

Songs of the Saints

Studies in the Psalms

Introduction to the Psalms

I. The Tradition of Psalmody in Israel

A. A rich tradition of psalmody exists in the OT records of Israel's history. Before the Book of Psalms came into existence as we know it, psalmody was part of the religious and cultural DNA of Israel. We can see that in the various songs and poetic texts imbedded in the biblical narratives:

1. Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1-8): A hymn of praise celebrating the Exodus event. It could be argued that this song connects psalmody with Israel's defining national moment—her inception as a nation through her liberation from slavery in Egypt. "The Song of the Sea was never incorporated within the Psalter, but was utilized effectively by the writer(s) [*sic*] of the Book of Exodus to make a theological point. God participates in Israel's history to liberate his chosen people from human bondage; that participation was perceived to be not merely an historical fact, but also a source of praise. The God who acted for his people should be praised by his people. The Song of the Sea thus reflects a human response to God's self-revelation in history; it mirrors the intimate relationship which existed between Israel and God" (Craigie, 26).
2. Song of the Ark (Num 10:35-36): A hymn to be sung with the departure and return of the Ark for war. This psalm represents a poetry with distinctive liturgical purposes in Israel's corporate life.
3. Oracles of Balaam (Num 23-24): A prophetic psalm which pronounces divine blessing on the people.
4. Song of Moses (Deut 32): A psalm not necessarily aimed at praise but rather instruction.
5. Blessing of Moses (Deut 33): A psalm pronouncing paternal and prophetic blessing on the people.
6. Song of Deborah (Judg 5): A song of praise celebrating God's participation in delivering Israel from her enemies.
7. Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10): A song of individual praise in response to the experience of sorrow and hardship and God's gracious intervention.
8. Lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19-27): A song of sorrow and lament over the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan. Such a song reveals the heart of human anguish over death and loss.

- B. “From these assembled examples of poetry and psalmody composed during Israel’s early history, a number of points become clear. First, poetry, as a form of language, was native to early Israel, as it was to most ancient cultures.... Second poetry was the natural medium through which to give expression to the most profound of human feelings and insights; prayers, praise, liturgy, wisdom and lament were conveyed in the words of poetry” (Craigie, 26).

II. Title

- A. The title of the book in our English Bibles is derived both from the Latin title *Psalmi* and the Greek ψάλλμος (*psalmos*), which, as it were, both translate the Hebrew term מִזְמוֹר (*mizmôr*), which refers to "songs accompanied by musical instrument" (VanGemeren, 5:20). In this way, these titles emphasize the *form* of these compositions—they are "songs" to be sung.
- B. The Hebrew title, however, is not *mizmôr* but rather תְּהִלִּים (*t^ehillîm*), which is derived from the verb הָלַל, “to praise,” a term connected with the temple service (1 Chron 16:4) and used commonly in the expression הַלְלוּ-יָהּ (*hal^elu-yah*), “praise Yahweh.” Thus, the Hebrew title means “Praises.”
- C. Thus, while the Greek and Latin titles focus on form, the Hebrew title emphasizes the purpose and content of the psalms. This seems fitting considering that while they were songs in the past, the way in which they were sung has been lost to us now. But their purpose and content remain intact.
- D. “Because the collection includes such a variety of psalms, no one term would adequately summarize them all, but no title could be more fitting for this collection, of which praise and thanksgiving are predominant characteristics, and which ends with the repetition of *hal^elu-Yah* in increasing intensity (Pss. 145-150)” (Ross, 39).

III. Authors & Date

- A. There are a total of 150 psalms in the Hebrew Psalter, and 102 bear the name of its author. In fact, a number of different psalmists appear in the book, representing a massive span of Israelite history:

Author	# of Psalm
David	75
Anonymous	48
Asaph	12
Sons of Korah	10
Solomon	2
Ethan	1
Heman	1
Moses	1

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- B. As is evident, the Psalms embrace the totality of Israel's history. It includes a psalm by Moses written during the time of Israel's wilderness wanderings. And it includes psalms written during the post-exilic generation.
- C. Thus, it is the OT in miniature, and as it stands in its final form, could be viewed as a post-exilic book. Though a majority of the psalms were written before the exile and concern events that occurred before the exile, the book was not organized until after Israel's release.

