“IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL PRAISE YOU” (PS 22:23B):
THE REINTERPRETATION OF THE PSALMS OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN JUDAISM
AND CHRISTIANITY

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by
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This dissertation looks at several psalms which exhibit a shift in focus from
individual to communal concerns (e.g. Pss 3, 25, 51, 102, 130). Sometimes this change
in focus seems to be the result of a textual intervention by a later scribe who was seeking
to give an older psalm a new context in light of the community’s experience. Part of this
shift may also be rooted in the vow to praise, which the psalmist fulfills among the
congregation. This reinterpretation of the psalms of the individual allowed for “I” of the
psalms to take on a variety of meanings, from David, the traditional author of many of the
psalms, to other biblical characters, to Christ in the New Testament, and ultimately to any
liturgical participant. Because many psalms of the individual later become collective in
their focus, many times the community itself makes the “I” of the psalms its own (Exod
15; Ps 129). After a close reading of many psalms in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 considers the
significance of psalms set within narratives in the Old Testament. Most important here
are the prayers of Tobit and Hezekiah (Tobit 3 and 13; Isa 38:9-20). Their prayers are not merely for or about themselves but reflect the concerns of the people to such an extent that their fates are intertwined. The final chapter considers the way psalms functioned in late Second Temple Judaism, particularly at Qumran. Psalms and other prayers inspired by them were important in shaping the self-understanding of the communities that prayed them.
For Danielle, Jacob, Cecilia, and Benedict

(וְזֶה לִי הָאָדָם וּגְנַוִּי שָמוֹם יְהוָה) (Ps 34:4)
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INTRODUCTION

This project originally grew out of a paper I wrote for Prof. Gary Anderson’s doctoral seminar on the book of Tobit. In the paper, I looked at Tobit’s two prayers (3:2-6; 13:1-18) and how they function in the book to link Tobit to the fate of Israel. Through further reading and conversations with Prof. Anderson, I came to see that a similar dynamic occurs in the Psalms and in fact in other narrative parts of the Hebrew Bible. In various ways, the one who prays a psalm is not only a member of but also a representative figure for Israel. What God does for the psalmist reflects the ways God has intervened on behalf of the people in the past and what he will one day do in the future (cf. Ps 22:5-6, 28-32).

It is no secret that the book of Psalms is full of such interactions between the “I” who prays many of them and the community of which he is a part. In Jewish and Christian reflection on the psalms, both in contemporary scholarship and in Rabbinic and Patristic interpretations of the psalms respectively, the “I” of the psalms has often shifted. Most of the psalms were originally anonymous pieces, some of which later editors associated with David as seen in the psalm titles or superscriptions. Because of the communal focus that occurs not only in explicitly communal psalms but also in psalms in which an individual’s concerns seem to predominate, one common interpretation is that the “I” of the psalms is meant to be the corporate “I” of the people of Israel (cf. Exod
While the psalms in their final form often function this way, it is doubtful that the original authors of the psalms intended their “I”s to have this kind of corporate focus at the earliest stages. Rather, the very nature of communal identity in ancient Israel and subsequently in Second Temple Judaism were constitutive for personal identity in a way difficult for denizens of the contemporary Western world to understand. For Israel, it was YHWH’s relationship with the people that was primary. Yes, YHWH did speak to individuals who spoke back to him as individuals. YHWH’s initial promises to Abram through which the people of Israel were born, as it were, began with a promise of descendants (Gen 12, 15, 17, 22). The promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not merely for them as individuals but also as types or paradigms that tie them inseparably to the nation as a whole. Because of this, it is natural that many of the psalms of the individual were later reworked to extend their concerns to the rest of the nation.

Outline

In Chapter 1, I consider the impact of scribal culture on the composition and redaction of the Psalter. I draw here from recent scholarship on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Karel van der Toorn’s recent book specifically dedicated to scribal culture in the formation of the Hebrew Bible. Most significant for our purposes is that it was common for scribes to make redactional interventions into a text at the beginnings and endings of books or sections therein. In the book of Psalms, there appear to be many such insertions at the end of several psalms. As we will see in Chapter 2, many of these contain collective elements that contrast with the individual focus of the earlier versions of such psalms.
In Chapter 2, I go through each of the psalms that exhibit collectivizing elements, either at the end, in the middle, or through an attempt to give the voice of the “I” to the community. I chose most of these psalms to study because there was such a marked contrast or shift from individual to communal concerns. Many psalms of the individual, whether of lament and of praise, do not exhibit this shift. Likewise, many psalms that are entirely communal in focus lack first person singular pronouns and are entirely concerned with the first person plural voice. Whether the jarring nature of the shift from individual to the communal in the psalms treated here simply betrays our modern preoccupation with the primacy of the individual is an open question. While identifying genres is a useful if not essential tool for biblical criticism, there is no doubt that it can often obscure or distort what is in the text if we simply impose our own categories, however helpful, on an ancient text.

In Chapter 3, I consider the relationship between the individual and collective elements in light of the intertextual relationship between psalms and narrative. In several places throughout the Old Testament, there are psalms from other contexts that authors or editors have placed in the middle of narratives in such a way that they mutually shed light on each other. In two of the cases we look at in this chapter, Hezekiah’s prayer in Isa 38 and Tobit’s two prayers (Tobit 3 and 13), the prayers are crucial for understanding the actors and how they function in relation to the broader communities of which they are a part. While Habakkuk’s prayer does not function in the same way, it is another example of an inset hymn, a psalm outside the Psalter, and one which contains elements that may suggest a collective identity for YHWH’s anointed. The other side of this interaction between psalms and narrative includes the 13 psalms with historical superscriptions that
may exhibit an early form of midrashic exegesis. This practice of associating timeless and a-historical psalms with particular historical characters and events invites imitation. Early Jewish and Christian readers happily obliged and freely associated the psalms with other biblical characters on the Jewish side and with Jesus of Nazareth on the Christian. This shows that the “I” of the psalms can be understood in one context as an anonymous figure, which any reader or liturgical participant can appropriate for him or herself. Yet in another context, the “I” of the psalm is given to a particular character and serves an important function in the narrative, even when the psalm has no apparent effect on the plot.

In the fourth and final major chapter, I look at some ways the questions raised in the earlier chapters play out in late Second Temple Judaism and at Qumran, with a gesture toward later Rabbinic interpretations of the psalms. The oft-quoted rabbinic dictum is something to which this chapter points: “Said Rabbi Yudan in the name of Rabbi Judah, ‘Whatever David says in his book pertains to himself, to all Israel, and to all times.’”¹ This chapter also includes the idea that, even before the Christian reading of the psalms in the first century, Jews had already begun to see David as a prophet and thus also the psalms as prophetic. This paved the way for such varied interpretations of the psalms as those at Qumran, in the New Testament, and in both Rabbinic and Patristic commentaries. The use of language and forms from the psalms infuses such documents as the Community Rule and the Hodayot, and this language was crucial for the self-understanding of the sectarian community.

¹ Mid. Teh. 18:1.
In conclusion we will consider what effect this research should have on the way we approach the psalms, both in a scholarly context and a liturgical one. Most commentaries on the psalms address the question of who the “I” of the psalms is meant to be and note that it is often extended in the text itself or in practice to become the voice of the community. Yet the full implications of this are not always fully explored except by liturgical theologians. Newsom’s appeal to critical theory and anthropology in the fourth chapter vis-à-vis the Hodayot scrolls from Qumran could likewise be applied to the psalms themselves and the effects they have on the formation of individual and communal identity in Jewish and Christian congregations today.
CHAPTER 1:

SCRIBAL CULTURE AND THE MAKING OF THE PSALTER

In the next chapter we will go through each psalm that seems to exhibit collective reinterpretation and assess the nature of the shift between the individual and the collective. This cannot be done in isolation from the many other issues that arise in the Psalms and their reception history. We will begin, therefore, by looking at the scribal development of the psalms more broadly and then moving on to how the specific issue of collective reinterpretation has fared in recent scholarship.

In his dictionary article on the Psalms, John McKenzie summarizes with extraordinary clarity the difficulty of studying the psalms:

There is a special difficulty in handling the Pss, because the book was obviously submitted to an unceasing process of development and adaptation: individual Pss become collective, private prayers become liturgical, songs of local sanctuaries are adapted to the temple of Jerusalem, royal Pss become messianic, historical Pss become eschatological. Modern interpreters speak of the ‘rereadings’ of the Pss; an earlier Ps which has in some way become antiquated (e.g. by the fall of the monarchy, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the loss of political independence) is reworked to fit a contemporary situation and given a direction to the future which was not present in the original composition.\(^2\)

To some extent we will look at each of these kinds of development and adaptation with particular focus on individual psalms becoming collective and private prayers becoming liturgical. Often, these are distinctive aspects of a single act of development. The

umbrella reality that encompasses all of these, as McKenzie says toward the end, is that these texts have been “reworked to fit a contemporary situation and given a direction to the future which was not present in the original composition.” As James Sanders and Eugene Ulrich have noted, this reworking and editing of texts in the process of transmission is also part of the canonical process. And in her recent book, Sidnie White Crawford says that the task of transmitting and reinterpreting received texts and traditions involved constant intervention into the received text, intervention that, as far as we can determine, was both expected and accepted as proper scribal activity. The scribes, who may be described as the servants of the text, had a two-fold role. First, they had to copy the books of Scripture as exactly as possible, with care for every detail. This is a familiar scribal task. But second, they needed to make the text of Scripture adaptable and relevant to the contemporary situation.

Before looking at the reinterpretation or expansion of certain Psalms during the Second Temple Period, it is necessary to take into account scribal practices during this time and how these bear on our questions. In his recent book, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, Karel van der Toorn makes a significant contribution to our understanding of ancient scribal culture in general and that which is related to the Hebrew


Bible in particular. While there is a popular conception of scribes as those who slavishly copy pre-existing texts without making deliberate alterations, study of the biblical texts, other Ancient Near Eastern texts, and most notably the Dead Sea Scrolls assure us that this is not the case. Though only a little of van der Toorn’s book is directly about the Psalms, his observations bear directly on their composition and transmission in several important ways.

