantry. It might be fair to claim that even well-intentioned kings failed to establish an honest and efficient system for administering the state in a manner that would serve the needs of society. In short, they have not tackled the deep-seated problem of graft and bribery that corrupts and clogs the organs of state and religion.

In comparing the poetic treatment of kings in Psalms and elsewhere, both high and low perceptions of kings are represented. Isaiah envisions a future king who, unlike the present occupants of the office, will possess both the virtue and the power to establish and uphold justice and righteousness while simultaneously delivering Israel from foreign oppression (Isa. 9:2–7; 11:1–9). Yet Hosea condemns Jehu for massacring his predecessor along with his family and followers (Hos. 1:4). Hosea channels God's opinion of these rulers, "They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes but without my knowledge" (Hos. 8:4). In the alleged "last words of David," the monarch boasts of his "just rule over men," which is nonetheless qualified by the rhetorical question, "Does not my house stand so with God?," a question that invites and expects an instantaneous positive response but allows for the possibility of a negative conclusion (2 Sam. 23:1–7).

The weakness and futility of royal rule is, moreover, mocked in Jotham's fable, where every productive tree or plant (olive tree, fig tree, grapevine) refuses to be king, but the scraggly bramble, good only as kindling for fires, accepts kingship. Such is the sarcastic

assessment of kings as socially useless and prone to self-destruction, which in its context is applied to Abimelech, son of Gideon, who made himself king in Shechem but was overthrown in civil strife within three years (Judg. 9:7–21). The contrary attitude toward kings is illustrated by notations at the end of Judges that imply that had there been a king in Israel at the time, the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine would not have occurred (Judg. 21: 25).

This striking ambivalence toward kings—valued and loved by some, deprecated and hated by others—has its focal point in the well-known conflict at the very foundation of the monarchy. Owing to the corruption of some tribal leaders and the advancing military threat of the Philistines, the demand for a king “like the nations” arises. Samuel, as the last judge, warns the people of the harsh rule that will be imposed on them if they adopt kingship. Nonetheless, the people insist on a king who will govern the nation and fight its wars (1 Sam. 8:10–18). Of course, it is at this juncture that the Deuteronomist sets the stage for the subsequent history of the kings. The “constitution” of the nation set forth in Deuteronomy 17: 14–20 requires that the king should maintain a modest army, avoid diplomatic alliances, and abstain from piling up wealth. In order to adhere to this very “unkingly” sort of conduct, the monarch is to study and apply the Law, understood as the commandments set forth in the book of Deuteronomy. This is the Deuteronomist's understanding of how a legitimate Israelite king would rule, and yet when he turns to recording the reigns of Israel's kings, he finds deficiencies in David and Solomon, in spite of their achievements, and among the subsequent rulers only Hezekiah and Josiah receive unqualified praise because it is they who carry out the reforms the book of Deuteronomy promulgates.

To undertake a comprehensive comparison of kingship in the Psalms and kingship elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, it would be necessary to examine the wisdom literature, especially Proverbs and Qoheleth, which, if I read them aright, also have an ambivalent, even heavily cynical, view of monarchic rule. More seriously, in order to be adequate, the comparison would have to be pursued on two levels beyond the synchronic literary approach I have adopted. One additional level would be to undertake a diachronic literary approach, only hinted at in this essay, to form working hypotheses about the literary history of the biblical sources, thereby uncovering the probable chronological ebb and flow of attitudes toward kingship. On yet another level would be an historical and political reading to propose how kings actually ruled in relation to all the other social actors in ancient Israel.

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PART VII

.....

CULTURALLY BASED
INTERPRETATIONS

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CHAPTER 30

SINGING A SUBVERSIVE SONG: PSALM 137 AND “COLORED POMPEY”

RODNEY S. SADLER, JR.

THE Psalms have been a significant religious resource to the African American community from the time of the community's introduction to Christianity to the present. For a people who have suffered the grave indignity of oppression, enslavement, segregation, and second-class citizenry, the Psalter became an example of how to celebrate God in good and bad times. The visceral nature of the Psalter—a book that grew out of the experiences of a people who themselves were familiar with lamentation and praise amid oppression, dislocation, and community crisis—became a source language for formerly enslaved Africans and African Americans, providing them a means of expressing their angst and anguish in intimate fellowship with their God.

Such resonance with the themes of the Psalter can be found, for example, in the narrative of William Anderson, a formerly enslaved man who tied together a litany from Psalms 23, 24, and 37 to attest to God's Providence that sustained him through slavery, false imprisonments, and racial persecution (1857: 44). Similarly, Olaudah Equiano, upon learning that his “master” would honor his promise to free him from slavery, celebrated by exclaiming the words of Psalm 126 (1789: 14–15). Likewise, Sojourner Truth recalls the instance when her “Mau Mau” would remember her children who were sold off, never to be seen again. She cried out in the words of the psalmist “Oh Lord, how long? Oh Lord, how long?” (1884: 17–18) The Psalter provided a vocabulary for early African and African American authors to exclaim their greatest joys and mourn their bitterest disappointments, a script that reflected their own struggles with the world and with God.

Because the sufferings and joys experienced by African Americans and the laments and praises voiced by the ancient psalmists cohere so readily, African American narratives may provide critical insight into the origins of certain psalms, particularly those that emerge from contexts of oppression and exile. In this essay I use a brief narrative

from the writings of a formerly enslaved African American as a window into a complex and often difficult to understand psalm, namely Psalm 137. By rereading this psalm in light of the story of “colored Pompey,” I show that this much maligned psalm is actually a protest psalm wherein a Judean exile subversively addresses his Babylonian captors with an insult concealed in the form of a Judean worship song. I hope to give a nuanced understanding of the psalm that demonstrates the value of these narratives as lenses for rereading Scripture.

The story of colored Pompey is taken from the writings of Peter Randolph, a Baptist “slave preacher” who was emancipated in 1847 to become a licensed preacher in the Northern states and in Canada as well as an antislavery agent. He would later go on to pastor Old African Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, one of the most famous congregations in the history of African American Christianity. Randolph’s emphases on liberation and protest against the seemingly intractable power structures evident in his own personal narrative are also present in the colored Pompey account and serve as a fitting lens through which to view Psalm 137.

AN IMPRECATORY PSALM

Some suggest that a psalm like 137 has no place in the Psalter, or at least has no place in contemporary worship. Some commentators have even taken umbrage with this psalm, deeming it not “fit for the praise of God.” Kenneth Slack, for example, suggests that “We need not regret that the whole [of Psalm 137] was included, providing that we do not say that this is all the word of God.” He later calls it “this grotesquely beastly blessing,” noting his horror over the death of “the innocent child whose lips have not yet uttered an intelligible word” (1975: 22). It is commonly suggested that imprecatory psalms such as Psalm 137 are a remnant of a past theological position rendered untenable in Christian theology and thus in need of revision or deletion. Thus, Johannes Vos argues that such psalms are morally problematic and often contrary to Christian theological sensibilities, though in the end, by qualifying their imprecations, Vos deems them useful “in the public and private exercises of the worship of God” (1942: 138). According to Hossfeld and Zenger, only as a “*poetic metaphor*” are we able to “pray and sing Psalm 137 . . . today when we are aware of the problematic nature of images of violence” (2011: 523; cf. Zenger 1996: 47–50).

While I appreciate the cause for concern raised about these psalms, I would suggest that they constitute legitimate parts of the canon that authentically express the visceral nature of life in this world and the intimacy between the psalmist and God that would not forbid even these disdainful statements from finding expression in Scripture. Walter Brueggemann argues that, far from being rejected, such psalms remain crucial for our understanding the nature of intimacy with God.

There is nothing out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate. Everything properly belongs in this conversation of the heart. To withhold parts of life from that

conversation is in fact to withhold part of life from the sovereignty of God. Thus these psalms make the important connection: everything must be *brought to speech*, and everything brought to speech must be *addressed to God*, who is the final reference for all life. (1984: 52)

Others have also found in them a significant contribution to religious traditions as they express the legitimate concern of the oppressed in this world. As J. Clinton McCann notes:

In the face of monstrous evil, the worst possible response is to feel nothing. What *must* be felt—by the victims and on behalf of the victims—are grief, rage, and outrage. In the absence of these feelings, evil becomes an acceptable commonplace. In other words, to forget is to submit to evil, to wither and die; to remember is to resist, to be faithful, and to live again. (1996: 1228)

Nancy deClaissé-Walford offers four reasons why the imprecatory psalms are valid canonical expressions of Christian faith tradition, which I summarize as follows:

1. They, like the rest of the psalms, address the inevitable struggle between the faithful and their “enemies”;
 2. They tend to be communal psalms expressing the concerns of a community of faith;
 3. They reflect the struggle of theodicy and pervasive evil in the world;
 4. They call upon God to make things right, not for speakers to exact vengeance.
- (2011: 84–86)

In my estimation, however, some of the most insightful work on Psalm 137 has been done by those employing socially located biblical hermeneutics. Looking at how this text appears through the lenses of contemporary groups that have struggled for survival has helped me to grasp the meaning of this psalm more fully. For example, Psalm 137 has been a remarkable resource to Ada Isasi-Díaz by helping her to understand her situation as a Cuban exile unable to return to the land she loves. For her, the notion of “remembrance” rehearsed in this psalm is key for inspiring her hope of return to Cuba and framing the distinctiveness of her Cuban identity, which could otherwise be subsumed by the American culture in which she has now lived as an exile longer than her eighteen years in Cuba. Further, Isasi-Díaz has found in the imprecation of this psalm an adequate means for expressing her feelings toward those who have forced her to live as an exile (1995: 149–63).

David Adamo suggests that imprecatory psalms such as this one serve a different role in Nigeria, where people employ them to “drive away the evil plans of enemies and especially witches and evil men.” So instead of seen as representing human violence, these psalms are reinterpreted as “protective psalms” (2001: 335). Further, Samuel Murrell describes the use of Psalm 137 among Rastafarians who employed the psalm in song to describe the slavery and oppression that they experienced in the African Diaspora and their desire to “chant down Babylon” or overturn the repressive systems in the Western hemisphere (2010: 220–36).

African American narratives have also shed new light on this old psalm. In his reading of the psalm, Brad Braxton wrestles with the legacy of “political and economic slavery” that have impacted African Americans and notes that this text can provide a basis for understanding the rage that these experiences produce within us. In his online lectionary entry on Psalm 137 and the Maafa or “Great Disaster” that was the American and Caribbean slave trade, he asserts that

by failing to engage these troubling verses, preachers may forfeit an opportunity to examine the dynamics of pain and imperial oppression. The psalmist honestly announces how violence enacted upon his community incites a violent impulse in him. . . . Rage—and the fantasies it creates—properly channeled can be a powerful tool for resisting political and economic slavery. The raw articulation of pain, especially in a worship context, has enormous healing potential. However, the danger of fantasies of revenge is that they can so quickly become obsessions that drive persons to the very violence they hate. By articulating the fantasies about revenge and violence in sermons and worship services, and then linking such fantasies to the violence that causes imperial domination in the first place, we may eventually reject the seductive invitations of violence. (2008)

It is precisely such a “particularized” socially located reading of this passage that I want to utilize as a lens through which to see this psalm anew. The brief story of colored Pompey offers an interesting perspective on this familiar psalm that merits yet another look.

POMPEY’S DILEMMA

I could only think, when Shell took so much glory to himself for the effect of his preaching upon the slaves, of the man who owned colored Pompey. This slave-holder was a great fighter (as most of them are), and had prepared himself for the contest with great care, and wished to know how he looked; so he said, “Pompey, how do I look?” “Oh, massa, *mighty!*” “What do you mean by ‘mighty’, Pompey?” “Why, massa, you look noble.” “What do you mean by ‘noble’?” “Why, sar, you look just like one *lion*.” “Why, Pompey, where have you ever seen a lion?” “I seen one down in yonder field the other day, massa.” “Pompey, you foolish fellow, that was a *jackass*.” “Was it, massa? Well, you look just like him.” (Randolph 1999: 65)

The story of colored Pompey always shocks my students when I first read it in class. I have used it in my rhetoric, black church studies, and Old Testament courses over the years and from each audience I have noticed a similar stunned amusement. Contained in the narrative composed by a formerly enslaved man, Peter Randolph, the story is full of power precisely because it is about a subjugated man. It is the account of a man who has no apparent power and is confronted daily by his enslaver, shown to be particularly powerful by mention not only of his position in relation to Pompey but also by his status

as a “great fighter.” There is a subtle cruelty in the question that the “master” asks of Pompey, “How do I look?” To play to his ego, the master asks a broken elderly enslaved man who has no outward beauty that would be recognized in the world in which he lives to shower him with complements on his own appearance.

Pompey’s portrayal in this account suggests the lack of his presumed intelligence as his master chides him for his ignorance and rehearses his lack of worldliness. What has Pompey seen? He has seen only those things that his master could control him seeing. His whole world is limited to what his master allows. In the midst of a social system that is completely arrayed against him, Pompey has no way to exert any overt degree of control over his circumstances, no real means of demonstrating his power or control over his world, no apparent hope of exercising any resistance. He is utterly disempowered by his master and serves as an object of ridicule used for his master’s amusement.

The presumed utter hopelessness of his situation is precisely what makes the narrative so powerfully poignant. Found in a situation that he has endured countless times throughout his life, Pompey finally seizes the opportunity to resist his oppressor. And how does he do so? He does so by engaging in a subtle act of subversion. Using his presumed ignorance as an asset, Pompey coyly calls his master, one completely in control of his own situation and confident in his “nobility,” a jackass to his face. The end result of the account is not chastisement, because Pompey’s presumed ignorance now functions as his shield. His master never imagined this “foolish fellow” could have the audacity or the ability to react against his oppression or to subtly subvert the prevailing power arrangements for even a moment. It is precisely because of the control the master thought he exerted that Pompey’s act constituted a momentary reversal of the power dynamics. Further, that his story is told at all attests to its powerful appeal as it was passed on, probably from one enslaved person to another until it was finally recorded in Peter Randolph’s narrative. In the end, Pompey’s story is a poignant example of how the oppressed “playfully” resist in situations where they are otherwise completely disempowered.

THE PSALMIST’S DILEMMA

Psalm 137 finds the speaker in precisely the same dilemma. Based on the details of this psalm, we can presume that the psalmist is captured, enslaved, exiled from his land, brought to his oppressors’ country, and forced to live in a completely disempowered state. He too is an object of amusement for his oppressors, who wish for him to “sing to us from the song(s) of Zion” (v. 3). As Brueggemann notes, “The grief [of the psalmists] is compounded by the torment of their overlords’ requiring them to sing Zion songs in order to humiliate, to show how helpless and bereft they are” (1984: 75). What could be a crueller demand than for one of the faithful Hebrews from Jerusalem to be forced to sing a song about the immortal and impenetrable city, the fortress of YHWH, his invulnerable God, in the land of those who have crushed his beloved city and seemingly humbled

his God? You can almost hear the chuckles of amusement bubbling up from behind the smirk on the captor's face.

How do you celebrate the glories of a fallen homeland when you have been disempowered, dislocated, and disgraced? "How will we... how *could* we sing a song of YHWH in a foreign land?" As Artur Weiser notes, "The holiness of God is affected when the Lord's song is degraded to a means of entertainment for a heathen audience" (1962: 795). What could they do in the face of the desecration and degradation of their God and their homeland? McCann suggests that "For the exiles, remembering Zion means faithfulness to God's place and to God's ongoing purposes. It is an act of resistance; 'in a foreign land' (v.4), they could not sing, but they could and must and did remember" (1996: 1227).

I counter, however, that the psalmist has no choice in the matter, no agency to exercise, no ability to *say* he has no ability to sing the requested song. After the cruelest of questions and his internal wrestling with his own conflicted nature (vv. 4–6), the psalmist responds in the only way that he can, *by singing a song*. Like Pompey, the request is one he cannot overtly resist without consequence. The song he is asked to sing is the song that he cannot sing. How do you sing about the glory of an unconquerable sacred citadel to the ones who have conquered and desecrated it?

Whereas some scholars suggest that the psalmist never sings a song, I think that singing is precisely what he does in verses 7–9. Consider, for instance, the insightful article by Karl Plank (2008). He begins his discussion of the psalm by recounting the story of the film *Shoah* and its character Simon Srebnik, a death camp survivor who escaped Camp Chelmno when he was a teen by singing for the entertainment of the SS, the local townspeople, and the German civilians in the area. He uses this figure to illustrate the psalmist's turmoil, who was similarly asked to sing sacred joyful songs for the amusement of his captors. Then Plank reads verses 1–4 suggesting that the psalmist, by hanging up his instrument, enacts a "violent gesture of refusal" and resists the captors' request (p. 187). He concludes that while the psalmist remains steadfast in his refusal to sing, he can only "weep as an exile."

While I am moved by Plank's argument, it is problematic at one point. He does not seem to recognize that Srebnik, his model for the psalmist's actions, *does* sing, indeed he *must* sing. When confronted with the undeniable power of the oppressor compelling a song, there is little the oppressed can do *but* sing. Just as Pompey had to answer his master's question, just as Srebnik had to sing his songs, so, I would argue, the psalmist *had to sing to survive*. And that is what we find labeled as imprecation in verses 7–9. Coerced, the psalmist sings a "song of Zion," or at least so it seems.

It is in the song that he sings, however, that he engages in his act of resistance. He gives a response, but it is not the expected response. He sings a song, but it is not the expected song. His song, while appeasing the pitiless demand of his oppressors, both recognizes and violates anticipation, for the psalmist's song is not a song of vain celebration or a song of depressed longing. Neither is it the passive "weeping" that Plank discerns. Instead it is a *subversive song*, one that "denigrates" his captors right to their faces. They do not expect much in the way of resistance from him, but the response is a poignant, biting imprecation that stands out as one of the most notorious in all the Hebrew

Scriptures. When viewed through the lens of colored Pompey's story, I can imagine that it, too, likely went unnoticed by its intended targets. It, too, was likely spread from exile to exile and then later recorded in the Psalter as a testimony to this psalmist's example of resistance.

THE SUBVERSIVE ACT

Verse 7 appears to signal the psalmist's compliance with the captors' request, marking the beginning of his song. He sings what *appears* to be a Zion song, complete with some of the features expected in such songs. We should note, however, that Psalm 137 does not equate with the psalm type or genre "song of Zion" as described in contemporary research. Nevertheless, the psalm does fit the category that Hans-Joachim Kraus calls "Yahweh songs" (1989: 504). As James Mays opines, "Psalm 137 is a song about Zion, but it is not one of the 'songs of Zion.' The songs of Zion are hymns full of joy and confidence" (1994: 421, see also Alter 2007: 474). While I concur, I would suggest that the song specifically in verses 7–9 was intentionally crafted to resemble a song of Zion, that is, a song that might have been sung in the Jerusalem Temple in praise to YHWH.

Reading this song closely, we can recognize that the psalm intentionally employs elements familiar to other Judean psalms but in a manner contrary to their typical usage. As discussed below, this song subversively recasts such elements into a notorious imprecation. The song in verses 7–9, as we will see, is an imprecatory wolf clothed in the sheepskins of a Jerusalem Temple song sung by a bent but unbroken Judean lyricist before his captors.

AURAL ALLUSIONS AND FAMILIAR PSALMIC ELEMENTS

In his study of Psalm 137, Zenger uses the phrase "aural allusion" to describe the deliberate attempt of the psalmist to play on the assonance of words *ʾārû* ("strip") and *yěrû*, the first two syllables in the name of the city, Jerusalem, in verse 7. It is a "double wordplay" that "could not have been missed" by the Hebrew hearers of this psalm (Hossfeld and Zenger 2011: 519). While I am not fully convinced by this particular allusion, I concur that there are a number of aural allusions in verses 7–9 that help us to understand the rhetorical significance of the imprecatory portion of this psalm.

For example, this song begins in verse 7 with an imprecatory call to *zēkōr*, to "remember" the deeds of the "Edomites," who were present on the day of Jerusalem's demise, cheering on the Babylonians as they destroyed Judah's sacred city.¹ A call to remember that humiliating act almost seems out of place here, since the song in verses 7–9 is a

response to Babylonian captors, until we realize what it is that the psalmist is actually doing. The *qal* imperative of *zkr* can be found in several different psalms that call upon YHWH to “remember” the relationship with the people of Israel.² This familiar psalmic element is followed by the phrase *libnê ʿədôm*, which can be translated as “against [the sons of] Edom.” While this is a relatively unfamiliar phrase in the Psalter, occurring only in 137:7 in this construction, the phonetically similar *libnê ʿādām* occurs four times in Psalm 107 alone. The construction *libnê ʿādām* is employed frequently throughout the Psalter as a phrase meaning “human beings” or “mortals.”³ Here the psalmist’s imprecation against the Babylonian ally Edom is concealed as an aural allusion to a familiar psalmic phrase calling God to remember “humanity.”

In verse 8 the Hebrew term *bat* (“daughter”) occurs in construct form prefixed to the term *bābel* (“Babylon”). While “daughter” language for Zion is much more frequent in the prophetic books,⁴ it does occur in the Psalter (9:15[14]), so we can assume that such a phrase may have been a feature that could have been used in the psalmist’s own song without arousing suspicion. We should note, however, that the term “daughter Babylon” also occurs in invectives against this nation found in Isaiah 47:1, 5 and in Jeremiah 50:42; 51:33. In these prophetic passages, the prophets are by way of an aural allusion coyly playing off of the more familiar “Daughter Zion” language as they craft their image of “Daughter Babylon,” the recipient of YHWH’s wrath. In like manner, the psalmist in Psalm 137 uses “Daughter Babylon” language, but then disguises the subsequent imprecation by introducing two *ʾašrê* clauses (“Happy . . .”).

The language of verses 8–9 intends to mimic that found in other psalms, beginning with the Hebrew word *ʾašrê*. This word recurs at the beginning of countless strophes or brief clauses in the Psalter, usually employed in reference to human beings who are doing something consonant with YHWH’s will. For those familiar with the sound of a psalm from the Jerusalem Temple, the introduction of a verse in a song with this word would put them in mind of numerous others psalms, as in Psalm 1:1 celebrating those faithful to YHWH’s law, 41:2–3[1–2] commemorating those who consider the poor, 2:12 recalling those who take refuge in YHWH, 84:13[12] extolling those who trust in YHWH, 127:5 regaling those who have many children, and 144:15 praising those whose God is YHWH. In each of these instances, those referenced by *ʾašrê* are celebrated for their positive actions concurring with YHWH’s will.

Psalm 137:8–9, in fact, is the only place in the entire Psalter where *ʾašrê* (two times) is set in a malediction (Schaefer 2001). Thus, an introduction featuring daughter language coupled immediately with an *ʾašrê* clause, suggesting that an affirmative benedictory phrase is to follow, leads instead to a series of the progressive imprecations in verses 7–9. This reversal of expectations here is ironic, strengthening the notion that the psalmist is deliberately and playfully employing a common psalmic theme in the act of subversion. Here the psalmist intentionally reverses expectations of the clause following *ʾašrê*, masking his true intent in his song.

The plural noun behind the construction “your little ones” (*ʾölālayik*) is relatively rare in the Psalter.⁵ If we look at the various instances in which the term is used throughout the Hebrew Bible,⁶ there are a surprising number of times when it is used in relationship

to vengeance, violence, and killing. *’Ölêlîm* is typically used hyperbolically to convey the epitome of exacted vengeance. It is often engaged to suggest that not only will everyone be killed; *even the littlest child* among them will suffer God’s wrath. Many scholars suggest that the appeal to the “little ones” in Psalm 137 is a deliberate attempt to “represent the future of a people” and take this reference to literally refer to the children of the Babylonians who will be dashed against a rock, a fitting response in the end to the Babylonians’ “monstrous evil” (McCann 1996: 1228). While I do not think that this is entirely without merit, I suggest that there is a more elaborate aural allusion at work here. So while this may well be an invective meant to cast the future of the Babylonians in doubt, it is also a part of the subversion that hides this intent in sweet-sounding words.

The aural allusion in this instance is to the word *halêlû yāh*, an element employed frequently in Judean worship songs. The phonetic similarities between these words are undeniable because of both the assonance of the vowel pattern and the meter of the terms, *’ölālayik* and *halêlû yāh*. Further, if we look at psalms that employ this imperative to praise, *halêlû yāh* typically occurs in a similar position at the end of the psalm.⁷ The final reference in Psalm 150 is most noteworthy because we find here that it is the last word of the Psalter, bringing the entire catalogue of poetry/songs to a fitting triumphal celebration with its emphatic boast about the glory of Judah’s God. Thus, the phonetically similar word strategically located here at the end of Psalm 137 would have obscured the psalmist’s actual meaning, sounding appropriate to all who heard this psalm, convincing the Aramaic-speaking Babylonians that the Hebrew captive was singing one of those “Zion songs.”

That said, I do not think this explanation excuses the harshness of an imprecation against small children; it just explains what may have been the rhetorical motivation behind it. Like other instances where the term *’ölêlîm* is engaged, the hyperbolic aspect of the imprecation should be understood as well. But the most callous and deeply depraved dimension of this song is the linking of “seizing and dashing” the “little ones” to the word with the final aural allusion *hassāla’* or “the rock” (v. 9).

The word, when stripped of its definite article, is a clear aural allusion to the term *selāh*, whose the meaning and function is contested. It is found numerous times in the Psalter and three times in Habakkuk. It frequently occurs at critical junctures within a psalm, perhaps marking a crescendo moment when the singers are instructed to raise their voices or punctuating a theologically significant declaration. In other instances, *selāh* occurs at the conclusion of a psalm (e.g., 3:9[8]; 9:21[20]; 24:10; 46:12[11]; 87:6) in a position similar to where the term *hassāla’* is located at the end of Psalm 137.

Thus I suggest that the author of this psalm, much like Pompey, when asked for a Psalm of Zion, does his best to sing a song that would suffice for his hearers but masks a deeper insult toward his captors. So instead of a standard Temple psalm that celebrated Daughter Zion and that included *’āšrê* clauses recounting “happy” acts, featured a jubilant “Hallelujah,” and ended with a punctuated crescendo, *selāh*, this author composed a biting critique against “the sons of Edom” and “Daughter Babylon,” included two *’āšrê* clauses that introduce two imprecations, featured an *’ölālayik* where we would expect a *halêlû yāh* to be, and ended with a hard imprecation about dashing “little ones” heads

against a *selā*’ or “rock,” here placed strategically where we might expect a *selāh*, namely at the end of the psalm’s final line.

CONCLUSION

Examining Psalm 137:7–9 in light of the colored Pompey story provides contemporary readers with a different point of access to this familiar and exhaustively researched psalm. By examining the way a subversive story works in a more recent historical context with similar power dynamics at play, this brief account offers us a window into the world, thoughts, and sentiments of an ancient psalmist enduring the humiliation of living under the control of a cruel master. I think these formerly enslaved narratives give to us a valuable lens through which to reimagine the meaning of the psalms, the lens of another exiled people. In this regard, I hope that other biblical scholars will look to these narratives both to celebrate the genius of this distinctive literary tradition and to find analogues that might prove useful for providing new perspectives on biblical interpretation.

As in the Pompey story, the psalmist’s words in 137 are carefully selected to shield his true intentions from those to whom he sings his song. And the way he composed this psalm within a psalm in verses 7–9, replete with aural allusions and familiar psalmic themes, is no accident. It too is deliberate, enabling the psalmist to coyly level the invective against his Aramaic-speaking audience in this approximation of a psalm sung in Jerusalem. As Robert Alter notes, “the powerless captives, ordered—perhaps mockingly—to sing their Zion songs, respond instead with a lament that is not really a song and ends with this blood curdling curse pronounced on their captors, who, fortunately, do not understand the Hebrew in which it is pronounced” (2007: 475). Herein rests the true rhetorical power of this subversive psalm within a psalm; this is why it can be said to the master’s face without having the master ever know that he has just been insulted.

Just as we can probably imagine colored Pompey saying to his master beneath his breath, “You want to know what you look like? I’ll *tell* you what you look like,” we can probably imagine the psalmist uttering similar words beneath his breath. “You want a song of Zion? I’ll *give* you a song of Zion!” Just as Pompey’s master likely went away unsure of the harsh critique subversively leveled in his enslaved man’s comment, the Babylonian captors probably never knew the song in verses 7–9 was actually about them. The victory is scored by the enslaved while the clueless captors can only walk away, gloating about their ability to cow their Judean subjects but oblivious to the Hebrew meaning of the “pretty” song the psalmist just sang.

NOTES

1. See, e.g., Obad. 10–14; Lam. 4:21–22; Ezek. 25:12–14; 35:1–6.
2. E.g., 74:2, 18, 22; 89:48[47], 51[50]; 106:4; 119:49; 132:1.

3. E.g., 11:4; 12:2[1], 9[8]; 14:2; 21:11; 31:20[19]; 36:8[7]; 45:3[2]; 49:3[2]; 53:3[2]; 57:5[4]; 58:2[1]; 62:10[9]; 66:5; 89:48[47]; 90:3; 107:8, 15, 21, 31; 115:16.
4. E.g., Isa. 1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 37:22; Jer. 4:31; 6:2, 23; Lam. 1:6; 2:4, 8, 10, 13, 15, 18.
5. It is unlikely that the Aramaic-speaking audience would have understood this term outside of its phonetic similarity to *halēlū yāh*, since the meaning of the closest word in Aramaic would have been the verb “to enter” (√*āl*).
6. 1 Sam. 15:3; 22:19; Jer. 6:11; 9:20; 44:7; Ps. 17:14; 8:3[2]; 137:9; Job 3:16; Lam. 4:4; Jonah 2:16; Lam. 1:5; 2:11, 19–20; Mic. 2:9, 2 Kgs. 8:2, 12; Hos. 14:1; Nah. 3:10; Isa. 13:16.
7. E.g., 104:35; 105:45; 106:48; 113:9; 115:18; 116:19; 117:2; 135:21; 146:10; 147:20; 148:14; 149:9; 150:6.

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CHAPTER 31

RISING FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION: LAMENT, HOPE, CONSCIOUSNESS, HOME, AND DREAM

JOHN J. AHN

ASIAN Americans have faced the challenges and struggles of voluntary dislocation, involuntary displacement, and resettlement—the “push and pull” factors of migration—as well as a host of issues due to their hybrid identity, including marriage and family enrichment (Y. Ahn 1986), finding home in the diaspora (J. Ahn 2013), and generational consciousness (Mannheim 1952). In spite of these challenges, there have been transformative moments and modicums of success, often attained through enduring hardship and sedulous work. The juxtaposition of “Asian” and “American” indicates two fundamentally different modes of being, like yin and yang. But as different as they are, the synthesis works. In fact, this dual location of culture and identity is celebrated not only within each individual Chinese American, Korean American, Japanese American, Vietnamese American, and Indian American, among others, but also externally, nationally, and globally (Bhabha 2004).

With respect to race and ethnicity in America, sociologists Perlmann and Waldinger describe the positive benefits of the “browning of America” as they identify what truly constitutes an American in the twenty-first century (1997: 893–922). As part of a dynamic ethnographic shift, Asians in America are no longer relegated to the history of the railroad, the sugar plantations in Hawai‘i, or other marginalizing experiences that perpetuate a host of stereotypes. Rather, as “model” immigrants they have steadily gained mainstream acceptance in medicine, business, engineering, music, literature, academics, fashion, sports, television, and the big screen. However, even before such mainstream acceptance, the heart of the Asian American contribution has long been felt on the religious end. There is something to be said about immigrants and their religions (Alba, Rabateau, and Wind 2009), especially Asians in America and the religions

they have brought from distant shores (Min and Kim 2002; Won, Kim, and Warner 2011). Coupling religious dedication with the drive to succeed, the Asian work ethos and the American dream truly echo Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992 [1930]).

Like the many poor and middle-class Irish Catholic immigrants who across several generations contributed to building St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and like the earliest Jewish settlers who established their place of worship in 1654, also in New York City, Asians in America, who came with little or nothing, have erected beautiful houses of worship as an expression of their faith and cultural identity (Carnes and Yang 2004).¹ Like immigrants before and after them, Asian Americans have come to establish and reestablish, negotiate and renegotiate old and new boundaries, including how they congregate, where they congregate, and in what language(s) they express their worship and fellowship. Identity is thus formed, reformed, and transformed through those assemblies. At times, traditional values and ideals have clashed with new cultural norms and expectations in these settings, especially between the generations. The first generation of Asian American Christians, attempting to make sense of the instabilities of their life in the States, relied on the more traditionally conceived notions of uncompromised truths found in ancient sacred literature, including the Old and New Testaments. Scripture was understood as divinely sanctioned and inspired, the error-free road map for navigating the here and now.

It is said that reading the Bible, such as by those coming from the *East to America* (Kim and Yu 1996), powerfully shapes identity (Liew 2008). But reading the Psalms in particular goes beyond identity formation. It gets to the heart of experiences of America's uglier side, experiences at odds with what it is supposed to be "beautiful America." When unexpected hardships or experiences of marginalization confront Asian Americans because they are perceived to be soft-spoken or passive, the injustice prompts certain perennial responses: How can this happen in America? It's not supposed to happen here. Why? Nevertheless, Asian Americans believe there must be some purpose behind these experiences, ultimately for some transformative good, as also expressed by the psalmists. Discovering the inner strength to turn bitterness into praise is a goal. In the lament psalms, the psalmist always turns to God for change. Growing through pain and hardship is said to produce perseverance, character, and hope (Rom. 5:3–5). And just as the psalmist finds the inner strength to exclaim "Thanks be to God!" or "Hallelujah!" during hard times, turning ill to some good will, death into life, so also Asians in America find inner resolve at the heart of their faith.

Hebrew poetry captures the experiences of hardship and joy with beauty and balance. Poetry that captures the movements of emotions in the peaks and valleys of consciousness (Blackmore 2011) frequently breaks from the fixed rules of prose syntax. Indeed, there are legitimate reasons for breaking certain rules, since difficult experiences are truly counterpoints to established melodies. Fluidity of style, evocative imagery, *parallelismus membrorum*, and poetic rhythm or meter help to counter all types of negative encounters, thereby uniting the experiences of all peoples on the move, especially those that are continuing to journey from "there" to "here," as well as from "here" to

“there.” Thus, each generation—the first, the transitional 1.5, the second, the third, and the fourth—rightfully experiences and recites the psalms through its own social construction of reality and generational consciousness.

GENERATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The first generational experience is described by Asian American theologians or scholars of religion and sociology as “*han*” (antithesis), “marginality,” and “liminality.” The pilgrim or sojourner is the metaphor that is often identified for the first generation. The struggle to move beyond culture shock and discrimination is the challenge of the first generation. It is the first generation in particular that endures more cultural and linguistic hardship than all subsequent generations. The first generation is known for its determinism. When faced with put-downs, their solution is to work harder, believe more diligently, and overcome “antithesis” by welcoming moments of grace: a shared meal, good grades from their children, an old familiar tune, a heartfelt, deference-filled bow—all seen as transformative moments in the here and now.

I see such experiences paralleled in the lament psalms. As the first generation of Asian Americans sought to move away emotionally, spiritually, and physically from the “there,” the lament psalm typically signals its move away from lament with the syntactical marker of transition, namely the adversative *wāw*: “*but* I will praise,” or “*but* I will faithfully respond by thanking” God. This is how faithful believers change their circumstances, through praise and thanksgiving.

Between the first and second generation is the transitional 1.5 generation (Chan 2006). Competition between the first language and the dominant language of the culture, as well as issues of inside and outside, leadership, and assimilation, are all concerns for this generation. Being both Asian and American yet at the same time neither fully Asian nor fully American, lacking complete mastery of the first language and being unable to navigate small talk and public discourse in the second language, are sociolinguistic burdens for the 1.5 generation. Moreover, not being old enough to be part of the first generation yet not young enough to be second generation is the painful cross this transitional generation bears. However, the import of this generation is not to be undervalued. The transitional generation preserves the inherited oral traditions and customs. Members of this generation function socially, linguistically, and culturally to bridge the first and second generations, sometimes at the expense of sacrificing their own dreams. Cultural memory is most often associated with this generation (Eril and Nünning 2008). Without the 1.5 generation, hope would be lost; yet they are often called the “forgotten generation.”

The passion to do something new is particularly strong among members of the second generation. This stems in part from their drive to succeed not only for themselves but also for their parents and their children. For many second-generation Asian American Christians, the source of their religious identity formation has been the first-generation

Asian American church. Yet the church has also been their greatest source of pain. Since the 1990s, many have left the church in a silent exodus, as a protest against the traditional hierarchical style of leadership, one that dismisses dialogue and compromise.

The primary difference between the 1.5 and second generation is that the 1.5 generation will not reject received traditions or cultural heritages, even the ones with which they disagree. In contrast, the second generation has little or no misgiving relinquishing past traditions. In fact, the second generation often feels the need to rewrite traditions or create anew what they regard as anachronistic or no longer conducive to their ideologies. In the broadest sense, then, it is this generation that actively forms a distinctive consciousness of the past, current, and future. In Asian American communities, social construction of reality and generational consciousness are attributed to the second generation, because in the second generation self-actualization has occurred. Just as the 1.5 generation was concerned with bridging, the second generation is concerned with the grander bridging of the first to the third generations. This is their *raison d'être*.

The third generation, consonant with Marcus Hansen's law—that which the children of immigrants (second generation) wish to forget, the grandchildren (third generation) desire to recover—marks a reclamation of the past. The final and true goal of the first generation (Kivisto and Dag Blanck 1990), the goal to bring their language, traditions, customs, song, food, and, above all, experiences and stories from a different shore (Takaki 1998), comes full circle. The third generation claims the past even as it locates and defines home as “here.” Though many will consider visiting their ancestral homeland, the social construction of a “temporary or permanent return migration” is not a viable option. Many will have intermarried and settled down permanently.

Most contemporary generational and migration studies conclude with the third generation. Interestingly, the generational saga in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament does not end with the third. A new dream is added to the ongoing narrative (Parati 2011).² The fourth generation's story is a novella set in the diaspora. Literarily, it is attached to the third generation's Jacob story. Joseph's intermarriage to Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, is found acceptable within the narrative. Such an act of foreign marriage is not regarded pejoratively, as in Ezra 9–10. Understood as a necessity for upward socioeconomic and theopolitical mobility, cultural assimilation (as further illustrated in Esther's story) is perhaps the model for the fourth generation. The fifth generation, represented by Ephraim and Manasseh, ironically replaces the fourth (Joseph). Thus the third, fourth, and fifth generations (Israel, Joseph, and Ephraim-Manasseh) constitute a return migration narrative counterpart to the narrative of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As early as 597 BCE, and again with the first return migration in 538 BCE, the Jewish community was split between those who remained in Babylon-Persia as Judeo-Babylonians/Persians from those who returned to Yehud as first-generation return migrants, as well as those who remained in the land of Judah as a remnant. Social and generational migration consciousness could help scholars redescribe the historical, literary, and sociological contours of the Hebrew Bible for sixth–fifth century BCE. It is through this generational consciousness that I approach the Psalms from an Asian American perspective. But first I would like to clarify briefly my methodological approach.

SOCIO-CANONICAL APPROACH TO THE PSALMS

My methods draw from two seemingly diverse approaches. Regarding overall method or approach to the critical study of the Hebrew Bible, Robert Wilson (1984) has been an advocate of the sociological approach. Brevard Childs (1979), on the other hand, is associated with the canonical approach. Both Robert Wilson and Brevard Childs were colleagues who taught generations of scholars and ministers. Yet not once in their overlapping tenures on the same faculty in the Divinity School or the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University did they ever co-teach a course. My own synthesis of these two approaches, a “socio-canonical” approach, bridges these central methodological approaches.

In Asian American Christian communities, the social setting or socially conditioned context(s) is determinative. The readers’ context inevitably shapes what is read and how meaning is made. In addition, Asian American Christians, even those equipped with critical approaches, typically hold Scripture, the *textus receptus*, and its authoritative status in high regard. In short, Asian American Christian communities read the Bible both socially and canonically.

My synthetic approach attempts to combine both the academic and community’s readings. In my view, such a method should not be limited to one group of readers but broadened to yield a more universal, holistic reading. Such is the aim of my methodology. I begin with the sociological approach, employing notions of social location and social reflexivity, as well as classic and contemporary sociological theories, to help readers better understand the original, generative setting of these texts, and then allow the canon in its final form, to shape the meaning of the texts.

SOCIO-CANONICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Building on the form-critical work of Gunkel and Mowinckel, I am indebted to Gerald Wilson’s (1985) insightful pairing of Psalm 1 (Torah) and Psalm 2 (kingship) as the hermeneutical key to the book of Psalms. In my view, Gerald Wilson did not go far enough in making this point. With a careful rereading of Psalms 1 and 2, I propose a well-developed stage of canonical consciousness. With the Babylonian exile, or better the forced migrations, of the southern kingdom of Judah, canonical consciousness and scripturalization rose to new heights. The “authority” of the (Davidic) monarchy came to a formal end in 597 BCE, when the last legitimate Davidic king relinquished his throne for the sake of saving lives, including his family and the lives of the noble, military, artisan, smiths, and other skilled classes—what we would call the upper and middle classes. All of these groups were displaced and resettled in Babylon. With geographical

displacement, the “authority of the king” shifted to the “authority of the text.” This authority would be binding for both Judeo-Babylonians in Babylon and the Judahite remnant. The text would politically and religiously keep the two separate communities together as one. To this bifurcation, of course, we must also include those that fled to Egypt and, presumably, to the coastlands as well.

With the loss of an entire generation (Ps. 137:8–9),³ sacrificial worship shifted inwardly to prayer as a substitute for communal or personal worship. The Psalms are a collection of individual and corporate responses to the exile, or the forced migrations experience, by those who continued to live in the diaspora and also by those who experienced an exile-less exile as “derivative forced migration” or DFM—a migration without an actual migration taking place (J. Ahn 2012b: 196–204). The law (Psalm 1) and the king (Psalm 2) became the hermeneutical and theopolitical response to that experience.

According to select rabbinic tradition, prayers are alive and contemporary in contrast to Scripture, which is dead, past, and fixed in history (Kugel 2006). Prayers are dynamic; they capture and express real experiences of peoples’ issues and concerns. Inasmuch as our society has changed significantly with the rise of new technologies, human emotions and how people respond, individually or collectively, have not. The devastating pain experienced by a mother in antiquity over the loss of her children dashed against the walls of Jerusalem is comparable to the experience of a mother who witnesses the slaughter of her children during the Armenian genocide (1915) or a mother who loses her daughter during a drone attack in Afghanistan. Painful experiences and how people respond emotionally are comparable, if not identical. Making sense of loss and pain transcends class distinctions (e.g., the upper/skilled classes of 597 BCE [Ps. 137:1–6] and the lower classes of 587/582 BCE [vv. 7–9]) and cultures separated by time and geography.

A FIRST GENERATION ASIAN AMERICAN READING

To remember and not forget is expressed repeatedly in Psalm 137. I would like for Asian Americans and the wider range of readers to get a snapshot of what life was like for many first-generation Asian Americans. This particular experience is set in the early 1980s in Queens, New York. Mr. Kang describes his work during the night shift of a fruit and vegetable grocery store.

I have been paid \$280 for the past five months. Although I can get up to \$320 elsewhere, I stay here because of an easygoing boss. If one works at night, one doesn’t have to pay attention to the boss. As I moisten these fruits and vegetables through the night, my hands become numb with cold. During the day, there are the boss, a female cashier, and four other workers—one for the salad bar, one for the vegetables, a manager, and a watchman. At night, I am the manager and work with a male cashier. I arrive at work around nine and I am then expected to eat dinner. As I awake just

before work, I usually have no appetite. I attend to the carrot, scallion, and spinach boxes until eleven by cutting, trimming, and displaying these items for sale. Then I smoke one cigarette. Around midnight, the cashier and I eat rice and kimchi, each by turn. It is 3:30 AM, when I finish the vegetables. Then I have a half-hour break to smoke. After that, I begin to set up the fruit outside. I preserve the orange juice and salad at the salad bar by icing it. Around 8:45 A.M. I finish, passing on my job to the daytime worker. (Park 1997: 66)

With this setting in view, reading Psalm 137: 1–6 takes on a unique tone (see Ahn 2008: 267–89).

By the irrigation canals of Babylon—
 there we lived and also wept
 when we remembered Zion.
 Upon the willows, in its midst,
 we hung our harps.
 For there our captors asked us for words of a song
 but our tormentors asked us for mirth, saying,
 “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
 How could we sing the LORD’s song
 on foreign soil?
 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
 let my right hand wither!
 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
 if I do not remember you,
 if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.
(author’s translation)

For first-generation Asian Americans, life is framed through work. Many live near work, which invariably shapes their identity, accompanied by sadness, regret, and memory of the social esteem that many once enjoyed in their homeland: a banker, teacher, engineer, bookkeeper, film director, among other prestigious careers exchanged for low-end, manually intense jobs with little or no recognition. There is lament. The tears shed by the first wave of Asian American immigrants are shared by the first-generation Judeo-Babylonians forced to work on irrigation canals. The willows join in, weeping. Nature, too, laments because former temple singers are now reduced to *corvée*. The harps that once filled the temple with tunes are hung on the willows, remaining silent. How can we sing the LORD’s song on foreign soil?

The demonstrative adverb “there” in verse 1 paints a picture without the need for many words. One doesn’t need to reference Auschwitz or Hitler in a liturgical setting or prayer. It suffices simply to say “there.” Less is more. We lived “there” and wept when we remembered what life was like back then. That image is echoed and experienced by many first-generation immigrants, even amid opportunities for advancement. “Our captors” are the forces of sociopolitical and economic hardships. “Our tormentors” are those who deride us because of who we are, where we are from. Without a strong political base, neither “Black nor Hispanic,” first-generation Asian Americans long for

the song of their homeland. They too lament, “How can we sing the LORD’s song on foreign soil?”

Beginning in verse 5, the psalm shifts to the first-person singular. The psalmist utters words of self-imprecation, revealing his socio-religious identity. He is a right-handed temple musician who used to sing in the temple. He curses the two most important parts of his body, his tongue and his hand, if he forgets Jerusalem. He is now reduced to *corvée* on the irrigation canals of Babylon. He is a member of the first wave of first generation forced migrants in 597 BCE.

A parallel lament is drawn by Mr. Kang and the many first generation Asian Americans that he represents. He works seven days a week, and on the first day of the week he is seen hustling quietly into church to sit in the back pew for the 9:00 AM Sunday worship service. He is exhausted because he just got off work. He’s always fifteen minutes late. And as the congregation moves along in worship singing “Blessed Assurance,” he recognizes the tune. He asks himself how he can sing the Lord’s song? Then, somehow he does and joins in “... this is my story, this is my song.”

A 1.5 GENERATION ASIAN AMERICAN READING

Sook Ryul Ryu’s “Poem by a Yellow Woman” captures the choices and difficult decisions that the transitional 1.5 generation makes, always gravitating toward the first generation, often sacrificing their own ambitions for the sake of their parent’s dreams.