IV. Development and Organization

- A. "In most contemporary forms of religion, use is made of a hymnal or service book for the purposes of worship. The hymnal is usually a collection of hymns and songs, written by many different people over the course of several centuries. It is basically an anthology, rather than the work of a single author. The individual compositions of many authors of entirely different backgrounds are brought together into a single volume by an editor or editorial team. A similar process apparently took place in the formation of the Book of Psalms" (Craigie, 27).
- B. As the book stands today, we cannot confidently trace the development of the Book of Psalms or give a definitive explanation for its formation. No doubt, the process occurred over an expansive period of history and involved numerous complex processes.
- C. We can speculate that the development of the Book of Psalms involved several successive stages (taken from Craigie, 28):

1. Stage 1

An individual psalm was composed. Sometimes we can ascertain the historical or circumstantial context of the psalm via its superscription. Other times, only the author is given, and in some cases no information is available. However, it is clear that psalms mostly arose individually.

2. Stage 2

As the number of psalms grew, some were naturally linked together with other psalms to form a small collection. We see evidence of these in the OT references to books such as *Book of the War of the Lord* (Num 21:14) and the *Book of Yashar* (2 Sam 1:18).

3. Stage 3

Eventually, several small collections may have been combined to form a larger unit of psalms. Evidence of this may be apparent in the various repetition of psalms (Ps 14 = Ps 53; Ps 40:13-17 = Ps 70; Ps 108 = Ps 57:7-11 + 60:5-12). These duplications "probably indicate that initially these psalms belonged

to independent collections; when the collections were brought together, some duplication was inevitable" (Craigie, 28).

4. Stage 4

Finally, sometime most likely during the post-exilic period, these various larger collections were combined with other miscellaneous individual psalms to form an anthology of psalms for post-exilic Israel, a sort of "collection of collections" of psalms spanning the totality of Israel's religious history.

D. Some smaller collections may be possible to identify based on their grouping within the current Book of Psalms:

1. Collections of David (Pss 3-41 [minus Ps 33], Pss 51-70 [minus Pss 66-67], and Pss 138-145)
2. Psalms of Asaph (Pss 73-83)
3. Psalms of the Sons of Korah (Pss 42-49 [minus Ps 43] and Pss 84-88 [minus Ps 86])
4. Songs of Ascent (Pss 120-134)
5. Egyptian Hallel Collection (Pss 113-118)
6. Hallel Songs (Pss 146-150)

E. Division of the Psalms

1. As a collection of prayers and songs of praise, the book of Psalms exhibits a thoroughly organized scheme.
2. They are arranged in five books of unequal length which Jewish tradition holds as modeled after the five books of Moses. In fact the Midrash on the Psalms notes that "Moses gave the Israelites the five books of the *Torah*, and coordinate therewith David gave them the books of the Psalms" (1:1).
3. Each book, in turn, ends with a doxology which may have been part of the original composition, or may have been appended to the close of each book by one or more editors (cf. Ps 72:20):

Book	Psalms	Doxology
I	Psalms 1-41	41:13
II	Psalms 42-72	72:18-20
III	Psalms 73-89	89:52
IV	Psalms 90-106	106:48
V	Psalms 107-150	150:1-6

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4. It is quite possible that this 5-fold division is as ancient as the book itself, dating back to before the completion of the OT (approx. 400 B.C.), and may have already occurred before the composition of the book of Chronicles:
 - a) In 1 Chronicles 16:7, David assigned Asaph and his family the responsibility of giving thanks to Yahweh at the tabernacle, and provided a thanksgiving psalm for this purpose. The psalm he provided in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 is actually a compilation of several different Davidic psalms (Pss 96, 105, 106), and the final verses (1 Chron 16:35-36) appear to be a quotation of the doxology at the close the Book 4. This would seem to indicate that the doxology that closes Book 4 was already in place in the time of David.
 - b) The conclusion of Book 2 includes a subscription noting that "the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended" (Ps 72:20). Since Books 1 and 2 contain more than Davidic psalms, and Books 3-5 also contain psalms by David, it's quite plausible that the editor who appended it meant to say that in his collection he had included all the psalms of David known to him and that the 9 psalms ascribed to Korah and Asaph that open Book 2 were at one time united with Pss 73-83 (also ascribed to Asaph). With those removed, it is possible to unite Pss 51-70 with Book 1, making the subscription to Psalm 72 a fitting conclusion to the Davidic collection.
 - c) Second Chronicles 29:30 states that "King Hezekiah . . . ordered the Levites to sing praises to Yahweh with the words of David and Asaph the seer." This could, in fact, be a reference to the Davidic collection in Books 1 and 2 and the Asaph collection in Book 3.
 - d) "The Psalter has had a long and varied history. No doubt the precentor of the temple choir had his own collection of hymns for public worship. Small groups of psalms may have been issued also for private use in the home. As time went on, collections were made on different organizing principles. Sometimes hymns attributed to a given author were perhaps brought into a single group. Possibly psalms of a certain type, such as Maskil and Miktam psalms, were gathered together in small collections. How these small groups were partly preserved and partly broken up, in the history of the formation of our present Psalter, will, perhaps, never be known" (Sampey).
5. Themes and Types of Divisions
 - a) As noted previously, the 5 books of the Psalms mirror or parallel in some regard the 5 books of the Torah. Yet while the Torah is a book about the Mosaic Covenant, the Psalms could be called a "cantata of the Davidic Covenant," for it is a musical reflection on this covenant.
 - b) Books 1 and 2 focus on the promises made to David in 2 Samuel 7:8-16 and the hope of its fulfillment:

BOOK I

Psalms 1-41

<i>The glory years of the Davidic kingdom</i>			
Authors	Names of God	Psalms Types	Themes
David (37)	Yahweh (278x)	25 laments	• Two ways: godly/ungodly
Jeduthun (1)	God (49x)	7 hymns	• Troubles of God's people
			• Faith & trust in Yahweh
			• Prayer

BOOK II

Psalms 42-72

<i>The troubled years of the Davidic kingdom</i>			
Authors	Names of God	Psalms Types	Themes
David (18)	Yahweh (32x)	17 laments	• Troubles of God's people
Sons of Korah (7)	God (198x)	5 hymns	• Faith & trust in Yahweh
Asaph (1)			• God, our refuge
Solomon (1)			• Yahweh is King & Judge
Jeduthun (1)			• Prayer

- c) Book 3 focuses on the dismantling of the Davidic dynasty and the fear of the covenant's disillusionment:

BOOK III

Psalms 73-89

<i>The breaking of the Davidic dynasty's power</i>			
Authors	Names of God	Psalms Types	Themes
Asaph (11)	Yahweh (34x)	10 laments	• God is King & Judge
Sons of Korah (3)	God (63x)	3 hymns	• God's mercies for Israel in spite of her rebellion
David (1)			• Prayer for Israel's restoration
Jeduthun (1)			• God's covenant
Heman (1)			• Forgiveness
Ethan (1)			

- d) Book 4's overall emphasis is the sovereignty of God. In the wake of the collapse of the Davidic dynasty, the book highlights Yahweh as the one who has been, is, and always will be in control, even in view of the failure of the Davidic dynasty as lamented in Psalm 89. The book opens with the "Prayer of Moses," symbolic of the need to return to the Mosaic Covenant. It concludes with two historical psalms (Pss 105 and 106):

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BOOK IV

Psalms 90-106

<i>History of Israel from the Exodus onward</i>			
Authors	Names of God	Psalms Types	Themes
David (2)	Yahweh (115x)	2 laments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yahweh is King• Israel's praise• Experiencing God's grace & mercy• Salvation• Prayer
Moses (1)	God (24x)	11 hymns	

- e) Book 5 is a massive and carefully selected conclusion to the Psalter. It focuses on the unfolding drama of redemption, returning to the covenant Name and psalms by David:

BOOK V

Psalms 107-150

<i>Babylonian Exile, restoration, and beyond</i>			
Authors	Names of God	Psalms Types	Themes
David (15)	Yahweh (236x)	15 pilgrim songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Word of God• Yahweh's steadfast love• Zion & God's presence• Salvation• Thanksgiving• The world's praise• Prayer
Solomon (1)	God (31x)	5 "Hallelujah" psalms	

V. Psalms Titles

116 psalms (>75% of the Psalter) have headings or titles which introduce the psalm with information about the author, the circumstances which brought about its composition or upon which it reflects, as well as a variety of liturgical and/or musical instructions.

A. *Evidences for Originality*

1. These headings or titles are often set apart from the rest of the psalm (left out of the versification), and some modern translations (e.g., Good News Bible) completely omit the headings, effectively suggesting that they are not original to the psalm nor inspired Scripture. As Sampey writes, "It is fashionable among advanced critics to waive the titles of the psalms out of court as wholly worthless and misleading."