His chapter “Making Books” (to which we know, of course, that there is no end) details many of the scribe’s roles in a text’s production: transcription, invention, compilation, expansion, adaptation, and integration. According to one model of transcription, such as what we find in Jeremiah 36, the scribe is simply “the faithful recorder who neither omits nor adds a single word; he simply transforms an oral artifact into a written text.” To view such transcription in an overly literal way, however, neglects the fact that the scribe adapted his writing to meet the conventions of his time and place. This does not grant the scribe the freedom to change what he is transcribing to such an extent that it no longer resembles that which was first spoken. It does mean, though, that we cannot simply assume that the written text is a perfect mirror of a particular ancient performance.

The question of scribal invention vis-à-vis the Hebrew Bible is a bit more complicated, since, as van der Toorn notes, “no text from the Hebrew Bible is explicitly

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8 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 110.
the invention of a scribe.”

To understand this, then, we must turn to other ANE texts to shed light on the scribe’s role in inventing a text. He notes especially the well-known *Babylonian Theodicy*. This text maintains what van der Toorn shows elsewhere throughout his book, namely, a link between scribal culture and wisdom literature. Even more interesting for our purposes is that this text is an acrostic. Thus, the marks that make this particular text a distinctively scribal invention include “the technique of the acrostic, the form of the dialogue, the focus on wisdom, and the references to the scribal context.”

Though these marks are not necessarily dominant in the Psalter, their presence is undeniable. Van der Toorn suggests that the acrostic Psalms (e.g. 9-10, 25, 34, 37, and 119, to name a few) are distinctively scribal products “meant for the instruction and enjoyment of scribes and apprentice scribes.” And given the strong importance of teaching and learning in Pss 25 and 119, for example, the association with wisdom literature is reinforced all the more. We can note in passing here what we will see in more detail soon, that Ps. 25 is a traditional acrostic, albeit with several irregularities. What is interesting is that after what should be the final verse, beginning with נ, there is another verse beginning with ד. Many Jewish readers have noticed that the first, middle,

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and final verses begin with א, ל, and פ, respectively, thus forming the verb אלף, “to learn, teach.”

van der Toorn gives other examples of scribal inventions associated with wisdom, including Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) and Ben Sira, “Qohelet because of its citation of proverbs and the scribal identification in the postscript (Qoh 12:9-10); Ben Sira because its author refers to himself as the teacher of a school (Sir 50:27, 51:23).”

Apart from these characteristics of scribal inventions, the Psalms manifest other connections to scribal culture. In Psalm 45, as van der Toorn notes, the Psalmist says, “My tongue is the pen of a nimble scribe” (45:3, NAB). This link between cult singers and scribes shows that the line between the two is more ambiguous and perhaps that the cult singers even perform both roles as a matter of course. Because of this, as van der Toorn says, “The prayers and hymns of the Psalter are, for the major part, the work of liturgists with a scribal background.”

Though van der Toorn does not mention it, there is another interesting verse related to scribal culture in Ps 102 (which we will study in more detail later). In the Zion hymn in the middle of the lament, the poet writes, “Let this be recorded [נכתב] for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD” (Ps 102:19). Childs sees in this not only a scribal reference but also a canonical formula that speaks to how this psalm would be passed on to future generations. Let us look at the next of van der Toorn’s scribal roles: compilation.

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15 Van der Toorn, Scribal Culture, 116-117.

16 Van der Toorn, Scribal Culture, 118.

Compilation includes the gathering of both oral and written sources and putting them together in new and creative, though certainly conventional ways.\textsuperscript{18} With oral sources, the scribal task is simply transcription as we already saw above. With written sources, the task of the scribe includes putting them together and arranging them in a way that is coherent and such that they correspond to the particular genre in which they are written. Cassuto says of this task, “A number of Biblical books…comprise, as we know, a collection of speeches or dicta or poems that, to begin with, were unconnected, being separate and independent pieces of literature, and only as a result of editorial work were they combined and formed into a single book.”\textsuperscript{19} The scribal task of compilation is evident in the construction of many biblical books, as even beginning students of the Bible learn. It is especially pertinent to the Psalter, which has such a complex scribal history. How is it that such a diverse collection of both individual and communal Psalms of lament, thanksgiving, repentance, and wisdom (not to mention many other categories) came to be gathered together in a single collection? This is a complicated question and one which may never be definitively solved, but let us look at some of the evidence for deliberate scribal intervention in the canonical book of Psalms as it stands.

It is clear in the text, as it was clear to early Jewish and Christian readers, that the Psalms are divided into five separate collections or books (Pss 3-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-

\textsuperscript{18} Van der Toorn, \textit{Scribal Culture}, 118-125. See especially Gerald Henry Wilson, \textit{The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter} (SBLDS 76; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985). This book is partly responsible for a paradigm shift in the way the book of Psalms has been studied for the past generation and has spawned numerous books and SBL sessions.

106; and 107-150). There is some disagreement about the edges of these divisions, since
Pss 1 and 2 lack superscriptions and serve as an introduction to the book as a whole
rather than to book 1 (Pss 3-41). Likewise, it is not clear where book 5 (107-150) ends.
Wilson proposes that Pss 145-150 form a final doxology, while Brueggemann sees Ps
150 as the sole climax because of its “uncompromising and undistracted summons to
praise.” Each of these books within the book of the Psalms ends with a standard
doxology that indicates a division between what has come before and what will follow.

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen. (Ps 41:14)

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.
Blessed be his glorious name for ever;
may his glory fill the whole earth!
Amen and Amen!
The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended. (Ps 72:19-20)

Blessed be the LORD for ever!
Amen and Amen. (Ps 89:53)

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, "Amen!"
Praise the LORD! (Ps 106:48)

Even though each of these doxologies seems to indicate some sort of editorial marker,
only the one in Ps 72, as Wilson notes, explicitly indicates any editorial function. He
says, “This comment makes it clear that a collection of compositions…attributed to a

20 Patrick D. Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” Pages 83-92 in The Shape and Shaping of the
Psalter; Miller, Interpreting the Psalms, 81-93; Hossfeld and Zenger, Die Psalmen I, 45-46.

21 Wilson, Editing of the Hebrew Psalter, 193-194.

The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter, at 37.
We should also note some of the other collections such as the psalms of the Korahites (Pss 42-49, 84-85, 87-88), of Asaph (Pss 50, 73-83), and the songs of ascents (Pss 120-134). It is possible, then, to speak not only of the final redactor(s) of the Psalter as a whole but also of redactors and compilers of the books and smaller subcollections within the Psalter.24

One of the more interesting tasks of the scribe that van der Toorn points out, expansion, has become more accessible ever since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-20th century. Because of variations among the different textual versions, scholars have long detected scribal interventions, including expansions, in the biblical text. The differences between ancient manuscripts already attested to the existence of expansions.25 In the texts from Qumran, however, it became possible to see this process at work more clearly. As van der Toorn says, “Expansion occurs where scribes enlarge an existing document with additions of their own” and “normally required the scribe to prepare a new copy of the text.”26 This new copy of the text is what we might call a new edition.27 It retains most of the previous text, though the scribe who does the expanding adds to and reshapes the text to adapt it to a new Sitz im Leben. This is akin to what James Sanders calls adaptability in the process of canon formation. An authoritative text,

23 Wilson, Editing of the Hebrew Psalter, 139.

24 See Mowinckel, “Earlier Collections; The Compilation of the Psalter,” Pages 193-201 in Psalms in Israel’s Worship II.


26 Van der Toorn, Scribal Culture, 125.

which may have meant one thing for a community of a past generation, takes on a new meaning for the contemporary one. The scribe adapting and expanding the text, from what we can tell, felt perfectly free to do so. Van der Toorn notes that our tendency to see an infraction in such manipulations is due to confusion between “the scribe as copyist with the scribe as editor.” A clear example of this in other literature is in the *Gilgamesh Epic*. Since we have copies of it that are roughly 500 years apart, it is easy to see the scribal interventions that lead the text to develop from the earlier one to the later one.

The most remarkable aspect of textual expansions that van der Toorn notes, for our purposes, is that they often occur at the borders of a given text. That is, it is common to detect such interventions at the beginnings and endings of entire books as well as in sections within the book and in individual pericopes. Elsewhere in the book, van der Toorn shows how this may have worked in the composition of the book of Deuteronomy. If we accept DeWette’s hypothesis, Deuteronomy 12-26 was the “book of the law” discovered by Josiah some time in the 620s B.C.E. After this, different editors composed layers around this core, similar to the layers of an onion. The final layer was probably composed by an exilic or perhaps even post-exilic author who reinterpreted the

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28 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 126.


30 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 128

previous layers of the book through the people’s experience of exile and subsequent restoration.\textsuperscript{32}

Because of the many editorial seams in the Psalter, it looks like van der Toorn’s proposal about textual expansions at the borders proves to be true. There are the obvious divisions between books within the Psalter. But given much of the research on superscriptions or headings to the individual Psalms, it looks like the borders between individual Psalms are another place to detect textual expansions.\textsuperscript{33} The history of interpretation of superscriptions goes back to the Septuagint itself.\textsuperscript{34} Given the difficulty in understanding the meanings of the words within them, it is no surprise that the LXX translators often did not know what to make of certain superscriptions. Even so, they normally translated them consistently, even if incorrectly.\textsuperscript{35} This itself shows how quickly what may have been important for one generation became not only obsolete but frankly incomprehensible to a later one.

\textsuperscript{32} Van der Toorn, “The Teaching of Moses: Scribal Culture in the Mirror of Deuteronomy,” 143-172 in \textit{Scribal Culture}.