My brother who has Master’s degree in English literature
Thinks about Norman Mailer’s American Dream
While selling fishes and vegetables to his white neighbors
24 hours a day.
My Sister, who liked the paintings of Picasso’s Blue Period, is working
on a sewing machine,
with dyed blond hair. (Park 1997: 36)

Psalm 23:1–4

The LORD is my shepherd; I lack nothing.
In meadows of grass he causes me to lie down;
besides waters of rest he refreshes me.
My dignity he restores;
he leads me in tracks of righteousness for the sake of his name.
Even though I walk in a valley of shadow-death,
I will not fear adversity.
Because You are with me;
your (royal) scepter and (shepherd) staff—they comfort me.
(author’s translation)

Although the ancient Near Eastern image of the shepherd frequently bore the trappings of royalty, the occupation itself was a low-end job. The image of Asian American men and women in their thirties and forties, highly educated with dreams and ambitions, either selling fish with a smile, unable to use one iota of their learning, or working ten-hour shifts on an industrial green and polished metal Juki sewing machine with dozens of other women in deplorable work conditions, begs for comfort and rest. Hope can only come from the Lord, hope that their lives can indeed dwell with dignity. Yet they are haunted by these fearful words: "You have failed and your situation will never change under the shadow of the first generation." But just as the Lord holds a scepter and a staff, so does the brilliant artist using her sewing machine and the fish salesman holding his MFA degree.

A SECOND GENERATION ASIAN AMERICAN READING

Vinh, a second-generation Vietnamese American says of his parents, "They are my life... I will take care of them, in *my house*... Whatever it takes to make them comfortable, I will provide it. There is no limit" (Kyle 2000: 250). Filial piety found in the Decalogue's command to "Honor your father and mother" is universal in scope. Most second-generation Asian Americans will recall and remember the humbling and physically demanding hardships their parents endured so that they might have books, shell-top Adidas, or a pair of "7 for all mankind" jeans. Rightfully, the generation embraces the honorable duty to comfort, whatever it takes to make their parents comfortable (see Isa. 40:1). There is a deep desire to do something honorable. Yet within the second-generation community, the so-called model minority, there is a split, as illustrated by Helen Zia and Jane Hyun. Zia writes:

Auntie Sue and her son Kim, who was of mixed race, white and Japanese, were regular visitors to our home. Though our mothers bonded readily, it was harder for their Asian American kids to connect simply because we looked alike. Mom and Auntie Sue had the shared experience of leaving their war-ravaged Asian homes for a new culture, but Kim and I shared little except for our Asian features; we stuck out like yellow streaks on a white-and-black canvas. Outside Chinatown, looking Asian meant looking foreign, alien, un-American. The pressure on us was to fit in with the "American" kids we looked so unlike, to conform and assimilate. Why would we want to be around other Asian kids who reminded us of our poor fit? At the tender age of six, I already felt different from the "real" Americans. I didn't feel comfortable with Kim and sensed his ambivalence to me. But the joke was on us, because no matter how hard we might try to blend in with the scenery, our faces gave us away. (Zia 2001: 7)

In contrast, as a corporate executive professional, Hyun in *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling* provides key pointers for success. Her fourth, seventh, and ninth points are worth citing: “(4) Develop cultural competency. You do not have to compromise your Asian values to succeed.... (7) Make use of your bicultural and bilingual abilities. Don’t underestimate the value you add to your organization because of your Asian background.... (9) Develop resiliency in your career. Don’t be afraid to fail. There is no shame in having failed if you have the courage to come back for another round” (2005: 279–80). Earlier in her work she recalls,

When a managing director from a top financial services institution went to a Harvard recruiting luncheon in 2002 to identify candidates for the investment banking training program, she was surprised to see more than 50% of the students who attended were of Asian descent, including a majority that were students who resided in Asia. She realized then that if this was the future of her company, she had better start understanding Asians better as her new recruiting targets—as the pipeline of potential bankers at her firm. (2005: 6)

In light of second-generation assimilation theories, one can identify three trajectories: (a) assimilation (straight line or bumpy line) into the mainstream; (b) conversely, assimilation into the underclass; and (c) assimilation also into the mainstream but with a greater sense of ethnic and cultural awareness. Elsewhere, I have attempted to show that such variances were also likely among members of the second-generation Judeo-Babylonian community (Ahn 2011).

Psalm 40:2–5 [1–4]

To wait for, I waited for the LORD;
and he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He brought me up out of a roaring pit, from the miry clay,
and set my feet upon a rock and established my steps.
He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;
many shall see and fear and trust in the LORD.
Blessedly happy (*ʾašrê*)⁴ is everyone who sets the LORD as one’s confidence,
and does not turn to pride or affairs of deception.

(author’s translation)

Consonant with the words of Second Isaiah—the second generation ideology of “Comfort, O comfort, my people” (Isa. 40:1)—waiting for the Lord is testimony to the only one who can truly address a collective plight, a testimony of resolute patience and trust that God is doing something new. As previous generations waited, the second generation found resolve in the new song.

In Hebrew prose syntax, the rendering of an infinitive absolute in conjunction with the finite form of the verbal root, as found in the opening verse of the psalm, suggests a reading like “I waited patiently.” But here I break from that convention by allowing the D-stem in its absolute state to hang freely in anticipation of the object (factive); “To wait for, I waited for the LORD” expresses a deep sense for longing. No one can satisfy

such longing except God. Patiently waiting for the Lord is an act of faith. Crying out to the Lord is also an act of faith, an act of hope for deliverance from the roaring abyss and miry clay, hope by those who are struggling on the bottom and those who have hit the glass ceiling. A new song, a new poem of praise is sung by actualizing that the future is brighter and more secure. The psalm reminds the second-generational members not to trust in their own intellect or abilities but to humbly place their trust and confidence in the Lord, who will provide.

THIRD GENERATION AND FOURTH GENERATIONS' READING

Brian is a third-generation Chinese American. He is twenty-four years old and works as a medical transcriber (Chinese to English) in California. He is proud of his heritage, having learned Chinese from his grandparents. When people ask him if he is Chinese American or Asian American, he now simply answers, "I'm Chinese" (Hansen's law). He says it's easier that way. But he wasn't always like this.

I had the desire to keep it, the language, going in my family, or like, yeah I didn't want it to die out... [T]hat stemmed from... my willingness to learn and speak to my grandma in Chinese, to make sure I kept it alive too. Even though all my grandparents are fluent in English, I try to speak in Chinese to them too, as much as possible. (Ho 2011: 19)

Isaiah is a third-generation Korean American. He is the only third-generation Asian American in Round Rock High School in Round Rock, Texas (a suburb of Austin, Texas—popular for live music venues like Austin City Limit and SXSW). He can understand his grandparents when they speak to him in Korean, but he rarely responds in Korean. He is seventeen, and like most Asian American seniors in high school, he is an "A" student. In addition, he is an officer in the student council; a core member of the varsity lacrosse and rowing teams; a musician who plays the violin, piano, and the drums; and a singer-song writer who has already recorded enough songs to have his first album released. The lyrics in his music are about self-identity and longing to fit in and discovering his importance and place in a world that sees him both fully as an American and as an Asian. His choice of music style is indie. He is inspired by poets such as T. S. Elliot, Edgar Allan Poe, and Walt Whitman, who influence the lyrics of his songs.

Katherine, a college student, is a fourth-generation Chinese American. She has 1.5, second-, third-, and fourth-generation Asian American friends. She is very comfortable as a fourth-generation Asian American. Popular Chinese culture from mainland China via the Internet has exposed her to contemporary Chinese music and Taiwanese dramas, from which she has developed a yearning to learn Mandarin and Cantonese.

Finally, we see reflections on generational history by a Yonsei, a fourth-generation Japanese American, Saren Sakurai, on June 19, 2003, remembering the Minidoka Internment Camp in Hunt, Idaho:

I wanted to say a few words on behalf of the Yonsei (fourth generation) to share with you a few things I have learned as a Yonsei in the Japanese American community.

From the Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrant) I have learned: Life is tough but it is not to be sneezed at. If you get knocked down, get back up, dust yourself off, and keep going. When the going gets tough, a Nikkei (Japanese American) relies on ingenuity.

From the Nisei (second generation) I have learned: When the elders speak, listen. When the children ask, answer. Life is what you make it. And it's particularly good to make of your life a good story. To live to tell your story. This may not have been in our culture then, but I can tell you, it's in our culture now.

From the Sansei (third generation) I have learned: If it's in the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights, take it literally. Trust it. Believe it. Expect it. Demand it. If these rights are found lacking, or have been denied to you, there are things that you can do. When you are right, as we are, you will win.

Now, I'd like to teach those generations something I know about being a Yonsei (fourth generation): You can trust us. We will remember Minidoka. We will carry on its memory and we will come back. We accept the Japanese American legacy as you have offered it to us. I swear to you today, on my ancestors memories interned here, Minidoka and the Nikkei (Japanese ancestry) story will not be forgotten. Its stories will be told. By me and by my children. But more importantly, it will not be repeated. Because from you we have learned that every experience is a learning experience—and we have learned how to pass that on.⁵

Psalm 126

A Song of Ascents

When the LORD returned the forced migrants of Zion,
we thought we were dreaming.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy

Then the great nations said,
“The LORD did all these things.”

The LORD caused us to be great;
we were joyful.

Return, O LORD (our remaining) forced migrants
through the deepest water-channels in the south.

May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

May those who go out weeping, carrying the seed for sowing,
truly come in with shouts of joy carrying their sheaves.

(author's translation)

After approximately seventy years in Babylon, or three-and-a-half generations (since each generation is demarcated by twenty years in the book of Numbers and in the

Damascus Document), the third- and fourth-generation forced migrants return home with songs of praise. Much time has elapsed. News of their return is filled with laughter and a sense of nationhood. The “dream” was never lost; it was kept alive. Just as Joseph’s bones are brought back, the dream of the first-generation Judeo-Babylonians finds fulfillment in the third and fourth generations. It should be noted, however, that those who made it in Babylon-Persia had little or no thoughts of ever permanently returning, except in the interest of recovering ancestral land as a temporary return. But for those who never made it in Babylon-Persia (i.e., the underclass of the descendants of 587 and 582 BCE), a permanent return migration is fulfilled. Shemaiah’s words of an immediate return from Babylon and Jeremiah’s prediction (Jeremiah 29) find common ground with Second Isaiah’s utopian vision for a collective return that gives the underclass “Jacob” a new start.

Home for Asian Americans is the United States of America. From time to time, there are voices that call from the East, calling the third and fourth generations to return to their ancestral land. But the song of these generations continues to be: “O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, for purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain! America, America, God shed his grace on thee. And crown thy good with brotherhood. From sea to shining sea!”

CONCLUSION

For the Brians, Isaiahs, Katherines, and Sarens, the third- and fourth-generation Asian Americans have indeed firmly established their identity in their “American-ness” with Asian features.⁶ To read the Psalms is to experience God’s presence for each generation, enabling lament (first), *golah* hope (1.5), consciousness (second), home (third), and dream (fourth). The dream is now becoming a reality through the endurance of hardship and the struggle for basic rights. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream is proudly displayed in President Barak H. Obama. But what is the dream of Asian Americans? Where are the Asian American equivalents of Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, who would pointedly bring to attention Asian American issues and concerns? Is the Asian American dream simply relegated to the pages of academics or university departments that address the educated and privileged? Or can a voice in the wilderness rise up and capture the spirit of all classes, especially everyday people who seek the “blessed happiness” acknowledged in the Psalms?

NOTES

1. See also Laderman and León 2003: 23–72; Yancey 2006: 83–104.
2. Reflecting sociologically on the three generations, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I consider the fourth generation diaspora novella in Joseph to be a late addition to the original

three-fold saga in Genesis. By the time of the fourth generation, there is a deep split between those who remained in Babylon and the underclass that returned to Yehud for new life. The fourth generation's split between Manasseh and Ephraim (fifth generation replacing the fourth) may reflect the distinction between the Cisjordanian and Transjordanian communities. The Hebrew Bible, in its final return migrations context, is thus an extended four-generation story. With respect to leadership, we have Moses in the first generation, Joshua and Caleb in the transitional 1.5 generation, the elders of the community, those born in the wilderness, in the second generation, the period of the judges representing the third generation, and finally the kings of Israel and Judah, who in themselves have succession as members of the fourth generation before Babylonian displacement and resettlement.

3. It should be pointed out that the centerpiece of Babylonian devastation should not be about the loss of the temple but about the loss of hundreds of infants and children dashed against the rocks/walls of Jerusalem.
4. In my judgment, the rendering "happy" (NRSV) dismisses the point that "blessings" in the Psalms may be pronounced and uttered by common people, not just by priests (cf. Num. 6:23–26). "Happy" downplays the theological gravitas by assigning the laity to a merely happy life rather than to a life filled with blessings. After all, if the psalms are ancient prayers used in liturgical settings, blessings with happiness, or simply "blessedly happy," may be a construct better suited for translating *ʾašrê*.
5. Available from http://www.awakeningis.net/ron_karen/Minidoka%20Pilgrimage/Message%20from%20a%20Yonsei.htm.
6. The first Ahn referenced in this piece is my father, the Rev. Dr. Yoo K. Ahn, a first-generation Korean/Asian American. While pursuing his doctorate, he worked in Harlem as a security guard for a Korean jewelry store in the late 1970s, in addition to working at a dry cleaner and holding the day shift at a fruit and grocery store, all to keep my family afloat. He started a Presbyterian church in addition to teaching at several seminaries in New York City. My mother commuted from the Bronx to Queens, a two-hour public bus ride each way, every day to a nursery school for several years before we moved to Queens. I am a second-generation Korean/Asian American. And although we have three children (Isaiah, Alexander, and Caroline), Isaiah, our first-born, is the one referenced in this chapter to represent the third generation.

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CHAPTER 32

PSALMS IN LATIN AMERICA

EDESIO SANCHEZ

It can be said from the outset that Psalms were first used on Latin American soil the very moment Christianity arrived with the first settlers from Spain. Data from the sixteenth century—less than a century after the discovery of the Americas (1492)—record the use of Psalms in different contexts of Spanish colonial life. For instance, in the coat of arms of the city of Puebla, Mexico, designed in 1538, Psalm 91:11 is quoted in golden letters. Psalm 103:5 also appears on several coats of arms that portray a two-headed eagle. Iconographic material from colonial times in Cuzco, Peru, also attests to ample use of psalmody texts in church and educational buildings. In churches throughout Latin America, priests and laity participated in choirs singing psalms (Lugo 2009: 217).

The choral use of Psalms in the liturgy of colonial Mexico (16th century and beyond) is attested in more than twenty-one codices or books on “Polyphony in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City.” The most important one, for our purpose, is Codex Eleven, in which thirty-three Psalms sheets are written for multichoral voices (Marin-Lopez 2003: 1081–84). In addition, written testimonies demonstrate the use of the Psalms in liturgy and musical teachings throughout Jesuit reductions, also called Jesuit Missions, a type of settlement for indigenous people, created with the purpose of Christianizing them, in colonial South America, especially in Paraguay.

All these examples assist in the understanding of the extended use of the Bible, both in Spanish and Amerindian languages. As Enrique Dussel, the Argentinean Church historian, indicates, it was not only the clergy who read and studied the Scriptures but also a great number of the laity, as demonstrated by the number of Bibles sold during the colonial period (1992: 115). Dussel writes, “It is important to say that Psalms, together with the New Testament, were the part of the Canon with more translations [into Amerindian languages] followed by the Gospels and the Book of Revelations” (p. 115 n. 7). It is also well known that the music of the national anthem of Nicaragua is an adaptation of an old liturgical psalm—number and title unknown—from the late 16th century, brought from Spain by a monk named Anselmo Castinove.

The following discussion shows that in light of all Christian confessions that have emerged on Latin American soil—those of the Catholic Church in the early fifteenth

century, Protestant groups at the end of the nineteenth century, followed in less quantity and influence by other confessions, such as the Orthodox Church—the use of Psalms pervades all corners of Christian religious life in Latin America.

Bible distribution and translation were part of the early tasks carried out by Christian missionaries. Today, churches and paraecclesial organizations continue translating and distributing the Bible. Translations, adaptations, and rereadings of the Psalms appear in documents and writings both in the Roman Catholic tradition and in Protestant traditions. In the Mayan language of the Yucatan in Mexico, the book of Psalms was one of the first translations, along with the Gospels, done by Spanish missionaries after learning the language. Many written documents, quoted in both Spanish and English books, inform us about the translation of the Psalms in the Nahuatl language, as early as the sixteenth century, and the extended use of Psalms in liturgy, marriages, and funerals. Poets of that time also composed psalms inspired by the book of Psalms—the poems in *Psalmodia Christiana* by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun are an example. The first translation of the Psalms in an Amerindian language in Latin America, through the efforts of Protestant missionaries in 1830, was in Quechua. In 1826 Diego Thompson, a British educator who spent several years visiting Latin American countries establishing the Lancasterian system of education and who also distributed Bibles and promoted Bible translations, asked Vicente Pazos Kanki, Bolivian ambassador to Great Britain during the presidency of Santa Cruz, to do the translation (Mitchell 1993). The fact that the book of Psalms was and continues to be important in the different ministries of the churches is confirmed in the priority typically given to the Psalms and the New Testament whenever a translation of the Bible is planned.

At the beginning of both Catholic and Protestant missionary work, common groups of Psalms were used, such as the Messianic psalms in order to teach and defend the divinity of Jesus Christ and to demonstrate how both the Old and New Testament bore witness. Psalms 1, 23, 51, and 91 are among the most quoted.

In liturgy, the Psalms were used and continue to be used as texts suggested by the Lectionary both in the Catholic Church and in several of the so called historical denominations. Choirs throughout Latin American churches sing psalms composed by old and new composers in Europe, the United States, and Latin America. From the Catholic side, the hymn book by the Peruvian priest Juan Antonio Espinosa has been part of Christian worship in both traditions since the 1970s: Psalms 67[66], 116[114–115], 117[116], 119[118], and 138[137]. From that time, and in the context of the Charismatic movement, many psalms, mostly from the Reina-Valera 1960 revision, became part of the Latin American Protestant hymnology: Psalms 25, 34, 100, 117, 148, and 150, among others. In an article written in the context of Brazilian social and economic realities, Fr. Marcelo de Barros Souza tells how a group of pastors, liturgists, composers, men, and women translated certain psalms into the language of the common people and composed music for those psalms with Brazilian tunes and rhythms (1992: 57–70). Through the singing of psalms, Christian communities help illiterate people pray and sing the Psalms amid persecution, torture, and marginalization. There are also essays on the use of the Psalms in liturgy, not only as singing material but as part of the whole worship

experience. For example, the Latin American Council of Churches published a guide for Christian worship written by Amos Lopez Rubio, a Cuban expert on liturgy: *Celebrando con los Salmos* (Rubio 2005).

In teaching and preaching, both in the context of the local church as well as in theological institutions, the Psalms play an important part. In fact, the number of commentaries on the book of Psalms translated into or written in Spanish illustrates well how pervasive the Psalms are in the ecclesial life and theological education in Latin America. Indeed, preaching from the book of Psalms has been very popular among preachers in Latin American Protestantism. Preachers today can find an excellent source of Psalms' preaching in a three-volume work by Mexican Baptist pastor Rolando Gutierrez-Cortez, who spent several years preaching all 150 psalms (Gutierrez-Cortez 1978–1982).

Perhaps the main contribution from Latin America to the rest of the world is the rereading, or paraphrasing, of the Psalms. The practice goes back to colonial times. There are other examples prior to the publication of *Salmos* by Ernesto Cardenal (1974), a well-known priest and poet from Nicaragua. In Lima, Peru, for instance, Jose Manuel Valdez published in 1839 a paraphrase of the 150 psalms. This poet adapted the content of the biblical psalms according to the needs of poetic language. Ernesto Cardenal has the distinction of being the one who, in the context of dictatorship states and the rise of liberation insurgents, contributed to Latin American Christianity the message of the Psalms through the tremendous power of poetry. His book, *Salmos*, has been translated into many languages. Although it is impossible to know precisely the extent of the impact of Cardenal's paraphrase, both in quantity and in depth, in Latin America and other parts of the world, it is clear that his *Salmos* continues to be read and listened to from the time it was first published to the present. In addition, Cardenal also started a school on rewriting psalms and other biblical poems.

Throughout Latin America one can find, in published books and loose pages, dozens of paraphrased biblical poems (see Bibliography). Even in theological institutions, one can find textbooks that have included rewritings of psalms in the style of Cardenal as part of their curriculum, as it can be seen in Tomás D. Hank's *Salmos de liberación* (1983). The tremendous impact and success of Cardenal's *Salmos*, as well as paraphrases from other authors, is a result of what Luis Alonso-Schökel calls

the outcome of a living process: He has prayed the psalms, he has experienced them, he has assimilated them. The language of the biblical psalms has become in him a creative energy. In the experience of praying and in the poetical act, the poet closes the distance between the old and the new. The biblical psalms speak to Cardenal about today's problems, employing symbols that have meaning today. (1986: 128)

That explains why Cardenal did not translate the Psalms as modern versions of the Bible do, nor did he want to use the language and images of the biblical poet. Cardenal's Psalms are not old psalms varnished with modern language and images. In Cardenal's poetry, the Psalms become alive, and they confront evildoers while giving hope to those who suffer violence. Psalm 5 is a telling example (translated by Robert Marquez):

Give ear to my words, O Lord
Hearken unto my moaning
Pay heed to my protest
For you are not a God friendly to dictators
neither are you a partisan of their politics

nor are you influenced by their propaganda
neither are you in league with the gangster

There is no sincerity in their speeches
nor in their press releases

They speak of peace in their speeches
while they increase their war production
They speak of peace at Peace Conferences
and secretly prepare for war

Their lying radios roar into the night
Their desks are strewn with criminal intentions and sinister reports
But you will deliver me from their plans
They speak through the mouth of the submachine-gun
Their flashing tongues are bayonets . . .

Punish them, O Lord,
thwart them in their policies,
confuse their memorandums,
obstruct their programs,
At the hour of the Alarm
you shall be with me
you shall be my refuge on the day of the Bomb
To him who believes not in the lies of their commercial messages
nor in their publicity campaigns nor in their political campaigns
you will give your blessing
With love do you encompass him
as with armor-plated tanks. (Cardinal 2011)

For a more restricted audience, Mamerto Menapace—an Argentinean Benedictine priest—published *Salmos Criollos* (1977). All sixty-nine psalms in the book were rewritten with the people of rural Argentina in mind. Menapace's psalms have the flavor of the poems in *El gaucho Martín Fierro*, composed years before by Jose Hernandez. Both the language and the form have the particular characteristics of the *gauche*an literary genre, which is best represented in the *Payada*, an oral and poetical improvisation, recited with accompaniment of the rhythm of the guitar. It takes the cadence, vocabulary, and grammar of the *gauchos* (rural herdsman) of the Argentinean pampas. Although many terms and expressions are not known outside Argentina, Menapace's psalms are used throughout Latin America in worship, sermons, and theological essays.

The two previous works belong to what is known in Latin America as *lectura popular de la Biblia*—a grassroots reading of the Bible. Besides Alonso-Schökel's (1986) work, originally presented to an academic audience (professors and students of the Pontificio Instituto Biblico of Rome), the psalms of Ernesto Cardenal are mostly read and heard among Christian communities composed of common people. And it is not an accident that Cardenal, the poet, is also the priest who shared Bible studies with peasants and fishermen in the Island of Solentiname, Nicaragua. So, as it has happened with other parts of the biblical canon, the Psalms have been used as part of a widely common practice throughout Latin America in grassroots Christian communities.

Carlos Mesters, of Brazil, is the best-known teacher and writer of *lectura popular de la Biblia*. His influence has been extensive and can be seen in the use of the Psalms in impoverished Christian communities throughout Latin America. See, for example, his book *Los Salmos: oración del pueblo* (1993), as well as examples by other authors such as Balancin-Stroniolo-Bortolini from Argentina (1989) and, from Chile, *Canto a la vida, la justicia y el amor*, written by a team of Christian Base Communities educators (Castillo 1990). In these small books (no more than seventy-five pages), the intention is to guide common people—mostly peasants and manual laborers living in poverty and marginality—to interact with the biblical text from their life experience. That explains why the topics move from suffering and violence to hope and resistance.

The level of language and exegetical method used in these works coheres with the context of life and education of those communities. Carlos Mesters, for instance, uses the image of the river to teach about praying the Psalms: how the water of that river fertilizes the life and history of God's people. The source or spring is the experience of God; the streams or brooks are the literary forms; the river is the praying of the Psalms; the boat is the community who cares and protects each member; the ship's paddles are the Covenant; the passengers are the people who take and leave the ship with their particular "baggage" and point of encounter with God; the captain is Jesus, who knows the entire route because he prayed the Psalms in each experience of his life; the harbor is the fulfillment of the Covenant (justice, peace, solidarity, and love); and the sea into which the river pours its water (where praying the Psalms ends) is God.

Commentaries on the Psalms first appeared in Latin American long ago, first in English, German, French, and Italian, as well as in later decades, in Spanish and Portuguese. After Vatican II, an important number of commentaries were translated into Spanish and extensively used in exegetical courses, essay writing, and preaching. Hans-Joachim Kraus's commentaries on Psalms, originally published in German, have been available in Spanish since the early 1990s. Also, the publication of commentaries on the Psalms, written directly in Spanish, both in Spain and in Latin America, is impressive. *El libro de los Salmos*, by Angel Gonzalez (1966), is one of the oldest, and *Salmos* by Angel Aparicio (2005–2009) is one of the most recent.

There are numerous academic articles and books written by Latin Americans. For instance, *Revista Bíblica*, from Argentina, counting only from 1992 to 2009, has published more than ten articles on Psalms. *Revista de interpretación bíblica latinoamericana* (RIBLA), besides the number of articles on Psalms published in the various

volumes, devoted an entire issue to the book of Psalms (No. 45, 2003). Practically all the work on Psalms raises the issue of suffering in the context of poverty and the experience of violence among the vast majority of Latin Americans. Most essays deal with psalms of lament and consider those psalms not only as the cry of the oppressed but also as a call for resistance and hope.

In this thematic context, it is important to mention the work of Tirsia Ventura (2008). Her study concentrates on the “Psalms of Ascents” (120–134) and concludes that these psalms can be taken as a paradigm of the pilgrimage of “bodies,” meaning human life in all its “corners.” In our “bodies” we carry suffering and everyday burdens as we walk toward “Jerusalem,” where we meet other “pilgrims” with whom we share our life experiences, dreams, hopes, and strengths. This would explain why these particular psalms are very short and do not concentrate on one particular topic but rather focus on the issue of everyday life as it is lived by everyday people. These psalms, according to Ventura, belong to the post-exilic period and reflect the life of those who remained in Judea and did not go in exile but suffered oppression and violence by the returning elite. Another book, written by Maria Veronica Talame (2007) from Argentina, considers the socioeconomic context of Latin America and addresses issues of poverty, violence, and oppression not from the psalms of lament and suffering but from the topic of joy. At the end of her book, Talame asserts:

The people of biblical times suffered, just as the majority of Latin Americans today, and were also deprived of the great adventure toward a life of happiness and joy. But they left us a living testimony of hope and trust: God is able to lead us to true happiness and joy in the midst of great suffering. When God takes care of our sorrows and burdens, victory is possible, and he gives us the courage to respond with outbursts of joyful songs and dances. (2007: 545)

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PART VIII

THEOLOGIES OF
THE PSALMS

CHAPTER 33

JEWISH THEOLOGY OF THE PSALMS

MARC ZVI BRETTLER

JEWISH BIBLICAL THEOLOGY COMES OF AGE

THE idea of Jewish biblical theology was first raised by Moshe Goshen-Gottstein (1980–1981) in a Hebrew article over thirty years ago, which he refined in a contribution to the Frank Cross (1987) festschrift several years later. Since then various scholars have offered contributions on what Jewish biblical theology might or should look like and given examples. The movement has reached adolescence, if not maturity, with Marvin Sweeney’s recently published *Tanak: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible*, which begins with a discussion of Jewish biblical theology and attempts a reading of the entire Hebrew Bible that is both theological and critical (Sweeney 2012: especially 11–36). The recent publication of a volume of collected essays on Jewish biblical theology (Kalimi 2012) also reflects this movement’s coming of age. These works are essential, since as recently as 1998 biblical scholars could write as if there were no sustained theological reflection on the Bible in Jewish circles (Gillingham 1998: 115–43).

Jewish biblical theology has grown steadily since Goshen-Gottstein’s proposals. A 1997 bibliography on Old Testament theology listed only six items on “The Jewish Perspective” (Martens 1997). Barr’s survey two years later had a brief but encouraging survey of the incipient field (1999: 286–311), noting that “the importance of Jewish participation is so obvious that it requires no underlining” (p. 606). Rolf Rendtorff has also suggested that although “the term ‘theology’ designates a set of questions that is alien to the Jewish tradition,” “it is significant that Jewish biblical scholars are now speaking unselfconsciously of ‘theology’ and of the need to be occupied with it” (2005a: 744, 746).

One impetus for this development was a conference organized by Michael Fishbane and the Tikva Frymer-Kensky at the University of Chicago on Jewish biblical theology in May 1996. The papers, some published (e.g., Brettler 1997; Frymer-Kensky 2000), others

not, recognized the newness of the venture. Frymer-Kensky opened her essay by observing, “At one time, not too long ago, writing on ‘Jewish biblical theology’ would have been considered unthinkable” (2000: 109). The conference also influenced others who were present, including Benjamin Sommer, the most significant and creative young voice in this arena (see Sommer 2012). By 2005, enough was written on the subject for Ziony Zevit (2005) to write a largely critical article titled “Jewish Biblical Theology: Whence? Why? And Whither?”

Another impetus for exploring the field was Jon D. Levenson’s 1987 oft-cited essay, “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology” (reprinted in Levenson 1993: 33–61). Even non-Jewish scholars have advocated its importance within the Christian community (Brawley 2000), and there is a broad, but not universal, consensus that Jewish biblical theology should in many ways be similar to mainstream Christian biblical theology—it should engage the same sorts of issues, bridging critical biblical studies, which is imagined to be neutral with respect to religion, and post-biblical through modern Jewish biblical interpretation and belief. The request by the editor of this volume to include this essay, on the Jewish theology of Psalms, recognizes correctly that the results of such a study are likely to be different from those of the subsequent essay, on Christian theology of the Psalms.

SOME TENETS OF JEWISH BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Jewish biblical theology would not approach each genre or book in the same way. Most obviously, Jewish biblical theology would highlight the importance of Torah texts, since in a variety of ways the Torah functions as *primus inter pares*. It plays a central role in the synagogue service, is commented on more than any other biblical work, and is the main source of *halakhah*, Jewish practice (Greenspahn 2012: 18–24). But the book of Psalms is not far behind in Judaism. Although some view the tripartite canon as reflecting decreasing levels of importance, from Torah to Writings, this is not so. Within Judaism, many psalms are more important than, for example, the prophetic book of Habakkuk. The Psalms is widely cited in the Jewish prayer book (Reif 2003: 1947–1948) and in rabbinic literature. It is the best-attested book among the Dead Sea Scrolls—there are more copies of the Psalms than of any other biblical book (Tov 2002: 167–81; see the list in Flint 2006: 233, 252–54). Thus, unlike some works that might be proper objects of study within Jewish biblical theology but not Christian (e.g., Deut. 6:4–9), or within Christian but not Jewish (e.g. Jer. 31), the Psalms is an ideal object of study within both faith traditions.

In a previous essay, I had suggested that biblical historical texts should be examined from a biblical theological perspective with the following four perspectives in mind: (1) We should hardly be concerned about the historical veracity of the biblical text, (2) we must not harmonize divergent biblical traditions, (3) we must be more

sensitive to the true genres of biblical historical texts, and (4) we must understand what stands behind these texts that are framed as depictions of a past (Brettler 1997). Many of these criteria are relevant to the Psalms and to the problems that the book presents. To the extent that there are some historical psalms, criteria (1) and (4) are especially relevant: The main focus should not be on the texts' connection to real historical events but on the past that these texts are trying to create, the theological vision that stands behind that past, and the implications of that past for the present.

Several psalms make this point very clearly. The core of Psalm 136 consists of references to God as creator and to having performed various acts in history, but these are not narrated for their own sake, but, as the psalm's frame indicates, in order to convince the audience to praise God (vv. 1–3, 26). The refrain states: "His steadfast love [*hesed*] is eternal" (NJPS), and thus God can be of help now as well. Psalm 106 recounts past "events" from Egypt and Canaan, but here too the interest is not in the events themselves but in reminding God that he heeded his people's cries in the past for the sake of his name (v. 8), his covenant and his faithfulness (*hesed*), and should save Israel again now. The psalmist's generation sinned like the ancestors (v. 6: "We have sinned like [Heb *'im*, literally "with"] our forefathers"), and they should be saved like the ancestors.

In exploring Jewish theology and the Psalms, I realize that I overgeneralized when I stated as a general principle: "(3) We must be more sensitive to the true genres of biblical historical texts." I said this in relation to biblical historical texts because I was concerned that they be read as depictions of a past rather than as depictions of the past, namely as accurate historical representations (Brettler 1997: 577–80). The study of genre in relation to the Psalms has a completely different history from that of genre within historical texts. Some scholars feel that modern biblical scholarship is moving away from Gunkel's position, which emphasized the importance of genre (Zenger 1998: 163–208). Jewish biblical scholarship has been less interested in genology and has, in general, been more concerned with the psalm's meaning rather than its pre-history, which the search for genre and *Sitz im Leben* emphasize. To the extent that Jewish biblical theology has as one of its areas of focus Jewish post-biblical interpretation of the Bible (just as Christian biblical theology looks at the New Testament's and other Church expositions of the Old), it is significant that Jewish tradition was hardly concerned with the type of genre concerns that Gunkel and others developed.

THE CENTER OF THE BIBLE

Of the four perspectives on biblical historical texts listed above, the only one that is most relevant for the study of Palms is "(2) We must not harmonize divergent biblical traditions." I began to explore this in a previous publication (Brettler 2012) and now return to this issue in more detail within a broader theoretical framework.

A key issue of Christian biblical theology is finding the *Mitte* or center of the Bible (Hasel 1991: 172–99; Penchansky 1995: 71–91; Barr 1999: index, s.v. “Centre for OT Theology”). Different scholars have suggested a wide variety of centers (Preuss 1995: 21–23), many of which involve themes that are prominent in the New Testament.

In the late twentieth century, however, some recent Christian theologians suggested that the OT does not have a center and are more circumspect about connecting the OT to the New (Martens 1997: 57). The clearest expositions of this position are the works of Goldingay (1987), Brueggemann (1997), and Gerstenberger (2002). Goldingay’s position is more historically based, Brueggemann’s is more philosophically based, dependent on post-critical thought, while Gerstenberger’s is more sociologically oriented. Thus, within contemporary biblical theologies, there is movement away from finding the “middle” of the OT as well as some movement toward seeing the OT autonomously from the New (Hasel 1991: 172–99), though the position that “Biblical theology views the biblical canon as a unity” continues to be voiced (Wells 2012: 111).

Within Jewish biblical theology, the center of the Hebrew Bible is not an issue (Brettler 1997; Brettler 2012), as Barr already observed in his magisterial summary of biblical theology (Barr 1999: 293, 295–96). Frymer-Kensky also sees as a given the “complexity and multivocality of Scripture” (2000: 117). Sweeney emphasizes the dialogical nature of the Hebrew Bible, and the fact that it expresses a “variety of viewpoints” (2012: 32). Thus, the view that the Bible does not have a center and is a diverse, polyphonic book dominates Jewish biblical theology. Furthermore, whereas Christian theologies that do not find tight connections between the Old and New Testaments find some connections, a comparable position is absent among Jewish scholars. Rabbinic literature for Jewish scholars is not analogous to the New Testament for Christian scholars—after all, rabbinic literature is not part of the Jewish biblical canon. These two issues—the connection between the Old and the New Testaments and the search for a center—may be connected, since the search for the center may have started within Christian theology on account of the NT perspective that Jesus as Christ is the Center of the OT. Again, there is nothing comparable in Judaism (Zevit 2005: 212).

THE CENTER OF PSALMS: CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH VIEWS

Protestant writers, following Luther, often see the book of Psalms as a “little Bible,” reflecting the larger canon and thus expect the Psalter to reflect “a biblical theology in miniature” (Kraus 1986: 12). Jewish tradition compares the five books of the Psalter to the five books of the Torah, suggesting an analogy between the two (Sarna 1972: 1307–9). Given these comparisons, it is not surprising that the same way that many scholars look for the center of the Bible, they look for the center of the Psalter, as illustrated in an essay titled “Psalms and Psalter: Paradigm for Biblical Theology” (Wilson 2002).

Wilson's essay outlines many of the core themes that various Christian scholars have found for Psalms; not surprisingly some have found a NT-related center to Psalms. This is most explicit in an essay by the Catholic scholar Georg Braulik (2004), who offers a royal-messianic interpretation of Psalms. Creach (2011: 60–61) also connects his recent reading of the Psalter to Jesus. Nasuti reads Psalms eschatologically, and Smith (1992: 412) sees the redaction of the book as reflecting “a future centered on divine kingship” (see also deClaissé-Walford 1997). Wilson (2002: 109) also favors an eschatological messianic interpretation that would be hard for a Jewish scholar to adopt, suggesting that the “shift [from human to divine kingship] prepares the way for Jesus’ peculiar understanding of this role as the suffering, dying kind of messiah who inaugurates an eternal kingdom of God.” It is unclear to me, however, whether the main theme of Psalms is royal and, within that, eschatological. For example, although *Midrash Tehillim* shows some concern for the world to come and the Messianic age (Braude xxiii–xxiv), such themes are by no means major in that work.

In the same way that general Christian theologies have found the Hebrew Bible to be polyphonic, some recent Christian treatments have emphasized the same about the Psalms. Gillingham has noted the Psalter’s “theological tensions” and observed that it contains “no self-conscious creation of systematic doctrine” (1994: 275). She speaks of “The Many Voices in the Psalter” (1998: 187–231; see also Whybray 1996: 123–24). Hunter (2008: 108) concurs in his recent *Introduction*, which is why he calls one of his chapters “Theological, Philosophical and Anthropological Reflections” (see also Tanner 2001). Rendtorff (2005) points out that to the extent that David is a major focus of Psalms, very different depictions are offered of David through the Davidic superscriptions. Even scholars such as Mays, who does find a theme of sorts, notes, “In a literary reading of the Psalter one is always in danger of overbidding the material, or imagining connections and patterns” (1994: 126). This is true as well of Brueggemann (2007) and Gerstenberger (2007), who emphasize the polyphony of the Bible in general.

This diversity makes sense from an historical perspective, given the broad consensus that Psalms was edited in stages and reflects works from many places and periods. Thus, the final product may show some systematization, but this is not fully accomplished (Mathys 1994: 231–316). This explains why some biblical scholars find a theology in Psalms (Bader 1996: 1–4), while others reject that possibility (pp. 5–9). The scholar who did the most to develop interest in the editing of the Psalter and its existence as a book was Gerald Wilson. In an essay, he correctly noted that “one of the chief characteristics of the Psalms is diversity” and that the Psalter contains “an incredible amount of tension” (2002: 101–2).

Given the Jewish attitude that there is no center to the Bible, Jewish scholars, as expected, like some of their Christian counterparts, are not part of the search for the center of the Psalms. For example, Meir Weiss’s (2001) book on Psalms is titled *Ideas and Beliefs in the Book of Psalms*, rather than *The Theology of the Psalms*.¹ In it, he highlights the variety of beliefs found in the Psalter concerning God as creator (pp. 25–29) and observes that the same diversity is found in other themes covered in Psalms (pp. 29–30). Stephen Geller similarly observes concerning the Bible’s depiction of

biblical religion: “the basic dichotomies had not yet been worked out, and different religious orientations and traditions are placed side by side” and that “the book of Psalms displays a similar wealth of traditions. It contains practically all the disparate religious viewpoints of biblical religion, sometimes juxtaposed to each other in a single psalm” (2011: 208). This position is not uniquely Jewish but is the main position taken by Jewish scholars concerning Psalms.

JEWISH INTERPRETATION OF THE PSALMS

As various scholars have noted, one aspect of modern Jewish biblical theology is its desire to connect with past interpretations and interpretive methods. Thus, in the same fashion that some Christian scholars either explicitly or implicitly offer Christological interpretations, there might be an expectation that Jewish scholars would interpret the Psalms in particular ways that connect it to Jewish tradition. But aside from Jewish rejection of Christological interpretation (see, e.g., Signer 1983; on Christological interpretation see Shepperd 1995), there is no single center on which medieval Jewish interpretation focuses and on which modern Jewish interpretation can build.

The earliest Jewish interpretation of individual psalms is found at Qumran, where three *pesharim* on the Psalms were unearthed (Charlesworth 2002: 6–33). All three show the typical interpretation found among the *pesharim*, where the biblical text is historicized and connected to events of the author of the *peshet* (Berrin 2005: 114–17; Charlesworth 2002). As a genre, *peshet* typically characterizes prophetic books, thus the *peshet* on the Psalms likely indicates that the book of Psalms was understood as prophetic by this group, and this is buttressed by the statement in 11QPs^a XXVII 11 that David composed 4,050 compositions “through prophecy which was given him from before the Most High” (Sanders 1965: 92). The text of these *pesharim* had no influence on later Judaism, though the idea that Psalms was prophetic would have some resonance in later periods.

Another avenue of early Jewish biblical interpretation is the early Bible translations. Unfortunately, only now is serious work being done on the exegetical methods of the LXX and the Targum to the Psalms. The best-known feature of the LXX is the manner in which it historicizes various psalms by adding superscriptions, following those found in some MT psalms. These tie the compositions to particular events in David’s life; they are added using midrashic-like methods to connect more psalms to the life of David (Slomovic 1979; Pietersma 1980). Many earlier treatments of the LXX Psalms saw it as a literal translation, but the most recent treatments are beginning to tease out, one psalm at a time, some of its theological underpinnings, though these have yet to be presented systematically (e.g., Zenger 2008; Bons 2008). Not surprisingly, the LXX of the Pentateuch influenced this translator, reflecting the Torah-centric view of Judaism (Joosten 2008). The Targum of Psalms, whose date remains unclear, follows “no overall program” other than “relating [the psalm] to a particular event or person in

Israel's history" (Fletcher and Chilton 2011: 253; see also Bernstein 2005) and, like the LXX, adduces various connections between the psalm and the Torah (Fletcher-Chilton 2011: 254). Such connections are expected given the Torah-centricity of the translator's world, the reference to Torah in Psalm 1, and the emphasis on Torah in Psalm 119, the Bible's longest chapter.

Uriel Simon (1991) has surveyed some medieval Jewish approaches to Psalms. He notes there that Saadyah interprets the book as a second Torah, that Karaite interpretation saw the psalms as mandatory prophetic prayers, that Moses ibn Gikatilah viewed them as non-prophetic prayers and poems, while Abraham ibn Ezra saw them as prophetic and sacred poetry. Rashi's commentary at various points is interested in "defus[ing] and neutraliz[ing] Christian teaching" (Gruber 2007: 131) but in places is eschatological (Signer 1983). Most medieval Jewish interpreters, following Talmudic tradition (b. Baba Batra 14b–15a), assume that David was the main author of the book, though some allow for later, even post-exilic psalms (Ta-Shma 1994; Ta-Shma 1997).

One example should suffice to illustrate this diversity of Jewish interpretation of the Psalms. The Psalter opens with *ʾāšrê hā'îš*—"happy is the man." Both the LXX and Targum render *hā'îš* as the equivalent of "the man." In contrast, the Midrash on the Psalms (see Strack and Stemberger 1981: 350–52) historicizes this "man" but in typical midrashic fashion identifies him not with a single individual but rather notes various opinions, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, the tribe of Levi, and Korah's sons (Braude 1959: 12–22). None of these historicized interpretations, however, is picked up by the standard medieval scholars found in the Rabbinic Bible (*Miqra'ot Gedolot*), such as Rashi, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Kimhi. Within the Jewish tradition there is no center of interpretation to this psalm, as there is no center of interpretation comparable to the Christological interpretation of the Psalms (or the broader Bible) in general. Thus, even though I and others have suggested that Jewish biblical theology should be attuned to post-biblical Jewish interpretation, this principle is not helpful (except in its negative element—no Christological interpretations) when approaching the Psalms as a Jewish biblical theologian. This is because there is no one post-biblical Jewish interpretation of the book.

PSALMS AS A POLYPHONIC BOOK

I have earlier explored the Psalter's many voices concerning how God treats the righteous, whether God always heeds contrite prayer, and how the Psalter understands the traditions surrounding the exodus (Brettler 2012: 193–95). I expand on some of these points here and offer additional case studies that reflect on the theological diversity of the Psalter, especially in light of several recent studies of the biblical images of God that focus on the Psalms.

The first case represents anthropology rather than theology. What is the nature of humanity? Stated differently, which one of these verses is correct: Psalm 8:6[5], which

claims that people are “little less than divine, and adorned . . . with glory and majesty” or 22:7[6], where the psalmist views himself as “a worm, less than human; scorned by men, despised by people”? To my mind, these verses represent two fundamentally different ideas about humanity, each of which may be found elsewhere in the Bible and later Jewish literature, and one should not be privileged over the other.

Korpel and de Moor recently explored divine silence in *The Silent God*, where they noted that in the Bible God is silent for a wide variety of reasons, some of which are presented as comprehensible, others as incomprehensible (2011: 231–77). God is incomprehensibly silent as in Psalm 22:2–3[1–2]: “My God, my God, why have You abandoned me; why so far from delivering me and from my anguished roaring? My God, I cry by day—You answer not; by night, and I have no respite.” In most other Psalm texts where God is silent, a reason is given, such as God does not listen to sinners (e.g., 66:18), what Korpel and de Moor call “divine prudence” (e.g., 50:3, 21), or that God was sleeping (Ps. 44:24[23]).

God might be present in Psalms written before 586, but, as Burnett notes, God could also be absent in some psalms because the Temple, the center of divine presence for the individual and the community, was destroyed (2010: 138–43). Balentine has pointed out that most laments that ask for God to appear do not mention the person’s sin and request forgiveness, suggesting that many psalmists thought God was silent even though they did not sin (1983: 49–65). Lindström similarly distinguishes between Psalms that attribute punishment to human sin and those that highlight divine anger not motivated by sin (2003: 266–68). Thus, what is often imagined as the theology of retribution in Psalms, that “though the misfortunes of the righteous be many, the LORD will save him from them all” (34:20[19]), is but one of many competing theologies.

Even that theology, which suggests that the righteous are heeded and blessed, appears in a variety of forms. Is such reward instant and perpetual, as suggested by the imagery of Psalm 1, which Krašovec uses to illustrate the principle of “The Blessedness of the Godly Life and the Futility of Godlessness” (1999: 571–76)? Or can it be delayed, as suggested by his analysis of Psalm 37 in reference to “Recompense and Retribution Will be Meted Out in Due Season” (pp. 576–82), or better Psalm 92:8, which acknowledges that “though the wicked sprout like grass, though all evildoers blossom, it is only that they may be destroyed forever”? Perhaps Psalm 73 illustrates still another theology, “The Final Punishment of the Wicked and the Eternal Union of the Righteous with God” (pp. 582–87). Crenshaw calls this “Justice Deferred: Banking on Life Beyond the Grave” and finds it in 49:16[15] and 73:26 (2005: 153–156; see Levenson 2006). Different scholars may dispute some of the interpretations offered to particular psalms in reference to the issue of retribution, but it is clear that Krašovec is correct in suggesting that “the composers of the psalms did not attempt to build up any sort of theological system” (p. 588), while Boda (2009) is incorrect in asserting that the theology of Psalm 1 is normative for the Psalter.