2. Yet there is strong evidence defending the authenticity of the headings as part of the original compositions, and thus part of inspired Scripture and worthy of preserving in translations and read both publically and devotionally.
3. Looking first outside the OT, it is important to note that even extra-biblical psalms include titles, indicating their antiquity. There is a well-known Hurrian Cult Song which includes the phrase, "This is a song of the Fall-of-the-Middle (tuning/scale), a hymn(?) of the gods, from Urhiya; copied by Ammurapi."
4. Internally, there is ample evidence to view these superscriptions as inspired:

a) They are authentic

- 1) Psalm 18 begins with a heading describing the historical circumstances leading to the composition of the psalm:

A psalm of David the servant of Yahweh, who spoke to Yahweh the words of this song in the day that Yahweh delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said...
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Superscription to Psalm 18

- 2) The same psalm appears in 2 Samuel 22 along with an identical superscription (22:1) as part of a series of official documents appended to the Book of Samuel as supporting the history of David. The psalm in 2 Samuel 22 is older and most likely the original psalm, and the repetition of the heading is a strong argument for its authenticity and inspiration.
- 3) To put it a different way, if we are allowed to question the authenticity and originality of the heading of Psalm 18 so as to remove it from the text, so we must also allow ourselves to question and possibly remove the 2 Samuel 22:1. The same argument can be made for the superscription and subscription to the psalm of Habakkuk (Hab 3:1, 19).

b) They are ancient

- 1) The terms used in the psalm headings (e.g., Pss 46, 58) are so ancient that their meaning had been lost by the time the translators in Alexandria were translating the text into Greek 250-300 years before Christ.
- 2) The older Greek version of the time had merely transliterated the more difficult and obscure terms, so when the LXX translators attempted their translation, they chose often spurious meanings for the words (e.g., "For the choir director" was sometimes translated as "unto the end").

c) They are accurate

- 1) The heading to Psalm 110 identifies David as the author of the psalm. The accuracy of the heading is confirmed by Jesus' use of an emphatic

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pronoun to identify David as author: "For David **himself** says in the book of Psalms..." (Luke 20:42).

- 2) The heading of Psalm 110 is the only place in the OT containing details on the authorship of that psalm, meaning that Jesus took the heading as an accurate and authentic heading to the psalm.

B. Thirtle's Theory

1. In 1904, James Thirtle published a study called *The Titles of the Psalms* where he hypothesized that "both superscriptions and subscriptions were incorporated in the Psalter, and that in the process of copying the Psalms by hand, the distinction between the superscription of a given psalm and the subscription of the one immediately preceding it was finally lost. When at length the different psalms were separated from one another, as in printed editions, the subscriptions and superscriptions were all set forth as superscriptions. Thus it came about that the musical subscription of a given psalm was prefixed to the literary superscription of the psalm immediately following it" (Sampey).
2. To demonstrate this, he provided a series of evidences:
 - a) Thirtle suggested the prayer of Habakkuk 3 as the model of a "normal psalm," which consisted of a literary superscription ("A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, upon Shigionoth" [3:1]) and a musical subscription ("For the chief musician, on my stringed instruments" [3:19]).
 - b) Hezekiah's prayer celebrating his recovery from illness (Isa 38:9-20) demonstrates this pattern as well. It begins with a superscription introducing the author and circumstance (38:9) and ends with a subscription which details the musical instruments that should accompany the psalm in public worship (38:20).
 - c) Thirtle suggested that returning the inaccurately divided subscriptions to their proper psalm resulted in a more intelligible connection between the psalm and its super-/subscription.
 - d) Thus, when the subscription for Psalm 55 (improperly placed as part of the superscription to Psalm 56) was returned to its proper location, it harmonized with the contents of the poem: "For the choir director; according to the silent dove of those who are far off." Such a saying seems strange as an introduction to Psalm 56, but harmonizes perfectly with Psalm 55:6-8.
 - e) The heading to Psalm 88 also receives clarification, since it contains two different authors, "the sons of Korah" and "Heman the Ezrahite," and because it includes instructions that the psalm should be performed *ma-halath leannoth*, "dancing with shouting," a quizzical instruction considering that Psalm 88 is one of the blackest psalms in the Psalter. However, when it is returned as a subscription to Psalm 87, not only does it match the superscription as "a psalm of the sons of Korah," but it also matches the cheerful tone of Psalm 87 which itself speaks of singing and dancing (87:7).