\textsuperscript{35} The most common example, of course, is the LXX’s use of εις το τελος (“to the end” or “regarding completion” (NETS)) to translate the MT’s למנצח, normally rendered in English “for the choirmaster” or “for the director.” For a treatment of the broader issues surrounding eschatology in the LXX see Joachim Schaper, \textit{Eschatology in the Greek Psalter} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).
Almost all modern commentators agree that Psalm superscriptions are secondary and that they were added to give context to, reinterpret, or reframe certain Psalms. Likewise, there are many instances at the end of individual Psalms that appear to be additions. One of the most well known examples, as we will soon see, is the end of Psalm 51, at verses 20-21. What comes before these verses is the Psalm of an individual penitent, associated in the superscription with David after the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah; it is concerned with his personal sin and God who alone can forgive him. His sacrifice, he says, is a “broken spirit” and a “broken and contrite heart” (Ps 51:19). Yet in the verses that close the Psalm, the Psalmist prays that the Lord “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” (Ps 51:20-21). Some scholars posit a priestly layer of redaction not only here, but throughout the entire Hebrew Bible. 36 This question need not detain us at the moment, however. What is important to note is that the scribe copying and making a new edition of this Psalm felt free to understand the previous prayer in a new context and so often added a verse or two at the end of a given psalm to give it a new scope or context. The prayer for rebuilding of the walls effectively becomes: “God, what you have accomplished in me through my penitence and subsequent restoration, now accomplish in your city and among your people” (cf. Ps 30). Later, we will consider other examples of this expansion at the borders and determine to what extent, if at all, such expansions are meaningful.

The next task of the scribe, adaptation, occurs when a scribe, working with a previous text, rewrites it for his own purposes. As van der Toorn says, this could be a mere translation from one language to another, or it could be a more serious intervention in which a prayer to another god is reappropriated for the worship of YHWH. One instance of this in the Psalms is Ps 20. As he notes, in the 1980s some scholars published an Aramaic hymn from Papyrus Amherst 63 that corresponded almost exactly with Ps. 20. Because of the divine names Bethel and Baal Shamayn in the Aramaic blessing, it seems that the text is actually already the translation of a Phoenician original. If these scholars are correct then, what happened was that both the copier of this Aramaic papyrus and the scribe who adapted Ps. 20 worked from this Phoenician original. Where the Aramaic translator substituted “Horus” for the original “Baal” the scribe penning Ps. 20 substituted “YHWH” for “Baal” and changed “Zaphon” (north) to “Zion.” Furthermore, as van der Toorn notes, the scribe further intervened to change what was originally a prayer for a specific occasion (a prayer related to “our trouble” which seemed impending “tomorrow”), to a stereotypical prayer suitable for any occasion at any time (a prayer for “the day of trouble” and that YHWH will answer “the day that we call”).

The final kind of scribal activity, which is outside the scope of this study, is called integration and involves the combination or weaving together of various sources into a new text.

37 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 133-137.
39 See the notes in van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 134 for further bibliographical references.
40 For more on this, see van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 141 and other sources.
Status Quaestionis

The history of scholarship regarding the individual and the corporate in the Psalter has been well rehearsed most recently and most thoroughly in Marko Marttila’s published dissertation, but one can find similar accounts in the work of Patrick Miller and Brevard Childs, among others. To give a bird’s-eye view of this discussion in the past 120 years, it began in earnest with the work of Rudolf Smend Sr. in the late 19th century. He argued that the “I” in the Psalms represented all of Israel. Thus, what we find explicitly in Ps. 129, for example, is true of the rest of the Psalms of the individual. That is, whenever the “I” speaks, it should be understood as the prayer of corporate Israel. After crossing the sea and thus being saved from the Egyptians, Moses and the people sang to YHWH as if with one voice, saying, “I will sing to the LORD…” (Exod 15:1). From this and Ps 129, it is clear that the corporate identity of the people is such that they can pray together using the language of the individual. In 1912, Emil Balla, responding to Smend, argued that the “I” in the Psalms was in fact an individual and not a collective representation. In two famous lectures delivered in the 1930s, Henry Wheeler Robinson

41 Marko Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation in the Psalms, 1-25.
42 Miller, Interpreting the Psalms, 11-13; Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture, 519-520;
45 Note also the various uses of the “I” in Lamentations, sometimes as the individual prophet, sometimes as personified Jerusalem.
46 Emil Balla, Das Ich der Psalmen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1912).
argued for an idea which he called “corporate personality.” Based on the abundance of collective nouns and other anthropological oddities in ancient Israel, he inferred something like Smend’s earlier theory that Israel herself had a personality and could thus speak the “I” of the individual Psalms. Mowinckel provided another way of looking at this with his idea of the “great ego.” He saw a trend toward “democratization” and “individualization” in which what were originally royal prayers were eventually made available to the whole people. Gunkel was very much opposed to Smend’s project of seeing the community behind the “I” of the psalms. He says, “It was thus the gravest mistake that psalm research in general could have made when they completely misunderstood such lively individual poetry and universally related the ‘I’ of the complaint songs to the ‘community.’” For him, the identity of the “I” with the poet himself was self-evident, as he pointed to other clear biblical examples such as Jeremiah and Job. There is no question that the “I” in this other poetry is meant to refer to an individual, so why should we presume an allegorical reading in the Psalter? Gunkel even went so far as to say that an interpreter should not “proceed from the presupposition that the community reinterpreted what were originally individual complaint songs for themselves. Rather, it is quite natural that the pious poet would also consider his own people when he has finished with himself, or that he first speaks of Israel and then of


48 Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel’s Worship I, 78-80.

49 Gunkel, Introduction to Psalms, 122.
himself, or even that he mixes the two together.”

Each scholar, I think, points to certain truths from the Hebrew Bible, but none of them sufficiently took into account the development of the text itself until the work of Joachim Becker in the 1960s and 70s.

As Marttila notes in his dissertation, which is itself in continuity with Becker’s project, Becker found Robinson’s model helpful to some extent, but inadequate. More helpful than some reconstructed idea of corporate personality, which, one could argue with Gunkel, is dubious, is the activity of the redactors of the Psalter. What Becker noticed is that certain Psalms which are clearly the prayers of an individual display redactional insertions that broaden their scope to include the rest of the community of Israel. Thus, in the final text of the Psalter itself, there is already a dynamic that links the individual with the broader community. It is not as simple as Robinson’s “corporate personality” or as Mowinckel’s “great ego,” though there are certainly examples of these. Rather, Becker shows that Psalms that were originally meant to be the prayers of an individual were later collectively reinterpreted to broaden their focus.

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52 Marttila, *Collective Reinterpretation*, 14ff.

53 Becker, *Israel deutet*, 22-24

Order of Treatment

A glance through secondary works on the Psalms reveals that there are several ways to approach the collection with regard to the order of treatment. Many commentaries simply proceed through the Psalter in its canonical order, beginning at Psalm 1 and continuing to Psalm 50 or 150 depending on whether it is a single- or multivolume commentary. Others proceed by looking at them according to genre or subcollections. As I began this project, I began by making a list of Psalms that exhibit collective reinterpretation, in which there is a shift from an individual to a communal focus. While it initially seemed like a good idea to move through the collection in canonical order, it quickly became apparent that the kinds of collective reinterpretation in the text are different enough that they should be treated based on the kind of shift exhibited. While some of the order remains a bit arbitrary, it is nonetheless intentional.

I have divided them up into four sections, the first two of which are followed by relevant excurses. The first, including Pss 51, 69, 102, and 22, covers psalms that exhibit a dramatic and unexpected shift from the perspective of an isolated individual to that of the nation. This includes language about Zion, the servants of YHWH, and the characteristic shift from lament to praise that we see throughout the Psalter. With the exception of Ps 51, it is also notable that the collective passages in each of these are several verses long. If these are, in fact, redactional expansions, they are major ones. Throughout his book, Marttila argues that the final three psalms in this first section are related in their composition, redaction, or both.\(^{55}\) The second section includes Pss 14, 130, 28, 29, 25, and 34. Each of these includes collective elements that occur in the final

\(^{55}\) Marttila, *Collective Reinterpretation*, 85-134.
verse or two, and, with the exception of Ps 34, seem out of place or unexpected. Although these examples are shorter than those in the first section, they are compelling examples of the shift between the individual and the collective. The third section includes weaker instances of collective reinterpretation to such an extent that we cannot say with great certainty if the collective elements in them are even secondary. These include Pss 3, 125, and 128. Each has a few words at the end that emphasize the nation. The fourth section contains the final two psalms for this chapter, Pss 30 and 129. While it may seem odd to look at these two Psalms excerpted from their contexts, Pss 25-34 and the Songs of Ascents, respectively, they are notable in that they both explicitly give the voice of the “I” to something beyond a mere individual. In Ps 30, the superscription, in what is likely a late and exegetical expansion, relates this individual psalm of thanksgiving to the dedication of the Temple. And in Ps 129, we see similarly an individual psalm of thanksgiving put into the mouth of personified Israel (“Let Israel now say…”).

Given that we could just as easily proceed through these psalms in canonical order, this order of treatment may seem arbitrary, but it helps us recognize that not all the shifts between the individual and the collective are identical. Some seem clearly to be redactional expansions, while some may belong to the original psalm. What they all demonstrate, however, is what McKenzie points out in the words cited at the very beginning of this chapter. In the “unceasing process of development and adaptation” that characterizes the Psalter in a way different than any other biblical book, the first thing he mentions is that “individual Pss become collective.”56 As we will see, this observation is

56 McKenzie, Dictionary, 703.
CHAPTER 2:
EXEGESIS OF INDIVIDUAL PSALMS WITH ASPECTS OF “COLLECTIVE REINTERPRETATION”

2.1 Psalm 51

Since its ending is nearly universally recognized as secondary, we will begin by looking at Ps 51. Though it occurs well into Book II of the Psalter, after a selection of psalms of the Korahites (Pss 42-49) and one of Asaph (Ps 50), Ps 51 begins a collection known as the “prayers of David” or the “second Davidic Psalter” (Pss 51-72). The concluding postscript in Ps 72:20 announces, “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.” Ps 51 also begins a section with an unusually high concentration of psalms with narrative or historical superscriptions (51, 52, 54, 56, 57 (58?), 59, 60, 63). A startling 8 of the 13 historical superscriptions in the entire Psalter occur between Pss 51 and 63.