One debated area in the Psalms is whether or not God sleeps. Usually, Psalm 121:4 (“See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!”) is taken as the normative view, but it is surely contradicted by 35:23, “Wake, rouse Yourself for my cause, for my

claim, O my God and my Lord!” and 44:24[23], “Rouse Yourself; why do You sleep, O Lord? Awaken, do not reject us forever!” These verses describe God as actually sleeping and should not be viewed simply as “vestiges of the ancient near eastern motif of the sleeping deity” (Batto 1987: 172; Mrozek and Votto, 1999; cf. McAlpine 1987: 181–99).

I could offer many other diverse theological views found within the Psalter: Does God prefer sacrifices (50:23) or prayer (51:17–19[15–17])? Does God reside in heaven (2:4) or on the Cherubim (18:11[10]; 80:2[1])? Is God’s kingship an occasion for the nations to rejoice (97:1) or tremble (99:1)? Was Israel chosen through the patriarchs (105:6, 9) or at the exodus (114:1–2)? These questions could be multiplied, especially by the reader who is not looking for unity, or even coherence, in the Psalter.

FOXES AND HEDGEHOGS

Although the polyphonic character of Psalms is not emphasized in much Christian theological reflection on the Psalter, such a view is not exclusively Jewish. It aligns well with those Christian scholars who do not believe that OT theologies should be organized around a center. Jewish theological work reaches conclusions similar to those reached by these scholars but for different reasons—reasons connected to the premise that the Bible is a polyphonic book and that the Psalms, as a microcosm of the Bible, is equally polyphonic. I am influenced by the fact that there is nothing comparable in Judaism to the Christology of the NT that might encourage me to look for unity or coherence rather than diversity. Classical Jewish texts reflect what I have called a *davar acher* (“another opinion”) culture—where alternative views, especially in the area of theology, are juxtaposed, and there is no arbitrator (Hidary 2010).

Stated differently, the Hebrew Bible read apart from the NT and in relation to post-biblical Jewish interpretation reflects a “fox” culture as explained by Sir Isaiah Berlin. A fox culture, unlike a hedgehog culture, does not “relate everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate.” Rather, it “pursue[s] many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory” (1953: 3). Changes in biblical theology in the past few decades have allowed room for foxes. Jewish biblical theology, to use Berlin’s words, is “centrifugal” rather than “centripetal” (p. 3). Being a fox is part of being a Jewish biblical scholar. Some Christians have tried, but with mixed success. Krašovec, for example, explores the variety of biblical views concerning reward and punishment, but nevertheless privileges Psalm 51, which is much more important within Christianity than within Judaism. Although Goldingay says, “I want to write on the Old Testament without looking at it through Christian lenses or even New Testament lenses” (2003: 20), he gives “Israel’s Gospel” as the subtitle of volume 1 of that work. Many Christian scholars try their best to remain firmly focused on the Old Testament, forgetting the New, but often do not succeed (see, e.g., Kalimi 2002: 149–50). It is not merely that they do not have the same commitment to a “variety of viewpoints” that Sweeney has as a Jew (2012: 32),

or to Frymer-Kensky's "complexity and multivocality of Scripture" (2000: 117). Rather, there is a strong tendency, influenced by belief, toward being a hedgehog.

Given this fundamental difference, I am less sanguine than Brueggemann when he states in his theology that "*what Jews and Christians share is much more extensive, much more important, much more definitional than what divides us*" (1997: 108). As Berlin notes, hedgehogs and foxes are fundamentally different. Perhaps the development of Jewish biblical theology concerning the Psalms and other works will make some Christians more fox-like, and the influence of Christian biblical theology will make some Jews more hedgehog-like. This interpenetration of different fundamental ideas may be good. But until Christian theology moves beyond the search for coherence, it will remain very different from its Jewish parallel.

NOTES

1. From an e-mail received from Yair Zakovitch, a student of Meir Weiss, on January 2, 2012: "Meir decided on the name of the book. He did not believe in the existence of theology. He believed that theology needed to be systematic, while each literary unit may have its own ideas and beliefs."

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CHAPTER 34

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF THE PSALMS

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“CHRISTIAN theology of the Psalms” refers to a constructive act of contextual interpretation that attends to how God is portrayed in the Psalter and to how that portrayal contributes to Christian understandings of God, Christian ethics, and Christian spiritual practices (both individual and communal). In particular, a “Christian” theology of the Psalms assumes continuity between the God who is portrayed in the Psalms and the God whom the church has come to know in Jesus of Nazareth. Such a theology is “constructive” because it seeks to glean from the diverse portrayals and perspective of the 150 canonical psalms and to offer normative theological claims and confessions. Such a theology is “contextual” because interpreters always interpret texts from particular social locations—particular times, cultures, places, and so on—that influence which questions, concerns, and issues those interpreters bring to the text.

Thus, there can never be a fully definitive, final Christian theology of the Psalms. Theology, including the theology of the Psalms, is itself an ongoing spiritual practice. Biblical theologians articulate the theology of the Psalms not to offer a final word on the meaning of the Psalms or to close off a conversation. Rather, articulations about the Psalms’ theological significance are offered to sustain the conversation so that “a generation to come” and “a people yet unborn” (Ps. 102:19[18]) might join the conversation.

As one might expect, the issues facing those who would attempt to develop a theology of the Psalms are similar to those that have occupied the fields of both Old Testament theology and Psalms interpretation. These issues include differences about the proper object of the theology of the Psalms, the appropriate method(s) to arrive at such a theology, how to interpret the Psalter’s poetic fabric theologically, and how to interpret psalmic genres, the individual psalms, and the Psalter as a book. In short, the primary challenge that faces those who attempt to articulate a theology of the Psalms is the sheer diversity of the Psalter.

The Psalter is the longest book of the Bible. Its compositional history may be the longest and most complex of any biblical book. Individual psalms date from every epoch in

Israel's history—from the pre-Israelite (Psalm 29) to the monarchical (Psalm 2) to the exilic (Psalm 137) and post-exilic (Psalm 1). Individual psalms also seem to have been composed in many different locales—from Jerusalem (Psalm 48) to Babylon (Psalm 137) and many other places (Psalms 42/43, 120). Because of this diversity, some scholars—even those of a theological bent—consider a “theology of the Psalms” to be impossible. While the present article is of a different mind, we shall let Erhard Gerstenberger speak for the naysayers. While affirming the Psalter's power “to stimulate our life of faith,” Gerstenberger asserts that “the Psalter is so vast in its theological dimensions that any systemizing effort must fall short” (1988: 36). Gerstenberger also writes, “The Book of Psalms neither diachronically nor synchronically represents a uniform theology. To the contrary, it exhibits multilayered conceptions of God” (2005: 622). For others, however, the Psalter's very diversity is the wellspring of its theological richness.

APPROACHES TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE PSALMS

Those interpreters who find value in the “systematizing effort” of articulating a theology of the Psalter have approached the challenge differently. Broadly speaking, these approaches can be divided into three basic groups: (i) those who have favored *historical-reconstruction approaches*, (ii) those who have favored *canonical-narrative approaches*, and (iii) those who have favored *key-concept approaches*. Again, speaking broadly, each of these approaches is dependent on a different mode of interpreting the Psalms and especially on a set of assumptions about how to interpret the various psalmic genres. The following modest survey of approaches attempts neither to be comprehensive nor exhaustive but merely representative and illustrative.

HISTORICAL-RECONSTRUCTION APPROACHES

In the decades following the groundbreaking form-critical work of Hermann Gunkel, a set of scholarly approaches to the theology of the Psalms emerged that relied greatly on historical reconstructions. This approach was dependent on a mode of interpretation that worked from the text backward to a social context and then forward again to interpretation. The assumption was that the common forms (lament, praise, thanksgiving, etc.) evidenced among the psalms were generated by specific, recurring social life settings (*Sitz im Leben*). By attending closely to the texts of the various forms, this approach then reconstructed the life settings that generated these forms and proceeded to interpret the

theology of the Psalms in light of these reconstructed settings. According to this approach, the *unifying element for the theology of the Psalms is to be found in the social life setting that generated the diverse psalm texts*. For those scholars who walked this road, the result was often a set of theologies of the Psalms: a theology of the hymns of praise, a theology of the individual laments, a theology of the thanksgiving psalms, a theology of Zion, and so on. This result is evident simply in the fact that many scholars organize their take on the theology of the psalms according to genre (e.g., Kraus 1988: 68–91; Brown 2010: 135–56).

Most famously, Sigmund Mowinckel located a great number of psalms (especially a great number of hymns of praise) in an autumn, New Year's "enthronement festival," at which God was ritually enthroned with the shout, "Yahweh has become king!" Scholars have likened Mowinckel's reconstructed festival to a powerful magnet, which draws more and more psalms into its field until the entire trajectory of psalms interpretation is swayed by its pull. Mowinckel's "cult-functional" approach interpreted most individual psalm texts from some reconstructed view of the cult. Many were almost—or mostly—persuaded by Mowinckel: they accepted the general cult-functional approach but offered their own reconstructions of what the cult festival may have been. These included Gunkel himself and Hans Schmidt, both of whom accepted the theory of a New Year's enthronement festival but located fewer psalms there. The British scholar Aubrey Johnson can be included here as well: he saw the speakers of these psalms as cultic prophets who bore witness to Yahweh's kingship. So also Artur Weiser and Hans-Joachim Kraus belong to this approach; Weiser recast the cultic festival as a covenant renewal festival while Kraus reconstructed a Temple festival in which the election of Zion was commemorated.

As an example of this approach with respect to the lament psalms, scholars such as Hans Schmidt, Walter Beyerlin, and Lien Delekat set these psalms in a ritual context of the Temple. The lament psalms offered rites for those seeking pronouncements of innocence in the face of false accusation. Or, alternatively, lament psalms were imagined as rites for those who were suffering from illness or another physical ailment, beset by enemies, or marginalized from the community. Erhard Gerstenberger and Rainer Albertz located the laments not in the Temple but in smaller, kinship communities and saw their function as the rehabilitation of marginalized members.

The theologies of this approach tend to emphasize concepts of sovereignty, election, and the revelation and presence of God. Let Weiser, as an example, represent this approach:

The Covenant Festival provided the external framework within which the majority of the pre-exilic psalms had their *Sitz im Leben*, but also in the sense that the cultic tradition of the festival, which had a peculiar religious character of its own, dominated the basic ideas of the Psalter and, in spite of all their diversity in details, linked these ideas to a spiritual and living unity which revolved around the revelation of Yahweh at its centre, not only from the point of view of the cult, *but also from the point of view of theology* (1962: 52; emphasis added).

CANONICAL-NARRATIVE APPROACHES

In the past quarter century, as is the case in biblical interpretation in general, canonical and narrative approaches to the Psalter have gained acceptance. In North America, Gerald Wilson, Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Walter Brueggemann, David Howard, William Bellinger, David Mitchell, J. Clinton McCann, Jerome Creach, William Brown, and others have been at the center of the conversation. In Europe, scholars such as Erich Zenger, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Matthias Millard, Klaus Seybold, Bernd Janowski, Klaus Koenen, Gunild Brunert, and Pierre Auffret have been at the forefront. It should be noted that Claus Westermann and Brevard Childs helped pave the way for this approach in Germany and North America, respectively. Without denying the validity of inquiring into the meaning of individual psalms, this school of thought attends to the Psalter as a holistic collection and inquires into the meaning of the whole book. The theological version of this question is, “What is the theological message of the canonical Psalter?” Not surprisingly, there are different approaches to this question and different answers.

The 1985 publication of Wilson’s 1981 dissertation, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, is regarded as the watershed moment for this approach. In a series of publications, Wilson saw the hinge between Books III and IV of the Psalter as significant. Psalm 89, the last psalm in Book III, is a royal prayer for help that first celebrates the Davidic covenant and then laments that “you have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown” (v. 40[39]). Psalm 90, the first psalm in Book IV, is the only psalm “of Moses” in the Psalter. This psalm is then followed by the enthronement psalms (93, 95–99), which emphasize Yahweh’s kingship. So while Books I–III predominantly celebrate the Davidic covenant, and have royal psalms “at the seams” (Pss. 2, 72, 89), the second half of the Psalter answers the crisis of the failure of the Davidic covenant by emphasizing God’s kingship and instruction in Torah (Psalm 119). In this regard, Wilson reads the Psalter narratively, in a linear, chapter-by-chapter fashion. But Wilson also reconstructed the “shape and shaping” of the Psalter historically. Building on the work of Westermann and Childs, he posited an earlier “royal covenantal frame” to the Psalter that consisted of royal Psalms 2, 72, 89, and 144, and then a later wisdom-Torah frame consisting of Psalms 1, 73, 90, 107, and 145. Wilson’s theology of the Psalms is, therefore, both a narrative and canonical approach that reads the Psalter as having a theological message: “(1) YHWH is king; (2) He has been our ‘refuge’ in the past, long before the monarchy existed (i.e., in the Mosaic period); (3) He will continue to be our refuge now that the monarchy is gone; (4) Blessed are they that trust in him!” (Wilson 1985: 215).

DeClaissé-Walford has argued that the Psalter rehearses Israel’s story more broadly, from Exodus to Exile and beyond to proclaim the message that God is ultimately sovereign. This story teaches who God is and who God’s people are in light of the story. Books I and II (Psalms 1–72) chronicle the reigns of Kings David and Solomon; Book III (Psalms 73–89) tells of the dark days of the divided kingdoms and their eventual destructions; Book IV (Psalms 90–106) recalls the years of the Babylonian exile during which

the community of faith had to rethink their identity as the people of God; and Book V (Psalms 107–150) celebrates the community's restoration to the land and God's sovereignty over them. For deClaissé-Walford, the story the Psalter tells is the story of survival under God's sovereignty. As one of Second Temple Judaism's constitutive documents, it helped give the remnant community of faith an identity that transcended its traditional understanding of itself as a nation with a human king. Israel was now a holy people, with God as king and with a new sense of post-national identity (deClaissé-Walford 1997, 2004, 2013).

David Howard and David Mitchell have argued that the alleged rejection of the Davidic covenant in the Psalms as argued by such scholars as Wilson and deClaissé-Walford is too severe. Instead, Psalms 1 and 2 together form an introduction to the Psalter, with the Psalter being a book of both wisdom and messianic, eschatological hope (Howard 1996; Mitchell 1997). Mitchell especially emphasizes an eschatological meaning to the Psalter. This tendency is promising because it offers a theological approach that removes the Psalter's witness from any of several possible ancient social contexts (e.g., Did it originate in the Jerusalem Temple or local community? Was it finalized in the Persian, Hellenistic, or Roman Period? Who were the editors?) and projects the Psalter's meaning against an unknown, future eschatological horizon.

Brueggemann has argued that Psalm 73 is the turning point of the Psalter, which follows a narrative movement from Torah "obedience" (Psalm 1) to a "lyrical self-abandonment of praise" (Psalm 150). The plot of the Psalter begins with an assertion of God's *hesed*, which is then questioned during crisis but eventually trusted and celebrated in the end. Within the arc of this plot, Psalm 73:17 marks the turning point of the Psalter, because there, in the presence of God in the sanctuary, the psalmist discovers that the wicked are not to be envied and that God's goodness is to be trusted (Brueggemann 1995b: 189–213).

As can be deduced from the above summary, approaches to the theological meaning of the Psalter in North America have largely been guided by synchronic (literary) concerns. In Europe, however, approaches have more often focused on the diachronic (historical) issues of the editorial process. The collaborative work of Erich Zenger and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld has been the most influential. Zenger and Hossfeld are confident in their ability to reconstruct the multiple stages in which the Psalter grew to its final form over multiple centuries. Zenger has written that the Psalter in its final form has four interwoven lines of thought. First, it offers teaching concerning divine and human righteousness. Second, it dramatically describes Israel's history, in which God is leading Israel through a chaotic world toward a consummation that will culminate in a cosmic song of praise. Third, it is a five-part Torah of the royal messianic David bearing testimony to the kingship of God. Fourth, and not least of all, it is a prayer book—a way of prayer, a path of prayer, that moves from petition/lament to thanksgiving/praise (Zenger 2010: 64–65; see also Hossfeld and Zenger 1993, 2005, 2010).

Since 2010, Hossfeld has led the University of Bonn's "Theology of the Psalter" project; this project includes the work of scholars such as Johannes Schnocks (2002), Egbert Ballhorn (2004), Till Magnus Steiner (Hossfeld and Steiner 2013), and Johannes

Bremer (2014). Methodologically, this “Bonn School” takes a redaction-history or tradition-history approach. They seek to uncover redactional layers in which various generations of scribal editors made contributions to the Psalter’s theological witness. Similarly, Matthias Millard argues that the predominant witness of the Psalter is to the Lord’s kingship and the Lord’s Torah. The Psalter is a prayer book, with pilgrimage themes, that served local community (not Temple) needs (Millard 1994).

In Great Britain, the prolific Susan Gillingham blends reception history with biblical theology. This daunting approach to theologies of the Psalter promises to widen the focal field of theological reflection on the Psalms away from the text of the psalms themselves, in order to include the many voices that have sung, prayed, and read the Psalms over the ages (Gillingham 2008).

KEY-CONCEPT APPROACHES

A final approach to the theology of the Psalms is characterized by the attempt to center, ground, or frame the theological discourse of the Psalms in one or more key concepts. James Luther Mays has described this approach well as “the attempt to discern or describe a theological dimension assumed by and/or expressed in the Psalms in all their variety” (Mays 1994: 12). Within the larger field of Old Testament theology, this approach corresponds to the work of scholars such as Eichrodt (covenant), Westermann (blessing and salvation), Terrien (the presence of God), Clements (law and promise), and Levenson (creation and covenant). Interpreters whose approaches fit here include James Luther Mays, Walter Brueggemann, Jerome Creach, William Brown, Hermann Spieckermann, Harry Nasuti, J. Clinton McCann, Markus Saur, and Rolf Jacobson. Note that some of these names were mentioned in connection with the first two approaches. This is the case because interpreters often work with multiple methods. This is also the case because the conceptual boundaries between these competing approaches is artificial and a matter of interpretive judgment. It is not surprising that Brueggemann, for example, given all that he has written on the Psalms in his productive career, could easily fit within all three of approaches.

Mays has argued that the “center” of the Psalms is the “root metaphor” that “the Lord *reigns*”: “an organizing center for the theology of the Psalms can be found in the sentence *Yhwh malak* [‘Yhwh reigns’]” (1994: 13). The prayers of the Psalter are prayed to the Lord as king; the hymns of the Psalter praise the Lord as king; the Judean king is the earthly regent of the divine king; and the order that the divine king mandates is made known through the laws and instruction (including the Psalms). Creach originally argued that the root metaphor of the Lord as “refuge” can be discerned both in the shape of the Psalter and in a set of terms that revolve around the semantic field of “refuge.” Creach later thickened his theological description by describing the Lord’s refuge in the Psalter as the “destiny of the righteous” (1996, 2009, 2011). Creach argues

that this organizing rubric for thinking about the theology of the Psalms provides a helpful category that encompasses other important theological themes, such as the kingship of the Lord, Zion theology (with its focus on the election of the Davidic king and Zion), and the Psalms as Torah. Brown diverged from Creach's original argument that the organizing center of the Psalms is the rubric of "refuge" by adding a second prominent metaphor: the Psalms as "pathway." "The Psalms . . . limn a *sanctuary movement* in every sense: the psalmist's sojourn to God and God's journey toward the psalmist. 'Pathway' and 'refuge' are the tectonic plates that give coherent shape to the Psalter's rugged landscape" (Brown 2002: 53; emphasis in original).

Similar to Brown, Brueggemann has argued for a polarity of terms as encompassing the theology of the Psalms. Building from an insight by Serene Jones, Brueggemann has argued that the juxtaposition of *incommensurability* and *mutuality* captures the I-thou relational matrix in which the Psalms do theology. This polarity of terms, according to Brueggemann, makes sense of how the various genres work theologically, shapes a community that prays and sings psalms, and captures the movement of the Psalter as canon.

The God of the Psalter is first and last an incommensurate sovereign who creates, redeems, and consummates. This is, nonetheless, a God whose incommensurability is interrupted, perforce, by the unsilenceable insistence of Israel's pain and indignity. In the end this is an incommensurability interrupted by YHWH's own willingness to be interrupted because this is a God unlike any other (2005: 599).

Spieckermann has also followed a "polarities" approach to the problem of a theology of the psalms. He argues that the presence of God's salvation (often in the midst of absence) is both the theological problem that drives the Psalter's theology and the answer to that problem. Even in becoming present, however, God remains God (Spieckermann 1989).

Nasuti has offered an insightful contribution to the conversation by focusing on the Psalms as divine-human encounter. In, with, and under the Psalms, the human and divine interact, one with the other. In this encounter, God characteristically takes the initiative, refusing to be an object, intentionally and personally interacting with the human. This encounter occurs in and is mediated by the faith community and is informed by the history of God's people. The only correct way of doing a theology of the Psalms is in the second person, the I-thou relationship, in which God's future breaks into the often-troubled present (Nasuti 2011: 27–48).

A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF THE PSALMS: THE LOVING FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD

My own approach to a Christian theology of the Psalms is to lean toward the key-concept approach. One virtue of this approach is that it not only describes the theology of the Psalms but also functions hermeneutically. The approach promises to draw out of the psalms themselves a theological lens that can aid in the interpretation of individual psalms and psalm texts. If there is such a concept in the Psalms themselves, and I believe there is, the concept will offer a fruitful theological point of reference that will aid readers as they seek to wrestle with the theological implications of the Psalms. This approach also has the virtue of not relying on speculative, “behind-the-text” historical reconstructions, especially regarding the stages of the Psalter’s formation.

In a word, the theological claim that the Psalms, in all their variety, assumes is: *The Lord is a God of loving faithfulness*.¹ “Loving faithfulness” renders the Hebrew word *hesed*, a term that stubbornly resists accurate translation in English. The term describes both God’s internal character and the fundamental characteristics of God’s external actions. This word may be the thickest, most theologically laden term in the entire Old Testament, as can be inferred from its leading place in the ancient, creedal fragment in Exodus 34:

The LORD passed before [Moses], and proclaimed,
 “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger,
 and abounding in loving faithfulness [*hesed*] and truthfulness,
 keeping loving faithfulness [*hesed*] to the thousandth generation,
 forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
 yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents
 upon the children and the children’s children,
 to the third and fourth generation.” (vv. 6–7)²

In this passage of divine self-disclosure the relational nature of *hesed* is underscored. Loving faithfulness describes the manner in which the Lord, true to the divine character, will be *in relationship*—forgiving, being gracious, staying faithful, being slow to anger, and yet maintaining the divine will for justice. Although lexical statistics make weak theological arguments, it is worth noting that over half of the occurrences of the term *hesed* in the Old Testament occur within the Psalter (130 out of 255). A small set of related terms that fall within the semantic field of “faithfulness” also plays important roles in charting the Psalter’s theological dimension: “truthfulness”/“fidelity” (*’emet*), “righteous”/“righteousness” (*šedākāh*), “salvation”/“deliverance” (*’yš’*), “mercy” (*reḥem*), “grace” (*hēn*), “justice” (*mišpāṭ*), “goodness” (*tôbāh*), and “faithfulness”/“trustworthiness” (*’emûnāh*).

THE LOVING FAITHFULNESS OF GOD AND THE GENRES OF THE PSALMS

The loving fidelity of the Lord is a working assumption of each genre featured in the Psalms, although the concept functions differently within the different genres. As the following explication should make clear (although only in passing), the concept also encompasses the other major theological issues and categories of the Psalter: Zion theology, the history of salvation, the kingship of the Lord, questions of theodicy, and the Psalms as Torah.

The Lord's Loving Faithfulness in the Hymns of Praise. Among the reasons or motivations for praise given in the hymns of praise, the LORD's faithfulness is the summary reason. Although many examples could be cited, a few will suffice:

Praise the LORD!
Give testimony to the LORD, for he is good;
 for his loving faithfulness endures forever! (106:1)

Give testimony to the LORD, for he is good;
 for his loving faithfulness endures forever! (107:1)

Praise the LORD, all you nations!
 Extol him, all you peoples!
 For his loving faithfulness is great unto us,
 and his truthfulness endures forever.
Praise the LORD! (117:1–2)

The hymns name two domains in which God's loving commitment can be experienced—creation and history. The first domain in which the Psalms testify to having experienced God's loving faithfulness is creation. In the words of Psalm 136, the Lord is the one who fashioned a trustworthy creation out of chaos: "who made the heavens through understanding, for his loving faithfulness endures forever" (136:5). The hymns testify that the Lord has created an orderly creation. The Lord has "set a boundary that [the forces of chaos] may not pass" (104:9a).³ Within this realm, order exists—the seasons have predictable patterns (104:19), daily life has trustworthy rhythms (vv. 22a–23), creation sustains life (vv. 14–18). A second domain in which the Lord's loving faithfulness has been disclosed is history—specifically the history of God's relationship with Israel.

It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
 for his loving faithfulness endures forever;
and rescued us from our foes,
 for his loving faithfulness endures forever. (136:23–24)

Three aspects of Israel's history receive special attention: (i) Israel's history with God was purely a matter of divine grace and forgiveness (106:7, 43–45; note here the Psalter's

theology of God's intervention in history); (ii) God's acts of election (of the ancestral figures, 105:9, and of David, 89 and 132 [note here the choice of Zion]); and (iii) God's consistent acts of power and deliverance (107). The hymns of praise, in sum, celebrate God's fidelity and relational trustworthiness.

The Lord's Loving Faithfulness and the Prayers for Help. If the hymns of praise offer testimony about God's trustworthy character and actions, the prayers for help cross-examine these claims in light of the personal pain and communal anguish that Israel often experienced—indeed, that all people experience. To be trustworthy, any truth claim must be allowed to be questioned—and this is especially true of divine truth claims. The basis for the prayers for help is twofold: people have experienced instances that seem inconsistent with faith in a faithful God, yet God is so trustworthy that God not only allows but invites challenges to and questions about God's fidelity.

Again, examples are many, but a few shall suffice. Psalm 89:50[49], which many see as a key verse in the editorial shape of the Psalter, may be the clearest example: "LORD, where is your loving faithfulness of old, which you swore to David by your truthfulness?" But others include: "Has God's loving faithfulness ceased forever? Are God's promises ended for all time?" (77:9[8]). "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (22:2[1]). "Why do you sleep, O Lord?" (44:24[23]). "How long, O LORD will you look on [but do nothing]?" (35:17).

If it is true that the complaint sections of the prayers for help are challenges to the confession of God's fidelity, it is no less true that the petitions of the prayers for help are based on hope in God's faithfulness. "Wondrously show your loving faithfulness, O savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries" (17:7). "Let your face shine upon your servant; in your loving faithfulness, save me!" (31:17[16]). "Do not, O LORD, withhold your mercy from me; let your loving faithfulness and your truth keep me safe forever" (40:12[11]). See also Psalms 25:6–7; 44:27[26]; 51:3[1]; 69:14[13]; and 109:36.

The prayers for help paradoxically challenge God's loving faithfulness yet rely on it as the basis both for the right to challenge God and for their hope that God will respond in loving fidelity. It is in this ambiguous reality—paradoxically both questioning and relying on the God's fidelity—that the prayers for help do theology. They suggest that doubt is a part of living with faith and that living with questions is part of the life of faith. And precisely in the experiences where God seems absent, the prayers for help invoke God and call on God's name—making God present at least in name, demanding God be present in action, asserting that God is present at least as the one who hears prayer.

The Lord's Loving Faithfulness and the Psalms of Trust. With many rich metaphors, the songs of trust realistically name the dangers that exist in life—"the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4), "evildoers who assail me to devour my flesh" (27:2), "the mountains [that] shake in the heart of the sea" (46:3[2]). With equally rich metaphors, these psalms also confess confidence in God's trustworthiness: the Lord "is my shepherd" (23:1), "my light and my salvation" (27:1), and "our refuge and strength" (26:1), to cite a few images. The reason given for such confidence in God is the Lord's faithful character. "Why do you boast of your evil, brave fellow? God's faithfulness never ceases.... But I am like a thriving olive tree in God's house; I trust in the faithfulness of God forever and ever"

(52:3, 10[1, 8]; NJPS). “[God] sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me—God sends forth his love and faithfulness. . . . Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. (57:4[3], 11b[10b]; NIV). “My God in his loving faithfulness will meet me; God will let me look down on those who slander me” (59:11[10]). And, again, examples could be multiplied. The psalmists who express trust bear witness to the Lord’s faithful character. These poems conceive of trust as a response to a promise from God. Beset by external difficulties, these poets do not muster their own internal courage but look outside of themselves for deliverance, to the Lord. And they express trust: “under his wings” and behind God’s “shield and buckler” (91:4) they find safety.

The Loving Faithfulness of the Lord and the Songs of Thanksgiving. As is widely recognized, the song of thanksgiving can be considered the outcome of the “vow to praise” found in the prayer for help. While in the midst of a crisis, the psalmist issues a “promise to praise” God once the crisis has passed. The song of praise is sung after the crisis has passed; it is the fulfillment of the promise to praise. It is not surprising, then, that the psalmists credit their deliverance from evil to the loving and faithful character of God. Psalm 40 begins “I waited and waited for the LORD,” who “drew me up from the desolate pit.” In two verses, the psalmist praises God for what God has done and who God is:

I have delivered good news of righteousness
in the great congregation,
I have not restrained my lips,
You know this, O LORD!
I have not hidden your righteousness in the midst of my heart,
I have reported your truthfulness and your salvation.
I have not concealed your loving faithfulness
or your fidelity from the great congregation. (vv. 10–11[9–10])

Note that deliverance from evil is seen as an instance of the Lord’s *hesed*. And the psalmist regards the psalm itself as similar to a “means of grace” through which the Lord’s loving faithfulness is made available to others: “I have not hidden your righteousness” and “I have not concealed your loving faithfulness.” In Psalm 18, the king reports how God delivered him from a crisis. “[God] has magnified the deliverance of his king; he has shown loving faithfulness to his anointed one, to David and to his offspring forever” (v. 51[50]). In Psalm 21, another royal song of trust, the king’s representative reports: “For the king has trusted in the LORD; / in the loving faithfulness of the Most High he shall not be shaken” (v. 8[7]). See also, for example, Psalm 32:11[10]; 66:19–20; and 92:3[2]. In Psalm 107 God’s loving faithfulness becomes the refrain around which the entire song is based. The psalm begins with the familiar cry: “Give testimony to the LORD, for he is good; for his loving faithfulness endures forever!” (v. 1). Then, at the end of each of the four stanzas, we hear: “Let them thank the LORD for his loving faithfulness, for his wonderful works to humanity” (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31).

The Lord’s Loving Faithfulness as a Hermeneutical Guide to Reading the Psalms. As noted above, one reason for preferring the key-concept approach is that if the approach successfully identifies a concept that the Psalms in all of their diversity assume, then the

concept can be employed fruitfully as a lens through which the Psalms can be read for theological meaning. It is my contention that *the loving faithfulness of the Lord* is just such a key concept. Some examples: When applied to the hymns of praise, the reader can explore the manifold expressions of praise and reasons for praise (e.g., history, creation, the institutions of Zion, kingship, people, and Torah) as manifestation of God's fidelity. Readers, in turn, can search their own experience and examine their own world for analogous experiences, institutions, and expressions. When brought to the prayers for help, the reader can enter with the psalmist into a painful crisis and question, challenge and probe the fidelity of God in their own or others' experience. Likewise, readers can join in appealing to God's fidelity as the basis of hope. In troubled times, the reader can find theological resonance in the confident metaphors of the psalms of trust—exploring those metaphors to test whether they resonate as genuine images of divine fidelity. With regard to the instructional psalms, readers can orient themselves to the instruction offered there as trustworthy instruction rather than as imposed restraints.

CONCLUSION

Conversation about the theological witness of the Psalter shall continue. Indeed, the conversation is just gathering steam. Those involved in the conversation already will continue to approach the subject from diverse perspectives and methods. At the same time, those already involved in the Christian theology of the Psalms are eager for new voices to join the conversation—especially voices from underrepresented communities, including the now majority of Christians who live south of the equator. In addition, as is the case with much of theology and biblical studies, the conversation is likely to grow increasingly more interdisciplinary and thus more complex. The Psalms are not purely the subject of study by Old Testament theologians. Historical theologians, pastoral theologians, and liturgical theologians have long worked deeply with the Psalms, as this volume demonstrates. For this reason, the theology of the Psalms is a subject that may be particularly ripe for investigation from interdisciplinary perspectives.

NOTES

1. See Jacobson 2011: 111–138; and Jacobson and Jacobson 2013: ch. 6.
2. See also Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Jer. 32:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8.
3. In the Psalms, as in the rest of the Old Testament and throughout ancient Near East literature, the waters and the sea are understood as the embodiment of chaos—as the physical form of disorderly powers that resist God's ordering creative powers.

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PART IX

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ANTHROPOLOGIES
OF THE PSALMS

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CHAPTER 35

ON “BEING HUMAN” IN THE PSALMS

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

THE book of Psalms does not provide a clear or formal taxonomy of “the human.” Rather we are offered glimpses and snippets of dramatic performance from which it is possible to deduce a more formal sketch, although such a sketch is, perforce, partial and subjective. The Psalter recognizes, in the midst of that dramatic performance, that the human person is complex, problematic, and wondrous. Consequently we expect not a sober reasonableness in its glimpses but rather a daring range of poetic extremities that witness to a risk-taking, subversive notion of humanness. On the one hand, the Psalm can celebrate the human as “next to God”:

What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor. (8:5–6[4–5])

On the other hand, the psalmist can ponder being “fearfully and wonderfully made,” formed and woven secretly by the creator (139:13–15). These references to “next to God” and “formed” from the “unformed substance” by God make clear that the human person is intimately and definitively linked to God, derived from God, a life lived before God, and answers back to God.

The human person, then, is ordained and authorized from the outset to be a dialogic partner with God in an interactive covenant that bestows both freedom and answerability (see Brueggemann 2009: 57–97). There is, to be sure, an *incommensurable* qualitative difference between God and the human creature, but there is also a defining *mutuality*, so that the relationship is always in process, as the human person in the dialogic interaction, is always being formed and reformed and reshaped in various covenantal transactions with God. The script of the Psalms may be understood as the way in which that dialogic transaction is performed, so that it reflects both the insistent intention of

creator God and the full range of rhetorical, worldly, and emotive extremities that properly belong to the human. Psalms study is largely defined by genre analysis, and we may take clearly characterized genres of poetry as a guide for the several themes that surface in this covenantal performance of the human.

1. The human person is constituted in *an act of praise*, an act of glad, exuberant yielding to another in wonder and awe. The hymn is among the most prominent of genres in the Psalter, a stylized acclamation that intends the elevation, magnification, and enhancement of YHWH, the God addressed in praise. The focus of doxology is on the one addressed, YHWH, of whom human persons in Israel never cease to sing and speak. The genre of doxology thus binds the human person to God in a practice of yielding submissiveness. As John Calvin understood so well, one cannot know well about the human person unless one knows about the God who is praised (1960: 35–39 [*Institutes* 1.1.1.1–3]).

The God of Israel's praise is celebrated for covenantal fidelity that is regularly formulated as "steadfast love and faithfulness" (as in 117:2). Such affirmation in such a community of praise is completely confident of God's fidelity; God is found to be reliable in every circumstance. On the one hand, Israel at praise celebrates the good, faithful, life-giving God of creation. This person affirms cosmic guarantees offered by God. It is this awareness that leads to the acclamation:

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of our creatures. (104:24)

It is this same awareness, moreover, that leads to acknowledgement of YHWH as the guarantor of the food chain (104:27–28; 145:15–16). And it is this same reliability that assures that the world is constituted in an equitable (predictable?) way that assures the rewarding of faithful human living, the assumption of wisdom teaching, as in Psalm 37.

On the other hand, Israel's praise concerns God's willing, effective intervention in historical crises to produce miracles and wonders of well-being and deliverance. Israel, thus, maintains a catalogue of miracles that it reiterates, as in Psalm 136, with each element attesting divine reliability. That catalogue is endlessly open, so that praising human beings in different times and circumstances can vary or supplement the list. It may be that the original doxology was a victory song (as in Exod. 15:20–21), but that manner of celebration can extend to many unexpected, inexplicable turns in human experience, variously saving, feeding, healing, forgiving, all wonders accomplished beyond human capacity (see 103:3–5).

The theological purpose of such doxology is to enhance YHWH. Thus YHWH's throne is "on the praises of Israel" (22:4[3]). The more exuberantly Israel sings, the more elevated is YHWH over other gods. And in the elevation of this God of order and rescue, the human adherents to this God are exalted as well.

The human person who engages in yielding doxology cedes the center and source and goal of one's life over to this other one. Thus praise is an effective, performative

acknowledgment that one's human life is rooted elsewhere and not in the self. As a consequence, the self is a relational self, dependent and reliant on gifts, wonders, miracles, and deliverances that one cannot generate for one's self. Such a praising person transgresses conventional modes of management and calculation in glad self-surrender with nothing held back. So exuberant is this yielding of self in gladness that the self summons the whole congregation to join in the doxology (22:23[22], 26[25]); and beyond that, the glad self requires (or at least hopes for) the active consent and participation of other peoples in this affirmation:

Praise the LORD, all you nations!
Extol him, all you peoples. (117:1)

And beyond other peoples, this praising human being imagines "all creatures of our God and king" ready to join the doxology:

Praise the LORD from the earth,
You sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!
Mountains and all hills,
Fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
Creeping things and flying birds!
(148:7-10)

This sketch of the human person refuses the temptation to self-sufficiency, self-actualization, and self-control. It is a subversive activity of a subversive, living, performing human person in contradiction to any tightly bound self. In contrast to such self-sufficiency, a doxological self dissolves in glad self-abandonment that, in the end, does not even have specific substance but is a wholesale act of glad self-giving to the other who is fully trusted. With Psalm 150, the Psalter ends in a quintessential song of a self dissolved in praise.

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
Praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clanging cymbals!
Let everything that breaths praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

This self is one whom Emmanuel Levinas characterizes as “infinite,” defined not by self-protective limits, but by the overflowing of an open self that corresponds to the overflowing of the agency of God for goodness (Levinas 1969).

2. The human person evidenced in the Psalms is one who *studies*, *worships*, and *obeys*. This person is a child of the Torah and is committed to continuing preoccupation with the Torah—the normative tradition of guidance, summons, and identity that is authorized by Moses. That preoccupation with the Torah is most clear in the Torah Psalms: 1, 19, 119. At the beginning of the Psalter, the one who is “happy” is enjoined to “meditate on the Torah day and night,” that is, to study it and to find in it a source of communion with God who gives and indwells the Torah. Thus this Torah-person continually refers back to Torah teaching to sustain a peculiar identity in the world as a member of the covenant and as a recipient of the power for life that is mediated by the Torah:

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
The decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the LORD is sure,
enduring forever;
The ordinances of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold,
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb. (19:8–11[7–10])

The study of the Torah is of a quite practical kind. It is not preoccupied with abstract or “rational” learning but concerns conduct in the world and behavior in the neighborhood. While the most extensive inventory of covenantal ethics is found in Job 31, the Psalms also provide guidance. In the two “entrance liturgies” of Psalms 15 and 24, the terms of admission to worship concern conduct in the community. That is, obedience to YHWH’s Torah concerns practicing neighborly responsibility:

Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
who do not slander with the tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up reproach against their neighbors;
in whose eyes the wicked are despised
but who honor those who fear the Lord;
who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

who do not lend money at interest,
 and do not take a bribe against the innocent. (15:2–5a)
 Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
 who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
 and do not swear deceitfully. (24:4)

The conduct commanded is for the enhancement of the neighborhood. The prohibited conduct is what will damage or disable the community. A fuller characterization of this ethic is given in Psalm 112, a sketch of "the righteous" (*ṣāddiq*), who act generously for the sake of the neighborhood.

"Righteousness" . . . is a notion concerned with relationship, and the man who meets the demands of a communal relationship is a "righteous" man. This communal relationship may be a civil or social one, but more often in the Old Testament refers to that relationship with Israel, which Yahweh has enshrined in his covenant (von Rad 1966: 248–49).

This Psalm of a "righteous" person is a match for God's "righteousness" in Psalm 111, where God is known to be a generative force for the neighborhood:

He provides food for those who fear him;
 he is ever mindful of his covenant.
 He has shown his people the power of his works,
 in giving them the heritage of the nations.
 The works of his hands are faithful and just;
 all his precepts are trustworthy. (111:5–7)

In the following psalm, the human person acts in ways that replicate or imitate the neighborly actions of God. As God has "sent redemption," so the righteous person is one who acts for the public good: dealing generously and lending, practicing justice, distributing freely, and giving to the poor (112:5–9). The Torah-based human person is engaged in distributive justice so that the have-nots in the community may prosper and be secure. It is affirmed in the Torah Psalms that those whose lives are preoccupied with Torah a) will devote energy and resources to the neighborhood, and b) will consequently prosper as a Torah-keepers:

Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
 the generation of the upright will be blessed.
 Wealth and riches are in their houses,
 and their righteousness endures forever. (112:2–3)

Study that nourishes obedience is matched by worship wherein one dwells in the presence of God via a cultic arrangement that is regularized and stylized (Ollenburger 1987; Lindstrom 1994). The temple in Jerusalem, eventually the locus of the Psalter, occupies a central place in the imagination of Israel as given in the Psalter. Thus

the Songs of Zion (46 and 84) affirm that the Jerusalem temple (and therefore the city) is a place of well-being and security because it is the place of divine habitation (Brueggemann 2005). The human person profiled in the Psalms has a hunger for the presence of God and gladly seizes opportunity to be in God's presence. The Psalms do not tell us about the "mechanics" of divine presence in the temple any more than any liturgy is able to tell us. It is, nonetheless, accepted that the temple is a place charged with God's presence. It is no wonder that the individual is enjoined to go there (122:1–2), to abide in the house of the Lord (23:6), a sanctuary from all the threats and anxieties of life.

Thus Psalms 42–43 (an original unity) voice a deep thirst for God that is to be satisfied only by temple access:

O send out your light and your truth;
 let them lead me;
 let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.
 Then I will go to the altar of God,
 to God of my exceeding joy;
 and I will praise you with the harp,
 O God, my God. (43:3–4)¹

The psalm speaks out of deep loss and disappointment; but also out of anticipation that the temple will offer a sojourn with God in gladness.

The temple was a place of offerings and sacrifices. Even after Psalm 51 concludes that God is not pleased with burnt offerings (51:18[16]), it concludes with a glad offer of sacrifice that functions as a means for full reconciliation and communion with God:

Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
 rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
 then you will delight in right sacrifices,
 in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
 then bulls will be offered on your altar. (51:20–21[18–19])

Worship is an opportunity for the reconstitution of the self in the presence of God as a child of Torah and a member of covenant. Psalm 73 may be divided into two parts. Verses 2–16 narrate a life that has almost "fallen out" of covenantal reality. And verses 18–28 characterize a life fully resituated in confidence and commitment to YHWH. The Psalm pivots on verse 17 where the Psalmist declares: "until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end." The verse attests that life is completely reordered, a recovery from the seductions of continuing disobedience in the first half of the psalm.

These two acts, variously voiced in the Psalms, characterize covenantal practice as *obedience to Torah* and *communion in temple*. While Torah and temple express the poles of Israel's religious life (and no doubt witness to some tension between the two), in the completed Psalter it is clearly a both/and, not an either/or. The interface of Torah study (from the tradition of Moses) and temple worship (from the tradition

of David and Solomon) provides a rich discipline and practice of life with God that sustains and nourishes a peculiar identity. It is possible to see that temple (life with God) and Torah (life with the neighbor) concern precisely "love of God" and "love of neighbor," both of which are essential for this human agent. Or cast in Christian liturgical terms, the twinned accents are on "word and sacrament," the word as instruction, testimony, and interpretation (all of which belong to Torah study) and the sacrament as a pre-rational mode of presence that mediates new life to the practitioner.

3. The human person given us in the Psalter is an assertive *complaining hoper* (see Westermann 1981; Gerstenberger 1980). The genre of lament–complaint–protest occurs frequently enough in the book of Psalms to suggest that the capacity and willingness to voice trouble in the presence of God (and in the midst of the community) is a major mark of faithful humanness. The genre exhibits a recurring pattern of speech that bespeaks a certain kind of covenantal performance as quintessentially human.

The human person as complainer is ready for courageous candor, unwilling to practice restraint or deference, even in God's presence. Thus, it is the work of the complainer to describe in precise detail the nature of the trouble to which God is summoned to attend. Very often the trouble concerns social isolation and disregard, although it may also reflect sickness or any other form of social dislocation. The willingness to tell the truth in some detail discloses the way in which this Jewish construal of the human and this Jewish practice of candor are important antecedents to Freud's delineation of repression and the multi-layer, conflicted complexity of human personality. Israel in its candor describes social dismay:

O LORD, how many are my foes!
 Many are rising up against me;
 many are saying to me,
 "There is no help for you in God." (3:2–3[1–2])
 [S]ave me from all my pursuers,
 and deliver me,
 Or like a lion they will tear me apart;
 they will drag me away, with on one to rescue. (7:2–3[1–2])
 They close their hearts to pity;
 with their mouths they speak arrogantly.
 They track me down; now they surround me;
 they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.
 They are like a lion eager to tear,
 Like a young lion lurking in ambush. (17:10–12)

Such extremity leads to physical, emotional disability that evokes the rhetoric of death:

I am weary with my moaning;
 every night I flood my bed with tears;

I drench my couch with my weeping.
 My eyes waste away because of grief;
 they grow weak because of all my foes. . . .
 (6:7–8[6–7]; see 22:15–16[14–15])

Such candor can lead to an accusation against God, who has been unfaithful on the assumption that when God is faithful, such trouble would be held in abeyance:

Yet you have rejected us and abased us,
 and you have not gone out with our armies.
 You made us turn back from our foe,
 and our enemies have gotten spoil.
 You have made us like sheep for slaughter,
 and have scattered us among the nations.
 (44:10–12[9–11]; see 13:1–2; 22:1)

The faithful complainer is variously entitled to deliverance, so that there is no groveling before God. Because the complainer is a member of the covenant with YHWH, this speaker has certain rights before God. It is for that reason that the speaker can voice petitions to God that amount to imperatives. The reason imperatives can be addressed to God is that God has made promises of fidelity; God is now summoned to keep those promises in the face of trouble:

Consider and answer me, O LORD, my God!
 Give light to my eyes. (13:4[3])
 Rise up, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand;
 do not forget the oppressed. . . .
 Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers;
 seek out their wickedness until you find none. (10:12, 15)
 But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
 O my help, come quickly to my aid!
 Deliver my soul from the sword,
 My life from the power of the dog!
 Save me from the mouth of the lion! (22:20–22a[19–21a])

That entitlement permits the speaker to be daringly assertive, not only accusing God of infidelity, but speaking vengeance against the “enemy” who has perpetrated the trouble that is under discussion (Zenger 1996). There is, in this sketch, no embarrassment about a wish for vengeance, so convinced is the covenant member of the legitimacy of the claim:

O God, break their teeth in their mouths;
 tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!
 Let them vanish like water that runs away;
 like grass let them be trodden down and wither.
 Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime;
 like the untimely birth that never sees the sun. (58:7–9[6–8]).²

The assertiveness grounded in covenantal entitlement goes so far as to compel God to act, because it is in God's self-interest to act. Thus the speaker asserts that his or her well-being matters to God and to God's honor. Without the speaker God will be diminished:

Do you work wonders for the dead?
 Do the shades rise up to praise you?
 Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
 or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
 Are your wonders known in the darkness,
 or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness? (88:11–13[10–12])³

The candor, entitlement, and assertiveness converge so that the complaint is in fact an act of expectation, a deep hope that God will act, that God can be moved and persuaded to act. And when God acts, all will be well. Thus the capacity to complain and protest is itself a conviction that the present trouble, variously described, is unbearable and cannot last, and that it is in God's self-interest to act to transform the circumstance of the speaker.