VI. The Types of Psalms

- A. The Psalms are unique in that they have a dual identity.
- B. "First and foremost [they are] God's Word to his people. We hear the voice of God in each individual psalm, through the many moods of the Psalms, and through the manifold themes of the Psalter" (VanGemeeren, 5:5).
- C. Yet at the very same time, they are thoroughly man's words to God. In fact, they are a mirror into the faith of a people that are separated from us by over 3,500 years and lived in a world and culture very different from our own.
- D. Thus, the Psalms reflect "the faith experience of the 'community' of God's people before the coming of Christ" (VanGemeeren, 5:7) and the expressions of their faith were influenced not only by their experiences and circumstances but also by their literary and cultural context.
- E. Thus, we find in the Psalms not just one *form* or way of praising God, but many expressions and forms of prayers and praise. Understanding the various forms of the Psalms can aid a great deal in interpretation.
- F. "The Psalms may be grouped into three major categories: psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. The first group refers to psalms of pure praise to Yahweh. No obstacles stand in the way of the psalmist's relationship to God. The second group is composed of psalms of lament. Something has happened to disturb the divine-human relationship. The psalmist may feel that God has abandoned him, or perhaps, he may be experiencing God's hostility. Reorientation, the third group, describes those psalms where the lament has been heard and the relationship healed. The psalmist gives God thanks for hearing his prayer" (Longman, *Cracking OT Codes*, 198).

1. Lament

- a) Longman describes lament as "a prayer of disorientation" (Longman, 198).
- b) VanGemeeren identifies it as the "prayer" aspect of the Psalms: "Prayer is man's communion with God. Prayers in the Psalms take the form of a complaint against the Lord. The individual or community laments the adversity, describes the evil in God's world, or petitions God to be true to his promises. Faith cries out for reality, and lament functions as an expression of authenticity" (VanGemeeren, 5:6).
- c) He goes on to note that such prayers reflect the faith experience of the "community" before the coming of Christ because "their expressions of frustration, impatience, anger, and joy reflect the tensions between promise and alienation. One of the issues in the lament psalms lies in their definition as petition or complaint. They are both. The emphasis on prayer as petition may emphasize submission to the power of God. The stress of lament will bring out the struggle with God, as the psalmist wrestles with God's freedom, God's promises, and his own inability to understand God. In either case, the psalmist cries out in faith for the fullness of redemption" (ibid.).

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- d) Within this type of psalm, there are both individual (Pss 3-7, 9-10, 12-14, 17, 22, 25-28, 31, 35, 38-43, 52-57, 59, 61, 63-64, 69-71, 77, 86, 88-89, 109, 120, 140-142) and corporate/national laments (Pss 44, 60, 74, 80, 83, 85, 90).

2. Praise

- a) Praise "is man's longing for God and for others to be moved with the same desire for God" (VanGemeeren, 5:6). Whether when all is right, or when things had been wrong but God had moved and right was restored, praise represents man reciting and responding to the *attributes* and *acts* of God, and praising God for both.
- b) "The acts of God in the past filled his children with longing for renewal of his acts, thus intertwining history and eschatology. Israel praised God's acts in the past: Creation, Exodus, Conquest, life of David, victories, and restoration from the Exile. Israel praised the perfections of the Lord, his kingship, his revelation, and his covenant. But they longed for the fullness of redemption, especially when distressed. Any *token* of God's goodness in fulfilling his promise occasioned a greater hope of eschatological fulfillment. Hence praise bridged the two horizons of the past and the future" (ibid.).
- c) Two primary types of praise occur in the psalms:
 - 1) Declarative praise (Pss 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 106, 116, 138) can be described as prayers of reorientation, where the psalmist is praising God for what he has done. "When the psalmist had experienced dire need and had prayed to God for deliverance, and God had intervened by granting the psalmist an answer—a specific act of deliverance—the psalmist broke forth in praise" (Barker, 221). While the circumstance had brought about tension in his relationship with God, he had experienced a restoration of that relationship and he responded in public thanksgiving, desiring that the entire community understood what God had had.
 - 2) Descriptive praise (Pss 33, 36, 105, 111, 113, 117, 135, 136, 146, 147) are prayers of orientation, where the psalmist is praising God for who he is. "Originally, psalms of descriptive praise were intended to be used either as a choral response or perhaps as a solo in the normal round of public or national worship. Because the psalmist was praising God primarily by describing his character, with a focus on the attributes of God—who he is and what is like—these psalms are frequently called hymns of praise or descriptive psalms" (ibid., 219).