Ps 51 is a psalm of repentance putatively penned by someone who has committed a grievous sin. Like most psalms of repentance or lament, the language is stereotypical enough to apply to a variety of situations. While Würthwein argues that this psalm is that

58 In addition to the individual commentaries consulted below, one of the most thorough treatments of this psalm remains Edward R. Dalglish, Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism (Leiden: Brill, 1962).


of a sick person (\textit{Krankenpsalm}),\textsuperscript{61} Hossfeld and Zenger show why it is more appropriately classified as a penitential psalm.\textsuperscript{62} The reference to דמים ("bloodshed")\textsuperscript{63} in v. 16 suggests that the psalmist may be guilty of a violent crime and is likely one of the major reasons this psalm was later associated with David’s sins of adultery and murder. The scope of vv. 3-19 is clear: an individual has sinned and seeks God’s forgiveness and cleansing. While the emphasis is clearly personal, he promises that once restored he will “teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you” (51:15). As in many of the other psalms of lament, part of the psalmist’s prayer is rooted in his vow to offer praise in the context of community in thanksgiving for the prayer being answered. Since this is a psalm of repentance, not simply one of lament or complaint, the vow is geared specifically toward sinners (51:15). He effectively promises that, since he now understands the error of his own ways, he will teach God’s ways to sinners that they may return to him. Even with this communal vow in mind, vv. 3-19 are deeply personal and are not, at least in their first layer, the personification of the nation as some earlier commentators thought.\textsuperscript{64}

The crucial verses for the topic of collective reinterpretation are vv. 20-21. Whether one judges them to be part of the original composition or not, they clearly differ in scope from the rest of the psalm. While the rest of the psalm is suffused with first


\textsuperscript{64} See, for example, Briggs, \textit{Book of Psalms, Vol. II}, 3-4; Smend, \textit{Über das Ich der Psalmen}, 112-115.
person pronouns, these verses completely lack them. More telling, perhaps, is the contrast between vv. 18-19 and vv. 20-21. Juxtaposed as they are, it is indeed difficult to imagine that the final two verses are original to the psalm. Using much of the same vocabulary, these verses are in tension with the two preceding verses. The psalmist specifically says that God will not be pleased with a sacrifice or a whole burnt offering and that (the) אלהים, (either “the sacrifices of God,” “the sacrifices acceptable to God,” or, pointed differently, “my sacrifice, O God”) are/is a broken spirit.65 And yet, after his prayer for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, the psalmist avers that, once these walls are rebuilt, “Then you will delight in right sacrifices, burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings. Then bulls will be offered upon your altar” (51:21).

Despite the incongruity of these final two verses with the rest of the psalm and especially the two preceding verses, some commentators have argued that the verses are in fact original. Briggs, for example, who regards the psalm as a “penitential prayer of the congregation in the time of Nehemiah,”66 sees the final verses as integral to the rest of the psalm. He says,

This verse is not a late addition to the Ps., as many have thought, because of a mistaken reference of it to the experience of David, or to a misinterpretation of the previous context, as if there were an unreconcilable antithesis between the Ps. and this conclusion; rather it is essential to the completeness of the Str., and expresses the historical situation of the poet.”67

If one posits, as he does, a specifically congregational prayer, then vv. 20-21 are not as alien to the prayer as they would be if this is understood as the prayer of an individual. In

65 Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 2, 13-14.
66 Briggs, Psalms, vol. II, 3
67 Briggs, Psalms, II, 10.
this case and throughout his commentary, it is clear that Briggs was largely influenced by Rudolf Smend and his tendency to identify the “I” of the Psalms with the community of Israel.⁶⁸ Like Briggs, Eaton also sees Ps 51 as the penitential prayer of a community and looks with suspicion on those who regard the final verses as an addition.⁶⁹ He says, “Like Ps. 50 then, the psalm seeks to establish a right evaluation of sacrifice and prizes the thanksgiving and votive sacrifices highly.”⁷⁰ While his evaluation is no doubt correct when judging the final form of this psalm, it is dubious in evaluating vv. 3-19, with or without the psalm’s title. He again stresses that he regards attempts to see the final two verses as secondary as “very questionable.” Without argument, Dahood agrees that these verses are authentic.⁷¹ Since he regards the rest of the psalm as late, he sees no reason to see the final two verses as additions to an existing prayer. This is entirely unconvincing. There are certainly those who would admit no historical connection between David and the psalm, regard its composition as post-exilic, and still maintain that the final two verses were added to an existing prayer. To sum up, those who regard the final two verses as original with the rest of the psalm see the psalm as post-exilic, probably dating around the time of Nehemiah. And given the scope that the final verses impose on the rest of the psalm, these commentators tend to regard it as the prayer of the congregation rather than of an individual.⁷²

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⁶⁸ Smend, Über das Ich der Psalmen.


⁷⁰ Eaton, Psalms (1967), 141-142.

⁷¹ Dahood, Psalms 51-100, 9-10.

⁷² See also Goldingay, Psalms 42-89, 125.
Apart from Briggs, Eaton, and Dahood, however, most commentators see the final two verses as secondary.\textsuperscript{73} Hossfeld and Zenger consider them to be a “secondary liturgical appendix” or perhaps better as “an eschatologizing and collectivizing continuation of the originally individual prayer of petition in vv. 3-19.”\textsuperscript{74} Unless one simply presumes that the “I” of the psalms is generally the nation of Israel, there is nothing in these verses to suggest such an identity or even that this is meant to be the prayer of a congregation. It is clearly the prayer of an individual. This individual could be the king (as in the superscription), a liturgical leader representing the congregation, an anonymous individual, or perhaps some combination of these. While the psalm contains at least one communal element, the promise to “teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you” (51:15), it is otherwise concerned strictly with the relationship between the individual and God. “Against you, you alone, have I sinned,” the psalmist confesses, even though his sin involves other people (51:6). As Mowinckel says, the words of this psalm “are written by an individual who has grasped something very essential in the relationship between God and man.”\textsuperscript{75} Even so, according to Mowinckel, this does not mean that “the reason for his prayer and confession of sin need be of a private nature.”\textsuperscript{76} The psalm may in fact have been originally composed because of a situation of personal sin and distress, but even in this original core, as Mowinckel notes, it seems to have been penned “with a view to the

\textsuperscript{73} See, for example, Westermann, \textit{The Living Psalms}, 100-101; Dalglish, \textit{Psalm Fifty-One}, 201-208; Becker, \textit{Israel deutet}, 68, n. 96; Marvin E. Tate, \textit{Psalms 51-100}, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{74} Hossfeld and Zenger, \textit{Psalms 2}, 16.

\textsuperscript{75} Mowinckel, \textit{Psalms in Israel’s Worship}, vol. II, 17.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
public cult and the concerns of the congregation.” Mowinckel handles the matter of the final two verses well, and he is worth quoting in full:

If we consider it an outcome of entirely private distress, we shall have to declare as is usually done that the two last verses have been added later. But if we want to include these verses, it is certainly more natural to think of a person in a condition much like that of Nehemiah when rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and of the hostility to which he was exposed on the part of political antagonists. And on the merits of the case the psalm will then have to be ranked among the public psalms, in which the whole congregation joins with the worshipper, while he officiates as the public religious spokesman of the congregation in a matter concerning them all.

If these were the only two options, we could say that Mowinckel is correct without qualification, yet if we consider this an instance of collective reinterpretation, it is possible to see this as both a private prayer and a communal prayer. It is likely that the author of the psalm or one of his associates wrote this psalm as a penitential prayer, expressing his sorrow, guilt, and intention to be reconciled with God. Perhaps around the time of Nehemiah, another scribe added the final two verses, clearly meant to accompany and provide a counterbalance to the dialectical negation of the previous two verses. But this was not their only purpose. They also, as Mowinckel and many other commentators note, broaden the scope of the rest of the psalm. What seemed to be the prayer of an individual in distress is now the prayer of the nation. “Now that you have rebuilt my broken and crushed spirit, now do good to Zion and (re)build the walls of Jerusalem,” the psalmist can now say. Only then (דני) can right sacrifices (צדק–צלוח) be offered on God’s altar. Because of this, Hossfeld and Zenger say that “interpretations that see Psalm

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
51 as *originally* a collective prayer of petition for the restoration of Zion appear rather implausible.” The most commonly accepted position as they articulate it is simply that “vv. 3-19 constitute the primary psalm, which is then updated in terms of Zion theology by the addition of vv. 20-21.”

What then are we to do with the superscription associating the psalm with David’s affair with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of Uriah? Could it have been attached to the original layer of the psalm? If it was not, when was it added? Was it added before, with, or after the final two verses? How should we assess the psalm in its final canonical form? As we have seen several times already, due to the tenuous connections between the psalms themselves and the superscriptions attached to them, most contemporary scholars agree that the superscriptions are secondary. They, in effect, make historical the unhistorical. Fishbane says of this historicization of the nonhistorical, “The phenomenon of adding superscriptions to the psalms should certainly be regarded as a type of inner-biblical exegesis.” Or, as Brevard Childs and many since the time of his article have suggested, the historical superscriptions or titles function as an early form of midrash. The reader is invited to read the psalm in light of a particular incident and perhaps have the psalm in mind the next time she reads the narrative. If the heading to Ps 51 was attached later, why did the scribe pick this particular incident? Unlike other psalms with

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80 Ibid. See also Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 100-101.

81 Fishbane, “Torah and Tradition,” 287.


83 See discussion in the next chapter.
historical titles, such as Ps 34, Ps 51 and its corresponding narrative fit much more clearly together. If those who added the superscriptions often associated them in some way with David (whether or not they meant them to indicate authorship), they could not have picked a more appropriate event in David’s life with which to associate the gravity of sin, remorse, and repentance expressed in the psalmist’s prayer. The verbal links between the two are undeniable. “I have sinned” (חטאתי) in 51:6 is identical to David’s confession in 2 Sam 12:13. The root חטא also occurs in the piel form in 51:9. As we alluded to briefly before, the reference to דמים in v. 16 is easily understood in light of David’s murder of Uriah.84

Given the abrupt shift in the final two verses of the psalm and in light of what we will see shortly in the closely related endings of Pss 69, 102, and 22, it is best to see the ending of Ps 51 as secondary. It seems to be a redactional expansion that extends the individual scope of the previous verses to one focused on Zion, the walls of Jerusalem, and right sacrifices. It may be but is not necessarily rooted in the vow to praise in vv 15-17.