In this often repeated act the human person emerges as one who has broken out of any rigid shell of deference and who has broken beyond any sense of self-sufficiency. The very act of speaking in this way evidences a human agent capable of daring freedom, who takes responsibility for life and who has become an active agent in his or her own history, unwilling to remain fated in any circumstance. It is this speaker who takes initiative, who summons God, and who insists upon the legitimacy of self-declaration, never doubting that the speech is appropriate. Thus the speaker is emboldened in a demanding interaction with God, confident that God can and will be moved to act.

In Psalm 30 this complaining hoper is on full display. The psalmist declares a context of social equilibrium (v. 7[6]). That equilibrium, however, is abruptly violated, and the speaker is plunged into dismay. The speaker, moreover, has no doubt that it is God's reneging that has evoked the crisis (v. 8[7]). The speaker turns to God in a demanding prayer (vv. 9–10[8–9]). The prayer is dominated by imperatives and by the rhetorical questions in v. 10[9] that press God to consider what is at stake for God in this crisis. At risk is the credibility of God's faithfulness and God's reception of praise. If God does not rescue, all will be lost for God. The petitions of verse 11[10] yield the responses of verses 12–13[11–12], ending in thanks. But it is the speaker who has taken the initiative and who has pressed God to act. The unspoken assumption of this poem, and many like it, is that the human agent must initiate the process whereby life can be transformed at God's behest. The speaker of such hope-filled protest performs the entire repertoire of covenantal fidelity, trusting in divine fidelity and raising issues about divine infidelity. Here the dialogic character of the human person is fully exhibited.

4. The human person in the Psalms is a *forgiven sinner*. This motif is, admittedly, not a major one in the Psalter. But because of the covenantal stipulations implied in Psalm 1 (and many times thereafter), Israel knows that violation of the commandments is a reality in human life. Such disobedience—variously styled as “sin, transgression, iniquity”—generates alienation from God and makes the violator subject to covenantal sanctions. While there are psalms that detail the requirements of covenant as we have

seen in Psalms 15, 24, and 112, there is no detailed inventory of sins committed. The focus rather is on alienation from God because of disobedience:

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
 and I did not hide my iniquity;
 I said, "I will confess my transgression to the LORD." (32:5)
 Blot out my transgressions.
 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 and cleanse me from my sin.
 For I know my transgressions,
 and my sin is ever before me. (51:3b–6[1b–3]; see 130:3)

The accent, however, is not on transgression and violation but on God's readiness to forgive. It is only required of the "sinner" that the violation be acknowledged, and God promptly forgives. The Psalms employ a full range of terms for forgiveness that reflects both priestly-sacramental and juridical categories:

You forgave the iniquity of your people;
 you pardoned all their sin. (85:3[2]; see 32:1; 130:4)

The person who speaks in the Psalms is aware of transgression. That same person, however, is more fully and confidently aware of God's readiness for pardon and reconciliation. Indeed, God's readiness to reconstitute the relationship issues in a wondrous doxology for those who have moved through sin and confession and on to a new life of covenantal well-being:

Bless the LORD . . .
 who forgives all your iniquity,
 who heals all your diseases,
 who redeems your life from the Pit,
 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
 who satisfies you with good as long as you live. . . . (103:2–5)

Forgiveness belongs to the inventory of YHWH's ready acts of transformative generosity, and this human person lives in that assuring awareness.

5. The human person in the Psalms who embraces the wondrous life-giving order of the creator, who experiences rescue from all sorts of trouble, and who knows about forgiveness and reconciliation is *a practitioner of thanksgiving* (Guthrie 1981). The characteristic mark of covenantal existence is gratitude for the gifts of life from God that overwhelm and that run beyond human capacity to generate or explain. Israel identifies the gifts of God that evoke gratitude. Thus in Psalm 107 we are offered four case studies of divine deliverance concerning desert wandering (vv. 4–9), imprisonment (vv. 10–16), sickness (vv. 17–22), and a storm at sea (vv. 23–32). In each case, Israel responds to God's powerful deliverance:

Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind. (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31)

The mantra holds together thanks, God's steadfastness, and the phrase "wonderful works" (miracles) that are beyond human reckoning. Israel is overwhelmed by God's capacity and readiness to make newness that Israel cannot make for itself.

In the third case of deliverance, rescue from sickness (vv. 17–22), the mantra of thanks is extended and made explicit:

And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. (v. 22)

Thanks issues in "thanksgiving sacrifices" that are accompanied by a narrative retelling of the miracle. Thus gratitude is given material, public enactment. The grateful person is to perform gratitude in the midst of the congregation (v. 32). The material response to God's action is definitional for this human person, an acknowledgement to God that is credible in and for the community:

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
and call upon the name of the LORD.
I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,
in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD! (116:17–19)

The thank offering is contrasted with other sacrifices that more likely functioned in a quid pro quo way (vv. 8–13). It is a spontaneous act of generosity toward God that corresponds to the constituting generosity of God (50:14, 23).

6. The psalmic person regularly performs the drama of covenantal relationship that runs from initial praise and obedience through complaint, petition, and confession to thanks for a new life in the world in a community defined by its commitment to God and God's intention. In each step along the way in this drama of covenantal existence, human life is defined with reference to the life of God. Thus,

Praise is addressed to God,
Obedience is to God's commands,
Complaint and petition are addressed to God,
Confession concerns sin against God, and
Thanksgiving is offered to God.

There is no part of this performed drama of humanness in which God is not the key agent and defining factor. And because this God of covenant has an intense eye on the well-being of the community (and eventually the world), life with God is nonnegotiable life with the neighbor.

As a result, this human person lives *through time with God and neighbor* and knows that life in the present is well situated between *memory and hope*. Such a person regularly recites the inventory of the community as it remembers divine miracles of deliverance and creation. This defining memory is summarized in the “historical psalms,” which offer a stylized recital of the past (78, 105, 106, 136; Brueggemann 1991). These particular psalms exhibit the various ways in which the recital may impinge upon the present. Thus in Psalm 78 the memory is tilted toward a new political reality in the regime of David, so that faith is drawn close to public life. In Psalm 105, the purpose of the recital is resolved obedience that culminates in glad doxology, thus obedience and praise: “that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the LORD!” (v. 45). In Psalm 106, conversely, the recital issues in a petition that God would save Israel from its own self-destructiveness (v. 47). And in Psalm 136 the entire memory is cast as a sustained exhibit of divine fidelity: “O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever” (v. 26).

Although the “historical psalms” are not matched by such an explicit inventory of hope, it is clear that the psalmist not only imagines back into the communal past but also imagines into the future of the community. Thus the psalmist cares about and anticipates on behalf of those who will come after:

...and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it. (22:32[31])

I would have been untrue to the circle of our children. (73:15)

We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell to the coming generation...
That the next generation might know then,
the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God. (78:4, 6–7; see 79:13; 89:2[1])

The psalmist knows that he or she does not live an isolated life in an isolated moment but is a part of a great company that will continue in its praise of God and its reliance on God.

Memory and hope are both situated within the wonder of God. This remembrance and anticipation impinge upon the present of the psalmist, both as reassurance and as summons to make the present a time of intentional obedience to God’s commandments.

7. I have traced the performed self of the human person in the Psalms according to the major genres of the literature. From that sketch two important conclusions may be drawn. First, the self in the Psalms is a *dialogic person*, always engaged with and standing before God (Buber 1965: 209–24). This God-given capacity for such dialogical engagement that constitutes life requires an agility in faith and in practice, as well as an awareness that the God before whom life is lived is also a dialogic agent, unlike the idols who are settled into immobilized passivity (Psalm 115). The psalmist is capable of emotional

extremities that run from praise and thanks to complaint, anger, and disappointment. Such a person finds, moreover, that the God from whom and toward whom life is lived is correspondingly a dialogic agent who receives praise and thanks but who also attends to and answers protesting petitions, even when they are cast as accusations. The Psalms thus provide a script for a performed life of interactive engagement that reaches the extremities of agony and ecstasy, that takes seriously both the reality of God and of the neighbor.

Second, it follows that this delineation of human personhood as dialogic agent is profoundly subversive of other models of personhood that are continually offered.

- The practice of praise subverts every self-sufficiency and self-congratulation;
- The practice of covenantal obedience eschews every notion of autonomy;
- The capacity for protest, petition, and complaint moves against every pious temptation to excessive deference;
- The readiness to confess sin rejects every romantic notion of innocence and the capacity to will the good in innocent ways;
- The mandate to thanksgiving protests against the notion of being self-made;
- The habit of remembering and hoping denies a self that is contextless and outside of particular history.

This dialogic characterization is, on the one hand, contrasted with and resistant to the self-sufficient, autonomous self featured in Enlightenment rationality and expressed in the possibility of technological mastery that leads to a disassociated life without communal context or grounding.

On the other hand, the dialogical self also subverts the common "religious" temptation to be a passive, deferential recipient of whatever God metes out, a self that is modeled in Job's friends who have reduced all of life to a quid pro quo, or in Ecclesiastes, a self that has settled for a fixed fate without any freedom in willing a future.

Against both the prospects of autonomy and abdication, the dialogical self of the Psalms embraces a life of responsible freedom, neighborly engagement, yielding gratitude, and lively obedience with an intense assertion of self in the presence of the partner. The practice of the Psalter, when done with intentionality, is indeed a subversive act that refuses the seductive models of the world and that commits to an alternative that is congruent with YHWH, who is steadfast in transformative power and in rigorous demands of obedience. The pilgrimage of such a self is from the bottom-line obedience to Torah (as in Psalm 1) to the self-abandoning doxology of Psalm 150, a pilgrimage that is endlessly demanding in obedience, gladly engaging in freedom, and devoted to uncompromising candor.

NOTES

1. See also Pss. 27:4–5; 36:8–10[7–9]; 63:4–6[3–5].
2. See also Pss. 17:3–4; 28:4; 55:16[15].
3. See also Pss. 74:18; 77:9–10[8–9].

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CHAPTER 36

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

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PSALMS addresses the anthropological question concerning what it means to be human perhaps more frequently and profoundly than any other biblical book. Many have observed that Psalm 8 takes on the question directly (“What are human beings that you are mindful of them?” Ps. 8:5[4]) and offers crucially important insights concerning the nature and identity of the human (see Mays 1994a: 511–20; Miller 2007: 226–36). This psalm presents the human much like Genesis 1–2, as one made in the image of God and given special authority on earth as God’s representative. More basic to the fabric of the Psalter, however, is the concern for how human beings stand in relation to God in terms of two categories: righteous (*ṣaddiq*) and wicked (*rāšāʿ*). In this chapter I explore this language and what it means for the Psalms’ notion of the human being. I suggest that these terms are the basic categories for the Psalter’s presentation of the human before God (for full discussion, see Creach 2008; Levin 1993: 355–81). As such, the terms righteous and wicked present readers of the Psalter with a call to identify with God and with a particular way of life that God desires.

To think of the human in these terms is difficult for many people because the words “righteous” and “wicked” have all but fallen out of the vocabulary of contemporary religious discourse in most communities of faith. This is no doubt due to the fact that these words are often associated with narrow, legalistic expressions of faith. But such associations are based on misunderstandings of the language. The term *ṣaddiq* (“righteous”) in the Psalms refers to those who depend on God for protection (34:7[6]), those who plead to God for forgiveness (38:19[18]), and those who worship God in humility (17:15). Such persons are not morally pure, nor do they consider themselves so; rather, they call on and align themselves with the righteousness of God (5:9[8]). It should be noted further that those called righteous in the Psalms do not so designate themselves. The label is always in the third person and essentially presents a divine perspective.

The stance of the righteous before God sets them apart from the wicked. While the righteous praise God (33:1) and pray to God when in trouble (37:39–40), the wicked

“flatter themselves” (36:3a[2a]) and seek to advance their own cause at any cost. “Greedy for gain,” the wicked “curse and renounce the Lord” (10:3). This difference between the righteous and the wicked in turn produces ways of life that are diametrically opposed to each other. The wicked are oppressive and violent and take advantage of the righteous. The righteous are often powerless before the wicked and therefore seek God’s mercy and justice (Psalm 143). These characteristics of the righteous suggest that the word *ṣaddîq* is virtually synonymous with the terms *‘ānî* (“poor”), *dal* (“oppressed”), and *‘ebyôn* (“needy”). Psalms 9 and 10, to cite but one example, place these words alongside each other in extended descriptions of those who are at the mercy of the wicked (10:7–18; see also Amos 2:6–8). The fact that the righteous rely on God in such circumstances suggests further they should be identified by the terms *yāšār* (“upright”; Ps. 73:1) and *‘ebed* (“servant”; 90:13, 16). As Mays states, the righteous relate to God as a servant to a king who is their lord (1994b: 27). Indeed, in the face of opposition and hardship the righteous rely on the reign of God for their security and future.

RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED AS PRIMARY CATEGORIES

The notion that the categories “righteous” and “wicked” are primary in the Psalter is supported by the sheer frequency of the language in the book. The Psalter begins with a psalm that sets forth the life of the righteous over against the wicked (1:1–3) and then declares what the end will be like for both groups: the wicked will be swept away in judgment while the righteous are kept in God’s care (vv. 4–6). In the psalms that follow the concern for the righteous does not diminish. The term *ṣaddîq* and its plural form *ṣaddîqîm* occur fifty-two times in the Psalms. Only Proverbs uses the term more often (sixty-six times). The word “upright” (*yāšār*) appears twenty-five times, more often in the Psalms than any other book. In all, the terms noted above that describe the righteous appear 125 times in the Psalter. Furthermore, the term *rāšā’* and its plural *rēšā’îm*, which signify those who oppress and persecute the righteous, appear eighty-two times in the Psalter, far more frequently than any other book of the Hebrew Bible.

The impressive number of occurrences of this terminology alone makes it hard to escape the crucial role the righteous and wicked play in the Psalter. But the interest in the righteous and their future is even more pervasive than this vocabulary indicates. The righteous appear repeatedly in the Psalter in the voices of those who pray. Or put another way, the prayers in the Psalter that call out to God for help are the prayers of those the Psalms call righteous. When this is recognized, it might well be concluded that the words righteous and wicked are the main designations for human beings in the Psalms.¹ The two labels therefore represent ways of being faithful to God or standing against God’s way in the world, respectively.

THE RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED AND THE SHAPE OF THE PSALTER

The central role of the righteous and wicked in the Psalms is also suggested by and made more understandable through the literary structure or “shape” of the Psalter (see Wilson 1985; McCann 1993; Mays 1987:3–12; Howard 2005: 23–40; Miller 2003: 87–90). Psalms 1 and 2, which form the Psalter’s dual introduction, are united by an interest in the two ways one can choose in life—the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Psalm 1:1 begins with the declaration, “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked.” The psalm then depicts the righteous as those who meditate on and delight in torah (v. 2) and whose future is secure because the righteous are grounded in divine instruction (v. 3). Psalm 1 ends by contrasting the destinies of the righteous and the wicked: “the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (v. 6).

Although it does not use the terms “righteous” and “wicked,” Psalm 2 vis-à-vis Psalm 1 addresses the subject implicitly by presenting two paths in life that assume these categories. It has often been noted that Psalms 1 and 2 share vocabulary that links them to each other and perhaps even indicates that Psalm 2 was edited to bring it in line thematically with Psalm 1 (Creach 1996: 77–79). The lexemes shared between the two psalms in nearly every case serve to contrast those who go the way of God and those who oppose that way. For example, while the righteous in Psalm 1 “meditate” on the Lord’s torah (1:2), the nations in Psalm 2 “meditate” on plans to thwart the work of God (2:1, both verses using the verb *hāgâ*). In Psalm 1 the “way” (*derek*) of the righteous is observed and rewarded by the Lord, but the way of the wicked will “perish” (*ābad*; 1:6). Similarly, in Psalm 2 those who oppose the Lord and the Lord’s anointed will “perish in the way” (*tō’bēdû derek*; 2:12). Perhaps the most obvious link between the two psalms is the word *āšrē* (“happy”), which creates a literary envelope around both psalms (1:1; 2:12). This term characterizes the righteous as those who enjoy God’s favor (and are thus “happy” or “fortunate”), and it sets them apart from the wicked who know only God’s wrath (see McCann 1996: 666–67; 2005: 340–48).

The final statement in Psalm 2 summarizes the character and future of the righteous, even as it warns the rebellious nations of the way they should go: “Happy are all who take refuge in him” (2:12d). While this statement enhances the connection between Psalms 1 and 2, it also points forward to the description of the righteous as those who “take refuge” in the Lord, a common designation throughout the Psalter (Creach 1996: 74–77). Hence, as Psalms 1 and 2 invite the reader into the book, they present the character of the righteous as an example to follow and the problem of the destiny of the righteous as something to ponder (Miller 1993: 85).

The language Psalm 2 shares with Psalm 1 gives a particular cast to the wicked: it brings the wicked under the rubric of “enemies.” (Miller 1993: 88–89). Hence, the two introductory psalms suggest that the identity of the righteous and the wicked in the

Psalter is both individual and corporate.² The righteous represent unnamed individuals who suffer (Psalm 1) *and* Israel suffering under its enemies (Psalm 2). The wicked, likewise, are both those who oppress the poor and the nations that oppress Israel. As Psalms 3 and the following will show, this dual identity of the righteous and their plight is borne out in the Psalter's portrait of the person of David.

Psalm 3 is set "when he (David) fled from his son Absalom." The most outstanding feature of David in Psalm 3 is not his power or influence. Rather, the picture is of one who cries out to God when beset by enemies. As Mays says, David's name in Psalm 3 and elsewhere "does not so much claim the psalms as the voice of a king as it identifies him, in the psalms that are claimed for David, with the lowly" (1994b:123).

The psalm opens with recognition of being overwhelmed by adversaries ("O LORD, how many are my foes!" v. 2[1]) and records the taunt of the enemy ("There is no help for you in God"; v. 3[2]). The word "many" appears three times in the first two verses to denote the dire circumstances ("how many are my foes" [*rabbû*], v. 2a[1a]; "many are rising against me" [*rabbîm*], v. 2b[1b]; "many are saying" [*rabbîm*] v. 3[2]). The consensus of those who oppose the anointed, as it were, is that "there is no help for you in God" (v. 3[2]). And yet David confesses, contrary to his foes' claim that God cannot help him, that "you, O LORD, are a shield around me" (v. 4[3]).

David's dependence on God is evident in Psalm 3. In the face of enemies rising (*qāmîm*) against him (v. 2b[1b]), he calls on God to "rise up" (*qûmâ*) and deliver (v. 8a[7a]). Matching the threefold reference to the "many" foes, Psalm 3 uses the word *yěšû'âtâ* ("deliverance," "salvation," or "help") three times to confess that God alone can deliver (vv. 3[2], 8a[7a], 9[8]). The three appearances of the term have a sequence that drives home this point. The adversaries taunt that there is no "help" in God (v. 3[2]); David cries for God to "help" or "deliver" (v. 8a[7a]); then at the close of the psalm he confesses that "deliverance" belongs to God (v. 9[8]). Psalm 3 thus presents David as representative of those who confess to being "poor and needy" (see 40:18[17]) (Mays 1994: 123). In other words, David is counted among the righteous who suffer at the hands of the wicked.

The concern for the welfare of the righteous also appears prominently in psalms that conclude Books I and II of the Psalter.³ The psalm at the end of Book I emphasizes the character and destiny of the righteous in ways much like Psalms 1 and 2. Psalm 41 begins with the word "happy" (*ʾāšrê*), the same term that appears at the beginning of Psalm 1 and at the end of Psalm 2. Therefore, as McCann has observed, all of Book I is framed by an interest in the human situation, particularly in what characterizes human happiness (2005: 340–48). Psalm 41 focuses on the concern for the righteous specifically in the attention it pays to those who "consider the poor" (v. 2[1]). Hence, Book I ends just as the Psalter began, with an expression of faith that God watches over the righteous and ensures their destiny.

Psalm 41 is also like the psalms at the beginning of the Psalter in that it seems to identify the king as both the model of righteousness and the defender of the righteous. Although the person identified here is not called "king" explicitly, that identification makes sense in light of the characterization of the person as one who considers the

poor.⁴ If Psalm 41 indeed has the king in mind, he is presented here like the anointed in Psalm 2: he is the earthly expression of divine justice and protection.

Psalm 72 concludes Book II with a prayer for the monarch that focuses on the ruler's care for the righteous much like Psalm 41 concludes Book I. Psalm 72 introduces the king as one who is to "judge your people with righteousness, and your poor (*'ānî*) with justice" (v. 2). Verses 12–14 presents the monarch's supreme concern for the poor most explicitly: he "delivers the needy" (v. 12), "has pity on the weak and needy," and "saves the lives of the needy" (v. 13). Verse 14 includes perhaps the strongest statement about the king's care for the righteous. It says the king redeems their lives "from oppression and violence." He "has pity" on them (v. 13), and "precious is their blood in his sight" (v. 14). The righteous, in other words, are not a distant concern of the king's administration; indeed, their needs are his first concern. Moreover, the fact that the king's actions on behalf of the righteous are characterized as "redemption" (v. 14) suggests the king identifies with the righteous as a near kinsman (Ruth 3:13; 4:4, 6; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 216).

Books I and II both end with psalms that portray the ruler as one whose primary concern is the welfare of the righteous. But the final psalms in Books I and II are not the only sign of concern for the righteous. Indeed, both books end with a cluster of psalms that highlight this concern and perhaps even show signs of intentional shaping around it. At the end of Book II three other psalms address the righteous and their destiny. Psalm 69 is a prayer for deliverance uttered by one of the righteous. The pray-er petitions God that the wicked "be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous" (v. 29[28]). Then the psalmist confesses to being "lowly" (*'ānî*, v. 30[29]) and in need of divine protection. The one who prays promises to offer true praise, that is, praise greater than mere sacrifice (vv. 31–32[30–31]). The brief psalm that follows concludes with the declaration, "But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD do not delay!" (70:6[5]). Psalm 71 continues this confession before the final psalm in Book II that, as already noted, presents the character of the king who defends the righteous.

The end of Book I features a pair of psalms that contain language and theological concerns remarkably similar to the psalms at the end of Book II. The similarities are made quite striking by the fact that the words of Psalm 70 appear as Psalm 40:14–18[13–17]. Because of the doublet, the psalmist confesses to being "poor and needy" at a penultimate place in Book I just as in Book II (40:18[17]; 70:6[5]). The focus on the righteous at the end of Books I and II, however, is more extensive than merely the repetition of Psalm 70. In the first half of Psalm 40 the psalmist speaks of a scroll that records the character of the righteous: "Then I said, 'Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written concerning me that my delight is to do the will of my God; indeed, your instruction is in my inward parts' (my translation; vv. 8–9[7–8]). The "scroll of the book" here likely refers to a document in which the names of the righteous are recorded so they can be duly rewarded.⁵ It has a close parallel in 69:29[28] that wishes for the wicked to be blotted out of God's book. Furthermore, 40:7[6] contrasts the psalmist's delight in God with burnt offering and sin offering in a way very similar to 69:32[31].

Hence, the repetition of Psalm 70 as 40:14–18[13–17] generates a set of parallels, all of which draw attention to the piety and plight of the righteous. Because Psalm 70 was likely borrowed to form the present ending of Psalm 40, it is possible to argue that the end of Books I and II were shaped to enhance the reader's view of the character and future of the righteous (Braulik 1975: 197–201). But even if the endings of Books I and II were not formed for this purpose editorially, the common focus on the righteous and the wicked in these two portions of the Psalter is unmistakable.

One may observe similar emphases in subsequent divisions of the Psalter. The following observations represent a sample of the prominence of concern for the righteous in the rest of the Psalms: Psalms 107 and 145, which frame Book V, highlight God's goodness to the righteous, for whom God extends *hesed* or "steadfast love."⁶ In Book V God's steadfast love to the righteous is a central subject. The term appears six times in Psalm 107 (vv. 1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 43); it appears in the first and last verses of the psalm and in a fourfold refrain that structures the poem (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). *Hesed* is also prominent in Psalm 145 in a declaration that "The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (v. 8). Psalms 107 and 145 likewise declare God's care for the righteous and provision for a secure future. Psalm 107 emphasizes throughout that God cares for those in distress (e.g., v. 9 declares that God "satisfies the thirsty" and "fills the hungry"), and verses 41–42 casts such care in terms of the destiny of the righteous: "But he raises up the needy out of distress, / and makes their families like flocks. The upright see it and are glad; / and all wickedness stops its mouth." In a similar way Psalm 145:19–20 states, "He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; / he also hears their cry, and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him, / but all the wicked he will destroy."

Hence, Book V begins and ends with promises that God will make the righteous flourish and bring the wicked to an end. Moreover, before the five psalms that conclude the Psalter give way to pure praise, they state again the concern for the righteous. Psalm 146:9 declares, "The LORD watches over the strangers; / he upholds the orphans and the widow, / but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE REIGN OF GOD

One point that emerges from this sketch of the righteous and the wicked in the Psalter is that the righteous claim faith in the reign of God as their ultimate source of security (Mays 1994b: 12–22). For example, in Psalm 5, which contains the first occurrence of the label *melek* ("king") for God in the Psalter, the psalmist invokes God's kingship as part of a plea for deliverance from the wicked. The psalmist calls on God with confidence that God's just rule does not permit wickedness to prevail (v. 5[4]) and that the Lord, as a beneficent monarch, spreads protection over the righteous (vv. 13–14[12–13]).

It is also important to note that the pronouncement *Yhwh mālak* ("the LORD reigns") occurs most frequently in a portion of the Psalter that was edited to address the problem of the righteous and wicked on a large, corporate scale.⁷ Book IV (90–106) wrestles with the fact that the righteous people, Israel, have suffered defeat and exile. Book IV

responds to that circumstance with the continued affirmation that “the LORD reigns” (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; Wilson 1985: 214–28). In other words, the affirmation that “the LORD reigns” is offered amid circumstances that would seem to indicate otherwise, circumstances centered on the situation of the righteous vis-à-vis the wicked.

The Psalter’s concern for the righteous also puts into perspective three other topics sometimes associated with the reign of God: the king, Mount Zion, and Torah. Each of these three subjects represents a tangible sign of God’s sovereignty and as such an “embodied hope” of the righteous (Creach 2008: 86–149).⁸

It has already been noted that David appears in the Psalter as both a righteous sufferer and as defender of the righteous. He suffers at the hands of the wicked and cries out to God for help (Psalm 3). But as the Lord’s anointed (2:2b), David is also the monarch who represents the heavenly king on earth. His main charge is to ensure justice for the “poor” (see Psalms 72 and 101). Hence, the king—David—at least in his ideally presented role is for the righteous a primary sign on earth that God’s order of justice and righteousness are at work for their sake. Mount Zion, on which the earthly king is enthroned and from which God’s reign is shown to the world, is the particular place on earth the righteous experience God’s presence and protection. Zion is thus the place the righteous long to be (Psalms 42–43).

Torah is the source of life and blessing on which the righteous “meditate day and night” (1:2). As a result, the righteous are made secure, “like trees planted by streams of water” (1:3; see Creach 1999: 34–46). Torah is the “polity of the reign of God” and, as such, it is the ultimate hope for the righteous.

THE RIGHTEOUS AS THOSE WHO PRAY AND PRAISE GOD

The survey of the appearance of the righteous and the wicked in the Psalter also reveals that the basic act of prayer distinguishes the righteous from the wicked. It indicates their dependence on God, which is perhaps the key feature of the profile of the righteous. In prayer the righteous recognize that they are “poor and needy” and seek God’s protection and care. Indeed, prayer distinguishes the righteous, who know they need God’s salvation, from the wicked, who think they are self-sufficient.

The prayer in Psalm 131 is a prime example of how the righteous call out to God in humility and trust. The psalm consists of two sections. Verses 1–2 contain the prayer itself. In these verses the psalmist expresses complete reliance on God. Verse 3 then urges this dependence on God upon all Israel. Verses 1–2 express a childlike faith that summarizes what it means to depend on God:

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high;
 I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.
 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother;
 my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. (vv. 1–2)

Narrative and prophetic traditions in the Old Testament characterize those with “heart raised” and “eyes lifted” as presumptuous toward God (2 Chron. 32:25). Ezekiel 28 goes so far as to suggest one who lives in this way is pretending to be God (vv. 2, 5, 17; Mays 1994c: 408). But the one who speaks Psalm 131 knows well that only God is God and that God’s protective presence is needed more than anything else in life.

The psalmist here speaks like Job who, in his final speech confesses that his charge against God was uttered in ignorance (Miller 1994: 240–41):

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me,
which I did not know. (Job 42:3)

Job has struggled with and protested his circumstances. But Job trusts in God and confesses that God’s ways are ultimately a mystery to humans. So also the speaker of Psalm 131 is not occupied “with things too great and too marvelous for me.” As the psalmist attests in verse 2, the one who prays in Psalm 131 has become like a child before God (Matt. 18:1–5; Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48).

Prayer also functions for the righteous as an avenue into God’s presence, the seeking of which acknowledges reliance on God. Mays states, “To ‘call on the name of God’ is to place oneself in his presence. The prayer describes the self, presents the self to God in all its weakness and need” (1994b: 41). Indeed, as the prayer in 27:4 indicates, the presence of God is the “one thing” the righteous person seeks after, and prayer is the primary avenue to that presence.

The Psalter refers to one act of prayer specifically as a feature of the activity of the righteous. The righteous’ “chief end” is, simply, praise.⁹ Praise is presented as the activity of the righteous most plainly at the end of Psalm 32 (vv. 10–11) and at the beginning of Psalm 33 (vv. 1–3). Psalm 32 is one of the so-called penitential psalms. The psalm alternates between proclamation of the benefits of God’s forgiveness (vv. 1–2, 10), instruction in the ways of penitence and faith (vv. 8–9, 11), and testimony by one who has approached God in confession of sin and now knows God’s mercy (vv. 3–7). The psalm ends with two verses that give assurance to the righteous of God’s protective care and of the certain end of the wicked:

Many are the pangs of the wicked;
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD
Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart. (vv. 10–11)

Psalm 33 begins the same way Psalm 32 ends, with a call for the righteous to praise God:

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous.
Praise befits the upright. (v. 1)

These two psalms suggest, therefore, that praise can only be uttered by the righteous, by those who acknowledge that the Lord reigns. Two other crucial points follow this understanding of praise. First, the righteous not only utter praise, they also are “at

home” in the place praise is offered and worship takes place. As noted already, the Psalter uses various images to portray the place of the righteous in the temple and in the presence of God. They take refuge under the cover of God’s “wings” (17:8; 57:1; 63:8[7]) and desire to “live” in the house of the LORD forever (23:6). The righteous are “rooted” in the house of God: “The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD, they flourish in the courts of God” (92:12–13).

Second, praise cannot be limited to what is traditionally considered “worship.” Rather, praise is the sum of the righteous’ *activity* as well. Indeed, to come before God in praise means to live as though God rules the world. Psalm 24 zeroes in on the actions of the righteous and makes clear that action is inextricably connected to the verbal expression of praise (similarly Psalm 15). Indeed, Psalms 32 and 33 specifically link right action with praising God in worship. Praise is action, and right action is praise.

Psalm 24 begins with a statement that is much like the one in Psalm 33:5 (“the steadfast love of the LORD fills the earth”): “The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it” (v. 1). God is in control of the world. The following question about who may ascend the “holy hill” is really a question of who acknowledges this fact, of who is able to praise God. The answer that follows describes certain behaviors. On close examination, however, it is clear that the characteristics of those permitted to enter the holy place are not so much requirements to participate in worship as characteristics of those who do worship “in spirit and in truth.” Indeed, the necessary holiness of those allowed to ascend the holy mountain is cast in comprehensive terms that will not allow a narrow legalistic understanding of human righteousness. Psalm 24:4 answers the question of who is worthy to be in God’s presence with two sweeping statements. The first half of the verse says the righteous have “clean hands and pure hearts” (v. 4a). Hand and heart refer to exterior acts and inner motivation (Kraus 1988: 314).¹⁰ The verse suggests that compliance with the letter of the law must also be accompanied by proper attention to the spirit of the law. In the pairing of these two aspects of righteousness, the psalm is like the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21–48). The righteous have “clean hands” because they have “pure hearts.”

Although the second half of Psalm 24:4 fills out the profile of righteous activity with descriptions of deeds that are easily compared to Old Testament commands, verse 4b also gives a comprehensive cast to righteous obedience, obedience ultimately grounded in relationship with God. This portion of the verse makes two statements about the righteous: they do not “lift up their souls to what is false” and they do not “swear deceitfully.” Swearing deceitfully refers to faithfulness in dealing with one’s neighbor. The same language of “deceit” appears in Hosea 12:8 and Micah 6:11 to refer to the false weights that dishonest merchants used to cheat their customers. Hence, “swear deceitfully” implies taking advantage of a neighbor by dishonest means. The language is thus sweeping, referring to the overall obligation to act rightly—to be fair and just—towards others. “Lift up their souls to what is false” is more oblique. Nevertheless, it seems to point to comprehensive right action toward God. The same

terms translated “lift up” (*nāśā*) and “false” (*šāw*) appear in the Decalogue: “You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God” (NJPS; Exod. 20:7). The word “false” in some other texts refers to idols (Ps. 31:7; Jer. 18:5). Thus, this portion of Psalm 24:4 could intend to say that the righteous do not “lift up their souls” (that is, bow down in worship) to other gods. Regardless of the exact intention, it seems clear that the description of the righteous as those who do not “lift up their souls to what is false” is of one who is faithful in all ways to God (Mays 1994c: 121).

Like the Decalogue, this psalm presents right relationships in two categories: one must be right with God and with one’s neighbor. Also like the Ten Commandments, Psalm 24 portrays the right actions of the righteous as actions that arise from a “pure heart.” Indeed, just as the commandments conclude with a requirement of the heart (“do not covet;” Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21), so Psalm 24:4 introduces the requirements for righteousness as a matter of internal purity.¹¹ Together, Psalm 24 and the Decalogue suggest that ethics begins with dependence on God, not on adherence to a legal code. The order of these two dimensions of righteousness is essential for understanding the activity of the righteous. Their right action is always based on and grows out of relationship; righteousness can never be obtained in the abstract. The characterization of the righteous in relationship to God and neighbor also shows that the righteous are those who are not focused primarily on themselves and their own desires. Rather, they are open to God and God’s reign, on the one hand, and open to the needs of others, to the well-being of the community, on the other hand. This openness to instruction from God and to the needs of others separates them from the wicked, who are most concerned about their own possessions and power.

It should also be noted that the profile of the righteous and the wicked in the Psalter helps make sense of two often misunderstood aspects of prayer. First, the psalmist’s frequent protestation of innocence makes sense as the cry of the righteous when accused by the wicked (7:4–6[3–5]; 17:1). Second, the psalms of imprecation are more understandable as the cries of those who are helpless before forces opposed to God. These two types of prayer enhance the Psalter’s portrait of the righteous: they rely completely on God, particularly as they seek God for deliverance from violence and injustice.

CONCLUSION

The book of Psalms places humankind in two primary categories, the righteous and the wicked. The Psalter distinguishes between the two groups mainly in terms of whether they recognize the reign of God and depend upon God’s reign. The wicked refuse to acknowledge God’s sovereignty and act out of self-interest. The righteous, by contrast, live humbly before God and approach others with proper humility and acts of justice.

It is worth noting that at least one early Christian community seems to have told the story of Jesus' passion against the backdrop of the Psalter's focus on the righteous as a basic category of the human being. According to Luke 23:47, at the death of Jesus the centurion beneath the cross "praised God and said, 'Truly this man was righteous'" (my translation). Here the centurion uses a Greek term (*dikaïos*) that is equivalent to the Hebrew *šaddiq*. When Jesus later explains to his disciples that his suffering, death, and resurrection were foretold "in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24:44), it is likely that the suffering of the anointed in the Psalms is standing in the background. Indeed, in Acts 2 Peter appeals to the suffering of David in the Psalms and to God's vindication of David to explain the suffering and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:25–36; Moessner 1998: 215–32). In other words, the author of Luke–Acts paints a picture of Jesus as one who suffers like the righteous in the Psalms. Jesus' destiny—his resurrection and continued presence with God—is understood as patterned after that of the righteous in the Psalter, particularly as the righteous are represented by the anointed one of God, David. It was largely because of this connection to the righteous in the Psalms that the church saw the Psalms as a work of theological gravity and, hence, an "abiding theological witness" to Jesus Christ.¹²

NOTES

1. As Patrick D. Miller notes concerning the righteous and the wicked, "how these two groups act, the way they go—whether one means their path of life or their ultimate fate—is very much the subject matter of the psalms" (1993: 85).
2. This dual identity of the righteous is quite apparent in the many psalms that are spoken by an individual but include invitations for the people. Psalms 129, 130, and 131 are parade examples (Becker 1967: 22–24, 41–68).
3. Gerald H. Wilson argues that psalms at the breaks between collections often show signs of editorial intentionality (1986: 85–94).
4. For a different interpretation of the psalm and its setting, see Gerstenberger 1988: 174–77.
5. The book is like the "book of remembrance" in Malachi 3:16–18 (see also Exod. 32:32–33; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5).
6. Note that the question of God's *hesed* ("steadfast love") to his anointed was raised in 89:50[49] and addressed in 90:14; 92:3[2]; 103:4, 17; 106:1, 45.
7. See the concern for the future of the righteous in, e.g., 92:9[8], 14–15[13–14]; 101:8; 103:6.
8. For the conception of king, Zion, and Torah as the "embodied hope" of the righteous, I am indebted to Walter Brueggemann's characterization of Israel's "embodied testimony" (1997: 567–704).
9. According to Westminster Confession of the Reformed Tradition, praise is the "chief and highest end of humanity" (*The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.: Part I: Book of Confessions*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999: 7.001 and 7.111).
10. For a different perspective on this language see Briggs 1903: 1.215, who understands each term in v. 4 to refer to inner purity.
11. On the significance of the First Commandment for internal purity, see Miller 2004: 45–60.
12. The expression "abiding theological witness" and its implication for understanding the Psalms as scripture is borrowed from Seitz 1998: 3–12, 61–74.

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PART X

PRACTICING
THE PSALMS

CHAPTER 37

THE PSALMS IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

KIMBERLY BRACKEN LONG

THE Psalter has been called Israel's songbook and the church's prayer book, even the prayer book of Jesus. Since the earliest days of the church, Christians have sung psalms as part of worship on the Lord's Day. As liturgies developed in both the Eastern and Western churches, psalms remained a crucial element. Monastics and other religious have long sung psalms daily as part of praying the hours. Martin Luther based many of his hymns on psalms, and John Calvin became the most ardent advocate of psalm singing among the Reformers. Calvin professed that singing the psalms as part of public prayer stirs the hearts of worshippers and impels them to pray in similar ways. Singing with ardor, he was convinced, enabled people to give more fully thanks and praise to God. He insisted that people sing the psalms in the vernacular so that they could participate actively, together, and was convinced that metrical psalmody best enabled them to do so (Calvin 2006 [1960]: 2.III.30.31–33, pp. 894–96). Jeremy Begbie further explains Calvin's insistence on psalm singing by underscoring the importance of music. "More than anything else Calvin highlights its [music's] emotional, affective power. When turned into song, Psalms are grasped with a heightened intensity, the conjunction of word and music linking mind and emotion in an especially potent way" (2007: 107).

Psalms were heard less often as other forms of song emerged in Christian worship. With the eighteenth century came the controversial innovations of Isaac Watts. John and Charles Wesley soon followed suit with their huge output of hymns. The nineteenth century saw the rise of gospel songs from evangelists such as Moody and Sankey and Fanny Crosby, whose hymns were about the intimate relationship between Jesus and the believer. Thomas Dorsey introduced blues to gospel music in the 1920s, and soon congregations were singing spirituals and gospel songs along with the classics of post-Reformation hymnody. Beginning in the 1970s, new musical forms were popularized by the Christian contemporary music movement, and modern hymn writers from a wide swath of traditions produced new hymns reflecting the concerns of the day. As a

result, the biblical psalms were sung much less frequently, often relegated to responsive readings or used in snippets at the opening of services.

In more recent decades, however, there has been an upsurge of interest in psalms. Among churches influenced by Vatican II and the subsequent liturgical renewal movement, the Revised Common Lectionary has become widespread, resulting in a greater number of communities including the reading or singing of psalms in worship. With all of the genres and forms available to Christian congregations, and the easy access to new music provided by a range of media, the use of psalms—and especially the singing of psalms—has seen a marked increase in the latter part of the 20th and early part of the twentieth-first century. Churches now have available to them psalm settings in a range of musical styles from chant to bluegrass, provided by established Roman Catholic and Protestant publishers, as well as by smaller resource groups and individual composers. With such a breadth of resources, churches are discovering new ways of incorporating the Psalms into liturgical celebrations through prayer, singing, and proclamation. It is not only the growth of musical resources that feeds this movement, however, but also the compelling nature of the psalms themselves that makes them meaningful for contemporary Christians.

PRAYING THE PSALMS IN WORSHIP

The Psalms as a School of Prayer. Christians have long considered the Psalms a school for prayer. The biblical poetry of the Psalter gives worshippers language to express the whole human condition before God in words that God provides. In this way, the Psalms are understood as both Scripture and liturgy. As Scripture, the Psalms proclaim the character of God, comfort the sorrowful, and urge God's people toward praise. As liturgy, the Psalms loosen the tongues of worshippers that they may give voice not only to praise and thanksgiving, but also to complaint, lament, and supplication. Praying Psalm 9, for example, enables believers to give thanks and praise to God while describing the character of God: "I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; / I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. . . . The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble" (vv. 2[1], 10[9]).

Certainly the Psalms provide language for praise. Overt expressions of praise such as Psalm 146 give worshippers words to express the inexpressible: "Praise the LORD, O my soul! / I will praise the LORD as long as I live; / I will sing praises to my God all my life long" (vv. 1–2). Psalm 95 not only forms speech; it instructs in the ways of worship: "O come, let us sing to the LORD; / let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! . . . let us worship and bow down, / let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! . . . O that today you would listen to his voice! / Do not harden your hearts" (95: 1, 6, 7b–8a). In simple strokes, the psalmist incites worshippers to praise and thanksgiving, humble adoration, and a posture of listening when in the presence of God.

Other psalms describe praise that goes beyond human speech:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
yet their voices goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world. (19:2–5[1–4])

It takes a poet to express such praise; the psalmist gives us exquisite language for prayer.

The quintessential confession of sin, Psalm 51, forms a basis for all other prayers of confession. The psalmist's prayer is humble yet forthright, acknowledging sin yet also pointing to the merciful character of God: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; / according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions" (v. 3[1]). The psalmist expresses confidence in God's willingness to forgive; rather than confessing specific misdeeds he describes the human propensity to transgress and asks for cleansing, restoration, and renewal. "Create in me a clean heart, O God," sings the psalmist, "and put anew and right spirit within me" (v. 12[10]). Here, again, these words of Scripture not only supply speech worthy to be addressed to the divine, but teach us the pattern and content of confession.

In his cries for divine help, the psalmist provides further counsel in the ways of prayer. "Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, / from the grasp of the unjust and cruel," he prays and then continues to declare his trust in God. "Upon you I have leaned from my birth; / it was you who took me from my mother's womb. / My praise is continually of you" (71: 4, 6). Psalms of supplication often include expressions of confidence in divine help, thereby teaching those who would pray the Psalms that in beseeching God one remembers the sovereign's faithfulness and depends on God's trustworthy character.

Yet not all of the psalmist's prayers of supplication include a remembrance of God's goodness; some are forthright and relentless. "Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me," the psalmist demands, "fight against those who fight against me! . . . How long, O LORD, will you look on? / Rescue me from their ravages, my life from the lions" (35:1, 17). Even though the psalmist promises to thank God for deliverance in the future, in the present he persists in crying out, "Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defense!" (v. 23a) That such direct, even demanding, language is included in Scripture, teaches all who would pray the psalms that God allows, and even invites, such honest speech. By praying the Psalms, particularly in corporate worship, Christians are schooled in the ways of prayer.

Voicing Every Human Emotion. Not only do the Psalms teach us to pray; they also lend language that expresses the emotional depths of the human condition. John Calvin called the Psalter "an anatomy of all the parts of the soul," for it reflects every human experience and emotion: joy, despair, confidence, doubt, gratitude, rage, fear, and awe (Calvin 1949: 1.xxxvii). The Psalter is full of joyful expressions of thanks and praise.

Psalm 138, to cite just one example, begins in gratitude for God's faithfulness: "I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise. . . . On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul" (vv. 1, 3). Yet the Psalter also contains expressions of more somber human emotions. Despair pours out with every word of the first ten verses of Psalm 77:

You keep my eyelids from closing;
 I am so troubled that I cannot speak. . . .
 "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?
 Has his steadfast love ceased forever?
 Are his promises at an end for all time?
 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
 Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" (vv. 5[4], 8–10[7–9])

The heart of Psalm 6 describes grief with poignancy:

I am weary with my moaning;
 every night I flood my bed with tears;
 I drench my couch with my weeping.
 My eyes waste away because of grief;
 they grow weak because of all my foes. (vv. 7–8[6–7])

The psalmist's pleas in Psalm 13 express deep pain before expressing hope in God's salvation: "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? / How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, / and have sorrow in my heart all day long?" (13:2–3a[1–2a]).

Even cries of vengeance have a place in the Psalter, signaling to worshippers that prayer is a sturdy enough vehicle for even the most destructive human impulse and that God is ready to hear even the harshest, most passionate outburst. "Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!" (137:9), cries the psalmist, enraged over Israel's exile. It may be difficult for worshippers to imagine ever praying such words. Yet should a suffering believer find herself experiencing such depths of emotion, the words of this psalm are available to her, as well as the knowledge that others have prayed these words before her and, in a sense, with her.