3. Other Types

Six principal subtypes of psalms appear in the Psalter as subcategories of lament and praise psalms:

- a) **Hymns** (Pss 24, 29, 33, 100, 103, 105, 111, 113-114, 117, 135-136, 145-150): The most general kind of praise psalm, which praise God in broad terms for his goodness throughout history, or his character and attributes.
- b) **Enthronement Psalms** (Pss 47, 93, 95-99): "Yahweh reigns" is a characteristic feature of these psalms, and they celebrate the universal and eternal rule of God. "All passages that speak of a future coming of the LORD over Israel or over the whole earth, are enthronement psalms and may ultimately be messianic—indirectly or by extension—for to be fully realized, they require a future, Messianic Kingdom on the earth" (Barker, 220).
- c) **Songs of Zion** (Pss 48, 84, 87, 120-134): These are psalms which celebrate the centrality of Jerusalem/Zion in covenant life, and Pss 120-134 in particular—known as the "Songs of Ascent" were probably sung by pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem for the three annual festivals.
- d) **Royal Psalms** (Pss 2, 20-21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144): These psalms celebrate and focus on elements of the Davidic Covenant, and focus on the relationship on the king and his relationship to God (Chisholm, 258). They may be directly messianic, or simply typify the ultimate Son of David.
- e) **Creation Psalms** (Pss 8, 19:1-6, 104): Psalms which specifically focus on the creative work of God as representative of his majesty, power, goodness, sovereignty, and grace.
- f) **Wisdom Psalms** (Pss 1, 37, 119): Psalms that, like Proverbs, "contrast the lifestyles and destinies of the righteous and the wicked" (ibid.).

VII. Major Themes

A. The Sovereign God

Since the Psalms are compositions of men's prayers and praises to God, it is not surprising that they are completely about God. Chisholm rightly asserts that "the central theme of the book of Psalms, which its prayers assume and its songs of praise affirm, is God's kingship" (258). In one way or another, God's many attributes, his relationship to Israel and the nations, and his dealings with them throughout history, all reflect his sovereign reign. Thus, throughout the Psalms, the various psalmists focus on numerous aspects of God's person and works as expressions of his kingship over them.

1. The God the Creation

- a) God's creatorship is the basis for his sovereign rule over the universe. In agreement with the opening words of the Torah (Gen 1:1), the psalms affirm that God created the heavens and the earth, and it is this fact that propels the psalmists to also affirm his sovereign authority and dominion over the universe.
- b) God is in complete control, and creation eagerly obeys his commands. The psalmists (i.e., David) also wonder at the incomprehensible privilege

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given to man to act as rulers over God's creation, thus affirming the Torah's view of man as God's image and thus divine representative (Ps 8); cf. Gen 1:26-28).

[See Pss 8, 19, 33, 74, 89, 93, 95, 104, 135, 136, 147, 148]

2. The God of Israel

- a) The psalmists view Israel as Yahweh's special creation, and they often rehearse Israel's birth as a nation, deliverance from Egypt, conquest into Canaan, and history under Yahweh's lordship.
- b) He created them to be his special covenant people and to accomplish his special purposes on the world as promised to Abraham (Pss 95:6; 100:3; 149:2). He has been in complete control over their history, and should be praised because of his faithfulness to Abraham and Israel, even while they are in exile.

[See Pss 33, 95, 100, 105, 106]

3. The God of the Nations

- a) Yahweh is not just the God of Israel, but also that of the nations, and the psalms present him as in absolute authority over them.
- b) The nations plan and scheme against God. They set themselves against him and his king (Ps 2:1-2). The kings of the earth think they will conquer God and his authority, but Yahweh laughs from heaven, will terrify the nations when he speaks to them in his fury, will frustrate their plans, and will establish his kingdom on earth through his anointed one.