2.2 Psalm 69

Like Psalm 22, Psalm 69 is one of the most vivid and intense of the psalms of lament.85 Perhaps it is for this reason that it is also one of the most quoted psalms in the


85 Helpful compilations of the vast secondary literature on this important psalm can be found in Tate, Psalms 51-100, 186; Leslie C. Allen, “The Value of Rhetorical Criticism in Psalm 69,” JBL 105 (1986): 577-598; Aubrey R. Johnson, The Cultic Prophet and Israel’s Psalmody (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), 386-398; Christiane de Vos and Gert Kwakkel, “Psalm 69: The Petitioner’s Understanding of Himself, His God, and His Enemies,” Pages 159-179 in Psalms and Prayers, eds. Bob
New Testament. It falls neatly into the form of individual lament, although the collective elements at the end, whether added or not, give it a broader scope than it would otherwise have. It is ironically true that anyone who attempts to master the vast secondary literature on Ps 69 can pray the opening verse without guile. The psalmist uses images of being overcome by water and mud, of crying out with no relief in sight, of being surrounded and completely overwhelmed by enemies. He briefly admits his sins, but this is not a major focus.86 He performs the necessary gestures for repentance and prays that God will rescue him from his distress that he might again praise him. Near the end of the complaint section, the psalmist curses his enemies several times (69:22-28). Given the complexity of Ps 69’s composition, it has engendered many opinions about whether it is unified or rather composed of two or more layers.87 The shift to the collective focus at the end is one of many shifts in the psalm that may point to its composite nature.

In a recent monograph Alphonso Groenewald has produced the definitive compilation and distillation of secondary literature on this, one of the most commented upon of psalms throughout Jewish and Christian history. As he notes Ps 69 has many anomalous features including its length. It is approximately twice as long as the average length of comparable psalms of lament from the first two books of the Psalter. How then did this Psalm come about, and what is its relation to Pss 22 and 102 with which it is so


86 In contrast, for example, to Pss 38 and 51, two of the seven traditional penitential psalms. On some of the apparent contradictions in this psalm, for example, those relating to the poet’s sin or innocence, see de Vos and Kwakkel, “Psalm 69: The Petitioner’s Understanding of Himself, His God, and His Enemies.”

87 For a list and description of the different theories about the formation of Ps 69, see Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 2, 172-176; Groenewald, Psalm 69, 176-189, summarized neatly at 189.
often compared? Is it significant that this psalm, which seems to have elements of collective reinterpretation in the final verses is so close to the seam between books II and III of the Psalter? Since to give this psalm adequate treatment requires at least a monograph such as Groenewald’s, we will simply have to prescind from the many important questions that surround this psalm and beg for resolution. Our focus here will be on verses 30-37, how these verses affect the meaning of the rest of the psalm, and whether they point to some kind of collective reinterpretation.

Along with the similar Psalms 22 and 102, Psalm 69 is one of the major ones that Marttila treats in his study of collective reinterpretation in the Psalms. Like these other major psalms, he prints the text of the psalm using different fonts to indicate where he sees different layers in the composition. As Groenewald also shows, the composition seems to have many layers and has given rise to several reconstructions most of which are plausible. Apart from its notable length, Ps 69 follows the form of an individual psalm of lament perfectly. The psalmist cries out to God from distress, lists his many sufferings, curses his enemies, and near the end turns on a dime and begins praising God. Either because of a priestly oracle or some other kind of indication of answered prayer, realized or anticipated, the psalmist praises God. It is not only for his own sake or even for God’s. He prays, “Let the oppressed (ענוים) see it and be glad; you who seek God,


89 In this, he follows Becker, Israel deutet, 45-48.

90 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 105-109.

91 Groenewald, Psalm 69, 189.

92 Gunkel, Introduction to the Psalms, 184ff.
let your hearts revive” (69:34). It is important that others see, hear, and continue to bear witness to this praise of God. After this, as in Ps 22, the scope of the psalm bursts forth as the psalmist invites heaven and earth, the seas and everything in them to praise him. “For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah; and his servants shall live there and possess it; the children of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall live in it” (69:36-37). It is notable that only here and in the final verse of Ps 34, possibly a redaction, does the designation “servants” appear in the first two collections in the Psalter.93 Its further appearance in the closely related Ps 102 is one argument for a common redactor.

In the initial transition to praise in v 31, there is no need to posit a separate layer of redaction, though some have certainly done this. This is simply the conventional movement within a Psalm of lament, from distress to answered prayer to praise.94 The well-known notable exception to this is Ps 88, which ends with no apparent relief or answered prayer. The cult critical motif in v. 32 is also interesting, since it echoes the similar verses in Ps 51:18-19 as we saw earlier (cf. Pss 40:7-9; 50:7-15).95 “This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs” (69:32). There seems to be a play on words in that a song (ׁשִיר) is better than an ox (ׁשָׂר) in what is pleasing to

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94 On the role of the vow to praise in complaint psalms, see Gunkel, Introduction to the Psalms, 184ff.

95 See Groenewald, Psalm 69, 141-144.
Allen notes broader “shin-mem wordplay” throughout Ps 69:31-37 with such words as שם, שֶׁמֶר, שֶׁמֶר, שֶׁמֶר, and שֶׁמֶר. The references to the oppressed and needy in vv. 33-34 hark back to the first book of the Psalter and may signal one of the final redactional layers of this composition. The poor are a major focus of the first part of the Psalter but are notably absent for much of the second. There is an increasing focus on the poor at the end of Book I, especially in Pss 35-41. It is fitting, then, to have a similar emphasis toward the end of Book II, where the poor were otherwise largely absent.

Similar to the closing verses of Ps 22 and the hymn of praise in the middle of Ps 102, the final three verses of Ps 69 expand the scope of the Psalm to encompass the macrocosm of creation. The language evokes the Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1, particularly with the use of the rare root רמש. Yet are these three verses a redactional insertion, or are they original to the psalm? Hossfeld and Zenger see three major ways to understand the Psalm: as an original unity, as a disunity in which two or more separate psalms were joined together, and a third middle-way position in which the psalm grew in stages as a result of compositional and redactional activity. Some variation of the third position is most common, and as we already noted, Groenewald treats six different ways

96 Allen, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 585; Seybold, Introducing the Psalms, 85.
97 Allen, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 585.
99 In the Psalms, it occurs only here and in 104:20. Otherwise, it is largely limited to Priestly texts (Gen 1:21, 26, 28, 30; 7:8, 14, 21; 8:17; 8:19; 9:2; Lev 11:44, 46; 20:25; Deut 4:18; Ezek 38:20).
100 Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 2, 174.
of tracing the psalm’s redactional development. Gunkel and Allen are two who argue for the original unity of the psalm. Gunkel simply sees the final verses as the traditional vow to praise and song of thanksgiving that together often conclude the psalm of lament. Allen looks more closely at the overall structure of Ps 69 in comparison with its twin, Ps 102. As he notes, it has a well-organized structure with two large stanzas of roughly equal length and a smaller one about half the size of the longer ones (2-14a, 14b-30, and 31-37), identical to the structure of Ps 102 (2-12, 13-23, 24-29). For Allen, the application of rhetorical criticism to this psalm helps him establish a “pervading structure” that “points to the integrity of the psalm.” The final verses do indicate a shift within the psalm, but it is a shift attested to elsewhere and is not necessarily a separate redactional layer. In any case the final seven verses set the psalm of lament into a context of praise. What seemed to be an isolated individual beset by enemies is now praising God in the presence of the oppressed and needy. Heaven and earth and all creation are invited to join into this chorus of praise. For God has saved not only the poet from his distress but will also “save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah.”

Examples of those who see the psalm as a disunity composed of two or more distinct psalms include Duhm and the Briggses. Duhm divides the two Psalms neatly

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103 Allen, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 591-595.

104 Allen, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 584.


between vv 2-32 and vv 33-37, while the Briggses see a more complicated intertwining. For them, the original psalm includes vv 2-3, 5, 7, 14b-19, 30-32

We are studying the psalms here both as individual compositions and as parts of the larger collections in which they are set. Ps 69 occurs near the very end of Book II (Pss 42-72) and near the end of the smaller collection known as “the prayers of David” (Pss 51-72). Is the placement of the Psalm here meaningful? Can we learn something about it based on its larger context, or did a redactor more or less randomly place it here in the collection? In his “composition-critical reading” of Ps 69, Groenewald notes several features that seem to point toward Ps 69’s meaningful placement here in the Psalter. As we saw briefly earlier, the final seven verses contain both a cult-critical statement similar to Pss 40, 50, and 51 as well as what Groenewald calls a “theology of the poor,” which, he says, has been notably absent from the rest of this section of the Psalter. Hans-Joachim Kraus’s observation that “the petitioner of the psalm belonged to the group that was enthusiastic about rebuilding the temple” also links this psalm to Ps 51 which is concerned at the very end with the time when right sacrifices will be offered on the altar (cf. Ps 69:10; 51:21) Groenewald also notes that the four preceding psalms (Pss 65-68) are not complaints but, according to traditional form-critical analysis, hymns or hymnic prayers. Since neither these nor the subsequent psalms in the collection


exhibit any mention of the cult, it is necessary to look at the cult-critical verses of Ps 69 together with the similar verses in Pss 40, 50, and 51.\textsuperscript{110}

Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required (Ps 40:7)

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds. For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me…. Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God" (Ps 50:8-16.24).

For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps 51:18-19).