Praying with, and for, One Another. In corporate worship, those who pray the psalms sometimes find themselves uttering words that do not reflect their own inner state. They may be called upon to sing songs of praise while feeling bereft or to utter a lament when their hearts are brimming with joy and thanksgiving. It is especially at those times that worshippers are aware that they pray not as individuals but as part of the greater body. Christians learn to pray not only for themselves but for others through words that have been voiced by believers through the centuries. In so doing, they remember the suffering of other believers who cry out to God in dire circumstances and stand with them in their distress. Likewise, other voices carry on outbursts of praise when the suffering cannot do it for themselves. Through the psalms, the body of Christ prays as one. Individual believers are drawn out of praying only for their own concerns and, indeed, learn a language of prayer that takes them beyond the range of their own experience.

Forming Christians for Justice. To rail against injustice with the psalmic language is not only to complain to God but to pray for the coming of God's own justice. The community that speaks or chants the words of Psalm 44 expresses both complaint and hope: "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O LORD? / Awake, do not cast us off forever! / Why do you hide your face? / Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? / For we sink down to the dust; / our bodies cling to the ground. / Rise up, come to our help. / Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love" (vv. 24–27[23–26]). A contemporary paraphrase of Psalm 73 includes a sung refrain in which the people ask, "Why do the powerful have it so good?" (Donaldson 2012: 454). The psalmist enables those who would speak the psalm to confess envy of "the arrogant," to question the success of those in power, and even to admit to feelings of bitterness, before confessing utmost trust in God. Psalm 82 paints a picture of what is right through words ascribed to God: "Give justice to the weak and the orphan; / maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. / Rescue the weak and the needy; / deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (vv. 3–4). Such words express the people's desire for justice while at the same time instructing them in what is right, forming them for doing justice in the world.

Shaping God's People for Gratitude. "I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness," declares the psalmist, "and sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High" (7:18[17]). "Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones," the psalmist urges any who would hear, "and give thanks to his holy name" (30:5[4]). Such thanksgiving erupts in gratitude for God's saving, healing actions:

You have turned my mourning into dancing;
 you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
 so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
 O LORD, my God, I will give thanks to you forever. (vv. 12–13[11–12])

Even while they plead for mercy in the midst of great suffering, the people of God trust in God's righteousness, declaring, "Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; / from generation to generation we will recount your praise" (79:12–13). The Psalms provide the church with language for praise and thanksgiving, enabling people to give voice to gratitude that is deeper than even their most beautiful words can express: "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; / for his steadfast love endures forever. / Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD, / or declare all his praise?" (106:1–2). Indeed, the whole Psalter crescendos in praise, as expressions of thanksgiving tumble forth in the climactic final chapters. Surely, those who pray the Psalms learn the language of gratitude.

Anticipating the Reign of God. Even in the midst of the present world's injustices and sufferings, the psalmist gives the people the language to describe the coming reign of God and the sort of ruler God is. The creator who fashioned the world is sovereign over all creation (136:4–9), judges the earth and rules the nations (82:8), and does so with equity (67:5[4]). Victorious over all enemies, God corrects every injustice, releasing captives and quelling oppressors. God's reign is one of goodness, mercy, and steadfast love, enduring forever. To pray the Psalms is to proclaim this coming reign of justice and peace; to sing of God's coming reign is to sustain all people in hope.

WAYS OF SPEAKING AND SINGING PSALMS

For centuries, Christians have been singing and speaking the Psalms as part of corporate worship. Incorporating multiple ways of speaking the Psalms may enable assemblies to more fully apprehend the depth and layers of meaning of the texts. At times, a single voice may most effectively express the psalm text; for example, the intimate language of Psalm 139 (“For it was you who formed my inward parts; / you knit me together in my mother’s womb” [v. 13]) lends itself to one speaker. In other cases, a chorus of voices may better declaim the psalmist’s words. One can imagine the exuberant Psalm 148 spoken with enthusiasm by a rehearsed group of voices (vv. 1–6) punctuated with single voices who instruct the earth and all that is in it to praise God (vv. 7–12), ending with a joyful choral exclamation.

The psalms also lend themselves to congregational reading, often done antiphonally (where two halves of the assembly alternate verses) or responsorially (where a lector and the congregation alternate verses). Hymnals and prayer books often contain psalms that are laid out for this sort of reading. In recent years, psalm collections have been published that enable a psalm to be read by a leader while the congregation responds with a musical refrain that punctuates the verses at regular intervals.

The earliest sung form of psalmody, chant, is still heard in churches today and performed in a variety of ways. Psalms may be chanted in unison by an entire assembly. Alternatively, a cantor or small ensemble may chant the verses and then invite the assembly to sing a melodic refrain at specified points throughout the psalm. Such refrains can be found in a wide range of American musical styles such as folk, jazz, gospel, and blues as well as musical idioms from around the globe.

Metrical psalms also allow the entire congregation to participate in psalm singing. Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin were among the earliest proponents of this form, which allowed congregations to sing paraphrases of psalms to singable, memorable tunes. Contemporary hymn writers and composers continue to draw on the Psalms, creating both psalm-based hymn texts and psalm paraphrases (for resources, see Witvliet 2007).

PSALMS IN THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY

In churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, a psalm is appointed for each Lord’s Day, or Sunday, and for every holy day in the Christian year. To allow congregations to hear a broad range of Scripture over time, the lectionary is arranged in a three-year cycle (Years A, B, and C). In this system of readings, four texts are recommended for use in worship: one from the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures), one from

the Psalms, one from the Epistles, and one from the Gospels. The psalm for the day is chosen as a response to the first reading, which is usually from the Old Testament.

It is important to note that there are two tracks of readings during the season after Pentecost. The complementary track assigns Old Testament and Epistle readings according to their relation to the day's gospel text. The semi-continuous track allows churches to read through Old Testament books over a period of weeks, which means that those readings will be different from the ones assigned in the complementary track. The epistle and gospel readings are the same in both tracks. The Psalms, however, will be different in each track, as they are chosen in all cases to respond to the first reading.

Not all of the one hundred fifty psalms are included in the Revised Common Lectionary. To use the full range of the Psalter, as described above, worship planners might consider additional ways to incorporate other psalms. This is discussed further in the next section.

Among churches that use the appointed readings of the Revised Common Lectionary, some consider the Psalms only as a prayerful response to the first reading, and therefore not appropriate for preaching. Other ecclesial communities, however, particularly those from the Reformed tradition, regard the Psalms as both prayer and proclamation and therefore contend that they are worthy texts for preaching.

THE USE OF PSALMS THROUGHOUT THE LITURGY

In the previous section the Psalms were considered part of the proclamation of Scripture. Congregations may, however, hear or voice the Psalms all throughout a service of worship. Certain psalm verses are traditionally spoken as opening sentences, either responsively or by one person. The *Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) includes, for example, several psalms to be used at the beginning of worship, such as 118:24 ("This is the day the LORD has made; / let us rejoice and be glad in it") or from 95:1, 2 ("O come, let us sing to the LORD / and shout with joy to the rock of our salvation! / Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving, / singing joyful songs of praise") (1993: 49). (One may note that the language is very close to that of the NRSV, but is adapted slightly for liturgical use. In some cases, the language of the Psalms is also adjusted to minimize the use of male pronouns for God. See the final section, below, for a brief discussion of inclusive language and the Psalms.)

Psalms may also be used to confess sin to God and to assure worshippers of God's forgiveness. The quintessential confessional psalm, Psalm 51, serves as a model for prayers of confession, for it frankly expresses human guilt and weakness, acknowledges people's need for God, and voices confidence in the faithfulness of God to

forgive and restore. Psalm 51 appears in numerous settings and musical styles, making it possible for congregations to sing portions or paraphrases of the psalm as well as speak it aloud. Similarly, Psalm 130 may be spoken or sung to both ask for and profess faith in God's forgiveness. "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, / LORD, who could stand?" the psalmist asks rhetorically. "But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered" (vv. 3–4).

Psalms may sometimes be used to call people to prayer. "Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD" begins Psalm 134. "Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the LORD" (v. 2). And, because the psalms *are* prayers, they provide language for the prayers of contemporary worshippers. One of the clearest examples of this is a text by Carl Daw, based on Psalm 143:

Hear my prayer, O God, and listen to my plea;
faithful, righteous One, give ear and answer me.
Judge me not, I pray; no merit dare I claim;
knowing my own faults, I trust in your just Name. (Daw 2012: 143A)

The songs of the Taizé community often employ the psalms, offering the church a whole body of sung prayer. The words of Psalm 62, for example, are the basis for the song "In You Our Hearts Find Rest" (Taizé 1998: 96). The congregation sings a refrain, "In you our hearts find rest and peaceful gladness," while a cantor sings verses taken from the psalm that address both God and the people. The song may be sung in its entirety, or a refrain such as this one might be used as a response to a series of spoken intercessions.

Psalms have long been part of the church's sacramental liturgies as well. In his detailed study, *The Psalms in Christian Worship*, John Alexander Lamb describes how psalms were used in baptismal, Eucharistic, and occasional services in the East and West (1962). While some of these practices have waned, others remain, at least in official worship books. Reformed churches, for instance, historically sang words from Psalm 103 after celebrating the sacrament of communion: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, / and all that is within me, bless his holy name. / Bless the LORD, O my soul, / and do not forget all his benefits" (103:1–2). Indeed, at any time that calls for words of praise, worshippers can turn to the Psalms for words that express the inexpressible.

PSALMS AS THE BASIS FOR SPOKEN LITURGY

Historically, Scripture has served as the basis for liturgy, spoken and sung. In the twenty-first century, those parts of the church whose worship is governed by authoritative liturgies can still make that claim. In some free churches, such as many African American churches, phrases from Scripture provide a good deal of the unwritten

liturgy. Other churches, however, particularly those assemblies in which the language of worship leans toward everyday, even slang, speech would be well served to reclaim the language of Scripture as the basis for what is spoken and sung. Much has been sacrificed in the name of creativity and accessibility. As Ronald J. Byars points out, the church cannot simply substitute secular words, images, and metaphors for those found in Scripture and expect them to express the same thing. “Forming a biblical consciousness,” he explains, “requires learning biblical language. Upon repeated exposure, biblical language, like poetic language, has a way of sneaking over, under, and around our various defenses” (Byars 2008: 4). It is necessary to use biblical language in worship, for the meaning of words like “grace” or “resurrection” are not entirely translatable into other speech. Worshippers learn the language of faith over a lifetime, primarily through biblical speech; the Psalms are a chief source for the words and images that shape Christian consciousness.

Often psalms are quoted directly, or closely paraphrased, in liturgy. As noted above, psalms of praise are frequently used at the opening of worship, and confessional psalms provide the language of repentance. The poetry of the psalms may also be used to assure worshippers of God’s forgiveness. One can hear an echo of Psalm 103:17 in this declaration: “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting.” Presiders may invite worshippers to the Eucharistic table by exclaiming, “O taste and see that the LORD is good” (34:9[8]). Psalmic imagery also finds its way into both the written and extemporaneous prayers that are part of Christian worship. Consider the well-known Psalm 23, for example, a rich source of images for prayer. The images and metaphors of shepherd and sheep, dark valleys, banquets, and anointing are easily incorporated into the church’s prayer language.

THE PSALMS IN OCCASIONAL LITURGIES

This article has considered primarily the use of the Psalms in Lord’s Day, or Sunday worship. The Psalms may also play a part in the liturgies of healing services, occasional services (such as weddings and funerals), and daily prayer. Psalm 6, which the NRSV labels as “Prayer for Recovery from Grave Illness,” offers language for those who come together to pray for healing. To say “Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; / O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror” (v. 3[2]) is to pray with those who have suffered over the centuries, thereby joining them with the faith of all who have called upon God for comfort and relief. The words of Psalm 22 give those who suffer language that baldly describes what it is like to be in distress: “I am poured out like water, / and all my bones are out of joint; / my heart is like wax; / it is melted within my breast; / my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, / and my tongue sticks to my jaws; / you lay me in the dust of death” (vv. 15–16[14–15]). The church must not shy away from using such vivid biblical poetry, for it gives language to those who may be too sick and tired to form their own prayers.

Other psalms affirm God's healing presence and engender hope. Psalm 63 begins, "O God, you are my God, I seek you, / my soul thirsts for you; / my flesh faints for you, / as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (v. 2[1]). Yet the psalm continues,

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me. (vv. 6–9[5–8])

The psalms offer songs of lament and comfort; both are required for those in need of healing.

Several psalms are among the various passages of Scripture that are particularly appropriate for weddings. Certainly psalms of praise, such as Psalms 95 and 100, sing out the joy of such an occasion, giving thanks and praise to God. The benedictory words of Psalm 67 take on a particular poignancy when spoken as a part of nuptials: "May God be gracious to us and bless us, / and make his face to shine upon us" (67:2[1]). Psalm 136 is an almost riotous outburst of thankful praise, with its repeated refrain, which makes it, too, especially fitting for weddings:

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
O give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever. (vv. 1–5)

The psalm continues in this way, telling the long history of God and Israel; even a portion of the psalm, however—say, vv. 1–9 and 26—lends a celebratory and grateful tone to marriage liturgies.

Certainly the psalms are a mainstay of Christian funeral liturgies. It is not uncommon to hear whole congregations recite, or sing, the comforting and uplifting words of Psalm 23. Psalm 121 is also often intoned, with its reminder that "My help comes from the LORD, / who made heaven and earth" (v. 2) and its assurance that "The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in / from this time on and forevermore" (v. 8). Psalm 46 is frequently heard as well: "God is our refuge and strength, / a very present help in trouble" (v. 2[1]), offering comfort in the midst of distress. "LORD, you have been our dwelling place in all generations," begins Psalm 90, reminding us of the brevity and fragility of human life, and beseeches God to

“teach us to count our days / that we may gain a wise heart” (vv. 1, 12). Psalm 103 also includes a reminder of human mortality, while pointing to “the steadfast love of the LORD” that “is from everlasting to everlasting” (v. 17). The assurance of the intimacy of God’s knowledge of us that is found in Psalm 139 comes as a particular comfort at the time of death, as the psalmist expresses his own knowledge of the constant presence and faithfulness of God.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND THE LITURGICAL USE OF PSALMS

Those who are concerned with inclusivity in liturgical language often struggle with the language of the Psalms. The frequent use of “LORD” and the prevalence of royal terms (“king” and “kingdom” foremost among them) make an inclusive rendering of the Psalms particularly difficult. In recent decades, however, several attempts have been made at doing just that. The Psalter included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006), for instance, uses inclusive language for humanity and limits the use of pronouns when referring to God, while retaining traditional names and images for God.

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CHAPTER 38

PREACHING PSALMS

THOMAS G. LONG

THE Psalter forms a deep, multifaceted, and fruitful resource for preaching, and preaching on the psalms has a long and notable heritage. Augustine loved to preach on the Psalms, and in his extensive preaching career delivered sermons on every one of the 150 psalms. Luther wrote that the Psalter “might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible” (*LW* 35: 254). Calvin, too, preached frequently on the Psalter and said in his commentary that “there is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this religious exercise” (1947: 24).

But despite the longstanding practice of Psalter preaching, the idea that psalms should be preached at all is by no means a unanimously held opinion. Some liturgical and homiletical scholars have claimed that the Psalms are certainly fertile texts for liturgy, but they are simply the wrong genre to serve as sermon texts. The argument is that psalms are liturgical poems, essentially hymns and prayers and, thus, words spoken by worshippers *to* God rather than oracles *from* God or words *about* God. As such, the Psalms should be prayed and sung but not preached.

This argument breaks down, however, at a number of points. First, the Psalms are not, in fact, purely prayer speech directed toward God. The Psalter includes examples of divine address (e.g., Psalm 82), ethical injunction (e.g., Psalm 1), historical recital (e.g., Psalm 78), liturgical instruction (e.g., Psalm 150), theological affirmation and reflection (e.g., Psalm 91), and other themes and tropes. Second, even when the Psalms are framed as prayers or songs, they are still permeated by theological claims, ideas, promises, and questions that constitute rich material for preaching. Psalm 42, for example, is a prayer, but it also contains powerful images of the life of faith (“As a deer longs for slowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.”) and reflection on theological ideas such as the complex nature of hope in moments of despair (“Why are you cast down, O my soul? . . . Hope in God, for I shall again praise him”). Like some theologically rich and often-preached New Testament texts that are themselves

hymns and prayers—for example, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), the canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1:67–79), the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus (Matt. 26:36–46), and the Christ hymn in Philippians (Phil. 2:6–11)—the Psalms are apt texts both for praying and for preaching.

EXEGETING THE PSALMS: EXPANDING THE REPERTOIRE

A sermon developed on a psalm can beneficially mine the distinctive features of the psalm genre. Because psalms are an amalgam of literary structures, poetic images and metaphors, theological themes, and emotional moods, all of which can inform sermons and stimulate the preaching imagination, multiple interpretive strategies and exegetical approaches can be fruitfully employed by the preacher. Among these are the following:

1. *Spotting the Parallels*—For centuries, biblical scholars have observed that Hebrew poetry generally and psalms in particular display a characteristic feature of language known as parallelism, namely the expression of thought in paired lines, A and B. There are several forms of parallelism, but the two main types are *synonymous* and *antithetic*.

In synonymous parallelism, the two lines, A and B, express similar and somewhat reinforcing ideas. For example,

A—Why, O LORD do you stand far off?
B—Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (10:1)

In antithetic parallelism, A and B express opposing ideas. For example,

A—The LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
B—but the way of the wicked will perish. (1:6)

Obviously, one effect of parallelism in a psalm is emphasis, an underscoring of the main idea of the unit, whether that is achieved by repetition (synonymous parallelism) or by contrast (antithetic parallelism). More recently, however, biblical interpreters have recognized that the relationship between lines A and B is often more complex than a simple repetition or contrast. Sometimes line B results in a value added, an extension, an elaboration, or a nuancing of the thought expressed in line A. When, for instance, Psalm 7:12[11] states, “God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day,” the first line describes a certain divine role, namely that of a righteous judge, but the second line provides an emotional intensity to that role. God is no dispassionate jurist, coolly meting out impartial judgments, but is instead a passionate advocate for those who have

been wronged, a God who is knee-deep in the daily affairs of human society and who is morally offended and outraged by injustice.

When interpreting a psalm, then, the preacher should pay close attention to the parallel units—not only to the central ideas that they contain but also to the tensive relationship between lines A and B and to their capacity to generate a “what is more” surplus of meaning. When the psalmist says, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name” (103:1), line A conveys focus and depth; the psalmist is summoning his soul (*nepheš*), his core being, to bless God. Line B adds breadth, a “what is more” overflow of meaning by extending the thought of line A in two directions. First, it broadens the idea of soul to “all that is within me,” implying that what is now being summoned to praise is not simply some white-hot spiritual essence, a soul, but everything that makes up a human being—thoughts, feelings, intentions, and the rest. Second, blessing the Lord is now redescribed in terms of blessing God’s “holy name,” which evokes the appearance of God to Moses at Horeb, the personal bond between God and Israel, and the specific actions of God in Israel’s (and the psalmist’s) memory. The preacher is prompted to a sermon that describes blessing God as more than a sequestered, spiritualized activity in a sanctuary but instead a pouring out to God all that constitutes a human being in every arena of personal and social life.

2. *Tracking the Structure*—Ever since the groundbreaking form-critical work of Hermann Gunkel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, students of the Psalms have recognized that psalms can be grouped into clusters of types (or genres). Each cluster gathers psalms that, while perhaps quite different in terms vocabulary or surface detail, share a common form and a similar intentionality. The Psalter includes, for example, several psalms of thanksgiving, psalms of praise, personal laments, communal laments, royal psalms, wisdom psalms, entrance liturgies, and so on.

Many commentaries on the psalms point out the “typical” structures of each of these psalm genres, but such templates can be misleading. Not only are there hybrid psalms that represent more than one genre, many psalms of a single type break away from the expected structural formulas in ways that are both interesting and fruitful for interpretation. Rather than sanding the edges off of a psalm to make it fit some predicted pattern, a preacher is better served to employ the standard generic patterns with a light touch. When preparing a sermon on Psalm 107, for example, it can be helpful to know that this is a psalm of thanksgiving and that the thanksgiving genre is often built on a fourfold structure: an expression of gratitude, a description of trouble from which the psalmist has been delivered, a tribute to God’s saving power, and a call to others to join in the act of giving thanks to God. Knowing this pattern helps the preacher spot these features as they appear in Psalm 107, but holding the template lightly enables the preacher to see how this psalm both fits the pattern and departs from it. All of the pieces of the thanksgiving template are present in Psalm 107 but not necessarily in order. Moreover, some elements of the expected pattern are repeated in the psalm, while others are not. In other words, the psalmist plays with the typical

formula, repeating it in cycles, emphasizing some parts and omitting others, varying it as the psalm proceeds.

A form-critical approach to the psalms highlights the fact that psalms have “plots,” somewhat like narratives. But also like narratives, each psalm has a plot that is in some ways unique to that psalm. A careful tracking of the plot of the psalm to be preached often yields insights valuable for the sermon.

Consider, for example, Psalm 77, which in terms of type is a personal lament. Indeed, the psalm begins as do many laments, by invoking God (v. 1) and then expressing a complaint (vv. 3–11[2–10]). In this case, however, the distress is deep and particularly painful. Whatever crisis has occurred has left the psalmist soul-sick and deeply shaken in faith. God, it seems, has abandoned the psalmist to his pain and has stopped being caring, loving, compassionate, and gracious. The psalmist’s deepest grief is “that the right hand of the Most High has changed,” that is, God’s power to save is gone. Note that the complaint of the psalmist is not compressed into a single brief cry but is allowed to flow unbridled verse after verse, protest upon protest, fully half of the psalm.

In verse 12[11], the plot of this psalm takes a surprising turn. Typically in personal laments, the psalmist will make a complaint and then cry out to God for help, but not in this psalm. The psalmist has already declared God to be weak and uncaring; what good would an appeal for divine assistance do? Instead, this psalmist makes a vow: “I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old.”

Usually, if there is a vow, it comes at the end of a lament psalm as an expression of gratitude to God for rescuing the psalmist (e.g., “I will sing praises to you, for God, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love”; 59:18[17]). But here the vow comes unexpectedly in the midst of the crisis, *before* the grief and anger have come to any resolution. Grief-stricken over God’s lack of love, compassion, and power, this psalmist vows to remember a time when God was present, caring, and powerful to save. We learn as we read the rest of the psalm that it is the exodus that is remembered, but at this point we do not know this. All we know is that the psalmist has steeled his resolve and has chosen to call to mind God’s mighty deeds. This is not an act of the emotions; the psalmist feels nothing but rage and despair. It is an act of the will. Emotionally, memory has generated nothing except speechless misery (77:5–6[4–5]), but now the psalmist chooses to remember in a different way, as an act of disciplined willfulness.

This vow turns out to be pivotal, transforming grief and anger into awestruck praise. But how? What happened? When the psalmist remembered the Exodus, his imagination was at first flooded by terrifying sensations of thunder and lightning, whirlwinds, earthquakes, and flooding rains. But then the psalmist saw something, something that he had previously overlooked. What he saw was that God’s “way was through the sea” (v. 20[19]), in other words, right through the trouble. Not around it, above it, or in spite of it... but *through* it. And in the middle of the churning trouble, God was most present when God was least visible, providing powerful redemption through the apparently weak form of human guidance (vv. 20–21[19–20]). These insights, gained through a willful act of memory, are enough to turn the psalmist from self-absorbed grief (*I am so*

troubled . . . *I* consider . . . *I* commune . . . *I, I, I*) into outer-directed praise (*Your* way, O God, is holy . . . *You* are the God who works wonders).

A sermon on this psalm could well be guided by its structure. The preacher could give full voice both to the lament of the psalmist and to the kinds of laments likely on the hearts of many in the congregation, and by the example of the psalmist be emboldened to express these laments in strong, graphic language and at length. Then the sermon could, like the psalm, call to mind God's mighty deeds in the past, searching them for clues to God's gracious presence in times of trouble. To biblical memory (the Exodus, the cross) could perhaps be added more contemporary memories of times when God was experienced as loving and salvific. Because the psalm embodies a compressed version of a process that undoubtedly took place over a long time, the preacher of this psalm may wish to resist tying up the loose ends quickly and neatly. Perhaps the sermon could lead not to a prematurely upbeat conclusion but instead to the singing of a hymn of praise performed as a sign of hope.

Psalm 19 can serve as another good example of how tracking the structure of a psalm can serve as an entrée into preaching. At first blush, this psalm appears to be a confusing welter of three separate and conflicting genres. Puzzlingly, an adaptation of a Near Eastern nature hymn ("The heavens are telling the glory of God . . ." vv. 2–7[1–6]) has been attached to a wisdom psalm in praise of the Torah ("The law of the LORD is perfect . . ." vv. 8–11[7–10]) and then to a personal lament ("Clear me from hidden faults . . ." vv. 12–15[11–14]). When it is recognized, however, that each of the three sections of the psalm is crafted around the theme of "speech," the unity of the psalm and the movement of the plot structure fall into place.¹

The psalm begins with the psalmist out in nature watching the sun course across the sky and hearing the heavens "speaking" the glory of the Creator. Verse 4[3] involves translation challenges ("There is no speech, nor are their words . . ."?), but it may reflect some degree of alienation on the part of the psalmist, who is aware that the cosmos is uttering a hymn of praise but may be expressing some difficulty making out the words and participating in this hymn.

But then the psalmist moves into the Temple, and there he experiences a different kind of speech, the ideal, pure, and certain "speech" of the Torah. This speech joins in the anthem of praise heard in creation, but it comes in language the psalmist can receive as clear, joyful, enlightening, and trustworthy. And finally, the psalmist himself is empowered to open his own mouth and to speak worthily: "May the words of my mouth . . . be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and redeemer." By tracking the structural flow of the psalm, the preacher can find the undergirding for a sermon on the power of scripture and the language of faith both to open us up to the doxologies being sung in the natural world and to the possibilities for faithful participation in those hymns of praise in our own lives.

The sermon can, perhaps, begin "out in the world," gazing with awe at the natural wonders. But then, the sermon can expose the ambiguities of that awe before nature. The same natural forces that reveal a dazzlingly beautiful sunset or an array of rainbow colored fish in a coral sea can also generate tsunamis and earthquakes. With only nature

as our guide, we do not know if God is for us or against us, if God is full of grace or simply the author of “nature, red in tooth and claw.” So, like the psalmist, we go from outside into the sanctuary, into the place of worship, to hear the Torah, to hear the gospel, to hear the story of a God who loves us and the world. Only then do we have the faithful tuning to make out the hymn and the lyrics being sung in the heavens and the firmament. Only then can our own voice, “the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart,” truly join in the refrain.

Psalm 107, described above, serves as yet another example of how the sermon can grow out of the plot-like structural movements of a psalm. We observed that this psalm is, in some ways, a typical thanksgiving psalm, with all four expected ingredients of that genre intact: an expression of gratitude (“O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good . . .” v. 1), descriptions of trouble from which God has given deliverance (e.g. “Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town, hungry and thirsty,” vv. 4–5), tributes to God’s saving power (e.g., “he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town,” vv. 6–7), and calls to join in the act of giving thanks to God (e.g., “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love . . .” v. 8). But it is only when we look more closely at the actual movements of the psalm that the full preaching possibilities emerge:

Movement 1—The psalm begins with a general “call to worship” issued to all those whom God has shown saving mercy: “O give thanks to the LORD. . . . Let the redeemed of the LORD say so . . .” (vv. 1–2). The picture implied here is of a congregation of worshippers gathered from the four corners of the earth, and the worship leader summons all of them to praise and thanksgiving, because all of them have, in some way, been “redeemed from trouble” (v. 2).

Movement 2—Even though all of those in the gathered congregation have been redeemed by God from trouble, not all of them have been delivered from the same kind of trouble or saved in the same way. So now, the psalmist/worship leader divides the throng into groups, based on the sort of distress they have experienced. We can almost imagine the psalmist passing his hand over the multitude gathered for worship, saying, “Some of you have been brought here by God’s mercy out of this kind of trouble, and others of you out of that kind of trouble. . . .” The psalmist specifically named four groups: people who were lost in the desert and who were guided to safety by God, people who were imprisoned for crimes against the commands of God and whom God delivered by breaking their chains, people who were sick because of their sinful ways and who were restored by God’s healing word, and people who were caught in a perilous storm at sea and for whom God stilled the storm. Everyone there has been in some sort of trouble, but trouble comes with different faces. Everyone there has been redeemed by God, but God’s redemption comes in different forms, matching the diversity of distress.

Movement 3—Having summoned the multitude to praise and thanksgiving because of God’s saving mercy shown to them in very specific ways, the psalmist, in this closing movement of the psalm, moves from the particular once again to the general. The psalmist reminds the people gathered that God’s saving acts are not isolated, one-time events but arise instead out of the very character of God. God did

not, for example, save those in trouble on the sea because God is some ancient sea god who, on a whim, allowed the sea to calm or who somehow managed to be appeased enough to spare their lives. No, God saved those imperiled on the sea because it is God's nature to save. This God turns things around all over the earth—rivers become deserts, fallow fields become fruitful, the needy are raised up. The function of this movement is to move the worshippers beyond their own particular experience of redemption ("I praise God today because he got me out of prison!") and toward the praise of God for God's own sake ("Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of God," v. 43).

We can imagine a sermon on Psalm 107 that would basically follow the flow of these three movements. It could begin by reminding the hearers that they are in worship and that they have not merely "come to worship" but instead have been "gathered for worship" by the loving God from the east, west, north, and south, gathered for the purpose of praise and thanksgiving. Then the sermon would, like the psalm, move to remind the hearers of their own experiences of God's saving mercy. The psalmist names desert wandering, imprisonment, illness, and sea peril, but the preacher could name the contemporary experiences of trouble and deliverance. Perhaps some have been released from addiction, delivered from depression, given a new sense of purpose and meaning in life, found healing in broken relationships, been rescued from homelessness, or been brought back from the brink of financial ruin. The point here is for the preacher to enable the congregation to be motivated to thanksgiving not by redemption as an abstract doctrine but as a remembered experience.

Finally, the preacher would summon the hearers to move beyond a *quid pro quo* expression of thanksgiving: "We give thanks today for what God has done in our lives, but more than this, for what God is doing today in all of life. We praise God this day not simply because *we* have felt God's mercy, but because God *is* mercy. We give thanks this day not only because of the love and saving power *we* have experienced from God but because God *is* love and because God is even now at work in the world to redeem those in trouble, even beyond our seeing and knowing."

3. *Experiencing the Moods*—Literary critic Laurence Perrine once described poetry as language with "higher voltage" than prose (1967: 10), and this is true of the psalms, especially regarding emotion and mood. The psalms are filled with joy, rage, grief, fear, desperation, resolve, shame, disgust, patience, hope, and more, and the preacher can reflect on those places where the emotions of the psalms connect to corresponding feelings in the lives of the contemporary hearers.

Take, for example, Psalm 70, which is a prayer for deliverance uttered in a state of near panic. Writer Anne Lamott is famous for her observation that the best two prayers she knows are "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." Psalm 70 is a prayer of the first kind, and the psalmist in desperation cries out for help from God immediately: "Hasten to me, O God . . . O LORD, do not delay!" (v. 6[5]).

In terms of mood, the desperation of Psalm 70 sharply contrasts with the calm patience of Psalm 40: "I waited patiently for the LORD. . . . Happy are those who make the LORD their trust" (vv. 2[1], 5[4]). One might be tempted to preach a sermon

vaunting the placidly faithful mood of Psalm 40 above that of the angst-driven Psalm 70, urging people to move from the high anxiety of “O God, do not delay!” to the serene trust of “I waited patiently for the LORD.” Tempted, that is, until we see that an editor has attached onto the end of Psalm 40 almost the exact text, word for word, of the urgent prayer of Psalm 70. This juxtaposition of composure and alarm allows the preacher to speak of the changing moods and conditions of prayer and also to remind the congregation that even when the choir is singing “Only be still, and wait God’s leisure, in cheerful hope, with heart content . . .,” someone in the balcony is clasping sweaty palms together and crying out in silence, “Hurry up, God, *please* hurry up!”

Another psalm that operates strongly on the affective plane is Psalm 150. In one sense, this psalm is powered forward by the constant repetition of the command to praise God, which is struck like a drum beat thirteen times in the psalm’s six short verses. The call to praise gathers force each time it is uttered, moving toward a dramatic crescendo, “Praise the LORD!”

The preacher might envision a “call and response” type of sermon on this psalm, allowing the interaction of preacher and congregation (actual or imaginatively depicted) to embody this emotive movement toward full-throttle praise:

“Praise the LORD!” the sermon would begin, to which the response is, “Where?”

“Praise God on the earth and in the heavens, in the sanctuary and in the skies,” to which the response is, “Why?”

“Praise God for mighty deeds,” the preacher would say, “but praise God also because of God’s surpassing greatness,” to which the response is, “How?”

“With the trumpet and the lute, the harp and the pipe, with dance and tambourine, with strings and clanging cymbals. Make your praise strong, with loud clashing cymbals,” to which the response is, “Who?”

“Every living creature,” the preacher would proclaim. “Everything that has breath, praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!”

Another psalm with a rich emotional connection to readers and hearers is, of course, Psalm 23. While fine sermons can be constructed from this psalm making elaborate use of the imagery of shepherd and sheep, it can be argued that the primary effect of this psalm has been to impart deep assurance and comfort in the face of loss, sorrow, and distress. Perhaps a good approach to preaching this psalm is to trust the language of the psalm to do its own work and for the preacher to embroider contemporary concerns into the weave of the psalm itself. Something like, “Even though we walk through the valley of darkness—the valley of depression, the valley of grief, the valley of sorrow, the valley of peril, the valley of loss—we will fear no evil, for God is with us. God’s rod and staff comfort us.”

4. *Exploring the Images*—Some psalms are built around significant controlling images. The preacher can explore these images as they are unfolded in the psalm and then extend those images into the lives of the hearers.

For example, Psalm 139 is built around the image of an all-seeing and all-present God who, by virtue of an intimate involvement with human life is constantly present to discern, judge, guide, and vindicate. God is present in the ordinary activities of life, in our sitting down, rising up, and thinking that make up daily living (v. 2), present in the places our feet take us in life and the places where we lie down to rest (v. 3). God sees and knows our words, even before they come to speech (v. 4). It is futile to play hide-and-seek with God because God is present in the heights and the depths, the near and the far, the dawn and the darkness (vv. 7–12). God is present in our beginning, even in the womb, knitting together human life, and God is present in our ending, having walked with us throughout our many days (vv. 13–18). The preacher can provide both the psalm's version of this image of the all-seeing, all-present God and also imagine God present in the contemporary experiences of life—present in the dark and anxious hours before dawn, present in the maternity ward and present in hospice, present on the mountaintop and present in the fearful depths, present in the office cubicle and present in the whispered conversations of night.

It could, of course, be a fearful thought to some that God is all-seeing and all-present, but the preacher can follow the psalm's lead to a different place. The psalmist is not terrorized by God's constant presence but encouraged and comforted, emboldened and prayerful. Because God sees and knows everything, the psalmist (albeit sometimes in harsh language) petitions God to discern two things: first, that he has been faithful, even when others have not, and, second, if there are places where he has not been faithful ("if there is any wicked way in me," v. 24), to set him on the right path—a fitting conclusion to the psalm, a fitting conclusion to a sermon.

5. *Hearing the Theological Themes*—It has been said that Christians often get their theology more from the hymns they sing than from the sermons they hear. It is certainly true that hymns, spirituals, and psalms are full of theological themes and claims, and that process of singing, chanting, or reciting these pieces over and again engraves their theological worldview on the hearts of worshippers. Yet another approach to preaching on the psalms is to focus on these theological ideas in the psalms, letting them form the claims of the sermon.

For example, Psalm 51 is theologically focused on the reality of sin. "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (v. 5[3]). This psalm does not sidestep the deep and personal reality of sinfulness. It uses none of the euphemisms our society employs to sidestep the painful truth of sin and guilt. It does not say, "Mistakes were made" or "I miscalculated the effect of my deeds on my family." It speaks bluntly, painfully, and personally about sin, transgression, blame, and guilt.

Old Testament scholar Patrick D. Miller has pointed out that this psalm has very little interest in sin as an abstract trait of humanity in general. The psalmist has in mind, rather, very specific sinful actions. Almost all of the words related to sin in this psalm, Miller points out, are in the singular. This psalmist has in mind not sin in general but his sins in particular. "All of this means," writes Miller, "that Psalm 51 may not necessarily be preached as always and universally applicable to the congregation but in order to make

it available when the soul has truly and specifically sinned and is stricken with that recognition” (1998: 6).

This idea that the psalm is not a general treatment of sinfulness but is connected to actual occurrences of sin in the psalmist’s life, means, as Miller says, that this is not a psalm for all seasons but rather a psalm for those painful seasons when life has broken apart at the painful realization that one has sinned deeply (1998). This suggests the possibility of a sermon on the theme “You’re Going to Need This Psalm Someday.” The sermon, like Psalm 51, would name the reality of sin, not as a mere misstep along life’s way, but as a tragic, deep-seated breaking of the relationship with God (“Against you alone have I sinned . . .” v. 6[4]). The sermon would observe that all human beings come, sooner or later, to the place where sin as a general feature of the human condition becomes radioactive, as a concrete, embodied set of malicious actions. This is not true of us every day, but it is true of all of us someday. When that happens, the psalm provides gritty, honest language to employ, pleading for forgiveness and cleansing, in those moments. The purpose of reading and reflecting on the psalm is to provide a “dress rehearsal” for those unavoidable times when we will need to come into the sanctuary and beat our breasts, pleading for mercy and forgiveness.

PREACHING A PSALM-LIKE SERMON

Most of the time the preacher will derive exegetical insight, and the sermon will acquire its content and direction, from one of the literary, structural, or theological aspects of the Psalms. The sermon will come *from* the psalm, but it will not aspire to be *like* the psalm. Sermons and psalms are their own discrete genres.

On occasion, however, it may be desirable to let the poetry of the psalm influence not only the ideas of the sermon but also to summon poetic language and form in the sermon, to generate, in other words, a psalm-like sermon. For example, John Vannorsdall, who for many years served as the chaplain at Yale University, preached a sermon on Psalm 130, titled “Waiting,” that was, in its own way, not simply a recasting of the content of the psalm but a regeneration of the poetry of the psalm (1977). Vannorsdall focused on the phrase “my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning.” Notice that this phrase provides a metaphor for waiting for the Lord, namely that of the long vigil of a night watchman waiting for the morning, but then, as soon as the metaphor is advanced, the psalmist destabilizes it by declaring that he waits for the Lord “*more* than those who watch for morning.” In other words, waiting for the Lord both *is* like the waiting of a night watchman and *is not* like that waiting because it exceeds it.

In the sermon, which, like the psalm on which it is based, is composed in lyrical and poetic language, Vannorsdall plays on this *is* / *is not* tension. Vannorsdall suggests a number of contemporary examples of waiting which are, in some ways, like waiting for the Lord. But as soon as he has presented the metaphors, he takes them back, indicating that waiting for the Lord exceeds the grasp of the image. So, waiting for the Lord is like

waiting for the coffee to boil, waiting for a taxi to come, waiting for the first day of school to begin. But finally waiting for the Lord is not like any of these forms of waiting because waiting for the Lord is not that ordinary.

The sermon then moves upward to suggest that waiting for the Lord is more like waiting for a special man or woman to come into our lives, waiting for love to happen, but, then, yes and no: waiting for the Lord is not that private or exclusive. Waiting for the Lord is more like waiting for something large enough to reshape all of life, like waiting for the electricity to come back on when the city has a blackout, like waiting for a snowstorm that closes offices and schools, like waiting for a war “when lives are changed, and whole societies, and nothing is ever much the same again,” like waiting for Christmas “in which all of us becomes, for a brief but glorious time, a part of the extended family of God.” But, then again, waiting for the Lord exceeds even these images of waiting, which, dramatic as they are, after all, are only fleeting. “They are like rain running down the window screen,” Vannorsdall says, “filling each tiny square of my life with water, but the drop moves on, and behind it the squares wink, and the water is gone.”

Having followed the trail of these upwardly spiraling images of waiting, and found them all increasingly useful but ultimately limited, Vannorsdall comes finally to the thing itself: waiting not for a taxi or a lover or even for Christmas, but waiting for *the Lord*. Here, like the psalmist, he can only sing:

I wait for the Lord
 who in a great parabola of Grace,
 enters the atmosphere of time and space,
 is bound to a Cross by the weight of human sin,
 and swoops on down into the Hell of all time's making,
 and arching up again through Easter's tomb,
 brings with Him all who wait for Him,
 and desire to live in the light and to sing the songs of freedom.
(Vannorsdall 1977: 49).

Here the psalm finds an echo not only in the ideas of the sermon but also in the poetic language and style of the sermon.

One of the great advantages of preaching on the Psalter is that the creative possibilities are virtually endless. The multiplicity of images and moods, themes and internal movements, in the Psalms allows the preacher to be faithful to the biblical text and also to ponder numerous homiletical approaches and connections to the hearers could be explored in the sermon. The richness of theological claim, impassioned appeal, and poetic effect in the psalms calls forth a commensurate richness of theology, passion, and poetry in the sermons themselves.

NOTE

1. I am deeply influenced here by the treatment of this psalm in Fishbane 1998: 84–90.

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CHAPTER 39

SINGING THE PSALMS

MICHAEL MORGAN

THE book of Psalms has been called many things: the hymn book of the Bible, the prayer book of the Bible, the worship book of the Bible. All of these labels are true and have been recognized for centuries—in Jewish tradition, in the daily offices of the Roman Catholic Church, and, since the beginning of the Reformation, in Protestant worship.

The first book of Scripture that many young Protestants learned to find with ease was the Psalter, located at the very middle of their Bible. All we had to do was let the Bible fall open at its heart, and there it was, ready to “sing” to us of a mighty God, a loving and caring Shepherd, a Lord of righteousness, repentance, and redemption. Of course, it took some years of living before we knew that if we opened our own hearts, as we opened the Bible, the Psalms would become a source of personal dialogue between that same faithful God and grown-up, much more complicated heirs.

The fourteenth-century English divine, Richard Rolle, defined the Psalter with lyrical vigor in the preface to his own translation of the book of Psalms:

Psalm singing chases fiends, excites angels to our help, removes sin, pleases God. It shapes perfection, removes and destroys annoyance and anguish of soul. As a lamp lighting our life, healing of a sick heart, honey to a bitter soul, this book is called a garden enclosed, well sealed, a paradise full of apples! (Rolle 1884: 3)

Walter Brueggemann says much the same thing in more contemporary terms:

The book of Psalms provides the most reliable theological, pastoral, and liturgical resource given us in the biblical tradition. In season and out of season, generation after generation, faithful women and men turn to the psalms as a most helpful resource for conversation with God about things that matter most. The psalms are helpful because they are a genuinely dialogical literature that expresses both sides of the conversation of faith.... In this literature the community of faith has heard and continues to hear the sovereign speech of God, who meets the community in its depths of need and in its heights of celebration.... The psalms, with few exceptions,

are not the voice of God addressing us. They are rather the voice of our own common humanity, gathered over a long period of time. (Brueggemann 1984: 15)

Between Rolle and Brueggemann, the seventeenth-century Scottish divine David Dickson spoke of the Psalms as being a blend of “crosses and sweet comforts,” which in a few words is a biography of our lives (1655: 3).

The conversation between God and the community of faith hosted in the Psalms underscores the fulfillment of the ancient covenant through which we have become the adopted sons and daughters of God—children who honor and claim the goodness and grace of a loving parent. And it is through worship, both corporately and personally, that we keep the conversation alive. The psalmist exhorts us time and again to “sing new songs unto the Lord.” In his letter to the Colossian Christians, Paul encourages his readers to “sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” with gratitude in their hearts (Col. 3:16).

What seems to set the Psalms apart from the rest of Scripture is their sacramental nature, their unique ability to mold and transform the believer. There is none of the narrative and parable of the historical books, the Gospels, and the Acts. We are not the objects of sermons and discourses from the Law and the Prophets. The letters of Paul have yet to be written to us. We find ourselves not as second-hand recipients of God’s Word but as one-to-one communicants actively in conversation with God. We lift up the Psalms to God as though they are our own prayers, in our own words, and not as the recitation of some ancient litany.

The psalmist and hymn writer Isaac Watts (1674–1748) distinguished between reading the Psalms, which he interpreted to be God speaking to us, and singing the psalms, which he understood to be our own words to God. Surely those devoted wordsmiths who lived nearly two centuries before Watts, when vernacular liturgy engaged worshippers in new ways, recognized this powerful dialogue—in word, in thought, in pulse, in prayer, in lament, in praise—between us and the One who created and loves us.

MUSIC DURING THE REFORMATION

At the dawn of the Reformation, one of the requirements of the Protestant churches was that the Bible be translated into the language of the people. It was through the Scriptures in the vernacular that the protests of the new churches were supported, in opposition to the established teachings and real and perceived prejudices of the medieval Roman Catholic Church.

The three leaders in the early history of the Protestant movement—Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Zurich, and Calvin in Geneva—each recognized the power of music to underscore liturgy, transform theology, and propel congregational worship. Martin Luther was the broadest in his approach to incorporating music into worship. He paraphrased some of the psalms, translated a number of old Latin hymns into German,

and wrote some new ones, always seeking to bring a Christian perspective to the Old Testament. For him, music was a “divine and glorious gift of God” and could be used to its best advantage in worship.¹ Zwingli, on the other hand, understood the power of music to transform but, out of his fear of what it could accomplish, initially banned it from his worship in all forms—from instrumental interludes to congregational song.

John Calvin struck a middle ground and, with few exceptions, allowed only metrical psalms to be sung in worship. Like Luther, he saw music as one of God’s gifts to us, to be returned to God through our congregational singing. Calvin believed that the only songs worthy of our returning to God were the songs God gave to us, namely the psalms, and held his congregation to his standard. He did, however, allow, encourage, and actually compose some metrical paraphrases of the psalms as an alternative to simply reading a prose version.²

THE BIRTH OF METRICAL PSALMODY

Metrical psalmody! Few elements of worship, especially congregational song, have such a lackluster-sounding Calvinistic association—or longer, more colorful history—than the singing of psalms, not psalms in the chanted prose version of an accepted Bible translation, but psalms paraphrased in verse to be sung to a variety of tunes.

One of the amazing coincidences in the history of church music is how metrical psalm singing developed in France and England at the same time, yet completely independently of each other. It was not in the churches but in the royal courts where psalm singing began, introduced not by clergy or court musicians but by simple servants of the king. The psalm texts were offered as alternatives to the secular songs of the day, which often sang too loudly of worldly pleasures or questionable virtues.

In France, a devoted servant to the royal family named Clement Marot turned his attention to versifying the psalms. He was fortunate enough to have received a better education than most servants. Marot had studied Latin, Italian, and Greek and knew music well. He was also familiar with the Huguenot doctrines and became a biting critic of the vices of monks and priests and the abuses of the Catholic Church. In 1539 he began circulating his metrical psalms, which became very popular with the aristocracy but were not allowed to be sung in the Catholic Church. They soon were discovered by John Calvin and filled the need for congregational song in the Reformed Church in Geneva. The tunes composed by Louis Bourgeois and others enlivened the poetry with accented syllables, syncopation, and rhythms that Queen Elizabeth was later to describe as “Geneva jigs,” but, for the first time in the history of the church, congregations were adding their own voices to the proverbial heavenly choir.