[See Pss 2, 33]

B. The Righteous and the Wicked

1. The book of Psalms initiates with a dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked—two separate peoples with two separate outcomes (Ps 1:1-2). These become the two kinds of people found throughout the rest of the psalms.
2. The righteous ones call out to Yahweh. They seek his help, his comfort, his protection. They sing his praise, and lament his reproach. And they are constantly persecuted by the wicked, who during this time are constantly on the attack.
3. The wicked seem to prosper. They set themselves against God and against the righteous. Yet the righteous align themselves with God, experience trouble, but also rest in the reality that their sufferings and their faith will ultimately be vindicated.

[See Ps 1]

C. The Attributes of God Revealed to His People

1. The psalms reflect the heart of the righteous man—the man after God's own heart (i.e., David).

2. As such, the psalms express the heart of those who cling to the attributes of God, whether in praise to him for who he is, or what he has done, or pleading for him to act according to who they know him to be.
3. Within the psalms, five attributes receive particular emphasis:
 - a) The psalmists exalt Yahweh as loyal and faithful. He is the God of the covenant, and he upholds his promises.
 - b) He is also good, in that he acts benevolently toward his people, and never maliciously.
 - c) He is the source of their good in life.
 - d) He is also righteous, and he upholds righteousness, justice, and purity.
 - e) And he is compassionate. He looks upon the plight of his people. He rescues. He relents of anger.

D. David & The Davidic Covenant

1. David is a central element in the Psalms. As the man after God's own heart, David's heart for God is reflected in the legacy not only of the psalms composed by him, but the entire Psalter as a curation of prayers and praises to God set to music for Israel's corporate worship.
2. As a "cantata of the Davidic Covenant," the Psalter rehearses David's covenant relationship with God, emphasizes the promises given to him, and rests in Yahweh's faithfulness to fulfill all that he promised.
3. Within its emphasis on David and his covenant with God, the Psalms also offer a hopeful view of Israel's messianic future.
4. The Royal Psalms portray the *ideal* Davidic king, a picture which every generation of Israel hoped would characterize *their* Davidic ruler.
5. Sadly, none of David's descendants realized these hopes, yet they were kept alive by prophetic promises of a future descendant of David would fulfill all that was expected on the Davidic king.
6. Because Jesus Christ came and realized this ideal, we can view the royal psalms as ultimately messianic in their expectation. However, there is a caution in how we read these psalms.
7. "Because the Davidic ideal portrayed in the royal psalms is fully and finally realized through Jesus, these psalms are often classified as messianic psalms. The label is appropriate, but in need of qualification. The royal psalms, by their literary nature, are not inherently prophetic and should not be understood as *direct* predictions of Jesus' messianic reign. As already noted, they express an ideal which, though probably attached with renewed hope to many historical Davidic kings on the occasion of their accession to the throne, is ultimately and fully realized in and through Jesus. As such, these psalms are to be understood as messianic in an indirect sense, in contrast to the messianic predictions of prophetic literature, which, though also rooted in the

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Davidic covenant ideal, may be classified as directly messianic on the basis of the literary genre in which they appear" (Chisholm, 269).

8. With very few exceptions (e.g., Ps 110), the royal psalms "more naturally reflect the historical background of ancient Israel, not the future reign of Christ," and yet "the ideal expressed in the psalm as a whole finds its realization in Jesus, not in a mere human ruler" (ibid.).

[See Pss 2, 45, 72, 89, 110, 132]

VIII. Purpose

The righteous pray to and praise Yahweh as they await the coming of God's kingdom.

- A. Since the wicked have not yet been judged, Messiah has not yet come, nor his kingdom established, the Psalms function today in the same way as they did for the original recipients.
- B. The righteous are to pray and praise Yahweh the way the psalmists did until God finally sends Messiah and establishes his kingdom on the earth. Then, the righteous will finally reign and the wicked will be judged.
- C. "The book of Psalms instructs the reader concerning faith in God's person, works, and word that God will deliver the King and all blessed in him from their troubles and wicked enemies and bring them to Zion to the praise and glory of God" (Toews, 6).

IX. Literary Structure

- A. The organization of the Psalter into five books paralleling the five books of the Torah has already been discussed previously.
- B. "The most important issue in regard to the shaping of the Psalter is not who shaped it into the book as we now have it, but the theological perspective of the 'Psalms-shaper.' From Daniel 9 and Ezra 1 it is clear that the book of Jeremiah and the Law of Moses were read and played a significant role in the hopes of Israel in the post-exilic period. The shaper of the Psalter then knew the prophetic picture of the restoration of Israel (Dt 30:1-10; Jer 30-33). Living in the post-exilic context as revealed in the books of Ezra/Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi it would have been clear to the psalms-shaper that the prophetic promises of God to Israel had not fully been realized. They had returned from exile in fulfillment of the Lord's seventy year promise (Jer. 29:12; Ezra 1:1) but the kingdom had not yet come. Instead they were slaves on the land (Ezr. 9:9 and Neh. 9:39). For the psalms-shaper his perspective must be one which looks forward to the future. God's plan for Israel and the nations in the Abrahamic promise and the Seed were still to come" (ibid.).