Groenewald argues that these verses are placed at strategic parts of these subcollections, that is, near the seams, in order to signal their importance. For him then, the cult-critical

\textsuperscript{110} See also Alphonso Groenewald, “Psalm 51 and the Criticism of the Cult: Does This Reflect a Divided Religious Leadership?” \textit{Old Testament Essays} 22 (2009): 47-62.
inscription in 69:32 “was inscribed by the final redactors not only to write their theology into this text through which they actualized this text for its tradents, but—even more important—it was inscribed into an already existing text in order to correspond to other strategic psalms in these two books (I and II).”¹¹¹

The mention of Zion in 69:36 is also noteworthy. In noting similarities between Pss 69 and 102, Allen mentions the blending of an individual perspective at the beginning with the communal and cosmic focus of the end, with a specific reference to Zion. As he says, “The Zion motif is rare in individual laments; besides 69:36 and 102:14, 17, it occurs only in 51:20—and there probably redactionally.”¹¹² Though it is not a lament, Ps 14 contains a reference to Zion in the final verse, one that appears to be a redactional insertion into the psalm.¹¹³ In all Allen finds 11 different kinds of connections between Pss 69 and 102, including structural, terminological, and thematic parallels and refers to them as “hitherto unrecognized twins.”¹¹⁴ Given the concern for Zion in the final verses and the “zeal for your house” from v 10, Adele Berlin argues that Ps 69 in its final form is a post-exilic lament of one of the “mourners for Zion” mentioned in Isa 61:2-3 and Zech 7:3-5.¹¹⁵ The psalmist’s “public mourning is the reason he is mocked by his friends and family and by society at large…. He may be living in Jerusalem but he feels like he

¹¹¹ Groenewald, Psalm 69, 85.
¹¹³ See discussion later in the chapter.
¹¹⁴ Allen, “Value of Rhetorical Criticism,” 593. See also Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 113; Becker, Israel deutet, 45-52.
is in exile.” Berlin’s creative reading bridges the concerns between the individual suffering at the beginning and the focus on Zion at the end and suggests that the Zion elements are not a redaction but at the core of the psalmist’s own sufferings.

In light of the many similarities between the apparent redactions in Pss 51 and 69, while looking ahead to our treatments of Pss 102, 22, and others, it is safe to classify at least some elements of its closing verses as secondary. While the shift to praise in v 31 is not unexpected, the emphasis on the poor in vv 33-34 and the eschatological imagery in vv 35-37 complete the shift from the isolated and despairing individual of the opening verses to God’s work of salvation, which includes rebuilding the cities of Judah and gathering the children of his servants.

2.3 Psalm 102

The majority of Psalm 102 is normally classified as an individual psalm of lament. Sandwiched in the middle of this lament, however, is a hymn of praise to YHWH who sits enthroned forever and who, in contrast to the psalmist whose life is only passing, endures for all generations (vv 13-23). The hymn contains several promises for Zion: that YHWH will “rise up and have compassion” on her (14), that he will build her up (17), and that in Zion, many will declare “the name of the LORD… and his praise in Jerusalem” (22). After this hymn of praise, the individual lament continues, though with some elements of a hymn remaining, as the poet contrasts his transitory state with the permanence of YHWH (cf. Ps 90). It is these different shifts throughout the psalm that

have led many to suspect that the psalm is composed of two or more layers.\textsuperscript{117} The layer of individual lament includes vv. 2-12 and 24-25a. The other material is mostly hymnic and includes the already mentioned promises for Zion and eschatological elements that expand the scope to the rest of the nations. Allen refers to the “bewildering multiplicity of interpretations” and the “variety of views regarding genre and setting” that make this psalm so interesting.\textsuperscript{118}

The superscription to this psalm is also unusual in that it is specifically designated as the “prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the LORD” (102:1). Unlike the many Davidic superscriptions that seem to designate a specifically royal character, whether David or an unnamed successor, this one would seem to apply to anyone in a state of such distress. And yet the fact that he pours out his complaint “before the LORD” (לפניך יהוה) as well as the hymn of praise in the middle seem to indicate a liturgical context. As Mowinckel says, “The ‘I’ of this psalm (the worshipper), if not a king (the psalm may be post-exilic), is at all events the cultic representative of the congregation, its leading man, and as such has the same position as the king in former times, and uses the vocabulary of the royal ideology. The worshipper represents Zion, the congregation.”\textsuperscript{119} Westermann, in contrast, sees the indication of the psalm’s \textit{Sitz im Leben} in the occasion for the prayer, “when he is faint” (כִּי יָטֵפָה). For him, this

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\textsuperscript{118} Allen, \textit{Psalms 101-150}, 16.

\textsuperscript{119} Mowinckel, \textit{He that Cometh}, 84, n. 4. See also Weiser, \textit{Psalms}, 653.
indicates that “the psalms of lament do not originally form part of regular acts of worship but presuppose the situation of one afflicted by grave suffering.” Though the psalmist is alone and surrounded by enemies, he makes known at least part of his lament to those around him (102:24). The national focus of the hymn in the middle suggests that the afflicted person is a representative figure whose prayer for himself is, through the final form of the psalm, joined with the fate of Zion itself. Delitzsch offers a word of caution before too quickly giving the voice of the “I” to Zion: “We must also take it just as personally as it sounds, and not turn the individual person into the nation,” even if the affliction is “certainly a national one.” Even without the Davidic superscription, the psalm could be prayed by a king but also by any liturgical representative whose state of distress is parallel to that of the nation. Just as YHWH will certainly have pity on and rebuild Zion, he will also “regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer” (102:18).

The eschatological elements about Zion call to mind the prophecies from Isa 2:2-5 and Micah 4:1-4. Childs sees the eschatological elements in Pss 102 and 22, for example, as an indication of a redactional shift. He says, “One of the most widespread features in the growth of the tradition was a new eschatological interpretation of older material. Particularly ancient complaint psalms have been intertwined with material of a very different sort which renders the psalm as a whole in a different way.” There is no

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120 Westermann, Living Psalms, 111.

121 See Briggs, Psalms II, 317; Westermann, Living Psalms, 113.

122 Delitzsch, Psalms III, 79.

better description of this phenomenon than Ps 102. Regardless of how one accounts for
this process of reinterpretation, he says, “the result is increasingly to give the Psalter an
eschatological flavour.”124 David Mitchell makes the same case for the Psalter as a
whole.125 While Mitchell is correct in his detection of eschatological elements in the
Psalter, it is not at all clear that there is anything like the full-scale eschatological
redaction for which he argues and which Childs often seems to imply. Finally, Lindström
notes several parallels between the Zion hymn in Ps 102 and passages from Deutero-
and Trito-Isaiah (LIST).126 As we have already noted several times, vis-à-vis Pss 22 and 69,
the hymn contains many parallels to the national and eschatological elements of their
endings as well.

If the Psalm is a composite, it is likely that its final layer, the hymn of praise in
the middle, is part of the same redactional layer as the similar elements in other psalms,
especially Pss 22, 51, and 69. Marttila has noted that the links between especially Pss 22,
69, and 102 are too many to be coincidental. According to him, the scribe who composed
the hymn in Ps 102 at least “knew the redactional material in Pss 22 and 69 in their
complete extent and used these lines as a model for his own supplement.”127 Whether the
national elements in these three similar psalms came from the same hand or later scribes
mimicked one or two of them, it is clear that these three psalms should be read in light of
each other, even as they span three distinct subcollections within the Psalter. Given the

124 Ibid.


126 Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 221-222.

127 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 133.
different layers in these psalms, and especially in Ps 102, Marttila is correct in seeing it as the “product of intense collective reinterpretation.”  

He may be correct in seeing vv. 26-29 as a separate redactional layer, but the evidence is not as compelling as that for the clear secondary nature of vv. 13-23. Yet, given the similarity in theme and language between vv. 26-29 and elements from both the complaint and the hymn, one could easily read vv. 26-29 as a hymnic comment on the earlier material.

For Lindström, the “hermeneutical implications of the national references in Ps 102 coincide with Pss 22; 40; 69.” Yet he views the composition of the psalm in a way different from the others. The other psalms, according to Lindström, begin as part of an individual framework, which subsequently breaks open and expands the focus to the broader community. Because of the way Ps 102 was composed, however, even with parts taken from different genres, even the apparent “I” verses were intended to have a national focus. He says, “Several formulations in the individual sections of Ps 102 remind us of expressions which are found in the individual complaint psalms, but which in all probability were used as national complaints in the exilic liturgy.” His argument is similar to his arguments against viewing Ps 22 as the combination of two distinct psalms, a psalm of lament and one of thanksgiving. Each section does not contain

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128 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 128.
129 Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 224. Emphasis mine.
130 Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 225-227.
131 Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 227.
132 See the treatment of Ps 22 below. Brueggemann’s questions about this are particularly apt: “Is it necessary that the ‘original’ should be lament to which praise is added? There is nothing that supports such a judgment except conventional assumptions of genre. Could not the original piece have aimed precisely at the juxtaposition of lament and praise?” from his review of Brunert, Psalm 102 im Context, Biblica 78 (1997) 112-115, at 114.
enough of the formal elements of its genre to stand alone. Since Ps 102:2-12 lacks “petition, affirmation of confidence, anticipated thanksgiving, and a vow with a promise of future action,” it is not easy to separate its distinctive parts and presume that they are independent compositions. Even though Gunkel was resistant to the idea of expanding the “I” of the poet to a broader community unless it was explicit (e.g. Ps 129), he acknowledged that, “The individual poetry pulls Israel’s heart strings more than communal poetry. The individual poetry is therefore far more richly developed, and the communal piety borrowed much from it.”

What should we make of Ps 102’s location in the fourth book of the Psalter, especially since, at least in its final form, it seems to be a relatively late psalm? With Gerald Wilson’s dissertation and subsequent work on the editing and shaping of the Psalter, came a greater emphasis in Psalms scholarship on looking not only at individual psalms, but also at the broader context in which they are set. In her monograph, Brunert is no exception, as she sees great significance in the placement of Ps 102 in the fourth book of the Psalter. Under the rubric of “Holistische Analyse,” she considers how it functions in this fourth book, which, as she and others argue, is an important transitional one in the final canonical shape of the Masoretic Psalter. In Wilson’s book, from which Brunert draws in her own analysis, Wilson gives attention to Book IV of the Psalter, not only because of its transitional significance, but also because of its prominence in

135 *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*.
11QPs. Wilson notes the high proportion of untitled psalms in this collection signaling either late composition or late inclusion within the Psalter. Because of this and other unusual features, which he notes in his book and later articles, he argues that the book is “especially the product of purposeful editorial arrangement.” Since the collection, which for the most part lacks superscriptions, many have seen the reference to Moses in the title of Ps 90 as casting a shadow as it were across the rest of the book, even though there are some Davidic superscriptions toward the end (Pss 101:1; 103:1). Wilson notes four ways that Ps 102 refers back to the themes set out in Ps 90: the transient nature of humankind (Pss 102:3, 11; 90:5-6, 9-10), the eternality of God (102:12, 24-27; 90:1-2, 4), God’s wrath because of humankind’s disobedience (102:9-10; 90:7-8), and the ultimate promise of security and relief from distress (102:28; 90:16). Ps 102, then, is in the odd position of being a sort of a microcosm of Book IV, beginning as it does with a reference to Moses, while at the same time being sandwiched between the only two psalms in the collection with Davidic superscriptions. For Flint, this gives the cluster of Pss 101 → 102 → 103 → 109 → [110] (the order of 11QPs) a “strong Davidic character” and ensures the place of 102 in the Davidic Psalter.