The English were a bit slower in getting a Psalter approved for public singing: Their one attempt, the *Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes* by Miles Coverdale, was banned by Henry the Eighth in 1535. The time was not right for introducing vernacular congregational song into the worship of the church. However, as early as 1546 the more

independent Scots published a translation of a number of psalms and other hymns from the German, known as *The Gude and Godlie Ballates*. Attributed to the three Wedderburn brothers, the collection contained a combination of hymn translations, secular ballads, and original psalm paraphrases. Their setting of Psalm 23 was innocent enough:

The Lord God is my Pastor good,
Abundantly me for to feed;
Then how can I be destitute
Of any good thing in my need? (Laing 1868)

Even if the Roman Catholic clergy were not particularly offended by the religious texts, except for the fact that they were in the language of the people, they could never support the work of poets who along with their psalms would turn the impending crisis between Protestants and Papists into such a troublesome ballad as:

The Pope, that pagan full of pride,
He hath us blinded long;
For where the blind the blind doth guide,
No wonder they go wrong. (Laing 1868)

In England, Thomas Sternhold was a servant who bore the title “Groom of the Robes” in the courts of Henry the Eighth and Edward the Sixth. According to tradition, young King Edward was strolling through the halls at Windsor Castle when he heard organ music and singing coming from the chapel. Stopping by, he learned the source was Sternhold singing some of his own psalm paraphrases. Liking very much what he heard, he encouraged Sternhold to write more. By the time of his death in 1549, Sternhold had completed thirty psalm versions. These psalm settings did not yet find a home in the liturgy, however. Even though the *Book of Common Prayer* was completed in the same year, no effort was made to introduce metrical psalms into the church, not so much due to any strong objection to the principle as to the fact that no complete psalter was yet available.

STERNHOLD AND HOPKINS: “THE OLD VERSION”

The Protestant refugees who fled to the Continent during the reign of Queen Mary Tudor—especially John Hopkins, William Whittingham, William Kethe, and Robert Wisdom—encountered the metrical psalmody of the French Protestant churches. Building upon the work of Sternhold, they brought back to England with them a complete English psalter in 1562, the same year the first French psalter was completed. The English version was perhaps not as poetically excellent as the French text, but it was an unmatched gift for the restored Church of England, replete with many tunes composed by Louis Bourgeois originally for Calvin’s psalter.

The Scots, always wanting to maintain some degree of independence from their English cousins, were reluctant to authorize an identical psalter. The work on their version was begun while John Knox was minister to the congregation in Geneva and was completed after he returned to Great Britain to become a “thorn in the flesh” to the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth. In the first Scottish psalter, completed in 1564, paraphrases by Scottish poets were substituted for about a third of the Anglican versions.

The one text from the English and Scottish psalters that has survived to this day, together with its tune, is William Kethe’s paraphrase of Psalm 100:

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with fear [mirth], his praise forth tell,
Come ye before him and rejoice! (Sternhold 1565)

While it was never actually published, the version of the psalms by Matthew Parker, who became Queen Elizabeth’s Archbishop of Canterbury, must be mentioned here—not for its poetic merit, but for the inclusion of tunes by Thomas Tallis (the famous *Canon* appears here for the first time, as well as the *Ordinal* and the *Third Mode Melody* made famous by Ralph Vaughan Williams). Parker remained in England during the reign of Mary Tudor, spending his time hiding in the countryside and, among other things, paraphrasing the Psalms. As the English and Scottish refugees flocked back to Britain when Elizabeth came to the throne, they brought with them the version of Sternhold and Hopkins. Parker realized that his version could not compete and privately printed his psalms in a few copies to present to friends.

He was right about the competition, for who would choose to sing, instead of Kethe’s immortal text, Parker’s version of Psalm 100:

O joy all men terrestrial,
Rejoice in God celestial,
I bid not Jews especial,
But Jews and Greeks in general! (Parker 1567)

The Sternhold and Hopkins psalter, named for its two earliest contributors, became popularly known as the “Old Version.” It remained in use, with minor language modifications, until the nineteenth century, long after the versions of Ainsworth, the Bay Colonists in Massachusetts, Tate and Brady, and even Watts and Wesley appeared on the scene.

The “Old Version” preceded the great era of Elizabethan poetry, and the quality of the metrical paraphrases varied significantly from one author to the next. But there could be no argument about the sincerity and dedication of those authors to their cause. The Reformation had brought some degree of denominational independence to the Protestant churches in England and Scotland and across the European continent, each of which had to compile new liturgies, establish new principles of faith and governance, and determine how best to draw their congregations into full participation in the worship of God. There were not very many places for them to turn beyond their own integrity and creativity; they were literally part of a “new creation,” which needed to be identified and celebrated.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Henry Ainsworth was pastor to the English-speaking Reformed church in the Netherlands, and it was his congregation who came to New England in 1620 as the Pilgrims. Ainsworth sought to render the Psalms with slavish fidelity to the Hebrew, as is evident in his metrical paraphrase of Psalm 23, first published in 1612:

Jehovah feedeth me, I shall not lack.
In grassy folds, he down doth make me lie:
He gently leads me, quiet waters by.
He doth return my soul for his name's sake,
In paths of justice leads me quietly. (Ainsworth 1618)

The Jewish leaders in Amsterdam became suspicious of Ainsworth's motives behind his intense scrutiny of their faith and culture, and his sudden death in 1623 of possible poisoning has been attributed to that community.

During the reign of King Charles the First, the Church of England began a campaign to impose the *Book of Common Prayer* on the Church of Scotland, which had refused to endorse a prescribed liturgy. William Laud, then Archbishop of Canterbury, began a revision of the Prayer Book, reinstating portions that even the Anglican Church had abandoned over the years since 1549.

To make the liturgy more acceptable to the Scots, the strategy of the Established Church was to create a strong bond with their Scottish heritage. The obvious link was King James, who had come down from Scotland at the death of Elizabeth to join the nations into a united kingdom. During his life, James had paraphrased a few psalms into English verse, and the idea of a complete metrical psalter attributed to him appealed very much to King Charles and his Archbishop of Canterbury. The poetic talents of William Alexander, the Earl of Stirling, were engaged, and his psalm texts, issued falsely under the name of the honored king, were first printed in 1631 and later revised to be bound with the Scottish Prayer Book in 1637. Entitled *The Psalmes of King David, Translated by King James*, the royal association was stretched to include not one but two kings!

The deception became a disaster, fueling riots the day the liturgy was first used in worship at St. Giles, Edinburgh, and contributed much to the ensuing civil war, the execution of King Charles, and the institution of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. The psalm texts were never sung again:

The Lord of all my shepherd is,
I shall from want be free;
He makes me in green pastures lie,
And near calm streams to be. (Alexander 1636)

By 1640 the colonists in the New World were beginning to take control over more and more aspects of their lives, and dissatisfaction with Ainsworth's psalm versions grew within their congregations. It spoke too strongly of the Hebrew connection, and their

desire was not to replace it with the “Old Version” of Sternhold and Hopkins but to compose a new psalter. Richard Mather, John Cotton, John Eliot, and other ministers completed the collection, published in 1640 as the Bay Psalm Book—the first book published in America. Over the next century, it became popular in England and Scotland and achieved wide use in America until it was eventually supplanted by Watts and Wesley.

Their version of Psalm 23, despite its awkward grammar, reflects the rugged determination of these settlers to claim the New World for themselves.

The Lord to me a shepherd is,
Want therefore shall not I.
He in the folds of tender grass
Doth cause me down to lie. (Bay Psalm Book 1762)

The second half of the seventeenth century began with the publication in 1650 of a new psalter: *The Psalmes of David in Meeter. Newly Translated, and Diligently Compared with the Originall Text, and Former Translations: More Plaine, Smooth, and Agreeable to the Text, Than Any Heretofore*. This version, based primarily in the work of Francis Rous and William Barton, was reprinted frequently and supplied the need for a singing paraphrase in the Church of Scotland. It became the basis of the significant 1912 Psalter, and its setting of Psalm 23 is still widely sung today:

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; he leadeth me
The quiet waters by. (Scottish Psalter 1650)

One final version of the Psalms from the seventeenth century needs to be mentioned, not for its popularity among congregations, but rather because of its approach. While so many interpreters of the Psalms sought to remain as faithful to the original Hebrew as possible, John Patrick, preacher at the Charterhouse in London, was the first to seek expression in another direction. He believed strongly that portions of some psalms were not appropriate to be sung in Christian worship—that they dwelt too much on the wrath of a vengeful God, called too strongly for the destruction of the enemies of God's chosen people, and dealt too intimately with issues that were only associated with Jewish faith and culture. In his paraphrase, published in 1694, he claimed the license to interpret the Psalms in a more Christian light, thus setting the stage for Isaac Watts and his psalms “imitated in the language of the New Testament” some twenty-five years later.

TATE AND BRADY: “THE NEW VERSION”

The seventeenth century came to a close with the publication of a paraphrase of the book of Psalms designed to replace the “Old Version.” Its authors were Nicholas Brady, a parish priest in London, and Nahum Tate, the Poet Laureate of England. Their collection of psalms was promptly designated as the “New Version.”

By far the more prominent partner was Nahum Tate, described by a contemporary as being “a man of learning, candor, and courteous to all, with a good share of wit and a great deal of modesty” (Hadden 1896: 82). In addition to his poetry, he wrote several dramatic productions, and revised Shakespeare’s works in an attempt to improve them (so much for his sense of modesty!). In reality he was a man of “intemperate and improvident life,” and died in poverty in 1715 (Julian 1891: 920). Their work was completed in 1696. Upon publication, however, it received significant criticism and was virtually rewritten in 1698. In its revised state, the “New Version” was reprinted throughout the nineteenth century.

The opening verse of Psalm 23, in the original state from 1696 and the revised text of 1698, shows the extreme steps they took to make the version more acceptable:

Since God does me, his worthless charge,
Protect with tender care,
As watchful shepherds guard their flocks,
What can I want or fear? (Tate 1696).

The Lord himself, the mighty Lord,
Vouchsafes to be my guide;
The Shepherd by whose constant care
My wants are all supplied. (Tate 1698).

Apparently none of the prospective worshippers singing the new version wanted to refer to themselves as God’s “worthless charge”! Even the profound humility expressed in the prayers of confession had its limit!

THE TRANSITION FROM PSALMODY TO HYMNODY

The popularity of singing predominantly the metrical psalms in worship began to decline during the 1600s, as Independent and Dissenting congregations began to separate themselves from tradition. One of the main complaints of those churches who sang only psalms was that it was quite difficult, and sometimes impossible, to celebrate fully the Christian seasons of the year, and the ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ, through the singing of these Old Testament psalms alone. Congregations were forced to read between the lines to add fulfillment to prophecy. It was like an Advent season with no Christmas nativity or Lent without an Easter resurrection.

From the beginning of Protestant congregational song, some texts other than the psalms were included in the various collections but not to the significant representation that would qualify the “psalters” to be called “hymnals.” Luther’s song books, prepared for his German-speaking congregations, contained the best balance between psalm and hymn settings, and a similar representation was achieved in the early collections of Miles Coverdale (*Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes*) and the Wedderburn brothers

(*Gude and Godlie Ballates*). This is due to the fact that these two volumes were modeled after, and heavily borrowed in translation from, Luther. Calvin took a more conservative approach and allowed only paraphrases of the Ten Commandments and the New Testament Song of Simeon (“*Nunc Dimittis*”) to be sung along with the metrical psalms in worship.

The “Old Version” of Sternhold and Hopkins provided a number of hymns in addition to the psalm settings. Many of these were paraphrases of other portions of Scripture: the *Benedicite*; the three Gospel canticles—the songs of Mary (“*Magnificat*”), Zachariah (“*Benedictus*”), and Simeon (“*Nunc Dimittis*”); the Lord’s Prayer; and the Ten Commandments (in two different meters). Other liturgical elements were paraphrased so that they could be either spoken or sung in worship: the *Te Deum*, the Athanasian Creed, and the Twelve Articles of the Faith (Apostles’ Creed).

In the first and succeeding editions, along with a translation of the Latin hymn “*Veni Creator*,” there were ten original hymns, not drawn from a particular biblical reference but based on the prayers of the people and actions in the liturgy:

Lamentation of a Sinner: “*O Lord, turn not away thy face*”
 Humble Suit of the Sinner: “*O Lord, of whom I do depend*”
 A Prayer Before Sermon: “*Come, Holy Spirit, the God of might*”
Da Pacem: “*Give peace in these our days, O Lord*”
 The Lamentation: “*Lord, in thee is all my trust*”
 Thanksgiving after Receiving the Lord’s Supper: “*The Lord be thanked for his gifts*”
 Before Morning Prayer: “*Praise the Lord, O ye Gentiles all*”
 Before Evening Prayer: “*Behold, now give heed such as be*”
 Complaint of a Sinner: “*Where righteousness doth say*”
 Benediction: “*Preserve us, Lord, by thy dear word*”

The first independent collection of original hymns, George Wither’s *Hymns and Songs of the Church* (1623), met with no success at all—perhaps through a combination of the attitude of many church leaders to keep the congregational songs based in Scripture and Wither’s constant antagonism of King Charles in matters political and religious.

The “New Version” of Tate and Brady remained faithful to the concept of a strict psalmody, but during its first decade of publication several supplements were issued with the psalms to provide hymns and spiritual songs for congregations. Now worshippers could celebrate Christmas not only in the abstract with paraphrases of Psalms 96, 97, and 98, which invoke us to “sing new songs unto the Lord,” but also with a hymn freely accounting the events of that glorious, holy night (e.g., “While shepherds watched their flocks by night”).

WATTS AND THE WESLEYS

The strongest advocate for a new vision of how the Psalms might speak to Christians was Isaac Watts, who in 1719 published his *Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of*

the New Testament. Watts was not the first writer of hymns in English, as his title “Father of English Hymnody” would imply. Rather, he was the first to think through the theory of congregational praise and to furnish a well-rounded body of material for the church to use in worship. His theory was that our songs are a human offering of praise to God and that the words ought to be our own, as opposed to the Calvinistic theory that the inspired words of the Bible, and particularly the Psalms, are the only fit offering to God.

As a young minister Watts once complained to his father about the quality of the poetry of the psalms used in the churches—to which his father responded, “Give us something better, young man!” (Bailey 1950: 48). Isaac accepted his father’s challenge and gave us versions of the Psalms that many Christians sing today, forgetting that they are singing psalms at all: “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” (Psalm 90), “Joy to the World” (Psalm 98), and “Jesus Shall Reign” (Psalm 72), to mention only a few.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) served even more as a catalyst in bringing together the concepts of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. His setting of Psalm 23 gives us the very familiar “Shepherd Psalm” in gospel “dress”:

Jesus the good Shepherd is;
Jesus died the sheep to save;
He is mine, and I am his;
All I want in him I have—
Life, and health, and rest, and food,
All the plentitude of God. (Wesley 1854)

NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Psalm singing as a discipline was kept alive through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries by the Scottish and Reformed churches. Elsewhere, the church had been so receptive to the changes initiated by Watts and Wesley and hymnody had found such popular appeal in the evangelical movement that including any significant representation of metrical psalms in its congregational song was an almost insurmountable task. The Gospel hymns had sung so much more strongly of New Testament theology than had the Old Testament psalms, and the music that accompanied them enjoyed a much broader appeal than the old psalm tunes. In the hymn collections of most Protestant denominations in the twentieth century, the psalm settings are not isolated but absorbed into the fabric of their hymnody.

The first attempts to restore the singing of metrical psalms in a denomination other than those Reformed churches that had always sung psalms were by several Presbyterian branches, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and culminating with *The Psalter with Responsive Readings* of 1912. While it included a number of favorite tunes of the era, the texts were primarily taken from the Scottish Psalter of 1650 with little alteration. Those dated texts did not sit well on the ears of a new generation, but, even though the 1912 *Psalter* achieved limited success in practical terms, it represented the most

significant attempt in over a century to provide a complete psalter for worship. The Scottish Psalter of 1650, with revisions, remains a standard in the field of psalmody and congregational song in both British and American editions.

Some denominational hymnals, in particular those in Presbyterian and Reformed churches and, most significantly, the *Psalter Hymnal* of the Christian Reformed Church remain very popular resources today. These denominations and others, rooted in the tradition of Calvinist theology, have kept psalmody at the heart of their singing, providing a wonderful complement of psalters and hymnbooks to support their congregations.

Supplemental collections of metrical psalms have been published in the hope of reclaiming this vital part of early worship for churches today. In 1986 Christopher Webber, an Episcopal priest, published his *New Metrical Psalter*, following the Common Lectionary and including new versions sung to familiar tunes, not as a substitute for the prose psalter of the Prayer Book but as a tool for helping worshippers understand and appreciate the Psalms.

The same year saw an effort in the Presbyterian Church to restore metrical psalm singing. The Rev. Fred Anderson had developed some versions for use in his congregation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. In 1986, as a member of the Task Force on the Use of Psalms in Worship, he published his collection of fifty-five metrical psalms, *Singing Psalms of Joy and Praise*, and has recently completed the entire psalter.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PSALTERS

Two recent collections of psalm settings for congregational singing promise to make significant contributions to metrical psalmody. The first is a collection by Hal Hopson entitled *The People's Psalter* (2008). Included is a wealth of folk tunes, familiar melodies, and global songs that combine responsorial and metrical psalms in a unique way. Rather than alternating a congregational response with canted prose texts (which are sometimes difficult to interpret musically by amateur singers), these settings engage soloists, children or youth choirs, and other creative possibilities in singing metrical versions of the psalms, with everyone joining in the response. Imaginative accompaniments bring a vitality and mood to the psalms. Hopson published an earlier significant collection of canted settings of the prose psalms, *The Psalter: Psalms and Canticles for Singing* (1993), which provides a wonderful alternative resource to the metrical psalms.

Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship was published in 2012 and is undoubtedly the most comprehensive resource on the psalms for use in Christian worship ever published. This massive single-volume anthology (some 1,200 pages), covering the history, reception, and practice of singing the psalms in Christian worship, contains all 150 psalms, all in multiple formats, and utilizes a wide variety of musical and spoken settings. It also includes a large selection of metrical paraphrases of the psalms, set in a rich tapestry of old and new tunes. Martin Tel, director of music at Princeton

Theological Seminary, Joyce Borger, editor of *Reformed Worship* and Faith Alive Christian Resources, and John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, assembled this unparalleled collection—a wonderful celebration on the 450th anniversary of the first complete psalters in French and English!

My own effort at a metrical psalter, the *Psalter for Christian Worship* (Morgan 1999, revised 2010), was composed for my congregation at Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Our worship staff was seeking to provide metrical settings of the psalms in an effort to reclaim that part of our Reformed heritage that we had lost over the years. We are a very strong hymn-singing church, and the idea of singing the psalms to familiar tunes was very appealing—and the result was an enthusiastic reception by our congregation. Never before had I been so immersed in study and reflection of Scripture than through this personal exercise in devotion and discipline.

In the enterprise of turning biblical prose into hymnic paraphrase, there is an evident distinction between a “rhymester” and a “poet.” Paraphrasts must seek to make the original imagery of the source text both faithful and creative in their efforts. Confinement to a particular text and converting it to words and rhythms that fit the constraints of a hymn tune are probably the reasons that more noted poets never attempted a paraphrase of the entire book of Psalms. Most of them were composed by local pastors, country squires, and humble parish organists whose intent usually surpassed their skill. None of the great poets ever attempted versifying the entire book of Psalms, with the possible exception of George Wither, Christopher Smart, and James Merrick (although one could reasonably argue whether any of these may be considered “great poets”). Milton, Donne, Crashaw, Cowper, and Herbert composed a few settings—more as exercises in the discipline of paraphrasing—and then moved on to more liberated creative efforts. Perhaps Oscar Wilde was correct when he observed that there seems to be “some curious connection between piety and poor rhyme!” (Hommerding and Kodner 1997: 124).

One question that always arises when paraphrasing the Psalter is how faithfully the poets are bound to the Old Testament theology and prophecy the Psalms represent and how much of the New Testament fulfillment will be reflected in their poetry. The name “Jesus” is found in many versions from Watts and Wesley through the evangelical movements of the last two centuries. The most faithful Christian paraphrasts retain the Messianic character of the psalms as much as possible, stopping short of bringing in the gospel accounts of Jesus, but never losing sight of where we live on this side of the cross. Where God’s wrath upon our enemies is invoked, we should acknowledge that we, too, are deserving of God’s anger and judgment yet are spared by God’s grace. God is our Shepherd, our refuge and strength, in ancient Israel and today.

Perhaps the most dramatic revelation to me as I approached the Psalter was the impeccable truth in what David Dickson meant when he described the Psalms as a blend of the “crosses and sweet comforts.” How often in the course of our lives, when things become so complicated and extreme, are we tempted to ask, “Why should I sing?”—our grief so inexpressible, our joy so complete, that nothing, perhaps not even music, can be

a fit vehicle for the words we would speak. Rather, may we throughout the seasons of our lives be sheltered and uplifted by psalms in our worship and never cease to ask ourselves, in the words of that old, familiar folk hymn, “How can I keep from singing?”

NOTES

1. Several translations exist: “divine and glorious gift,” “fair and glorious gift,” “beautiful and glorious gift,” and so on. See Leaver 2007: 70, 86–87, 89.
2. “Calvin on Congregational Singing, 1543,” quoted in Canadian Reformed Churches 1972: v.

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CHAPTER 40

PSALMS AS RESOURCES FOR PASTORAL CARE

CAROL L. SCHNABL SCHWEITZER

THE work of Donald Capps has been seminal among ministers and pastoral theologians who turn to the Psalms as a resource for grief counseling in pastoral care (Capps 2003: 47–97; Anderson 2005: 199).¹ Later in this essay we will look briefly at the structure of lament psalms and how this structure provides a pathway² for pastoral care in times of grief. This being said, there is a tendency to think of psalms and pastoral care as inextricably linked around the issue of grief as a direct result of important work begun by Capps and later continued by others including Billman and Migliore (1999) and Hamman (2005). I suggest that attending to grief by the pathway of lament is one among many ways in which the Psalms may be viewed as a resource for pastoral care and counseling relationships.

Taking a cue from James L. Mays, who states that psalms are “the vocabulary of prayer and praise, the ‘first order’ language that expressed the sense of self and world that comes with faith in the God to whom, of whom, and for whom the psalms speak” (1994: 3), we may conclude that using the Psalms as a resource in pastoral care guides the speaker as well as the listener in acquiring a language that is dynamic and mutually engaging. Speaker and listener obtain a clarified sense of self and a better understanding of their place in the world and in relationship to God. Mays identifies three ways in which the identity of Psalms as scripture shaped their liturgical usage: (i) They were “the constant, the continuity, or common language” among people of faith “across the ages”; “along with scripture and catholic creeds they are a foundational component of community in the world church”; (ii) they became a model for writing other hymns and prayers; and (iii) they were “studied and interpreted” thus “protecting worship from decay into rote” (1994: 5). The significance of these points for pastoral care were and continue to be the *familiarity of the Psalms* for leaders and members of Christian faith communities even if the language world of the ancient psalm writers differs significantly from that of the twenty-first century. Does this familiarity diminish the power of their metaphors for today’s faithful? I attempt to demonstrate that the answer to this question is “no” when

I examine briefly what two contemporary scholars have written in relation to the power of the Psalms in times of illness. The Psalms provide pathways between past, present, and future for individuals and communities of faith from which one may learn how to move from lament to praise because God's word "is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path" (Ps. 119:105).

Mays is quick to observe that the relationship between worship practices and Psalms is reciprocal insofar as their identity as scripture shaped liturgical practices, but their use in worship also affected the use of psalms or reading of psalms as scripture in two important ways that have significance for pastoral care. First, Mays notes that liturgical and devotional uses of psalms "gave them a place in the life of Christians that no other scripture had. They were heard more often and on special occasions" (1994: 5). As further evidence, Mays directs our attention to the reality that certain psalms set the tone for particular liturgical observances—Psalm 51 and Ash Wednesday or the beginning of Lent is one such example. Second, Mays observes that as a direct result of the manner in which psalms are used in worship and for devotional practices "they became the language of the people. There was the possibility—and actuality—that the people became the 'I' and the 'we' whose praise and prayers and meditations the psalms express" (Mays 1994: 5). Thus in response to the question, "How does this shape pastoral care?" one may want to consider a line from a hymn text, "What language shall I borrow?"³

A pastor or pastoral counselor who desires to incorporate scripture in pastoral care as more than a way to close a session will benefit from regular personal devotional reading of the Psalms.⁴ Why? Psalms can inform our own language of prayer and praise, and the poetry can guide or instruct us concerning how to think in new ways to help bring about the transformation of suffering in the lives of the faithful who seek our counsel. It is not accidental or coincidental that the use of psalms in pastoral care is associated chiefly and primarily with occasions of grief. In this essay I would like to offer up a challenge to expand our pastoral uses of psalms by thinking about the use of metaphor and poetry. When Mays describes Augustine's reading of the Psalms, he notes that the language of the Psalms evokes feelings that may in turn be led or guided by the Psalms (1994: 3). As already noted, they are the language of the people and this language stretches across time and boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and geography. The use of psalms in pastoral care is dependent upon the way "poetry does its work by bringing out something new from what is conventional" (Brown 2010: 19). In a manner of speaking, a pastoral counseling relationship at its best calls forth something new in the life of the one seeking counseling as well as in the life of the minister providing counsel. Brown's description of the work of a poet is analogous to the work of a pastoral counselor:

The poet is a semantic alchemist who combines standard verbal ingredients in new ways and records the surprising results. He or she excels in the art of combination, of juxtaposition. A poem's freshness emerges from the forging of new connections among familiar words and images, from taking surprising turns along well-worn routes. (2010: 19–20)

The minister or pastoral counselor assists the one seeking care to “combine standard verbal ingredients in new ways” by listening appreciatively to the story as it unfolds in the context of a safe and nurturing relationship. Healing or amelioration of suffering is fostered along a new pathway born out of a relationship where “connections among familiar words and images” take surprising new turns.

THE BIBLE AND PASTORAL CARE: A CAVEAT

The mere mention of using scripture as a foundation for pastoral care among pastoral theologians is almost certain to point toward what has become a type of polar divide among those who provide pastoral counseling. The discussion of how scripture is to be used and understood in a counseling situation raises anxieties by counselors who reside on either side of the divide.⁵ Pastoral theologian Donald Capps describes the moderate resurgence group in pastoral care as those who believe that “the Bible has a major contribution to make to the very process and goals of pastoral care and counseling” along with theories and techniques from modern secular psychotherapies (Capps 1984: 8; Schnabl Schweitzer 2009: 631). The other side of the polar divide is represented by those who subscribe to a “biblical counseling model” that rejects completely any wisdom obtained from secular psychologies in favor of wisdom that “can only come from God and God’s word” (Winfrey 2007: 24–27). The divide exists along an imaginary line between those who subscribe to a “biblical model,” claiming that it is sufficient for answering life’s questions and healing life’s difficulties, and those who tend in the direction toward the “triumph of the therapeutic” in pastoral counseling thereby minimizing the disclosive power of scripture (or what Capps identifies as the principle of the Bible as agent of change) and its ability to promote transformation in the lives of the faithful.⁶ There is a growing middle ground approach to pastoral care and counseling that values both the disclosive power of scripture and the advances made in the human sciences. Is the cost of engaging in this enterprise—bringing the Bible to bear on pastoral care—worth the benefit? I suggest that it is, and we’ll see or overhear just how this is so in the juxtaposition of Walter Brueggemann and James Kugel.

A TALE FROM TWO SCHOLARS

Brueggemann grounds his approach to relating the Bible and pastoral care upon the metaphor of covenant, which he contends is our human vocation (Brueggemann 1995: 151). He understands covenant as metaphor to be “a way of discerning and articulating reality impressionistically, which permits a variety of nuances, dimensions, and possibilities. But the metaphor gives a focus to all these diversities and makes a main claim in distinction to some other anthropological options” (p. 151). His purpose boldly

stated is “to consider a way in which fresh conversation with psychological disciplines can be enhanced. We hope that biblical perspectives can serve as both support and criticism” (p. 151).

Thus far it would appear that Brueggemann is taking a moderate approach to the relationship between the Bible and pastoral care. Moreover, he contends that the “primary claim of ‘covenant’ as a way of understanding our theme of pastoral counseling and theological anthropology is that human persons are grounded in Another who initiates personhood and who stays bound to persons in loyal ways for their well-being” (p. 151). There is no ground for contention from the perspective of a feminist pastoral theologian just yet. As noted earlier, through the language of the Psalms we may come to gain a deeper appreciation of self in relation to God and the world. Covenant as metaphor seems on the surface to cohere with Mays’s view that psalmic language is based on one phrase, “the Lord reigns,” which is to be heard as “both a declaration of faith and a statement about reality” (Mays 1994: 6). Brueggemann continues that this emphasis on personhood being grounded in Another serves as an antidote to the contemporary “temptation” toward “self-groundedness” or what I would identify as narcissism. I certainly concur here. This is, I suggest, where the similarity ceases between Brueggemann’s and Mays’s view, and my own hopes for fresh interdisciplinary conversations offered up by Brueggemann are dashed.

Brueggemann claims to want a fresh conversation with psychological disciplines that will enhance pastoral care, which is laudable. Yet just as an ill-timed response in pastoral care may create a serious setback or, worse, sever a relationship, so too an ill-timed or poorly informed scholarly claim serves to heighten tension rather than build bridges in an interdisciplinary conversation. How so? Brueggemann contends that even as he summarizes God’s characteristic actions from a theological perspective, psychology “must ask about actions that are appropriate responses to God’s initiatives toward us” (1995: 157). Psychology or psychologists are interested in actions, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals and groups, but as an academic discipline psychology is less than interested in “appropriate responses to God’s initiatives.” Pastoral theologians *are interested* in this kind of analysis, and there are certainly areas of overlap with academic psychology—discussions about human abilities to forgive are one such example that occur both in psychology and pastoral theology. Brueggemann’s next move is to speak about hope as an appropriate response to God’s initiatives. Again, on the surface this seems to be a safe psychological move.

When I was a seminary student my clinical pastoral education supervisor cautioned me that the disjunctive “but” used in a sentence needs to be done so judiciously because it serves as an eraser for everything that precedes it. Brueggemann’s conclusions about despair and depression serve as just this sort of an eraser, making it difficult to have fresh interdisciplinary conversations that will enhance the reading of scripture and pastoral care. He states: “Hope is not something one does at the margins of life when our resources fail, but it is definitional for persons in covenant with this God. *I submit that despair and its psychologically acceptable form, depression, are in fact covert acts of atheism in which we conclude that nothing can happen apart from us and no one is at work but*

us” (1995: 157, emphasis added). To argue that depression is a condition that constitutes “covert atheism” is misinformed at best and irresponsible at worst. It is precisely these types of comments that increase tensions—and not creatively—between disciplines in the art and practice of pastoral care.

Nevertheless, Brueggemann acknowledges the importance of lament as a “faithful human action” in response to loss and grief. He notes, not surprisingly, that lament psalms end with praise suggesting that this act of praising God is where despair and depression need to turn (1995: 159–160). Yes, this is so, but this type of posture toward a person struggling with depression overlooks the reality that persons struggling with depression may actually have the desire to make a response but lack the ability to make a response because the grief is overwhelming—paralyzing to the extent that it blocks out the light of day.⁷ Brueggemann’s statements are tantamount to blaming the one who has been victimized and express, perhaps unwittingly, a naïveté about the numerous types of depression and the origins of depression. A complete discussion of the reasons for and types of depression is beyond the scope of this essay, but I raise up Brueggemann’s comments for consideration because he is a well-respected biblical scholar who wields much influence. The claim that depression is a form of covert atheism sounds strangely reminiscent of the “biblical counseling model” that rejects insights from psychology. The nuances he expounds with respect to covenant are not extended with the same generosity toward psychology. There are, however, other voices from the guild of biblical scholarship that are more generous.

James L. Kugel is one such voice. Kugel’s book, *In the Valley of the Shadow* (2011) was released approximately ten years after his cancer diagnosis and seven years after he went into remission. Although his aim is to assist the reader to acquire a deeper understanding of the foundations of religious belief, his writing is deeply personal and his elucidation of certain psalms (and other wisdom texts including Ecclesiastes 3) in light of his illness draws the reader in immediately. While not directly the purpose of his writing, Kugel’s interpretations and translations provide new insights and suggest pastoral uses for the psalms that do inspire the hope that Brueggemann writes about because Kugel does what Brueggemann does not—acknowledge the reality of despair with a pastoral voice. Thus Kugel writes: “But the main change in my state of mind was that—I can’t think of a better way to put it—the background music suddenly stopped. It had always been there, the music of daily life that’s constantly going, the music of infinite time and possibilities; and now suddenly it was gone, replaced by *nothing*, just silence” (2011: 2; emphasis in original). He even admits that just as music is infinite, he like so many others thought (somewhat naively one might want to interject) that his life would also go on, but at age fifty-four he came to a rude awakening despite what he describes as his own obsession with death.

Kugel locates the feeling of shock (when music fades to silence) that sounds more like the silence of despair in Psalm 146:3–4, which he translates as: “Do not rely on the mighty to save you, or on any human being. His breath gives out, then back to earth he goes—on that very day, his projects are all for naught” (2011: 3). This is one illustration of how personal insight intertwined with careful study of the psalms may lead to

new pastoral discoveries. The sentiment expressed may well describe the experience of a cancer patient undergoing chemotherapy—everything is for naught and life becomes very small; it is centered on treatment and dealing with its side effects. Here we see how these two verses may speak differently to one undergoing treatment for cancer. They are tucked into a psalm that is often described as one that praises God for God's help and could easily be overlooked.

Kugel's translation in light of his experience as a patient raises up an important point for ministers who want to use scripture—the Psalms specifically—as an integral part of their pastoral care: the experience of our congregation members or clients may yield insights not previously considered. This is a matter of how to interpret and whose interpretation will carry more transformative power. The feeling of “absolute smallness” that Kugel attempts to portray is what another might name despair, but at no time is it a statement of rejection of God. It is a statement about the finitude of being human and what it feels like to be a sufferer struggling with something that approximates the absence of God (Kugel 2011: 27). The trained theologian may need to yield his or her own voice of interpretation in favor of something not yet considered as the music plays on.

Again Kugel reads and translates from the perspective of a cancer diagnosis as we read with him from Psalm 102, “O my God, do not take me *halfway through life*. Your time stretches from age to age” (2011: 4; emphasis added).⁸ The psalmist knows that God's time is infinite and thus implores God for more time. As Kugel concludes, there was still some hope even though the situation was not normal. In stark contrast to Brueggemann's proposal that acknowledgment (or worse yet, acceptance) of despair is tantamount to atheism, we see here that acknowledgment of feelings raw and unrefined actually leads toward a vision of hope. God is present; God listens; God may intervene. In fact, the psalmist cries: “I've been groaning so much my ribs show through my skin.” We see here a graphic description of persistence (Kugel 2011: 5). The words of the psalm outline for us what a counselor would identify as a process of working through the issue. A brief confession: I've read these same verses many times over but until I read them from Kugel's perspective, bearing in mind his illness, I did not hear them this distinctly. What then does this tale from two scholars teach us about pastoral uses of the psalms?

Brueggemann wants us to think broadly in terms of covenant as the apex of human vocation, but he does so in a manner that is abstract and nearly devoid of connection to the realities of human suffering in the twenty-first century. Because we live in a covenant relationship with God, there is always hope, but Brueggemann's portrayal of hope is experience-distant when compared to the experience-near interpretation provided by Kugel. Experience-near language is the language of pastoral care (Capps 1993: 3). Kugel's own journey through illness was not devoid of hope, but his hindsight reflections give us a glimpse of how the language of the Psalms is the language of the people—a language to borrow from in times of great distress. In some manner what we see when juxtaposing the work of these two scholars are two very different types of perceiving self in relation to the world. I suggest that Kugel's way of perceiving the world and his place in it in relationship to God embodies a more pastoral approach to using psalms as a resource

in providing care. Thus he writes, “What the self *is* is not a fact in itself; rather, it’s a way of *construing* the facts, a way of construing reality” (2011: 67; emphasis in original). We may conclude here that if our sense of self or our sense of reality has become distorted by the particulars that silence our background music the psalms may revive the strains of the melody if even faintly. The Psalms provide a counterpoint to the way we construe the facts of our lives. Where does the music take us from here? From grief to praise.

LAMENT—A PATHWAY FROM GRIEF TO PRAISE

Billman and Migliore (1999: 5–21) and Brueggemann (1995: 98) are among the voices who take note of the cost of lost lament for the life of faith, both communally and individually. Capps first published his recommendations for the use of lament psalms in grief counseling more than a decade (1981) prior to any of these works and laid the foundation for what followed (2003 [1981]: 73–97). His work provides a model or program for ministers who counsel grieving parishioners. He notes that the six elements of a lament psalm⁹ provide us with a structure for the process of this type of counseling. The fact that there are six elements does not suggest that the counseling will endure over a six-week period, nor does it suggest that all grieving persons will move through the process at an identical pace or even that the counseling relationship is bound by all six elements. These elements do suggest a shape for the movement of the counseling from beginning to conclusion. Thus Capps contends: “If grief counseling is to be shaped by the psalm of lament, it needs to deepen its understanding of the *complaint* stage and take seriously the three later stages in the lament: *petition*, *words of assurance*, and *vow to praise*” (p. 77; emphasis in original). Capps emphasizes that God’s transforming intervention “gains its entry through the *complaint* stage, so the importance of this stage can hardly be exaggerated” (p. 77; emphasis in original). He summarizes four lessons for counseling which may be learned from these four elements or stages of lament.

The first gain from taking the lament form and its complaint seriously is to become more aware of “the *range* and *depth* of complaints in the grief experience” (2003 [1981]: 77; emphasis in original). Why is this significant? It is a grieving person’s attempt to give a name to what is felt and focus those feelings. The listener—whether it is God, the minister, a counselor, or trusted friend—demonstrates trustworthiness by hearing the complaint into truth. No matter how graphic the description, no matter how intense the level of felt anguish, the listener suspends his or her judgment and listens attentively. It is only possible to move on to a confession of trust if the speaker has a felt sense of “adequate grounds for trust. . . . Those who do not, need to be helped to discover such grounds for trust. The pastoral conversation can itself provide a context in which trust is not only discussed but actually experienced” (p. 79). Trust is not a resolution to the

problem, but it is, as Capps notes, “a simple confidence that one will be able to cope” (p. 80).

A second benefit gained or lesson learned from taking the lament form seriously for working with those who are grieving is to understand the significance of petitioning God to intervene. (We noted this earlier in Kugel’s discussion of Psalm 102.) A basic rule of pastoral care is to follow the lead of the one seeking care, which means allowing the one who grieves to set the tempo of conversation. The background music will not be revived or restored (to borrow from Kugel’s metaphor) if the minister pushes the one who grieves to accept the loss before he or she is ready. The very structure of the petition grants the griever pardon to keep on asking questions, to keep on pleading with God for assistance even until one’s “bones show through the skin.” This is significant for the grieving process because “it enables one to do something about one’s complaints by clarifying how they might be alleviated, and by laying hold of new spiritual energies to overcome them” (Capps 2003: 80). In other words, I rehearse to myself, the counselor, the minister, God, or the one who is deceased what would be helpful in the process of moving on by addressing God formally to intervene in response to these needs (e.g., request for assistance with anger, guilt, loneliness, betrayal). This process works with individuals grieving a loss as well as with individuals preparing for death.

In juxtaposing the elements of a lament psalm with “stages of grief” as delineated by Kübler-Ross, Capps offers insightful critique of her understanding of the “bargaining phase.” As a hypothetical case Capps proposes that a person with a terminal illness promises to attend church every Sunday if God will restore health. Capps understands this not as a “bargaining” enterprise but rather as a petition that ministers in their “zeal to help the dying move toward ‘acceptance’” tend to dismiss, and he asks a question worth pondering: “Or is it that we moderns have difficulty believing that a promise to attend church if one is healed might be the petitioner’s way of *vowing to praise?*” (2003: 82; emphasis in original). Thus ministers may actually impede the grieving process. This leads us to a third lesson learned from Capps and his interpretation of the lament form as a model for grief counseling.

Yet another way for ministers to become obstacles in the grieving process is to offer words of assurance too soon in which case the words of assurance may be misunderstood or rejected by the one who is grieving. Using Westermann’s work as a guide, Capps observes that “even though the words of assurance were spoken by a human voice, what was critical to the movement from petition to assurance that one’s petition had been heard was not human words but the *experience* of God’s trustworthiness, which is implicit in the very structure of the lament itself” (2003: 82; emphasis in original; see also Westermann 1974: 20–38; 1980). The lament psalm begins after all with an address to God expecting that God is all the while listening. Counselors, ministers, and others who listen to the petitions of the grieving never take the place of God’s intervention, but they may serve as mediators supporting the petitions of those who grieve. By listening and perhaps by repeating or rehearsing the details of the petitions, the minister offers a mediating or reassuring presence that in turn facilitates a psychological process

of internalization of the deceased (in the event of a death). The end result is “neither mere ‘acceptance’ of . . . loss nor a denial of the reality of death, but the emergence of a new dimension in the relationship between the deceased and the survivor” (Capps 2003: 82–83). When these steps or stages in a process have been navigated with some measure of confidence and success, the resolution phase or “vow to praise” may be close at hand.

A fourth lesson learned from Capps is that when a vow to praise God is not forthcoming because the one who grieves is disillusioned (or perhaps bitter), God who listens to lament accepts this difficulty (2003: 87). Psalm 131 is an example of just this sort of inability. The Psalm concludes not with praise but implores Israel to hope in the Lord forever. No complaint is described, no petition is offered, but a condition of sorrow is portrayed, “my heart is not lifted up” (v. 1). The mediator (minister or counselor) who has offered words of assurance and testified to the trustworthiness of God by virtue of his or her ability to listen and not defend God’s actions embodies this quality on God’s behalf. As Capps suggests, the counselor may simply offer up the idea by stating that in the counselee’s same shoes or situation it would be difficult for the counselor or minister to praise God. It may be the case that as a result of internalization a person is able to praise God that a loved one no longer suffers or give thanks for a long and fruitful life, but this need not be a requirement for a “successful” closure to a counseling process. In this discussion of lament as a form or structure for grief counseling, we have focused on death as the occasion of grief. There are, of course, many other types of loss that may trigger a grieving process including physical well-being, personal resources, a job, a home, or a dream not realized. By extension one can implement the same sort of structure using a lament form to guide the grieving or counseling process. In the final section of this essay we examine briefly the power of metaphor in counseling relationships and the possibilities for hope that poetry offers—especially the poetry of the Psalms.

PASTOR AND POET—PROPOSALS FOR HOPING

If one accepts the premise that “steady growth and transformation toward a healthy self and healthy relationships are often the focus of a pastor’s relationship with individuals in a care-giving relationship” (Schnabl Schweitzer 2010: 31), then metaphors as understood by Gerhart and Russell (1984) are an important element in pastoral conversation that promotes such growth and transformation. They identify three main contributions that metaphor offers for theological discourse, contributions also appropriate for pastoral care, which I have summarized in an earlier work: (i) one can use the tension of metaphor to contradict one’s ordinary world of meanings and to conclude in paradox; (ii) one can succumb to the tension, allowing it to bring about a horizon shift so sudden and radical that self-continuity is sacrificed; and (iii) one can mediate the new meaning,

allowing it to transform the new incompatibility within the self's steady horizon-growth (Schnabl Schweitzer 2010: 31; see also Gerhart and Russell 1984: 85–120). It is this third point that I believe offers the most promise for pastoral care because a new meaning has the power to transform grieving into hoping for a better future and eventually leads to praising God for prayers heard and answered. Nevertheless, with point one we see that metaphor may contradict what seems like hopelessness in the face of a looming crisis so that hope may be rediscovered. Moreover, in the case of grieving a loss or a death (or even an anticipated death) one may experience this as an “incompatibility” that, when confronted by a powerful metaphor, is transformed and leads to new self-understanding and deeper relationships in community and with God.

Individuals who seek out ministers and counselors for care often come with issues of suffering, sorrow, or other life crises that have shifted their self-continuity such that they have difficulty reestablishing equilibrium. As psychoanalyst Steven Knoblauch has observed, many of these same individuals in therapy have difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings verbally, which has led him to focus on what he has identified as the “musical edge of therapy” or the “acoustic, nonverbal dimensions of speech” (2000: 25). I introduce this new concept here not to complicate matters but rather to highlight the similarity between music, metaphor, and poetry. Just as music offers us a different way to listen, so too do metaphor and poetry. When speech fails a person seeking help, as it frequently does, the conscientious caregiver needs to be prepared to take a road less traveled. Psalms provide an intersection in much the same way that song lyrics do between metaphor, music, and poetry. Psalmody has a musical edge that may serve to awaken expression of previously unspoken or unarticulated thoughts and feelings because it has the power to reach into the unconscious mind as it breaks down the walls of repression. Brown observes this “musical edge” in a similar fashion from the vantage point of biblical scholar: “The power of poetry, specifically biblical poetry, to invite the reader to *look through* and thus *beyond* the written word, beyond its poetic structure and meter, through its symmetry and sonority, presents an irresolvable paradox” (2002: 9; emphasis in original). Why is this important for pastoral care relationships? This power stirs imagination and memory even while it challenges our visions of the way things are so that minister and parishioner together are transported to a new place where hoping is reinvigorated and life becomes more bearable. Does the pastor need to be a poet him- or herself?

Capps recognizes an affinity between poets and pastors insofar as each has a “tendency to be explorative, questioning, and tentative, though not spineless or without conviction and a passion for truth” (1993: 3). Thus the pastor does not need to be a poet but needs to have an appreciation for language in much the same way that poets do. Poetry as we noted, especially biblical poetry, has the capacity to “challenge our usual and routine ways of perceiving and construing our life experiences, enticing us into viewing them from a different angle or slant” (p. 2). This is what pastoral care providers strive for in their caregiving. Psalms help us to revive the background music that grows faint or completely silent when faced with difficulty or tragedy. Even when we are unable to recite the words of the psalms for ourselves, to hear them recited aloud by a minister (or

a faith community) who does have confidence reassures us that God still listens, there is still hope, and a new dawn is possible.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the Psalms are the language of the people that give voice to deep rooted but sometimes unexpressed feelings. They challenge us to see the world from new angles and provide a form or structure for the process of pastoral care and counseling. The context in which psalms are read is as vitally important as the context in which they were written. Psalms portray a covenant relationship between God and God's faithful people offering us a pathway out of suffering to a life enriched with hope that concludes with praise of God. Nurturing growth in faith, a healthy sense of self, and transformed or healthy relationships are goals for pastoral care relationships that are dynamic and mutually engaging. The language of the Psalms and the episodes of life portrayed therein instruct us in the ways of faith—grace, gratitude, hope, love and trust—and provide pathways for our erring feet when we lose our way. The harsher realities of life are never diminished or denied but are named, often graphically, which may be jolting for individuals who have not yet worked through situations of abuse.