- C. Thus, the "Psalm-shaper," as Toews calls him, looked to the eschaton. He created a Psalter which held out hope of the fulfillment of God's promises to David, and the five-fold division of the book takes the reader through a narrative-like journey from David to Solomon (Books 1-2), to the Babylonian exile (Book 3) and life in exile (Book 4), and finally the return from exile to the land (Book 5).
- D. But at the beginning of the Psalter, the editor introduces the book in a most strategic and intentional way.
- E. "That Psalms 1-2 have been purposively placed at the beginning of the Psalter is virtually universally accepted in the current literature.... An introduction serves a text-wide function: to acquaint the readership to the main issues that a text is going to address. In other words, the introduction should provide the macrostructure elements of the entire text" (Toews, 4).
- F. What are those macrostructures? Toews identifies them as (1) God, (2) the wicked enemies, (3) the righteous, (4) communication/instruction, (5) deliverance/judgment, (6), the king, and (7) Israel.
- G. Toews' analysis identifies each of these elements within the first two psalms, making them a fitting introduction to the Psalter as a whole.
- H. Here, two anonymous psalms present the dichotomy of the righteous over the wicked, their relationships to Yahweh and his law, and then gives wise instruction to the nations/wicked to kiss the son.
- I. The Psalter then ends with a 4-psalm conclusion of unrelenting praise to Yahweh. All the laments and petitions of the book "has moved from petition to praise, from suffering to glory" (Toews, 18).

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE PSALTER¹

Book I - David in Exile Trusts in the Lord for his Deliverance

Psalm 1-2 Anonymous - Introduction: The Instruction that Gives the Wisdom to Kiss the Son

Psalm 3-41 David - *The King in Exile Trusts in the Lord for Deliverance from Death*

Book II - The Ideal King is Coming; David and his Enemies are Judged

Psalm 42-49 Korah - *The Ideal King Ushers in the Kingdom*

Psalm 50 Asaph - *God, the Judge of the Godly and Ungodly*

Psalm 51 David - *The Godly Man Judged*

Psalm 52-71 David - *The Enemies of God's Anointed Judged*

Psalm 72 Solomon - *The Kingdom of the Ideal King*

Book III - The Pure in Heart Hope in God; Israel's Unfaithfulness has Led to Judgment

Psalm 72-83 Asaph - *God has Judged Israel but there is Hope based on God's Past Work*

Psalm 84-85 Korah - *The Glory of the Temple and Petition for Deliverance*

Psalm 86 - David - *Prayer for Salvation and Faith*

Psalm 87-88 Korah - *The Glory of Zion and Petition for Deliverance*

Psalm 89 Ethan - *The Davidic Promise and Present Judgment of Davidic Kingdom*

Book IV - Israel in 'wilderness' exile looks to the eternal King of Heaven

Psalm 90 Moses - *The Eternality of God vs. Man under the Judgment of God*

Psalm 91-100 Anonymous - *The Wisdom for those who Wait*

Psalm 101-103 David - *Praise and Trust in the Midst of Affliction*

Psalm 104-106 Anonymous - *The Great Works of the Lord*

Book V - The Restoration of Israel from Exile and the Look to the Future

Psalm 107 Anonymous - GIVE THANKS TO YAHWEH

Psalm 108-110 DAVID Texts

Psalm 111-117 Anonymous - PRAISE YAHWEH

Psalm 118 Anonymous - GIVE THANKS TO YAHWEH

Psalm 119 Anonymous - *The Grand Torah Psalm*

Psalm 120-134 Various Authors - *The Songs of Ascent*

Psalm 135 Anonymous - PRAISE YAHWEH

Psalm 136-137 Anonymous - GIVE THANKS TO YAHWEH

Psalm 138-145 DAVID texts

Psalm 146-150 Anonymous - Concluding PRAISE

¹ Adapted from Toews, 20