If we are to take this recent interest in looking at the editorial shaping of the Psalter seriously, we must consider Ps 102 and the possible redaction in the middle of it both in the context of Book IV and of the two Davidic hymns in which it is set, both in

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137 See Wilson, Editing, 214-215.

138 Wilson, Editing, 215. See also his “Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise,” and “Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms,” Pages 42-51 and 72-82 respectively in Shape and Shaping of the Psalter.

139 Wilson, Editing, 218.

140 Flint, Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls, 194.
the Masoretic text and in 11QPs. While, as we saw earlier, some see the hymn of praise in Ps 102:13-23 as making the voice of the “I” in the Psalm that of Israel, one can more correctly argue that the Psalm, in its final form, actually distinguishes between them. The superscription, which is the same in both the MT and in 11QPs, gives the psalm a definite setting, though not a cultic one. As Wilson says, the psalm “is viewed as properly accessible to the individual in need…. The picture is of a needy individual who approaches his God, expressing his need in the words of this ps. This s/s in effect has loosed the ps from any cultic associations which may have spawned it and freed it to function on an individual, personal basis.” It is precisely because of this psalm’s generic character and lack of association with David that Murphy declares this to be his “preference among all the superscriptions in the psalms.” For him, the superscription captures and summarizes the mood of vv 2-12, which, because of the addition of vv 12-29, was perhaps adapted for community use. This is similar to what we will see later in Ps 130. At the end, therefore, Ps 102 does seem to exhibit aspects of collective reinterpretation, similar in many ways to Pss 51, 69, and 22. The voice of the “I” remains that of an individual, particularly one in distress. Yet his personal concern extends, because of the inclusion of the hymn to the concerns of the nation and what God will do for Zion at some time in the future. In this case, unlike others, the collective elements do

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141 Wilson, *Editing*, 232; Flint, *Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls*, 127.
143 Murphy, “Reflections on Contextual Interpretation of the Psalms,” Pages 21-28 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, at 27.
144 See Murphy, “Reflections,” 27. Note that he does not look at vv 24-29 as carefully as Brunert and others do, to make distinctions between what may be secondary and/or tertiary layers within the psalm.
not occur at the very end of the personal material (cf. Pss 22, 51, 69, etc.) but sandwiched in the middle of it.

2.4 Psalm 22

In many ways Psalm 22 is the quintessential psalm of lament. This is certainly magnified by its use in the passion narratives and the effect of this use in the broader Christian tradition. Like Pss 69 and 102 with which we have already compared it, it contains so much vivid lament imagery that even many of the commentaries on this psalm are beautiful. The shift to praise in v 23, though dramatic, is the formulaic vow to praise that we have already identified in several other places in the Psalter. What makes this psalm so distinctive for our purposes is how utterly dramatic is the transformation between the despair and isolation of the opening verses and the unabashed praise in the context of a community toward the end. In no other psalm do we see such a complete transformation of the lamenter’s plight.

It is precisely because of this that the psalm has elicited such a broad range of interpretations, especially regarding the history of its composition. Through form critical analysis, many early 20th century scholars simply divided the psalm into two independent compositions which were later joined: a psalm of lament and a hymn of thanksgiving. Thus 22:2-22 is a psalm of lament, which, in its final word, יונתני ("you have answered me"), envisions an answer to the lamenter’s pleas. The verses that follow provide a

145 Note especially the treatments in Westermann, The Living Psalms, 79-91 and Miller, Interpreting the Psalms, 100-111.
fitting hymn of thanksgiving for the deliverance but clearly belong to a different genre and are thus, according to this analysis, an independent composition.146

As Lindström perceptively notes, however, there is a significant problem with dividing the psalm into two independent compositions. If Ps 22:23-32 were an independent thanksgiving psalm, why is there no reference to the crisis from which the psalmist has been saved?147 This is an important characteristic of the genre, and, without the first 22 verses of the psalm, the reason for praise is lacking.148 Lindström, therefore, sees vv 23-32 simply as an extension of the vow to praise that we expect in most psalms of lament.

Building on Lindström’s work, Marttila looks at the seams within Ps 22 in a different way. While those who sought to divide the psalm into two independent compositions do so between vv 22 and 23, Marttila sees the real seam between vv 23 and 24. The vow to praise in v 23 should be included with the rest of the lament because “the pattern of individual complaint psalm seems to require a short thanksgiving after the complaint (examples Ps 7:18; 13:6; 27:6; 28:6-7; 31:20-25; 35:28; 42:6,12; 43:5; 54:8; 56:13-14; 59:17-18; 61:9; 86:12; 109:30-31; 142:8).”149 While the praise does begin at v 23 and continue through the end of the psalm, it is “the sudden change from the cohortatives of the preceding passage to plural imperatives, which is quite exceptional to

146 See, for example, Duhm, Die Psalmen erklärt, 68-74, in which he simply exegetes them separately.

147 Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 66.

148 As Lindström notes, contrast this with Isa 38:10-16; Jonah 2:3-7; Pss 30:7-13; 116:3-4 in which one finds an account of the lamenter’s trouble mentioned in the context of the thanksgiving.

149 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 100.
the language of the psalms.” Marttila does, then, see the psalm as a work that has been redacted, but not simply as the somewhat awkward combination of two independent psalms.

Drawing on the work of Peter Weimar, even while disagreeing with him on many details of his proposition, Marttila acknowledges that Ps 22 “was in course of time the object of numerous modernizing reinterpretations.” Since we, like Marttila, are looking at the shift between the individual and the collective within the psalm, let us consider his proposal for the first redactional layer. The first collective element in the psalm occurs not at the transition to praise at the end but toward the beginning. In what seems to be an insertion between verses 3 and 7, we read,

   Yet you are holy,  
   enthroned on the praises of Israel.  
   In you our ancestors trusted;  
   they trusted, and you delivered them.  
   To you they cried, and were saved;  
   in you they trusted, and were not put to shame (22:4-6).

Similar to the hymn of praise in Ps 102, it seems that this expression of trust has been set directly into the middle of the psalmist’s lament. In Ps 102, one can read v 24 immediately after v 12 as if it were a seamless transition (with vv 13-23 being the eschatological hymn of praise). Likewise in Ps 22 there seems to be a seamless transition between vv 3 and 7, interrupted by an expression of trust that not only contrasts the fate of the suffering individual with God, but also appeals to his past actions on behalf of Israel. “They trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you

150 Ibid.
151 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 103. See also Peter Weimar, “Psalm 22,” in Freude an der Weisung des Herrn, 487-494.
they trusted, and were not put to shame” (22:5-6). He effectively prays, “God, since you acted this way in the past on behalf of the nation/our ancestors, so now, for the sake of your own glory, do the same for me in the state of my distress.” The expression of trust, therefore, not only breaks up the lament and begins to put it in the broader context of God’s past actions, but also situates the psalmist in the context of the nation. For Marttila, then, it seems likely vv 4-6 and 24-27 belong to the same redactional layer. The case is strengthened, he says, by the presence of the word יהוה in both sections. As he says, somewhat surprisingly, “Israel” shows up relatively infrequently in the Psalms, about 60 times. What Marttila does not mention is that “Israel” occurs only five times in the first book of the Psalter (14:7; 22:3,23; 25:22; 41:13), and I would argue that every one of these is an editorial insertion into the text. If this proposal is correct, then vv 24-27 would have been the conclusion to the psalm at one stage. And given the concluding words, this is eminently plausible.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; 
my vows I will pay before those who fear him. 
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!  
May your hearts live forever! (Ps 22:26-27)

The break between vv. 27 and 28 is so jarring that Marttila, following Hossfeld and Zenger and others, sees the final five verses as the last redactional layer of the psalm itself. With language evocative of the promises to Abraham, the psalmist looks ahead

152 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 104. See Mandelkern, Concordantiae, 1456-1458.
153 See the treatment of 14:7 and 25:22 elsewhere in the dissertation. 41:13, of course is the closing doxology that concludes Book I of the Psalter.
154 The superscription may in fact be later, but this is irrelevant for our purposes.
to a time when all on earth will acknowledge YHWH’s universal dominion and will gather to worship (22:28-32).

For this closing section, Westermann uses the helpful image of ever expanding circles of praise. What began as a psalm of lament, isolation, and loneliness transforms into praise, community, and fulfillment. The aim of the psalm in its final form, according to Westermann, is “to portray the extension of the praise of God to ever wider circles. It begins when God hears a sufferer’s plea from the depths of despair. It moves on to his promise to recount his experience to others and then, from that small group, the praise of God echoes forth with hidden power through ever wider circles.”

This spatial expansion of praise is similar to any psalm of lament in which the worshiper vows to praise God in the middle of the (great) congregation (cf. Pss 35:18; 40:9-10; 107:32; 111:1; 149:1). It is the world-encompassing scope here that makes Ps 22, along with its siblings, Pss 69 and 102, so noteworthy.

Yet there is one more thing that Westermann notes that makes Ps 22 so unusual. The expansion in this psalm is not limited to the spatial but extends to the temporal as well. As he says,

[t]he summons to praise must make headway both into the past and into the future. Death sets a limit to praising God, as we are told in Psalm 6:5 and many other passages. Only here does v. 29 [v. 30, Hebrew], greatly daring, look beyond death: now the summons to praise must also reach “all who sleep in the earth.”

In his time of suffering and even when he has received the promise of its end, the psalmist both looks back to God’s past action and to those who already sleep in the dust

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156 Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 90.
as well as to the future when God will act again, and the living, the dead, and even a “people yet unborn” will together praise him (22:31-32; cf. 102:19).