Some may still want to ask, “Just how am I to use the Psalms pastorally?” In response, I suggest that one begin by reading them regularly in a disciplined way but do so imaginatively thinking of experiences that parishioners or clients bring to bear on the text. Sing the psalms and note the rhythmic patterns, the tonal modulations, and the peaks and valleys of phrases highlighted by those who have set psalms to music. Write a poem or psalm that addresses a pastoral care situation. Extend the lessons learned from laments. Listen for the Word of God for *you*.

A FINAL PERSONAL NOTE

When the time drew near to be writing and then completing this essay, I discovered myself in the midst of a “new incompatibility” as both of my parents’ health declined. I lamented while I accompanied my mother to many of her weekly trips to the chemotherapy infusion unit. These trips shaped my “new normal” as well as hers. There is no doubt in my mind that had I finished writing this essay prior to the beginning of my parents’ steady decline and my mother’s eventual death, I would have had a much different perspective while writing. For a time, my own personal grief silenced the background music and the words did not flow. I have experienced firsthand how one needs to move from complaint to an eventual vow to praise God if only by giving thanks that a loved one no longer suffers from the ravages of a dreadful disease. It was from my mother that

I first heard the Word of God spoken as Bible stories at bedtime and then as hymns sung, and for her inspiration I can now praise God.

NOTES

1. Anderson cites Capps's book to note that "no one has written more about the Bible and pastoral care" than Capps (2005: 199).
2. See Brown 2002: 33. Brown writes in his discussion of Psalm 119: "Poetically speaking, the metaphor of the pathway 'maps' both God's *tôrâ* [which Brown defines as God's instructive word, teaching, commandment, statue, or precept] and the speaker's response to *tôrâ*, imbuing them with a sense of dynamic, mutual engagement."
3. From "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2006: 352).
4. In my own devotional practice, I am inclined to read the psalms aloud or sing them, because they were written for such purposes. This takes more time, but it is well worth the investment in view of the fact that recall of the text of psalms is enhanced by the melodic shape of a psalm tone. This translates into an expanded ability to "borrow" from their language. For more information on how music encodes language and facilitates the recall of words, see Levitin 2008: 1–40, 189–228. Levitin writes about the connections between rituals, religion, and song, noting that rituals "are a form of externalized, social memory, and when marked by music, they become even more firmly instantiated in both our personal and collective memory. The songs, sung at the same time and place every year . . . bind these events together in a common theme, in a common set of beliefs about the nature of life. The music acts as a powerful retrieval cue for these memories precisely because it is associated with these and only these times and places" (p. 191). We have seen this same kind of association made by Mays in reference to festival occasions in church and the reading of certain psalms.
5. This writer includes herself in the discussion concerning anxiety and the use of scripture in pastoral care because a more fundamental approach to interpreting scripture often exacerbates or escalates violence in abusive situations. It certainly perpetuates the subordination of women and children who are often left without a voice in patriarchal faith communities that promote corporal punishment for behaviors that are construed as a form of disobedience or sin.
6. Capps 1984: 12–13. "Triumph of the therapeutic" refers to a text by Philip Rieff first published in 1966 by University of Chicago Press. When this phrase is employed by those who counsel from the perspective of a biblical model, it is meant as a derogatory critique of anyone who chooses to learn something from the human sciences. The "biblical model" as described here is a naïve approach at best and a harmful perspective at its worst because it views mental illness as "sin."
7. Central in my own work as scholar and pastor has been a study of how to assist those faithful Christians who struggle with depression to acquire an improved sense of self and amelioration of their suffering. See Schnabl Schweitzer 2010.
8. By comparing Kugel's translation with that of the NRSV, one discerns more readily that the speaker in the psalm does not want a premature death (102:23–24).

9. Every lament psalm does not include all six elements, which Capps identifies as address to God, complaint, confession of trust, petition, words of assurance, and vow to praise (2003 [1981]: 75).

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CHAPTER 41

THE PSALMS: A MONASTIC PERSPECTIVE

EDMÉE KINGSMILL SLG

What reason did not dictate reason cannot explain.

Samuel Johnson

THE first five chapters of Andrew Louth's *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* presents five figures for whom contemplation takes the soul upwards in an ascent to the One to whom they seek to be united: Plato, Philo, Plotinus, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. These are followed by a chapter called "The Monastic Contribution," and about the contrast Louth writes:

No longer will they be drawn upwards to holiness in ever greater likeness to the invisible God; now they will find themselves being drawn down into the material world with the Word made flesh. So, in the *Life of Antony*, we read nothing of the soul's ascent to God in contemplation, but rather of its descent into the world given over to sin, a descent to the place of the demons, there to do battle with them. (Louth 1981: 99–100)

In Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, the Psalms are cited no more frequently than other Scriptural texts. But several references to Antony's own words reveal that when the battle with the demons was on, Antony resisted them with psalms.¹ It was after Antony's death in 356 that the Psalter began to displace other biblical texts in the worship of the ascetics who had followed Antony into the Egyptian desert. The music historian J. McKinnon, describes the "psalmodic movement" as "an unprecedented wave of enthusiasm for the singing of psalms that swept from east to west. . . in the closing decades of the fourth century" (McKinnon 1994: 506). McKinnon surveys the wave of enthusiasm for psalmody in detail, tracing its progress from the desert to the churches, basilicas, and cathedrals of the towns where vigils using psalmody became an established and popular practice. John Chrysostom, an exact contemporary of the rise of psalmody, wrote in an oft-quoted panegyric, "David is first, last and central."

The combination of the emergence of Christian monasticism with the “unprecedented wave of enthusiasm for the singing of psalms” reflected an extraordinary resurgence of the Hebraic spirit. Not that the Hebraic spirit had ever departed. But in the early centuries, after Christianity had become established, both the Old and New Testaments were largely interpreted by writers educated in Hellenic modes of thought and culture. Consequently, the early theologians and exegetes of Scripture brought a cast of mind that, while essential to the development of the nascent Church, overshadowed its Hebraic roots, as in the case of the greatest of all exegetes and theologians of the early centuries, Origen (185—c. 254).

Origen’s first major work was a massive commentary on the Psalms, nine books of which survived intact through antiquity, while in our day the seventy-four *Homilies on the Psalms*, attributed to Jerome, have been restored to Origen (Peri 1980; see also McGuckin 2011: 98). Those aspects of Origen’s theological speculations that were thought to be suspect, and which led to his condemnation at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, resulted in the greater part of his enormous output being lost. But some important works—his *Commentary and Homilies on the Song of Songs* and *On First Principles* among them—were saved by being translated into Latin. From this latter work, John McGuckin has drawn out comments on the Psalms which, he tells us, are cited more often than any other Old Testament book. Many of these citations, McGuckin writes, “apply the psalms within a cluster of other Old Testament citations, so as to provide what we might call ‘generic ballast’ to his argument; that is, Origen shows his readers that his ideas have a genuine network of scriptural support sustaining them” (2011: 99).² Commenting on Psalm 34:6 (LXX): “Let their way be dark and slippery and an angel of the Lord persecuting them,” Origen takes what McGuckin calls the “catholic *simpliciores*” to task for believing

that a moral fall from grace is always attributable to demonic influence, and is only something to be expected since human psychic abilities, if pitted against demonic powers, will always fall short....[Origen shows] how many passages there are in scripture which demonstrate that fallen angels are in opposition to the just on earth, but not that they are given irresistible power over them. (McGuckin 2011: 101).

This is a subject to which we will return.

Not much more than a century after Origen’s death, when the Egyptian desert was teeming with ascetics, both male and female, a division developed between the “intellectuals” and the “anthropomorphites,” as they have been dubbed. The “intellectuals” were those who read and revered Origen and who believed in a wholly incorporeal God. The “anthropomorphites,” on the other hand, were those who did not read Origen, who believed in the God presented to them in the Old Testament and who, consequently, are always referred to in the literature on this subject as “simple, unlettered monks.” But there was no division on the question of psalmody about which all were united and which became the principal liturgical ingredient in the life of the ascetics.

The quantity of psalms varied from the hermit who might recite the Psalter every twenty-four hours to the communities where the number of psalms varied until, in the

Rule of St Benedict, a century and a half later, the Rule prescribed a weekly cycle for the recitation of the Psalter:

For those monks show themselves very slothful in their sacred service who, in the course of a week sing less than the Psalter and the customary canticles, whereas we read that our holy fathers strenuously fulfilled in a single day what I pray that we lukewarm monks may perform in a whole week. (Cited in McCann 1952: 67)

This weekly cycle continued in Benedictine communities down to recent times. But modern constitutions are unable to sustain the Night Office, and the weekly cycle has had to be modified accordingly.³ That there is a direct correlation between asceticism and the quantity of psalms prescribed is supported by a passage in the *Institutes* of John Cassian (c. 360–435), the great archivist of the Egyptian ascetics, which illustrates this correlation. “The venerable fathers,” he writes, “...met together to discuss what plan should be adopted for the daily worship throughout the whole body of the brethren.” And he goes on:

And when each man in proportion to his own fervour—and unmindful of the weakness of others—thought that *that* should be appointed which he judged to be quite easy by considering his own faith and strength, taking too little account of what would be possible for the great mass of the brethren (wherein a very large proportion of weak ones is sure to be found); and when in different degrees they strove, each according to his own powers, to fix an enormous number of psalms, and some were for fifty, others sixty, and some, not content with this number thought they actually ought to go beyond it, there was such a holy difference of opinion... that the time for their Vespers office came before the sacred question was decided. (*Institutes* II, 5)

The account goes on to relate that one cantor rose up in the midst to chant the psalms while everyone else sat, listening intently, as was then the custom (and continues to be in the Orthodox East). At the conclusion of twelve psalms, interspersed by prayers, the cantor sang an “alleluia!” and vanished. Cassian’s account continues in the next chapter:

Whereupon the venerable assembly of the Fathers understood that by Divine Providence a general rule had been fixed for the congregations of the brethren through the angel’s direction, and so decreed that this number should be preserved both in their evening and in their nocturnal services. (*Institutes* II, 6)

It seems to me that this importance given to the psalms is at least partly due to what I call the Hebraic spirit of the early monks of the Egyptian desert. And it is this spirit that responds to the anthropomorphism of the Psalms. The Psalms reveal a God to whom one can talk, praise, complain, cry for help against demonic forces, cast oneself down in penitence, and, above all, love. But this is to read the scriptures literally, complain the “intellectuals.” Nevertheless, the God of the Hebrew Bible, particularly of the Psalms, *is*

represented in anthropomorphic terms. Eyes, ears, hands, and face all occur frequently. For example:

Let your eyes be fixed on justice (17:2).⁴
 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb (139:15).
 Bow down your ear, O Lord, and answer me (86:1).
 Let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication (130:1).
 O God, lift up your hand (10:12).
 Your hands have made me and fashioned me (119:73).
 How long will you hide your face from me? (13:2[1]).
 Your face, Lord, will I seek (27:11).

It is this picture of a heavenly, fatherly being—found no less in the New Testament—that is the mark of the Hebraic spirit, a spirit which, as already noted, is inevitably under attack from the “Greek” spirit whenever the two coincide. Cassian relates a tragic story, the consequence of the Pastoral Letter sent by Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, in 399 to the monks of the desert in which he considered the foolish heresy of anthropomorphism at great length and vigorously refuted it. Cassian goes on:

This was received by almost all the body of monks residing in the whole province of Egypt with such bitterness, owing to their simplicity and error [Cassian was on the side of the intellectuals!] that the greater part of the Elders decreed that on the contrary the aforesaid Bishop ought to be abhorred by the whole body of the brethren as tainted with heresy of the worst kind. (*Conferences* X, 2)

But in Cassian’s monastery a visitor explained the error of anthropomorphism to the brethren with such learning and eloquence that all were convinced of its heresy except one old man, Sarapion, of outstanding virtue. But he too was brought finally to heel until, bewildered and confused,

he on a sudden burst into a flood of bitter tears and continual sobs cast himself on the ground and exclaimed with strong groanings: “Alas! wretched man that I am! They have taken away my God from me, and I now have none to lay hold of, and whom to worship and address I know not.” (*Conferences* X, 3)

The different understandings of the intellectuals and the anthropomorphites on the question of God’s incorporeality inevitably led to the latter, as we have seen, being portrayed as unlettered folk who knew no better. But that is because the doctrine of divine incorporeality is a legacy from ancient Greece that has already held the field, influencing post-talmudic Judaism on this point hardly less than a Christianity under Greek influence.

Ideally, we would like both the Hebraic spirit and the Greek spirit to be brought together. And they were. At the end of his introductory pages in the chapter “The Monastic Contribution,” quoted above, Louth writes:

And so the two strands, what we might call mystical and anti-mystical, are woven together in the history of Christian monasticism and are the source of endless tensions. But, at the outset of this history, we find them both embodied in a state of perfect development in one man, Evagrius of Pontus. (Louth 1981: 100)

EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS

Evagrius articulated the “wisdom of the desert” in both its practice and its mysticism. “His writings comprise perhaps the single most influential body of works in Eastern Christian ascetico-mystical literature and, in the person and *oeuvre* of his disciple, John Cassian, they would travel to Latin-speaking monasticism as well” (Golitzin 2002: 28).

What is known about Evagrius (c. 345–399) derives largely from the *Lausiac History* by Palladius, which records his brilliance as a debater against the Arians before he withdrew into the Egyptian desert about 383. Evagrius was very much an Origenist, which led him into similar speculations leading to his condemnation at the Council in 553, at which Origen was also condemned. Consequently, a great many of his writings were lost, although much was saved under the names of more orthodox writers and by translations into other languages, especially Syriac. But his *Scholia on Psalms* survived in Greek in its entirety and, as Luke Dysinger writes in his study, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, can be “reconstructed from printed sources” (2005: 23). Dysinger’s interest is primarily concerned with Evagrius’ teaching on the Psalms as preparation for contemplation and less with Evagrius’ view of the violence in the Psalms as expressing the battle of the ascetic with the demons.⁵ But because the Psalms cannot, in my view, be fully comprehended without some understanding of the prominent place given in them to this battle, I am here focusing on that aspect in relation to the monastic life.

In the Coptic version of the *Lausiac History* we learn that Evagrius recited a hundred psalms in the course of twenty-four hours interrupted by periods of silent prayer. It seems that the monks did not regard psalmody as prayer, and Evagrius was emphatic on this point. For him prayer is silent and imageless and prepares the soul for the battle between good and evil expressed in the Psalms, while the praise of God in the Psalms leads in turn to contemplative prayer. In one of his works, the *Praktikos*, Evagrius notes a difference between prayer and psalmody: “It is a great thing to pray without distraction; a greater thing still to sing psalms without distraction” (Dysinger 2005: 71).

First and foremost, for Evagrius the Psalms provide an encounter with Christ. They are indeed messianic, whether they are understood to be pointing to the Messiah of the New Testament or to a messiah yet to come. And while the Christian interpretation of the Psalms is justified, especially by the verse at Luke 24:44 (“everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled”), the Christological interpretation, safe in the hands of the Church Fathers, was seriously overdone in the later medieval period. The resultant sense of satiety made it difficult to arouse any appetite for it, inducing an aversion that remains to this day. In any case, the

importance of Evagrius lies, rather, in his understanding of the Psalms as “the mirror of the soul,” as promoting repentance, calming the passions, putting to rest the body’s disharmony and, of prime importance, his understanding of those psalms now thought to be violent as being about demonic forces and the means of dealing with them.

Evagrius’ teaching on this aspect of the psalms articulates the experience of the desert ascetics, in particular those who, like Antony, battled alone with demons for many years. Evagrius himself lived the semi-eremitical life, that is, he was attached to a community and joined them for the liturgy on Saturdays and Sundays, but otherwise he lived as a hermit. Thus he knew both kinds of life, and of the distinction between them he writes in his treatise on the *Praktikos*: “The demons fight hand to hand with the hermits, but in their battle against those who live a life of virtue in a monastery or a community they fight only indirectly—through the more negligent brethren” (cited in Louth 1981: 104). And, it may be added, especially while singing psalms in choir—the battleground of any monastic community.

We see, then, that only the fiercest of ascetics actually encounter the demons. And it is these demons of which the psalms speak. But for both the hermit, when not engaged in hand-to-hand encounter, and for those living in community, they hang around, attacking by insinuation, tempting thoughts, arousing memories, as well as causing sadness, boredom, resentment, a sense of there being no love among the brethren, and, worst of all in Evagrius’ view, anger—except anger against the demons, which he recommends striking with a psalm verse. Another warning from Evagrius is to avoid being led astray by the demons’ reasonable-seeming words—difficult advice indeed!

THE PSALMS IN THE VERNACULAR

The language used for the Psalter by the men and women of the fourth-century desert was Greek. From Benedict onwards it was Latin, the language used down the centuries in the monastic communities of the West for the recitation of the Psalter. That a high proportion of monks and, even more so of nuns, would not have known Latin was not seen as a barr to understanding. It was the act of reciting the Psalms, of being in choir and chanting them that was understood to feed the soul. For those who did know Latin, the violence in a number of the Psalms would have been understood at the level of allegory. But monastic communities founded, or re-founded, in modern times have generally adopted a vernacular version or have moved from the Latin to the vernacular, and so have been brought up against what is, to the modern mind, a real difficulty. There are always those for whom the Psalms are, to use Evagrius’s phrase, the “mirror of the soul,” but for others the violence remains a problem. There is rarely a consensus, but there are communities that have made a decision to exclude the violent passages. Let us look into this question.

In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* there is an entry under the heading “Imprecatory Psalms” as follows: “A term apparently first used in 1881 by the Semitic

scholar, Robertson Smith, for those psalms which invoke the divine vengeance (e.g., 58, 68:21–3, 69:23–29, 109:5–19 and 137:7–9)” (Cross and Livingstone 2005: 829). The *Dictionary* goes on: “The proposed revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1928 provided for the omission from public recitation of such portions of the Psalter as were considered incompatible with the spirit of Christianity” (p. 829).

If taken at face value, the imprecatory psalms would indeed be incompatible with Christianity and no less with Judaism. But the language of biblical poetry is wholly metaphorical and was understood to be so before the reaction of the Enlightenment to excessively florid interpretations reduced exegesis to the one level of obvious meaning. That reaction may have been justified in its early stages, but it soon hardened and became determinedly rational. The acceptance of some psalms as typical of Old Testament violence, and the view that any other reading fails to face the facts and is “spiritualizing” or “allegorizing,” deprives the biblical reader of the capacity to look through the words and thus to be given the sense that these psalms are about the cosmic battle between good and evil. For instance, Psalm 109 cannot be said if “Let his children be fatherless, and his wife become a widow” is understood *au pied de la lettre*.

The most horrifying psalm of all read literally is, of course, Psalm 137 with its final verse: “Blessed is he who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock.” Evagrius understood this verse to mean: Dash the thoughts provoked by the demons that distract during prayer against the rock, which is Christ. A little later Augustine on this psalm, in his *Expositions on the Book of the Psalms*, would give the interpretation that was to become the traditional one for Christians:

What are the little ones of Babylon? Evil desires at their birth. For there are those who have to fight with inveterate lusts. When lust is born, before evil habit gives it strength against you, when lust is little, by no means let it gain the strength of evil habit; when it is little dash it. But you fear lest though dashed it does not die. Dash it against the rock. And that rock is Christ. (Augustine 1857: 6.12)⁶

A modern writer, C. S. Lewis, also reflects the view that the psalmist is referring to thoughts:

I can use even the horrible passage in 137 about dashing the Babylonian babies against the stones [Coverdale mistranslation]. I know things in the inner world which are like babies; the infantile beginnings of small indulgences, small resentments, which may one day become dipsomania or settled hatred, but which woo us and wheedle us with special pleadings and seem so tiny, so helpless that in resisting them we feel we are being cruel to animals. They begin whimpering to us, “I don’t ask much, but,” or “I had at least hoped,” or, “you owe yourself *some* consideration.” Against all such pretty infants (the dears have such winning ways) the advice of the Psalmist is the best: Knock the little bastards’ brains out. And “blessed” is he who can, for it is easier said than done. (Lewis 1958: 136)

C. S. Lewis thought he was allegorizing (and how well he does it!). It is now the accepted view that Augustine was allegorizing. But it would not have occurred to Augustine, neither to Evagrius, nor to anyone else before faith in the Old Testament as a source of divine instruction had faltered, not to say failed, to think this verse could mean that a person is “blessed” who takes actual infants and dashes them against a rock. A little investigation into the Hebrew of this psalm suggests that the “allegorizers” are right.

First, the context of Psalm 137 is that of the tragedy of exile and of its consequences: “For how shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (v. 4). The word for “strange” is *nēkār*, which means “that which is foreign,” especially “foreign gods,” thus: “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in the midst of idolatry?” The last two verses, which are directly addressed to Babylon personified, express the desire that her “little ones” (*ōlēlīm*) will be dashed against the rock. The word also occurs in Psalm 8:2 in a well-known metaphorical sense: “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.” Otherwise, it is used, with one exception (Joel 2:16), in situations of tragedy and violence. That *ōlēlīm* should be dashed in pieces occurs in four other places: 2 Kings 8:12; Hosea 13:16; Nahum 3:10; and Isaiah 13:16. The three occurrences in the prophetic books give a place as the “mother.” In Hosea, it is Samaria; in Nahum, it is Nineveh; and in Isaiah, as in Psalm 137, it is Babylon. In these three instances, the word *ōlēlīm* is evidently used as a metaphor for what a people give birth to—evil of some kind which, in the prophets, means idolatry. Here the “little ones” represent the lies, that is, the false worship to which the “daughter of Babylon” gives birth. Another psalm gives us a clue to the meaning of vv. 7–9: “Behold those who are in labor with wickedness, who conceive evil and give birth to a lie” (Psalm 7:15). It is, then, of such “little ones” that a state of blessedness would be granted to the one who dashes them against the rock. But this interpretation hangs upon the word for “rock” (*sela’*). It is used in four other psalms in each of which the psalmist states, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress,” or something similar (18:3[2]; 31:4[3]; 71:3), and “God is my rock” (42:10[9]).⁷ Here the psalmist is less explicit, but he does give a clue by providing the definite article. It is not, then, *any* rock but *the* rock, that is, God against whom the *ōlēlīm* must be dashed.

The mistranslation “stones” by Coverdale—the Psalter C. S. Lewis would have used—followed by the King James Bible was evidently influenced by the Latin, which does have stones/rocks, in the plural, unlike the Septuagint which translates the Hebrew accurately. But now that our English translations have, for the most part, corrected this mistake,⁸ it should be seen without resort to the Hebrew that “the rock” is God.

We seem, however, to be no nearer making this connection. The rational spirit of the second-century heretic Marcion has reemerged in the last two or three hundred years and has so entered the bloodstream that all apparent violence in the Psalms is understood by Christians to be an example of the God of wrath of the Old Testament in contrast to the God of love of the New—the disastrous consequence that the Church Fathers foresaw in their battle against Marcionism.

ANDRÉ CHOURAQUI AND THE PSALMS

So far I have only considered the Psalms from the standpoint of the beliefs and practices of Christians, particularly in regard to monasticism. A modern voice, neither Christian nor monastic, focuses no less on aspects of the Psalms which those living the monastic life are liable to experience.

André Chouraqui was born in Ain Témouchent in Algeria of parents descended from Spanish Jews. He studied law in Paris and became a distinguished politician as well as a biblical scholar—an unusual combination. He died in Jerusalem in 2007, where he had been president of a number of good causes, in particular working for peace between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. His approach to Christianity was sympathetic, and he was not afraid to use the language of the New Testament. He was evidently successful in his many undertakings, but the other side of success in promoting human welfare, as evident it seems to me in the long Introduction to his translation and commentary on the Psalms, is suffering (Chouraqui 1970).⁹

This Introduction is concerned in the first place with the battle between the “Innocent” and the “Reprouvé” or “Révolté” as Chouraqui also calls this entity. The Innocent represents the Just and the latter two appellations represent the satanic force that opposes the Just *sans cesse*. The opening page is a panegyric but quite unlike those Christian panegyrics that tend to confine themselves to the positive aspects: the praise, joy, and beauty of the Psalter. Chouraqui, on the contrary, plunges us straight into the battle: 150 steps erected between life and death, 150 mirrors of our rebellions and our faithfulnesses, of our death-throes and our resurrections.

There are, Chouraqui insists, only two ways: the Way of Light and the Way of Darkness, two ways that are unequal and inimical to each other but coexisting in time and space. The two actors in this duel, who are at the frontier of life and death and who confront each other from beginning to end are the Innocent and the Rebel. Both say “No.” One refuses the Way of Light; the other rejects the Way of Darkness. One says “No” to the iniquity of the world; the other to the eternity of Light. On the way of iniquity we soon meet the Prince of Darkness, the apocalyptic beast. In the struggle against this beast the Psalter constitutes the reserve of arms for combat: every verse, every word is a two-edged sword, and every two-edged sword has the power of death over the demons.

And the Psalter resounds with this battle. We see it wholly engaged in hunting humankind. It lies in wait and comes unexpectedly upon the less attentive of those on the way of light. The way of the Prince of Darkness ends only in death. He is, he lives, he wounds in the realm of illusion. He cannot, whatever he does, attain to that work which lasts. Nevertheless, his power seems not to have any obstacle. For him the Innocent, on the one hand, does not exist, while, on the other, the Innocent is the object of his hatred. The Innocent, for his part, opposes nothing. He offers his throat to the knife of the Revolté. If the Innocent is often wounded, the Revolté is always vanquished. For the inflexible line that separates them is the line that leads to God’s justice. Such is the most powerful intuition of the Psalms, the articulation of all biblical revelation.

Chouraqui then considers the suffering of the Just as a necessity for purification. The Just is spared neither struggles nor sufferings. The night of the Just corresponds to the darkness of the Reprouvé. The symbolism of the night is constantly used by the psalmist to make clear the stages of purification, each day leads to new sufferings:

I have come into deep waters,
and the torrent washes over me.
I have grown weary with my crying;
my throat is inflamed;
my eyes have failed from looking for my God. (69: 3b-4[2b-3])

The night of the purification of the Just is well symbolized by the three images that occur frequently in the Psalms: the Just is dumb, deaf, and blind. Thus he is torn from the way of iniquity. His interior distress weds him to the night of his grief to accomplish his redemption.

Chouraqui then goes on to consider the relation of the Just to the collective. We have noted two actors, he writes, the Innocent and the Reprouvé, who share the same scene. In reality they are assisted by an innumerable following. Those on the side of the Reprouvé he sees as the nations against Israel. This interpretation, it seems to me, is full of potential for understanding much of the Old Testament. In the New Testament—to leave Chouraqui for a moment—Matthew's Gospel presents the Innocent contra the Reprouvé at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4), while at the end the same Gospel gives the most vivid picture of the scenes leading up to the crucifixion, where we see the collective ranged against the One, the Innocent in the hands of a humanity under the influence of the diabolic.

To return to Chouraqui, there is much more that cannot be followed here except to note that at the end of the Introduction he makes a statement that, like all the foregoing, links him to the thought of Evagrius: "On the way of a unifying knowledge it [the Psalter] is situated at the threshold of pure contemplation" (Chouraqui 1970: 111).

Chouraqui, it seems to me, touches the depths of the Psalms. He could have been among those discerners of the divine who collected the psalms into a five-part book—the interior aspect of the five Books of Moses?—and added them to the sacred scrolls.

LITTLE GIDDING

I want to conclude with a brief mention of a community that was by no means monastic in structure or intention but in the perfection of its corporate life has been surpassed by few of the monastic houses of history.

Little Gidding, a place in Huntingdonshire, England, from which the community took its name, flourished in the early seventeenth century. It consisted of about thirty persons, mostly related to one another, including children and grandchildren. This extraordinary family became increasingly ascetic in regard to food and sleep under the guidance of Nicholas Ferrar. They prayed the entire Psalter daily. And when they adopted night vigils, they again used the Psalter.¹⁰ Two studies by A. L. Maycock give a full and vivid picture of this family (1954 and 1963). Little Gidding and Nicholas Ferrar, its founder and guide, remain a wonder and an example—impossible to follow—of living wholly to the glory of God. But their very virtue exposed them to attack. They were accused, on the one hand, of being Papists and, on the other, of being Puritans—equally serious charges at the time, in both cases subject to the death penalty. Nicholas Ferrar once declared to a friend that “to fry on a faggot was not a worse torment than the continual obloquy to which he and his family had been exposed.” Again, in the thought of Chouraqui, the Just is often wounded while the Revolté is always vanquished. Little Gidding remains the brightest of beacons on the Way of Light.

CONCLUSION

I have focused on that aspect of the Psalms which presents the greatest difficulty to the rational mind. It is not exactly the case that those living the monastic life have irrational minds and therefore understand the Psalms any the better on that account! It is, rather, that the Psalter by its nature is the proper food for those giving themselves to a life of prayer in common. The chanting of the Psalms in this context nourishes a level of consciousness that, like the unconscious, is not directly available to us. At this other level the Psalms are, to use Evagrius’s phrase once more, recognized as the “mirror of the soul,” both where the battle is fought and where praise and joy in God overflow. But for everyone who reads the Psalter, there is, as for the reading of all Scripture, a choice, beautifully expressed by the seventeenth-century poet George Herbert, in a verse of his well-known poem *The Elixir*:

A man who looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass.
And then the heav’n espy.

NOTES

1. *Life of Antony* 39 and 40 (Athanasius 1980: 60–62).
2. This is an important point, often not understood and dismissed as “allegorizing.”
3. My own community kept up the Night Office until the late 1980s.

4. I am using the Psalter in the Proposed *Book of Common Prayer* for the use of the Episcopal Church, which we adopted in my community not long after its publication in 1977.
5. In what follows I am largely indebted to Dysinger's excellent study (2005).
6. Ps. CXXXVIII.12 (my modernization.)
7. There is another word for "rock" in the Psalms, *šûr*, which occurs explicitly in relation to God thirty-three times. In Pss. 18:3[2]; 31:3[2]; 71:3 both words occur in parallel, not always shown in translations.
8. The NIV compromises and features "the rocks," which, of course, is no better than "stones."
9. The following discussion is drawn from pages 83–100 in his Introduction.
10. The most recent study fails to inform the reader on this central practice (Ransome 2011).

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CHAPTER 42

ECOLOGICAL USE OF THE PSALMS

DAVID RENSBERGER

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, human beings face a circumstance unlike anything hitherto known. Former generations endangered and sometimes wiped out other species, but not until modern times have we had the technological capacity to transform the earth, the oceans, and the atmosphere themselves. The ecological crisis confronts us with a potential devastation so great that it may threaten our own existence, or at any rate the continuance of human societies and cultures as we know them.

What will have happened by 2030 or 2050 cannot be known for certain as this is being written. But what does seem clear is that something must change in human behavior if cataclysmic effects are to be avoided. A problem unique to the modern era requires a unique and innovative resolution. The quest for this resolution begins by recognizing that we got here in large part because a culture of unrestrained exploitation of the earth's systems to satisfy human desires persisted after the tools and technology it employed changed drastically. This culture may have been functional when technology was relatively crude, prior to the Industrial Revolution, but now it can no longer endure, simply because it has gotten too good at what it does. It must end or be transformed. A culture of living *from* the earth and even *against* the earth must give way to a culture of living *on* the earth and *within* the given systems of the earth.

What tools do humans possess for such a reshaping of culture? Among many that might be named, surely two of the most important are religion and art. Both have been significant in creating and sustaining human cultures, and both can play a part in cultural transformation. The Psalms exist precisely at the nexus of these two. They are religious art, religious poetry and song; put differently, they are artistic religion, religion chanted and sung. Their pervasive presence in Judaism and Christianity has had a formative impact on the cultures in which these religions exist and which they have helped to create. Now the Psalms can play a major role in the necessary ecological transformation—it is not too much to call it a conversion—of culture.

But are the Psalms able to bear this part? Can poems and songs from a culture so remote be of any use in resolving this uniquely twenty-first century dilemma? Three complementary perspectives suggest that they can. First, certain premodern cultures had a more harmonistic stance toward the nonhuman world than the modern culture of “man versus nature.” The Psalms, which both expressed and shaped one such culture, may offer the possibility of stepping back from modern aggressiveness into a posture more open to coexistence with earth’s other creatures. Second, there is the ancient Christian principle of *lex orandi lex credendi*, “the rule of prayer is the rule of faith.” The Psalter (or the particular aspects of it that are emphasized) can shape the worldview of those who pray it, encouraging them to live within the earth rather than against it. Of course, they can do so only if the Psalter contains elements conducive to such a transformation. Third, then, there are in fact aspects of the Psalms that can be useful, and even essential, to the transformation of culture in the twenty-first century. The remainder of this essay is devoted to identifying and considering some of these factors.¹

THE CREATOR AND THE CREATION IN THE PSALMS

The Psalms, like all the biblical texts, assume a created world. The cosmos is neither self-originated nor eternally existing, nor is it self-governing. The texts make no attempt to demonstrate this or prove it, but simply presuppose it as a feature of the world as it is—indeed, as its *determinative* feature.

Cosmology

Needless to say, the psalmists’ understanding of “the world as it is” was quite different from our own. The solar system (not to speak of galaxies and an expanding universe), magnetic fields, relativity, even so basic a concept as gravity were unknown to them. The earth was understood as an unmoving flat disc with edges that could, in theory, be reached (the “ends of the earth,” Pss. 65:6[5]; 72:8; and elsewhere).² Below it were the deep waters that here and there break forth as springs, creating streams and rivers (104:6–10; 136:6), and Sheol, the Pit, the realm of the dead (69:16[15]; 139:8). Foundations or pillars held the earth-disc above these waters (18:16[15]; 75:4[3]; 102:26[25]). Surrounding the disc of dry land was the sea, generally a deadly, chaotic threat to orderly human life in the Hebrew Bible. Far above the earth-disc, a dome arched over it (also supported by pillars or mountains beyond the sea; 18:8[7])—the sky, conceived of as a solid object with the heavenly bodies moving about in it. Above this sky or heaven was the realm of the divine beings from which God ruled, presiding over a royal court composed of angels

(“messengers”; 103:20; 91:11) or of subordinate “gods” (82; 95:3). This heaven perhaps had a “heaven” above it and water that God let fall down as rain (148:4). All the waters seem somehow connected, so that sky/heaven, earth, and water/sea form the three levels or “stories” of the universe (135:6).

In all this, the psalmists simply joined in the observations and presuppositions of their time and place. Yet regardless of the great the gulf between their understanding and ours, there is one commonality. God, although absolute ruler of the world, was not seen as intervening capriciously to alter its known regime. As indicated by the predictable movements of the heavenly bodies, there were unchanging rules set in place, “a decree that will never pass away” (148:6 NIV). Despite allowances for rare miracles, the universe was considered reliable and unchanging.

A Variety of Contexts

“Creation” in the Hebrew Bible refers not only to the origin of the universe but to its continued maintenance and governance (Fretheim 2005: 3–5). God as Creator is the focus of Psalms 8, 104, and 148 (discussed below). But the theme of creation is present in numerous other psalms of various types. “Enthronement” psalms, celebrating YHWH’s universal reign, are rich in creation language and motifs (Pss. 93:3–4; 96:10–13). Some of these motifs are drawn from the divine battles of Canaanite mythology, also found within other types of psalms, such as the communal plea in 74:12–17 and the proclamation of the Davidic covenant in 89:10–13[9–12]. The thunderstorm theophany of Psalm 97, also a Canaanite motif, is paralleled in the celebration of divine rescue in Psalm 18:7–17[6–16], the praise hymn Psalm 29, and the recollections of the exodus in 68:8–10[7–9]; 77:17–21[16–20]. The praise hymn Psalm 33 links creation to the relationship of justice and faithfulness between the Creator and Israel. While that psalm does not overtly connect God’s creative word with the Torah, God’s covenant word to Israel, Psalm 147:15–20 does do so. Psalm 119:89–96 makes the same connection more subtly, and Psalm 19, viewed as a whole, parallels the order of the heavens and the all-pervading sun with the Torah that gives wisdom and light (Brown 2002: 82–84; Fretheim 2005: 140–44). The invitation to worship in Psalm 95 is based on the acclamation of God as maker of all things. Other psalms connect the Creator with the bestowal of vital agricultural bounty (65:7–14[6–13]; 144:13–14). Not only human beings but all other creatures are the objects of this divine bounty and care (104:10–23; 147:8–9).

The idea of God as Creator is thus part of the fundamental substratum of the Psalms, appealed to in all sorts of contexts and circumstances. All this is poetry, of course, not science or philosophy. The aim is not consistency or mathematical exactitude but to praise the Creator, or promote faithfulness, or plead with God. The appeal is more to the viscera than to the intellect. The Psalms assume and celebrate a Creator whose work of invention, maintenance, and regulation may be imagined (because no human has direct access to it) using a variety of motifs, metaphors, and images.

A Variety of Perspectives

The psalmists' God is not an abstract clockmaker, winding the universe up and letting it run, but a personal Creator deeply involved in the world. In some respects, however, we find an interesting diversity.³ Quite strikingly, Psalm 90:2 speaks of God as *giving birth* to the world, a cosmic Mother. While Psalms 33 and 147 refer to God's creation and maintenance of the world by means of the divine word, Psalm 104 focuses on the *ordering* of the universe, and early in this psalm sky, water, wind, and earth may possibly be thought of as existing materials rather than being created out of nothing (cf. 8:4[3]). The frequent use of the verb *yšr*, "to form or fashion," has similar implications (74:17; 95:5; 104:26). In Psalm 104:30, the ongoing birth of new animals is the creative work of the divine spirit even after the universe has been established. As noted above, in some psalms there are hints of contact with Canaanite mythology in which the storm god Baal defeats Sea and Death, giving order to the world by taming these chaotic beings.

What is clear and consistent is that the Creator retains absolute control over the creatures and governs them with complete authority. Yet even here there is some diversity. Often God is portrayed as taking moment-by-moment charge of events in creation: "Whatever the LORD pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps" (135:6 NRSV), causing, for instance, both snowfall and the warm wind that melts it (147:15–18). All things serve God (119:91; 103:19–22; *hakkōl* ["the all"] in such passages is a term as near to "the universe" as the Hebrew Bible has). The cosmos in all its details is keenly responsive to the divine will. On the other hand, the Creator can also be seen as responsible for putting in place the general order of the world, and the divine word can be viewed not as an instrument of minute governance but more broadly as "a decree that will never pass away" (148:6 NIV). Psalm 104 lists in exquisite particularity the domains in space and time given over to the activities of all the creatures, celebrating the divine wisdom that brought them into being (v. 24). Similarly Psalm 147:4–5 remarks how God, infinite in intelligence, is able to number and name the stars. These two perspectives are not necessarily in conflict; the poets of the Psalms celebrate the divine providence on both grand and fine scales. It is simply worth noting that both scales are in fact present.

For the psalmists, the cosmic order, with its wonderful profusion, intricacy, and continuity, is a cause for praise of the One who ordained and maintains it. This praise arises not only from the Psalms' human speakers but also from other creatures: the universe not only obeys but worships. Besides Psalm 148, discussed below, this theme occurs in the psalms celebrating YHWH's enthronement as universal ruler, wherein earth, sea, and sky join in the new song (Psalms 96, 97, and 98). This praise from nonhuman creatures is a noteworthy factor in the psalmists' understanding of the relationship between Creator and creation.⁴

ECOLOGICAL APPLICATION

What role can the Psalms' massive and varied representation of God as Creator in lively relationship with the created world play in the twenty-first century transformation of human awareness and behavior? To begin with, if the world is *created*, what does that imply about the human response to it? It might seem that the bare fact of belief in the biblical Creator should be enough to stimulate reverence and concern for all that has been made, but regrettably this has often not been the case. The failure to draw this conclusion is part of what must change. Rather than self-centered exploitation, the psalmists invite those who recognize the earth and its inhabitants as objects of divine benevolence to respond with humility, wonder, and gratitude. A basic orientation toward the universe as created rather than self-existing should call forth a desire to participate in created life responsibly, as beings accountable to the one who both brought the world into existence and continues to care for it. Living authentically within the reality of a created world goes beyond acknowledging the Creator's existence to harmonizing with the Creator's will, which according to the Psalms seeks the ongoing well-being of the creatures.

Twenty-first century readers of the Psalter obviously cannot adopt the ancient cosmology in which it participates. However, the very fact that the Psalms share that cosmology and occasionally even adapt the mythology of their Egyptian, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian neighbors has interesting implications. It suggests that while there is a distinctively biblical understanding of creation, there is not a distinctively biblical cosmology. Faithfulness to the Bible does not require adherence to an outdated understanding of the physical universe. Rather, just as the psalmists joined in the observations and presuppositions of ancient cultures about the universe, *so may their heirs join in those of the twenty-first century*. What is authorized by the Bible is not a particular concept of cosmic structure but an *explanation* of that structure in terms of the one Creator God. Those who read, pray, and sing the Psalms today may adopt Einstein's physics, Hubble's astronomy, and Darwin's biology with the same openness displayed by the ancient composers of the Psalms. We need have no more qualms about such modern "mythology" than the psalmists did about the mythology of their day. Just as they reframed the commonly understood universe in terms of the God revealed as the covenant God of Israel, so their inheritors today can reconceive the scientific cosmos as a created cosmos.

The larger task of reimagining, however, is that of rethinking the human relationship to the rest of creation. The Psalter's diversity in its representation of the Creator and the creation may prove particularly energizing in this task. This diversity means that there is a wealth of material available for rethinking Creator, creation, and cosmos, and the task is so great that all of this wealth may be required. Some themes and perspectives, for instance, may prove more inviting to one group of interpreters and some to another, and some previously muted motifs (such as the cosmic Mother in 90:2) may come to greater prominence. But the first step is to acknowledge and welcome the diversity itself. Too often the presence of multiple voices and viewpoints within the Bible has been

denied or treated with embarrassment, as if it somehow called the integrity or authority of the Bible into question. At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, a greater openness to plurality is becoming visible, and this will be vital for ecological reimagining. It should be added that the rapidly growing churches in African and other non-Western societies may find aspects of the Psalms' worldview more immediately congenial to the traditional perspectives of their cultures and may therefore have a particular contribution to make to this worldwide task.

In what contexts can the Psalter's portrayal of Creator and creation assist in the transforming of human culture and behavior? Worship is the most obvious, since the Psalms are worship texts in the first instance. Psalms of creation can be incorporated into liturgies and worship services alongside psalms of redemption, for instance. Transformed worship will hopefully lead toward transformed lifestyles. If "the rule of prayer is the rule of faith," it may be hoped that a rule of faith generates rules for life. The Psalter's basic response to awareness of the world as created is praise, and a life genuinely conditioned by praise for the Creator cannot remain an exploitative and destructive one. Advocacy will likely be another avenue toward the needed changes in human attitudes and behaviors, and the Psalms, with their arresting and moving language and rich conceptuality, should furnish both motivation and means for this as well.

JUSTICE ISSUES

The Psalms' understanding of God as Creator incorporates features of the social and political structures within which the psalmists lived. The acclamation "YHWH is king!" presupposes a monarchical system in which the sovereign rules absolutely. "All things are your servants" (119:91 NRSV) reflects a slaveholding society, with "servants" bound to do their owners' bidding. In such strongly hierarchical social orders, the self-determining will of the individual is minimized if not eliminated. The question must be raised whether concepts of God, humanity, and creation produced in such societies can still be viable in highly individualistic modern and postmodern democracies.

Although that question cannot be fully addressed here, we should note that the Psalms, as poems, operate by means of metaphor and other figures of speech. One cannot take "YHWH is king!" simply as an expression of cosmically approved political structure any more than one can take "a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past" (90:4 NRSV) as a statement of exact chronology. Metaphor, simile, and their kin are inherently both accurate and inaccurate. They point toward some truth about an entity, but they do not claim to express entire truth or pure truth: not *everything* about the thing compared is meant to apply to the entity under discussion. Comparing one's beloved to a flower may assert something about the beloved's beauty but not about a need for frequent watering. Saying that God is king expresses something about the difference between Creator and creation and about what creatures owe to their Creator, but it is not a statement about despotism or gender. It is important to be mindful of both the

strengths and the shortcomings of metaphors, and of the fact that *any* language about God ultimately fails. The sociopolitical world of the Psalms no longer exists, and metaphors drawn from it must be used with caution; yet they may still have important things to tell us about living as creatures in a created world.

Another area of encounter between justice issues and metaphor has to do with the “voice” (or lack of voice) of the earth itself in the Psalms. Members of the Earth Bible Project have suggested that the anthropocentrism of many of the biblical texts has worked to muffle or suppress earth’s voice, preventing the hearing of various kinds of potential communication from the nonhuman creation. What do we make, for instance, of Psalm 29:5–9? Does the storm-god theophany here represent Deity terrifying and injuring the creatures, who are left without a voice to protest? Should the biblical interpreter take up their cause and object to a portrayal in which violence seems inherent in the Creator–creature relationship (Habel and Avent 2001: 42–50)?

The mere raising of these questions might be criticized as pressing metaphor beyond its capacities, and also as being itself an anthropomorphism (and therefore anthropocentric), supplying the nonhuman creation with a set of responses typical of human beings alone. The response to such criticism from the Earth Bible Project has been to foreground the need and the possibility—more potent in “indigenous” cultures than in the post-Enlightenment West—of regarding the earth and its creatures as subjects and not just objects. Nonhuman beings may be thought of as having voice and other “human” characteristics, in ways that go beyond metaphor, precisely when they are thought of as *subjects* with whom humans experience intersubjective engagement. In thinking of other creatures as subjects, we are likely to think in terms of their “voice,” because voice and language are our primary tools for all communication and thought. Any anthropomorphism in this is then simply inevitable (Earth Bible Team 2001: 23–28).

Although it may be unavoidable for human beings to perceive the responses of nonhuman creatures in terms of human emotions and language, a certain reserve does seem advisable. Besides language, humans are also gifted with a freedom of will that differs from the rest of the “earth community,” and this freedom figures prominently in our perceptions of justice and injustice. The thunderstorm that shatters trees and sets forests on fire is part of the system necessary for forests to exist. Where we see only the terrifying (as Psalm 29 certainly portrays it), other creatures might experience an event that is loud but necessary and life-sustaining.

From these considerations it is clear that the vivid language of biblical poetry can stimulate our thinking and acting in relation to the rest of creation in multiple ways. It should sensitize us to questions of justice and of the applicability of ideas derived from human interrelationships to those among God, humanity, and the nonhuman creation. For instance, earth and sea, field and trees are said to rejoice at God’s coming to judge the peoples justly (96:10–13; 98:7–9), meaning not only judicial decision-making but equitable governance. Here the voices of the “earth community” are lifted up in joy that the Creator rules so as to protect the weak from the strong, including protecting other creatures from the depredations of “the peoples.” The strong bent toward justice in the Psalms implies justice not only among humans but also between humans and others.

Here is a strong motivation for reforming human conduct on the earth: those who see the wisdom and rightness of carrying out the will of God, both Creator and Judge, will want to align their actions with the universal equity envisioned by that will.

Imagination and creative discernment must be factors not only in worship but in the entire change of thinking that is needed for the transformation of human living toward the well-being of all creatures. Translating the Psalms' metaphors and imagery into new sociopolitical environments and allowing them to open our ears to the voices of other creatures without superimposing our voices on theirs will require sensitivity and patience for what may be a complex process of trial and error.

THE PLACE OF HUMANITY WITHIN THE CREATION

The rest of this essay focuses on the three psalms that deal specifically with the creation. Of these, only Psalm 8 has the human role in creation as its theme. But the others also imply an understanding of that role, and in this as in other matters we find a significant diversity of viewpoints.

Psalm 8

Psalm 8 offers the only concentrated reflection in the Psalter on humanity's place and role within the creation, and both its viewpoint and the difficulties associated with it are well known. "What is humanity that you should be mindful of [them], a human being that you should care about [them]? Yet you have made [them] little less than gods. . . . You have made [them] the ruler over all the works of your hands" (vv. 5–7a[4–6a]). Human beings have a God-given dominance over all other creatures. Indeed, as "little less than gods [or "God"]," their power and will seem to represent those of the Creator; they function as God's vice-regents on earth. This representation of seemingly unchecked human rule over the rest of creation, combined with the similar (but not identical) wording in Genesis 1:28, has often been taken as *the* biblical understanding of the human position in the world, whether regarded as blessing or bane for the world.

Such a reading does give something of the sense of what Psalm 8 has to say, but in this decontextualized and unnuanced form it is scarcely adequate or even accurate. Three factors in the context within Psalm 8 are particularly significant. First, the question "What is humanity?" does not stand alone but follows a temporal clause: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established. . ." (v. 4[3] NRSV). The stress is not on the grandeur but on the *smallness* of humanity in the cosmos. Given the immensity of the universe as even ancient people experienced it, there is nothing *intrinsic* to human nature that suggests a position of

sovereignty in the world. Moreover, the heavens are “*your* heavens”: whatever the human place in the universe may be, it is given, not earned, and therefore subject to accountability. This is a conception of the universe that draws on the hierarchical arrangement of ancient society, and we cannot help feeling skeptical of its view of humanity among the creatures as a kind of baron among peons. Nevertheless, the psalm makes it clear that our “glory and honor” (v. 6[5]) are secondary to our essential nothingness, and we remain answerable to our “lord,” our hierarchical superior (vv. 1[2], 9[10]). Finally, this portrayal seems based on a recognition that humanity’s godlike faculties of reason, language, and invention inescapably give us a dominant position on earth. Yet the psalm stops well short of seeing that position as something to be used exploitatively. The majesty of the divine Name “in all the earth” (vv. 1[2], 9[10]) is maintained when (and only when!) human beings exercise their powers in humility and dependence on the Creator.

This view of the human position in creation is fraught with danger, particularly when taken out of its context in Psalm 8, and out of the context of the other creation psalms. It is not surprising that human appetite for power has seized on this aspect of this psalm and made it central to a theological and ideological conception of human superiority over the creation. The understandings found in other psalms, however, offer an important corrective.

Psalm 148

Of all the psalms of creation, Psalm 148 may have had the most interesting afterlife. Its sweeping summons to praise addressed to the whole cosmos, visible and invisible, animate and inanimate, plant, animal, and human, is echoed in a number of subsequent poems and hymns, including the Song of the Three Young Men in the longer Greek text of Daniel (Prayer of Azariah 35–65), and the thirteenth-century CE “Canticle of the Creatures” or “Canticle of Brother Sun” by Francis of Assisi, with its slightly different perspective (giving praise to God *through* or *for* all the creatures surveyed). Modern Christian hymn writers have taken up the theme both by adapting the Song of the Three or Francis’s canticle and by composing new works based on Psalm 148 and other psalms. Examples include “All Creatures of Our God and King,” “Let the Whole Creation Cry,” and “Earth and All Stars.”

Two aspects of Psalm 148 seem to have intrigued and inspired later poets: its survey of the creatures, and its suggestion that the nonhuman creation offers praise to God (see Fretheim 2005: 249–68). The former seems to have roots, or at least counterparts, in Egyptian and Mesopotamian hymns. Something similar to the latter is found in other psalms but to nowhere near this extent (e.g., 96:11–12; 103:20–22; similar passages occur in the prophets, especially Second Isaiah, e.g., Isa. 43:10–12). In Psalm 148 the earth and its creatures, and the heavenly creatures, are clearly given voice. While we may think of this language as metaphorical, “merely poetic,” there may be an underlying assumption in this psalm that in some way all creatures actually are capable of praising God. *How* plants and animals (not to speak of hills and weather!) offer this

praise is not stated, and perhaps the psalmist did not think that other creatures' means and manner of praise were knowable by humans. Whether regarded as "mere" metaphor or not, this exercise in both literary and spiritual imagination continues to commend itself to our reflection on the relationship between the Creator and the non-human creation. By thinking of the praises of other creatures, we remind ourselves of the sanctity of all that is. To awaken to a worshipping universe would be dramatically transforming for most modern people. Indeed, it takes almost as great an act of imagination to conceive of *ourselves* and how we might behave with such an outlook. If we think of the hills not just as mineral stockpiles, of "creeping things and flying birds" (NRSV) not just as pests, but as fellow worshippers of our God, what happens to our inclination to exploit and exterminate them?

In Psalm 148, humans appear as *one among many* of the creatures that praise the Lord. The psalm thus offers a leveling vision of the created world. Humanity, with all its own internal societal diversity of status, gender, and age, still at its best simply takes its place alongside the stars, the wind, the trees, and the beasts as worshippers of the one Creator. This radically unfamiliar worldview is precisely the kind of *different* imagining of the world that may spur the twenty-first century's *reimagining*. Rather than seeing this "sacral" universe as somehow aside from or at odds with the central interests of biblical theology (a center that is, after all, always a constructed one), it is time to bring it into clear focus as part of the biblical witness to the relationship between God and creation and to the human place within it.

Psalm 104

In some ways Psalm 104 seems the most contemporary of the three creation psalms. Here too is a survey of creation, with human beings located firmly among the creatures, not apart from them. The focus here, however, is not on praise but on the entire life of the creation, and the survey is far more detailed. There are wild donkeys, cattle, ibex, rock hyraxes, and lions (Ps. 104:11, 14, 18, 21). Even the sea, alien territory to ancient Israel, gets brief mention (vv. 25–26). The psalm's attention to the habitats of the creatures offers a point of contact for the modern concept of ecological niches. The inanimate creation is seen in terms of its benefits for living creatures, providing drink, food, habitat, and niche differentiation (vv. 10–23); the provision of food and other goods for humans is merely a specific instance of the overall phenomenon (vv. 14–15, 21, 27). New generations of creatures come into being by the gift of divine spirit or breath (Hebrew *rûah*, v. 30). Thus not only the initial act of creation but the ongoing maintenance of the world is due to divine care, and all creatures are *continuously dependent on their Creator*.

It is widely acknowledged that Psalm 104 owes much to Egyptian models, as seen by comparing the fourteenth-century BCE hymn of Pharaoh Akhenaton to the Aton (sun-disk). There are Canaanite influences as well (vv. 3–9, 26). This Israelite hymn to YHWH as Creator is thus expressed in terms that seem deliberately cross-cultural,

but the cross-cultural influences have been processed through a particular vision of creation, the Creator, and the human place in it. Sun and sea, for instance, are no longer powers that create or destroy but obedient and fruitful creatures of the one God. Thus the shared elements are adapted to Israelite theology, while the Israelite creation ideas are enriched from other sources. Here too there may be exemplars for the twenty-first century dialog between creation belief and modern cosmological “mythologies.”

Psalm 104’s celebration of diversity and placement of humans alongside other creatures produces a view of humanity as having a particular place *within* the complex created order, not above or apart from it. This is strikingly evident in verses 19–23. Here sun and moon mark out niches for predators and human workers, each with its independent role and value. The speaker observes how “the young lions . . . seek their food from God,” unperturbed that, in the wrong place at the wrong time, he or she might *be* that God-given food. It has been noted that the principle of interdependence evident in this understanding of the human role in creation has been more at home in some African and Pacific Island cultures than in the post-Enlightenment West.⁵ Yet just this principle is an essential feature of ecological thought, and Westerners have a powerful and delightful resource for its recovery in Psalm 104. Moreover, this psalm leaves room for wilderness, for *wildness* as essential to God’s creation. The wild animals and wild places on land and sea are valued as highly as the cultivated ones, and wilderness is not the enemy of human life but the larger tableau in which it must humbly find its home.

Although, in broad outline, Psalm 104 follows the sequence of Genesis 1, there is one act of creation that is conspicuously unmentioned—that of human beings! Yet besides their interaction with other creatures, they are present in the psalm in a less obvious way, namely, *in the very praise given by the psalmist*, the “I” of verses 1, 33–35. They speak the psalm itself in their role as the creatures who are aware of all creation, and who have the joyful task of praise. Birds sing, the sun sets, lions roar, human beings praise.⁶

What are we to make, finally, of this psalm’s concluding prayer: “may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more” (v. 35ab NIV)? The note of judgment and perhaps even violence seems jarringly out of place. Yet consider it precisely *in* this specific place: who are “the wicked”? Surely those who *reject their position within God’s creation* and seek to carry out their own self-centered, exploitative desires rather than their Creator’s will. There may be an appeal to divine judgment here, but it may also be taken as a prayer that all people will awaken to the joy of serving the Creator in our modest niche, so that in this way “the wicked will be no more” (similarly Brown 2006: 23–32).

HUMANITY WITHIN CREATION: DIVERSE VIEWS

Psalms 8, 148, and 104 present three distinct, although not irreconcilable, views of the place and role of humanity within the created world. In Psalm 8 people are the climactic and ruling creatures. In Psalm 148 they offer praise *along with* other creatures, having no superior place. In Psalm 104 human beings are *the* praising creatures, but even more clearly than in Psalm 148 they occupy their own niche, not set apart from other creatures but with their own particular role. This diversity may prove to be helpful and even vital for the task of reconceiving the human role on earth, offering a variety of starting points and motivators for various people and groups to reach the moment of transformation.

For those for whom human supremacy in the natural world seems obvious and even divinely ordained, Psalm 8 offers confirmation but also indicates the contingent nature of that supremacy and suggests humility and accountability as indispensable factors in it. For those for whom worship and devotion are the center of spiritual and religious life, Psalm 148 offers a transformed vision of a praising universe. To live in this world, below stars, among hurricanes, cedars, and “feathered fowls” (Geneva Bible), is to dwell in the midst of praise, respecting our fellow-worshippers. Psalm 104 emphasizes more the dailiness of created life and the Creator’s care for it. All creatures have intrinsic value, apart from any usefulness to us, and their Maker provides for their needs. The human role is to observe the rest, to exclaim in wonder at the multiplicity and interconnectedness of it all, and to acknowledge the divine wisdom present everywhere in the world, not just in what serves or pleases us. By abandoning sins of exploitation, we help ensure that the glory of the Lord endures forevermore (v. 31). These psalms, like all the Psalms, thus offer a diversity of guideposts to the same goal: life lived wisely and justly, in obedience to the Creator and in harmony with all creation.

NOTES

1. For an alternative but similar treatment of the Psalms, see Walker-Jones 2009.
2. Translations of biblical texts are the author’s own unless otherwise indicated. Groups of references are meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.
3. On modes of creation in Genesis and elsewhere, see Fretheim 2005: 34–48.
4. or parallel phenomena in praise poetry from the Celtic tradition, see Allchin 1991: 3–15.
5. Ntrel 2001: 98; Walker-Jones 2001: 96–97.
6. It has been argued that in Psalm 104 all things, both “animate” and “inanimate,” are alive, given the terms for service, satisfaction, knowledge, seeking, and worry in vv. 4, 13, 16, 19, 21, 27 (Walker-Jones 2001: 92–96). This is well worth pondering, but Psalm 104 is not Psalm 148, and there does seem to be a distinctive human role of praise in the creation and singing of this hymn itself.

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APPENDIX I

“APOCRYPHAL” PSALMS IN THE PSALMS SCROLLS AND IN TEXTS INCORPORATING PSALMS

PETER W. FLINT

THE Psalms scrolls and texts incorporating Psalms contain text from fifteen or sixteen compositions that we would traditionally classify as apocryphal, plus at least two other texts. These are found in only six manuscripts, four from Cave 4 (4QPs^f, *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* [4Q448], *Prophecy of Joshua* [4Q522]), and three from Cave 11 (11QPs^a, 11QPs^b, and 11QapocrPs). This appendix introduces the fifteen (or sixteen) apocryphal psalms and two works that include psalmic compositions. For the nine marked with an asterisk (*), a translation is also provided.

Two compositions containing material also found in the Hebrew Bible:

- 1) David's Last Words (= 2 Sam. 23:1–7 in 11QPs^a)*
- 2) *Catena* (in 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b)*

Five compositions in the Apocrypha or found in some early Bibles:

- 3) Sirach 51:13–30 (in 11QPs^a)*
- 4) *Psalm 151A* (in 11QPs^a)*
- 5) *Psalm 151B* (in 11QPs^a)*
- 6) *Psalm 154* (in *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* and 11QPs^a)
- 7) *Psalm 155* (in 11QPs^a)

Eight or nine compositions unknown before the discovery of the Scrolls:

- 8) *Apostrophe to Zion* (in 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b)
- 9) *Eschatological Hymn* (in 4QPs^f)*
- 10) *Apostrophe to Judah* (in 4QPs^f)*
- 11) *Hymn to the Creator* (in 11QPs^a)
- 12) *Plea for Deliverance* (in 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b)

- 13) *David's Compositions* (in 11QPs^a)*
- 14) *First Song (or Incantation) against Demons* (in 11QapocrPs)
- 15) *Second Song (or Incantation) against Demons* (in 11QapocrPs)
- 16) *Third Song (or Incantation) against Demons* (in 11QapocrPs)*

Two previously unknown works that include psalms:

- 17) *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* (4Q448)
- 18) *Apocryphon (or Prophecy) of Joshua* (4Q522)

Text 1. David's Last Words

The Great Psalms Scroll preserves most of the final verse of *David's Last Words* (1 Sam. 23:17); the first six verses were also included but are now lost from the damaged bottom portion of column 26. The verses from this striking poem were apparently included to emphasize the Davidic character of the 11QPs^a-Psalter. Three other compositions that have the same function are *David's Compositions*, *Psalm 151A*, and *Psalm 151B*. In the following translation, verse 6 is added from the NRSV to supply context:

David's Last Words (11QPs^a, col. 27:1)

- ⁶But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away;
for they cannot be picked up with the hand.
⁷[And the one who touches them uses an iron bar
or the shaft of *battle-axes* (or, *outside weapons*. MT 2 Sam. 23:7 reads *a spear*);
and they are entirely consumed with fire on the spot.

Text 2. Catena

In 11QPs^a, Psalm 136 is followed by a short psalm of seven verses, six of them also found in Psalm 118. Because Psalm 118 itself is represented earlier in the scroll (frg. E:1–5, with vv. 25–29), this portion cannot be a different form of it. The *Catena* (i.e., a connected series of verses) is most likely a separate composition because it follows 136:26 with a small interval. (However, elsewhere 11QPs^a has larger spaces between successive compositions or starts them on the next line.) The first three verses of the *Catena* are also preserved in 11QPs^b. With almost all its contents found in Psalm 118, the verses of the *Catena* are numbered accordingly (vv. 1, 15, 16, 8, 9, X, 29, with X denoting an unknown verse). Furthermore, additional or variant readings are given in italics.

Catena (11QPs^a, col. 26:1–7. Differences from MT in italics.)

- ¹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!
¹⁵Listen to the shouts of joy and victory in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD's right hand has done mighty things,
¹⁶The LORD's right hand is lifted high, the LORD's right hand has gained *victory!*”

⁸It is better to *have confidence* in the LORD than to put confidence in humans.

⁹It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.

(^X)It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in a thousand people!

²⁹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!

Praise the LORD!

Text 3. Sirach 51:13–30

Jesus ben Sira was a Jewish teacher who compiled a book of wise sayings and instructions in Hebrew somewhere between 190 and 180 BCE. The author's grandson later translated this work into Greek and added a preface. The traditional book in the Septuagint, based on this Greek translation, has fifty-one chapters and is best titled *Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus*. The *Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira*, or simply *Ben Sira*, denotes the original Hebrew form, which contains many differences.

The poem in Sirach 51:13–30 was previously familiar to us as the second canticle following the Epilogue. Its inclusion in a collection of Psalms shows that the canticle was still being used as an independent unit in the first century CE, long after its incorporation in the book of Ben Sira. Because it is found in two different books, the canticle may have been a “floating piece”; where it originally belonged is open to question. The form of this poem in 11QPs^a is very erotic in several places (e.g., “hand” in v. 22 can mean “penis”). The Greek version revised the canticle by substituting pious ideas for such erotic images, but the Great Psalms Scroll now gives us access to the original, uncensored poem.

Sirach 51:13–30 (11QPs^a, col. 21:11–17)

¹³When I was a young man, before I went on my travels, I looked for her.

¹⁴She came to me in her beauty, when at last I sought her out.

¹⁵Just as a blossom drops when grapes ripen, making the heart glad,

¹⁶my feet were treading on level ground; for I have known her since my youth.

¹⁷I bent my ear just a little, and so great was the captivation that I found.

¹⁸So she became a wet-nurse for me; to my mistress I gave my passion.

¹⁹I decided to live it up. I was so obsessed with pleasure, I could not turn back.

²⁰I set alight my desire for her, and could not turn away my face.

²¹I kept my desire going for her, and on her heights I could not relax.

²²[I] uncovered my “hand” [...and] got to know her private parts.

²³I cleansed my “hand” [...]

³⁰... your reward in its proper time.

Texts 4–5. Psalm 151A and Psalm 151B

In the Septuagint, the Book of Psalms ends with Psalm 151 (as in Orthodox Bibles). There Psalm 151 is a single composition, and in the Latin and Syriac translations based on the Greek. Among the Psalms scrolls, the Hebrew text is preserved at the end (col. 28:3–14) of the Great Psalms Scroll (11QPs^a). Thus in the first century CE (the scroll was copied c. 30–50), at least some Jews were using a collection of Psalms in Hebrew that also ended with Psalm 151.

11QPs^a represents the original Hebrew, which is very different from the Greek version. Psalm 151 is a single composition in the Septuagint, but in 11QPs^a two distinct psalms (151A and 151B), each with its own superscription and with the second psalm beginning on a new line. Psalm

151A is poetic midrash on the events on David's life found in 1 Samuel 16:1–13, and 151B covers David's encounter with Goliath, as reported in 1 Samuel 17:17–54. The Greek translator reworked and synthesized these into a single composition, with Psalm 151A:1–7 condensed into Greek verses 1–5, and Psalm 151B:1–2 into Greek verses 6–7.

Psalm 151A (11QPs^a, col. 28:3–12)

Superscription: Hallelujah! A Psalm of David, Son of Jesse.

- ¹ Smaller was I than my brothers, and the youngest of my father's sons,
so he made me shepherd of his flock and ruler over his kid goats.
- ² My hands fashioned a reed pipe, and my fingers a lyre;
and I gave glory to the LORD. I said within my mind:
- ³ "The mountains cannot bear witness to him, nor can the hills proclaim about him—
so cherish my words, you trees, and cherish my deeds, you flocks.
- ⁴ For who can announce, and who can tell, and who can recount my deeds?"
The Lord of all has seen, the God of all—he has heard and has listened.
- ⁵ He sent his prophet to anoint me, Samuel to make me great.
My brothers went out to meet him, so handsome of figure, tall in appearance,
- ⁶ So tall in stature, and beautiful with their hair—
yet the LORD God did not choose them.
- ⁷ But he sent and fetched me from behind the flock, and anointed me with holy oil,
and he appointed me prince of his people and ruler over the children of his covenant.

Psalm 151B (11QPs^a, col. 28:13–14)

Superscription:

The start of mighty d[ee]ds for [Davi]d, after the prophet of God had anointed him.

¹ Then I s[a]w a Philistine, throwing out taunts from the r[anks] of the enemy].

² ... I ... the ...

Texts 6–7. Psalm 154 and Psalm 155

Psalm 154 and Psalm 155 are included in the Mosul manuscript, the oldest surviving Syriac version of the book of Psalms.¹ They are *Syriac Psalms II* and *III* in the *Book of Discipline* by the tenth-century Nestorian Bishop Elijah of al-Anbar (with Psalm 151 as Psalm 1).

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Psalm 154 is represented in 11QPs^a and *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* (4Q448), and Psalm 155 is found in 11QPs^a, which shows that some traditions known at Qumran were preserved in the writings of Eastern or Orthodox Christianity. Comparison with the Qumran evidence shows that for Psalms 154 and 155 the Mosul copy is the most faithful Syriac version, although it contains significant variant readings against later manuscripts. 11QPs^a represents the Hebrew text used by the Syriac translator, since there is a 95 percent or better, correspondence in wording.

Psalm 154 is written in poetry of biblical style and is a call to worship. One noteworthy feature is the personification of Wisdom as a woman (vv. 5 onward), which also occurs in the Hebrew Bible (notably Prov. 8:34) and in the book of Sirach (1:15). Of the psalm's twenty verses (as found in the Syriac), verses 3–19 are preserved in 11QPs^a (col. 18:1–16). In *Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer* (4Q448), verses 16–20 are found (col. 1:7–10) as part of a larger psalm (1:1–10). For further details on 4Q448, which includes the *Prayer for King Jonathan* (cols. 2:1–3:9), see under Text 17 below. (For a translation of Psalm 154, see Flint 1999: 572–73).

Psalm 155 is as a psalm of thanksgiving, but it incorporates a plea for deliverance and is reminiscent of Psalms 22 and 51. The composition opens with the psalmist's cry for deliverance, and then asks for God's protection from overwhelming situations (v. 11) and the "evil scourge" (v. 13) and asserts confidence in God's positive response and ability to save the psalmist (vv. 15 and following).

Of the psalm's twenty-one verses (fully preserved only in the Syriac), verses 1–19 are preserved in 11QPs^a (col. 24:3–17). This is a broken (partial) acrostic psalm. With the final two verses reconstructed from the Mosul manuscript, it seems to have had twenty-one verses instead of the expected twenty-two. Moreover, the psalm ended (at least in the Mosul text) with the *pe* verse instead of the *taw* one. Of the preserved text in 11QPs^a, verse 5 is the *bet* verse, verse 6 is the *gimel* verse, and verses 9–18 are the *he* through *nun* verses. However, the fourth line begins with *yod* (*yhw*h), not the expected *dalet*. (For a translation, see Flint 1999: 579–80).

Text 8. Apostrophe to Zion

Many passages in the Hebrew Bible focus on Jerusalem, both in the Psalms (e.g., 46, 48, 76, 87) and elsewhere (the address in Isa. 54:1–8). The *Apostrophe to Zion* invokes blessings on Jerusalem, affirms the defeat of her enemies, and looks forward to her salvation and everlasting righteousness. This is an acrostic composition, each successive verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

The *Apostrophe* is found in three scrolls. In 11QPs^a, all twenty-two verses are preserved. However, this is in eighteen verses rather than the expected twenty-two because several components are short and some verses include more than one of them (cf. col. 22:1–15), while 4QPs^f contains text from the *'alep* to *gimel* verses (col. 7:14–17) and from the *mem* to *šin* verses (col. 8:2–15). In 11QPs^b the *he* and *zayin* verses are represented (frg. 6.1–2). (For a translation, see Flint 1999: 576–77).

Texts 9–10. Eschatological Hymn and Apostrophe to Judah

The *Eschatological Hymn* and *Apostrophe to Judah* were unknown to scholars prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls but are now available to us in 4QPs^f. In DJD 16 (Skehan, Ulrich, and Flint 2000), they are published as two separate works: the *Hymn* in column 9:1–15 and the *Apostrophe* in column 10:4–15. Some scholars view both pieces as parts of a single composition, possibly a broken acrostic poem; compare Psalm 155 (Text 7 above). One further point is that the *Halleluyah* in column 10:15 marks the end of the psalm in that column.

The *Eschatological Hymn* is a psalm on the Last Days. It offers praise to God and celebrates the end of the wicked and of evil, the fruitfulness of the heavens and earth, the feeding of the poor, and how those who fear the LORD will be satisfied. The *Apostrophe to Judah* is also eschatological, but with a special focus on Judah; like the *Apostrophe to Zion* (Text 8 above), it is addressed to a place. Heaven and earth are to give praise in this psalm, which is highly anthological, containing many words and phrases known from other parts of the Hebrew Bible.

Eschatological Hymn (4QPs^f, col. 9:1–1, here 4–14)

... then they will extol the ⁵the name of the LORD,
 [f]or he comes to judge ⁶every ac[ti]on,
 to do away with the wicked ⁷from the earth,
 [so that the children of] iniquity will no longer ⁸be found.
 [And] the hea[v]ens [will give] their dew,
⁹and there will be no ev[il within] their borders.
 And the earth ¹⁰will offer up its fruits in season,
 and will not ¹¹fall short of its [pro]duce.
 The ¹²fruit trees [will...] their vines,
 and [...] will not fall short of their [...] ¹³...
 The ¹⁴oppressed will eat,
 and those who fear the LORD [will be satisfied]

Apostrophe to Judah (4QPs^f, col. 10:4–15, here 5–15)

⁵... So heaven and earth give praise as one,
⁶let all the stars of twilight give praise!
⁷Rejoice, O Judah, in your joy;
⁸be glad in your gladness, and dance in your dance.
⁹Make your pilgrimages, fulfil your vows,
 for ¹⁰Belial is nowhere in your midst.
 May your hand be lifted up!
¹¹May your right hand prevail!
 See, enemies will ¹²perish,
 and all ¹³who carry out will be scattered.
 But you, O LORD, are eter[nal];
¹⁴your glory endures forev[er and ev]er.
¹⁵Praise the Lord!

Text 11. Hymn to the Creator

This is a wisdom poem, a category in which Sirach 51:13–30 (Text 3) and Psalm 155 (Text 7) also belong. Only nine verses survive in 11QPs^a (col. 26:9–15).

The psalm praises God as Creator. Lines 14–15 are a rearrangement of Jeremiah 10:12–13 and Psalm 135:7. More generally, it has affinities with Psalm 104 because both Psalms draw on cosmic and creation themes from Genesis 1. Verse 6 (“decking out hills with produce, good food for every living being,” line 11) is quoted in a modified form in the *Admonition of the Flood* (4Q370) column 1:1: “So he decked out the mountains with pro[duce, heap]ing up good food upon them, ...”. (For a translation, see Flint 1999: 582–83).

Text 12. Plea for Deliverance

This is a prayer seeking God’s forgiveness, protection, and deliverance from the power of Satan. It also includes praise and thanksgiving for God’s kindness and faithfulness. The style, vocabulary, and ideas are similar to other prayers and pleas in the Hebrew Bible. For example, the argument that God should spare a man his life because in death no one can praise God makes use of similar phrases in Isaiah 38:18–19 and Psalm 6:4–5. The mention of “Sheol,” the domain of the afterlife, may also be noted.

The complete psalm originally had twenty-four or twenty-five verses. In 11QPs^a (19:1–18), nineteen are preserved, and the second half of a twentieth. About five lines are missing from

the beginning and one more or so at the end. Less text is preserved in 11QPs^b frgs. 4–5. Lines 3–15 preserve text from sixteen verses (= 11QPs^a 19:1–15), but lines 1–2 have some letters from the verses missing at the beginning of 11QPs^a. Line 2 reads: “[Poor] and weak am I, since [...]” (For a translation, see Flint 1999: 573).

Text 13. David’s Compositions

This important piece forms a prose epilogue to the 11QPs^a-Psalter, even though it is found in the second-last column (27) of 11QPs^a. It describes the extensive literary activity of King David, as author of the book of Psalms, the apocryphal psalms, and many others as well. With a total of 4,050 songs or psalms (line 10), David was even more prolific than Solomon, who composed 4,005 pieces (3,000 proverbs plus 1,005 songs; see 1 Kings 4:34 [Hebrew 5:12]).

The songs (psalms) of David were inspired: “All these he composed through prophecy...” (line 11). This text implies that David is the author of the collection in 11QPs^a (and thus the 11QPs^a-Psalter), and that its arrangement and compositions were inspired by God himself.

The 364 songs for the daily sacrifice and other items (fifty-two Sabbath songs, and thirty songs for monthly offerings and festivals) show that this Psalter was arranged in accordance with the year, weeks, and months of the 364-day solar calendar. Thus David is associated with the calendar evident in the books of 1 Enoch and Jubilees, and used by the *Yahad* Essenes at Qumran and elsewhere.

David’s Compositions (11QPs^a, col. 27:1–11)

²Now David, son of Jesse, was wise, and he shined like the light of the sun. And he was a scribe, ³and discerning, and blameless in all his ways before God and humankind. The LORD gave ⁴him a discerning and shining spirit, so that he wrote:

⁵Psalms: 3,600.

Songs to sing before the altar over the daily ⁶perpetual offering for all the days of the year: 364.

⁷For the Sabbath offerings: 52 songs.

For the new moon offerings, ⁸all the festival days, and the Day of Atonement: 30 songs.

⁹The total for all the songs that he composed was 446.

Also, songs ¹⁰for making music over people afflicted by demons: 4.

And the sum total (Psalms and Songs) was 4,050.

¹¹All of these he composed through prophecy, which was given to him by the Most High.

Texts 14–16. Three Songs (or Incantations) Against Demons

The manuscript known as *11QApocryphal Psalms* (11QapocrPs or 11Q11) was copied 50–68 CE and contains text from four psalms (possibly five) for use in exorcisms against demons. Many scholars regard these as the *Four Songs for Making Music over People Afflicted by Demons* (11QPs^a 27:9–10) mentioned in *David’s Compositions* (Text 13). Another text found at Qumran that involves exorcism is *Against Demons* (4Q560).

The first three exorcism songs were unknown until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but the fourth is found in the Hebrew Bible and modern Bibles as Psalm 91. This is the most prominent psalm connected with exorcisms of demonic forces in both Jewish and Christian traditions. In some rabbinic texts (*b.Shebu’ot* 15b and *y.Sabbat* 16.8), this Psalm is referred to as (“the song of/for people afflicted by demons”).

The manuscript is very damaged and is preserved in four fragments and six columns. The fourth song is Psalm 91, of which all thirteen verses are represented in column 6:3–13. For a translation of the first two songs, see Flint (1999: 539–40). The third song is translated below. Poorly preserved in column 5:4–14, it is clearly attributed to David and uttered against a demon or evil spirit. The reference to this demon's horns in line 7 is noteworthy in view of popular notions that the devil has horns.

Third Song (or Incantation) Against Demons (11QapocPs, col. 5:4–14)

Superscription: ⁴A Psalm of David. Again[st . . . An incanta]tion in the name of the LORD. To be invoked at an[y] time ⁵to the heav[ens] . . .

When] he comes to you at nig[ht], you will [s]ay to him:

⁶Who are you? [Depart from] humanity and from the offspring of the ho[ly one]s!

For your face is a face of ⁷[delu]sion, and your horns are horns of [fan]tasy.

You are darkness, not light, ⁸[wicked]ness, not righteousness [. . .]

the Commander of the Army, the LORD [will bring] you [down ⁹into] deepest [Sheo]l,

[and he will close the] two [ga]tes of bronze th[rough which n]o ¹⁰light [can enter],

and [the] sun [will] not [appear for you] tha[t shines ¹¹upon the] righteous to [. . .]

And] then you will say: “[. . . ¹² . . . the right]eous, to come [. . .] a de[mon] harms him, [¹³ . . . of tr]uth from [. . . because] he has [righ]teousness [. . .]

[. . . ¹⁴ . . .] and . . . ”

Text 17. Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer

Apocryphal Psalm and Prayer (4Q448) is in the appendix because it features Psalm 154 and another composition. The original scroll never contained all of Psalm 154; of the psalm's twenty verses (as found in the Syriac) this text preserves verse 16–20 (col. 1:7–10) as part of a different psalm altogether (1:1–10).

There follows a *Prayer for King Jonathan* (cols. 2:1–3:9), apparently the Hasmonean Alexander Jannaeus, who ruled from 103–76 BCE. This king also appears in the *Commentary on Nahum* (4Q169), where he is twice described as the “Lion of Wrath” (frgs. 3–4 col. i, lines 5–6). The fact that the *Prayer* suggests a positive attitude toward him is in contrast to the *Commentary*'s negative view of Jannaeus, who was a violent ruler and persecuted the Pharisees. (For a translation of both columns, see Wise, Abegg, and Cook 2005: 506–507.)

Text 18. Apocryphon (or Prophecy) of Joshua

The *Apocryphon (or Prophecy) of Joshua* (4Q522) is in the appendix because it includes Psalm 122 and other material. One earlier preserved section (in frgs. 8 and 9) contains a list of cities in Canaan and the tribes to which they are assigned. A later portion (col. 2:1–13) praises God's choice of Mount Zion for the building of the Temple. Psalm 122 comes at the end of the manuscript, or what remains if it. The overall focus of these three sections is on God's blessing of the land of Israel, Jerusalem the Holy City, and the Davidic dynasty.

In the second portion (col. 2:1–13), from the author's standpoint Jerusalem is still ruled by the Amorites (line 4), and Eleazar son of Aaron is the officiating priest (line 13; cf. Josh. 14:1), and the Tabernacle is in Bethel (line 13). However, the son of Jesse (David) will choose the rock of Zion and drive the Amorites from Jerusalem, so that the Temple can be built, which will be

carried by his younger son (lines 3–6). (For a translation of both sections preceding Psalm 122, see Wise, Abegg, and Cook 2005: 532–33.)

NOTE

1. A Nestorian manuscript in Mosul/Baghdad, Library of the Chaldaean Patriarchate 1113 (cf. Sanders 1965: 53; 1967: 103).

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APPENDIX II

CONTENTS OF THE PSALMS SCROLLS AND RELATED MANUSCRIPTS

PETER W. FLINT

FOR each entry, the Psalms passage is followed by an abbreviated title for the relevant scroll and its cave number. Apocryphal Psalms and other compositions that are not found in the Masoretic Psalter appear at the end of the listing. Four types of sigla may be noted:

X = Additional verse or text not present in the Masoretic Psalter; for example, 33:1–7, X, 8–18 in 4QPs^q

→ = Verses follow directly with no break; for example, 145:1–7, 13 → X → 14–21 → X (plus refrain) in 11QPs^a

(?) = Written to the *left*, denotes the entry is not certain; for example, (?)99:1–2, 5 in 4QPs^k

(?) = Written to the *right*, denotes a verse or wording is not sure; for example, 49:6(?), 9–12, 15, 17 in 4QPs^j.

This appendix also identifies passages from the Psalms that are quoted in key nonbiblical scrolls found in the Judaean Desert (almost always Qumran). The topic of quotations of, and allusions, to the Psalms in the nonbiblical scrolls requires more than one monograph (see the extensive list in Lange and Weigold 2011: 163–78). Nevertheless, it is appropriate to include here Psalms material that is clearly quoted or excerpted in key nonbiblical texts. The following texts were consulted:

1Q16 (*Peshar Psalms*)

1QH^a (*Hodayot* or *Thanksgiving Hymns*)

4Q171 (*Peshar Psalms*^a)

4Q173 (*Peshar Psalms*^b)

4Q173a (*House of the Stumbling Fragment*)

4Q174 (*Florilegium*)

4Q176 (*Tanhumim*)

4Q177 (*Catena A*)

4Q381–82 (*Non-Canonical Psalms A and B*)

Psalms 1 to 150

Psalms	Manuscript
1:1a	4Q174 (<i>Florilegium</i>)
2:1	4Q174 (<i>Florilegium</i>)
2:1–8	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
2:6–7	3QPs (3Q2)
5:2–3a	4Q174 (<i>Florilegium</i>)
5:8–13	4QPs ^s (4Q98b)
5:9–13	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
5:10(?)	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
6:1	4QPs ^s (4Q98b)
6:1–4	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
6:2, 4	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
6:2–4	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
7:13–18	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
8:1, 4–10	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
9:3–6	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
9:3–7	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
9:8–13	XQPs A (Schøyen Ps)
9:12–21	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
10:1–6, 8–9, 18	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
11:1–2	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
11:1–4	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
11:1–4	XQPs B (Green Ps)
12:1	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
12:5–9	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
12:6	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
12:6–9	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
13:1, 2	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
13:1–3	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
13:4	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
13:2–3, 5–6	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
14:1–6	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
14:2–4	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
15:1–5	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
16:1	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
16:3	4QCatena A (4Q177)
16:7–9	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
(?)17:1	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
17:1	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
17:2	4Q177 (<i>Catena A</i>)
17:5–9, 14	8QPs (8Q2)

Psalms**Manuscript**

17:9–15	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
18:1–12, 15–17(?)	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
18:2	4Q381 (<i>Non-Canonical Psalms B</i>)
18:3–14, 16–17, 32–36, 39–42	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
18:6	4Q381 (<i>Non-Canonical Psalms B</i>)
18:6–11, 18–36, 38–43	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
18:6–13 [= 2 Sam 22:6–13]	8QPs (8Q2)
18:7	4Q381 (<i>Non-Canonical Psalms B</i>)
18:15–17(?)	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
18:26–29	MasPs ^a (M1039–160)
18:26–29, 39–42	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
19:3(?) [or 60:9(?)]	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
19:4–8	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
22:4–9, 15–21	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
22:4–13	XQPs C (SwB Ps)
22:14–17	4QPs ^f (4Q88)
23:2–6	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
24:1–2	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
25:2–7	11QPs ^c (11Q7)
25:4–6	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
25:15	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
26:7–12	4QPs ^r (4Q98a)
26:12	1QH ^a (<i>Hodayot</i>)
27:1	4QPs ^r (4Q98a)
27:12–14	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
28:1–4	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
29:1–2	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
30:9–13	4QPs ^r (4Q98a)
31:3–22	5/6HevPs (5/6Hev 1b)
31:23–24	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
31:24–25	4QPs ^q (4Q98)
33:1–7, X, 8–18	4QPs ^q (4Q98)
33:2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
34:21–22	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
35:2, 13–18, 20, 26–27	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
35:4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14–15, 17, 19–20	4QPs ^q (4Q98)
35:27–28	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
36:1, 3, 5–7, 9	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
36:13	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
37:1–4, 5(?)	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
37:2(?), 6–26, 28–40	4Q171 (<i>Pesher Psalms^a</i>)

Psalms	Manuscript
37:18–19	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
38:2, 4–6, 8–10, 12, 16–23	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
39:13–14	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
40:1, 2(?)	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
42:5	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
42:5	4QPs ^u (4Q98d)
43:1–3	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
44:3–5, 7, 9, 23–24, 25	1QPs ^c (1Q12)
(?)44:8–9	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
45:Title-1 [Heb. 1–2]	4Q171 (<i>Pesher Psalms</i> ^a)
45:6–8	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
45:8–11	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
46:8(?) or 12(?)	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
47:2	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
48:1–3, 5, 7, 9	4QPs ^j (4Q91)
49:1–17	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
49:6(?), 9–12, 15, 17	4QPs ^j (4Q91)
50:3, 5, 7	11QPs ^e (?)(11Q9(?))
50:14–23	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
51:1–5	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
51:2–6	4QPs ^j (4Q91)
52:6–11	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
53:1	4QPs ^c (4Q85)
53:2, 4–5, 7	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
54:2–3, 5–6	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
56:4	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
57:1, 4	1QpPs (1Q16)
59:5–6, 8	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
(?)60:8–9 [Eng. 6–7] or (?)108:8–9 [Eng. 7–8]	4Q171 (<i>Pesher Psalms</i> ^a)
60:9(?) [or 19:3(?)]	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
62:13	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
63:2, 4	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
66:16, 18–20	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
67:1–2, 4–8	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
68:1, 3–5, 14–18	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
68: 13, 26–27, 30–31 [Eng. 12, 25–26, 29–30]	1Q16 (<i>Pesher Psalms</i>)
69:1–19	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
71:1–14	4QPs ^a (4Q83)
76:10–12	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
77:1	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
77:18–21	11QPs ^b (11Q6)
78:1	11QPs ^b (11Q6)
78:5–12	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
78:6–7, 31–33	4QPs ^e (4Q87)

Psalms

(?)78:36–37
 78:36–37
 81:2–3
 81:2–17
 81:4–9
 82:1–2
 82:1–8
 82:2
 83:1–19
 84:1–13
 85:1–6
 86:5–6, 8
 86:10–11
 86:11–14
 86:16–17

 88:1–5
 88:15–17
 89: 7, 10, 11, 12, 14 [Eng. 6, 9, 10, 11, 13]

 89:20–22 → 26 → 23 → 27–28 → 31
 89:44–48, 50–53
 91:1–14 → 16b → X
 91:5–8, 12–15
 92:4–8, 13–15
 92:12–14
 93:1–3
 93:3–5
 93:5
 94:1–4, 8–14, 17–18, 21–22
 94:16
 95:3–7
 95:11
 96:1–2
 96:2
 97:6–9
 98:4
 98:4–8
 99:1
 99:1–2, 5
 99:5–6
 100:1–2
 101:1–8
 102:1–2, 18–29

Manuscript

11QPs^d (11Q8)
 pap6QPs (6Q5)
 4QPs^e (4Q87)
 MasPs^a (M1039–160)
 11QPs^d (11Q8)
 11Q13 (*Melchizedek*)
 MasPs^a (M1039–160)
 11QMelch (11Q13)
 MasPs^a (M1039–160)
 MasPs^a (M1039–160)
 MasPs^a (M1039–160)
 1QPs^a (1Q10)
 4QPs^e (4Q87)
 11QPs^d (11Q8)
 4Q381 (*Non-Canonical Psalms B*)
 4QPs^e (4Q87)
 4QPs^t (4Q98c)
 4Q381 (*Non-Canonical Psalms B*)
 4QPs^x (4Q98g)
 4QPs^e (4Q87)
 11QapocPs (11Q11)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 1QPs^a (1Q10)
 11QPs^a (11Q5)
 4QPs^m (4Q94)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 1QPs^a (1Q10)
 4QPs^m (4Q94)
 1QPs^a (1Q10)
 1QPs^a (1Q10)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 4QPs^m (4Q94)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 4QPs^m (4Q94)
 4QPs^v (4Q98e)
 4QPs^k (4Q92)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 4QPs^b (4Q84)
 11QPs^a (11Q5)
 11QPs^a (11Q5)

Psalms	Manuscript
102:5, 10–29	4QPs ^b (4Q84)
103:1	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
103:1–6, 9–14, 20–21	4QPs ^b (4Q84)
103:2, 4–6, 8–11	2QPs (2Q14)
(?)103:22	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
104:1–3, 20–22	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
104:1–5, 8–11, 14–15, 22–25, 33–35	4QPs ^d (4Q86)
104:1–6, 21–35	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
104:3–5, 11–12	4QPs ^l (4Q93)
104:6, 8–9, 11	2QPs (2Q14)
105:X, 1–11, 25–26, 28–31, 33–35, 37–39, 41–42, 44–45	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
105:1–3, 23–25, 36–45	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
(?)106:1 or (?)146:1	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
106:48	4QPs ^d (4Q86)
107:2–5, 8–16, 18–19, 22–30, 35–42	4QPs ^f (4Q88)
(?)108:8–9 [Eng. 7–8] or (?)60:8–9 [Eng. 6–7]	4Q171 (<i>Pesher Psalms</i> ^a)
109:1(?), 8(?), 13	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
109:3–4(?)	11QPs ^a or ^b (11Q5 or 6)
109:4–6, 24–28	4QPs ^f (4Q88)
109:21–22, 24–31	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
112:1, 3, 5, 7, 9	4QPs ^w (4Q98f)
112:4–5	4QPs ^b (4Q84)
113:1	4QPs ^b (4Q84)
114:5	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
114:7	4QPs ^o (4Q96)
115:1–2, 4	4QPs ^o (4Q96)
115:2–3	4QPs ^b (4Q84)
115:15–18	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
115:16–18	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
116:1	11QPs ^d (11Q8)
116:1–4	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
116:5, 7–10	4QPs ^o (4Q96)
116:17–19	4QPs ^b (4Q84)
118:1, 15–16 (<i>Catena</i>)	11QPs ^b (11Q6)
118:1 → 15–16 → 8–9 → X → 29 (<i>Catena</i>)	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
118:1–3, 5–10 → 12, 18–20, 23–26, 29	4QPs ^b (4Q84)
118:25–29	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
118:20	(4Q173a) <i>House of the Stumbling Fragment</i>
118:29	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
119:1–6, 15–28, 37–49, 59–73, 82–96, 105–120,	
128–142, 150–164, 171–176	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
119:10–21	4QPs ^h (4Q90)
119:31–34, 43–48, 77–80	1QPs ^a (1Q10)

Psalm	Manuscript
119:37-46, 49-50, 73-74, 81-83, 89-92	4QPs ^g (4Q89)
119:99-101, 104, 113-120, 138-142	5QPs (5Q5)
119:163-65	11QPs ^b (11Q6)
120:6-7	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
121:1-8	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
122:1-9	<i>Prophecy of Joshua</i> (4Q522)
122:1-9	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
123:1-2	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
124:7-8	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
125:1-5	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
125:2-5	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
126:1-5	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
126:1-6	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
126:6	1QPs ^b (1Q11)
127:1	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
127:1-5	1QPs ^b (1Q11)
127:2-3, 5	1Q173 (<i>Pesher Psalms</i> ^b)
128:3	1QPs ^b (1Q11)
128:3-6	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
129:1-8	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
129:7-8	1Q173 (<i>Pesher Psalms</i> ^b)
129:8	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
130:1-3, 6	4QPs ^e (4Q87)
130:1-8	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
131:1	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
132:8-18	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
133:1-3, X	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
133:1-3, X	11QPs ^b (11Q6)
134:1-3	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
135:1-6, X, 7, 9, 17-21	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
135:6-8, 11-12	4QPs ⁿ (4Q95)
135:6-8, 10-13, 15-16	4QPs ^k (4Q92)
136:1-7, X, 8-16, 26	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
136:23-24	4QPs ⁿ (4Q95)
137:1, 9	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
138:1-8	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
139:8-24	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
140:1-5	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
141:5-10	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
141:10	11QPs ^b (11Q6)
142:4-8	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
143:1-8	11QPs ^a (11Q5)
143:2-4, 6-8	4QPs ^p (4Q97)
144:1-2	11QPs ^b (11Q6)
144:1-7, 15	11QPs ^a (11Q5)

Psalm**Manuscript**

145:1-7, 13 → X → 14-21 → X (plus refrain)

11QPs^a (11Q5)

146:1(?) or 106:1(?)

4QPs^e (4Q87)

146:9, X, 10

11QPs^a (11Q5)

147:1-2, 3(?), 18-20

11QPs^a (11Q5)

147:1-4, 13-17, 20

4QPs^d (4Q86)

147:18-19

MasPs^b (M1103-1742)

148:1-12

11QPs^a (11Q5)

149:7-9, X

11QPs^a (11Q5)

150:1-6

11QPs^a (11Q5)

150:1-6

MasPs^b (M1103-1742)**“Apocryphal” Psalms and Other Compositions**

Sirach 51:1-11, 23 [= 13-20, 30 LXX]

11QPs^a (11Q5)

151A:1-7

11QPs^a (11Q5)

151B:1-2

11QPs^a (11Q5)

154:3-19

11QPs^a (11Q5)

154:16-20

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