How then should we assess the relationship between the individual and collective elements in the psalm? Whatever the redactional history of this psalm (though I suspect with Marttila and others that it grew in stages), in its final form, there is a clear movement from the psalmist’s state of loneliness and despair to his place in the community praising God for his deliverance. The expression of trust in vv 4-6, which briefly interrupts his cry of lament, situates the psalmist in the context of God’s previous intervention on behalf of the nation and looks ahead to that crucial answered prayer at the end of v 22 (עניתני). The vow to praise “in the midst of the congregation” in the following verse is one of the keys to understanding this movement from the individual to the collective elements in this and in many of the other similar psalms.

2.5 Excursus: Vows and Inscriptions

In his treatment of individual complaint psalms (Die Klagelieder des Einzelnen), Gunkel sees the fulfillment of a vow as “the expression of a feeling of thankfulness which has welled up.”¹⁵⁷ Common to these vows, not only in the biblical psalms but also in parallel Babylonian and Egyptian psalms of petition, is the vow to make public the greatness of the deity.¹⁵⁸ According to the prescriptions in Leviticus 7,

¹⁵⁷ Gunkel, Introduction to Psalms, 184.
however, one who pledged a thanksgiving sacrifice (תודה זבח) would accompany this praise with its requisite offerings.\(^{159}\) The thanksgiving song and the thanksgiving sacrifice are normally associated with each other. Yet eventually, as Gunkel notes, “the vow of the thanksgiving song gradually replaced the vow of the thanksgiving offering. Traces of this process can be seen in Pss 40:7f; 51:18; and 69:31ff, places that speak of YHWH not wanting the sacrifice.”\(^{160}\)

In his article “The Praise of God as a Cultic Event,”\(^{161}\) Gary A. Anderson builds on Gunkel’s insights and notes how, following the destruction of the Temple, prayer gradually replaced sacrifice. For the rabbis an important text supporting this was Ps 141:2: “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!” Referring to the same biblical text, Kugel says, “Apparently it was not the spontaneous overflowing of a grateful worshiper or the simple expression of religious awe: rather was praise sometimes presented as an offering in and of itself and, in this sense parallel to cultic sacrifice.”\(^{162}\) Van der Toorn speaks similarly of the composition of the psalms in the context of scribal culture: “These texts are not spontaneous expressions of grief or joy but fixed liturgical chants designed to be recited or sung. They are the work of cult specialists trained to translate situations and


sentiments into proper words of prayer and thanksgiving.”163 Anderson also notes the pairing of praise and sacrifice in Ps 107.164 The psalm describes the acts of praise and thanksgiving offered by four types of people: those who return from the desert, come back from a journey at sea, are released from prison, and recover from illness. For the first, second, and fourth groups, the prescription is to “Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind” (107:8, 15, 31). The third group gets the same exhortation, but in addition to this, it says, “And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy” (107:22; cf. Ps 66:13-20). As Anderson says, the two are paired activities, which eventually become separable and interchangeable. What is interesting about Ps 22 is that, similar to Ps 107:22, the thanksgiving song and thanksgiving sacrifice are both present.

After the initial vow to praise in v 22 and the verses that follow, the psalmist announces his intention to pay his vows “before those who fear him.” (22:26; cf. Ps 116:12-14, 17-18; Jonah 1:16; 2:9). He continues, “The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!” (22:27). In the context of the thanksgiving sacrifices as enumerated in Leviticus 7, this is no mere metaphor or eschatological promise. If the psalmist has promised to fulfill his vow to make a thanksgiving offering, there is the very practical matter of consuming the meat from the sacrifice. As Leviticus says, “And the flesh of your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day it is offered; you shall not leave any of it until

163 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 118.

morning” (Lev 7:15). The ritualized lament and thanksgiving in Ps 22, at least in one stage of its development, envisioned a cultic setting with an actual sacrifice. This gives the individual lament its broader communal context.

Before leaving Ps 22 and its closely related siblings, Pss 69 and 102, there is a further interesting point to which we need to attend with regard to the practical matter of how this individual praise will be made known to the congregation and beyond. At one level there is the apparent oral performance of the psalm in the midst of the great congregation, part of which is addressed to all the Israelites (22:24). Yet, as we already noted, the praise expands to “all the ends of the earth,” “all the families of the nations,” “all the proud of the earth,” “all who go down to the dust,” and even “a people yet unborn” (22:28-32; cf. 69:32, 34; 102:16-23). Oral recitation, though indispensable in the ancient world, was not and could not have been sufficient to fulfill the promise of the psalm. The solution lies within the hymn found in Ps 102. After the initial praise and prophecies related to Zion, the psalmist writes, “Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD” (102:19). Childs sees in these words a canonical formula similar to the commands in Deuteronomy not to add or take away from the words in the book (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; cf. Rev 22:19). The very nature of Israel’s sacred tradition, he says, is that it must be passed down from generation to generation (Ps 78:5-7; 145:4; Joel 1:3). The original way of doing this was of course

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165 See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 417-419 for more on the meaning of this verse.

through oral tradition, though eventually much of this material was written down.\footnote{167} Childs says, “If in early Israel the transmission and actualization of Israel’s sacred tradition occurred in the context of the cult, increasingly in the late pre-exilic and post-exilic periods Israel’s tradition was given a written form and transmitted by scribal schools.”\footnote{168} In the context of Ps 102, and by extension Pss 22 and 69, Childs sees the canonical formula in v 19 as “the key to the psalm.” He says,

> By committing the promise to writing the continuity of Israel’s hope was established once-and-for-all. The written record became the vehicle for the promise. The word was written not just to maintain contact with the past, but to point to Israel’s true future. The crucial theological point to make is that the promise was not locked into the past, nor was it abstracted into a timeless sphere. Rather, it was directed to a future generation, to a concrete people who experienced in common the same temporal sequence as all of humanity.\footnote{169}

After treating the interchangeability of and movement between the thanksgiving sacrifice and the thanksgiving song, Anderson also notes the links many 20\textsuperscript{th} century scholars highlighted between thanksgiving psalms and “epigraphic monuments of praise found in or near temples throughout the Ancient Near East.”\footnote{170} Gunkel and Begrich point out the counterparts to biblical thanksgiving psalms in Phoenician, Aramaic, Babylonian, and Egyptian inscriptions.\footnote{171} Shortly after this, in 1945, H. L. Ginsberg published an important article in which he compared a then-recently discovered Ben-hadad stele with

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{167} Again, see the much-cited van der Toorn, \textit{Scribal Culture} for an outstanding account of this process.
\item \footnote{168} Childs, “Analysis of a Canonical Formula,” 360.
\item \footnote{169} Ibid., 362.
\item \footnote{170} Anderson, “Praise of God as a Cultic Event,” 19.
\item \footnote{171} Gunkel, \textit{Introduction to the Psalms}, 215-221.
\end{itemize}
similar psalms from the Bible. According to his translation the stele reads, “The stele which Bir-Hadad...set up for his lord Milqart because he had prayed (נזר) to him and he had hearkened to his voice.” Ginsberg argues that behind the ז in נזר, there lies an original ד, since “the Phoenician alphabet, in which this old Aramaic was written, had no character with that value.” This would give us the Hebrew נזר, which refers, of course, to vows. Thus, as Anderson also notes, the response to prayer in both the stele and in the biblical psalms is “not simply spontaneous praise but praise that was vowed.”

Ginsberg attempts to strengthen his case by pointing out the superscription to the psalm of Hezekiah in Isa 38:9-20. Interrupting the flow of the narrative as it does, it begins by identifying the psalm as a מכתב, a “writing” or an “inscription.” For Ginsberg, this suggests “the natural inference (in view of the foregoing) from the nature of the document being that it was published, and from the rank of its author that it was published by being engraved in stone.” Ginsberg, along with most biblical commentators, sees a connection between the מכתב in Isa 38 and the mysterious superscription מכתם in Pss 16 and 56-60. Both Ginsberg and Miller note that the LXX

172 Ginsberg, “Psalms and Inscriptions.”
173 Ginsberg, “Psalms and Inscriptions,” 160.
174 Ibid., 161.
177 We will look at this psalm in further detail in the next chapter.
(στηλογραφία) and other ancient translations confirm this association.\textsuperscript{179} In addition, the other element in several of these psalm titles, תשחת אל, normally translated, “Do not destroy,” “may indeed be a further reflex of the habit of committing the psalms to epigraphy” (Pss 57:1; 58:1; 59:1; 75:1).\textsuperscript{180} Thus, as Anderson concludes, “The cultic role of these hymns of praise is analogous to the votive or dedicatory monuments which ancient Near Eastern kings were wont to place in their temples. These monuments testify to the thankfulness of the supplicant and serve to illustrate graphically the relation of the supplicant to his god.”\textsuperscript{181} Whether King Hezekiah or the author of Pss 16 and 56-60 originally inscribed their psalms on stone or on a scroll is beyond the scope of our inquiry.\textsuperscript{182} The point is that the very act of writing down these hymns of praise was an act of commitment to YHWH, which also made it possible to extend the praise to another generation.\textsuperscript{183} Just as the psalmist looks back at God’s past actions on behalf of the people in Ps 22:5-6, so now the salvation of the individual can become an object lesson for the whole community.


\textsuperscript{180} Ginsberg, “Psalms and Inscriptions,” 171, n. 40; Miller, “Psalms and Inscriptions,” 313. For other possible meanings of תשחת אל, see Gary A. Anderson, “King David and the Psalms of Imprecation,” 272-274.

\textsuperscript{181} Anderson, “Praise of God,” 30-31.

\textsuperscript{182} Note that King Hezekiah and his acquaintances are also associated with scribal activity in Prov 25:1: “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied.” See van der Toorn, \textit{Scribal Culture}, 37, 46, and 118 for comments on the nature of their editorial activity.

\textsuperscript{183} Though he was not a king, it is notable that Tobit also writes down his prayer (Tobit 13:1ff) in response to Raphael’s command (12:20).
2.6 Psalm 14 (=53)

This psalm, paralleled in the second section of the Psalter by Ps 53, is an unusual one that demonstrates the difficulty of attempting to assign forms to each Psalm.\textsuperscript{184} Most commentators agree that it contains a mix of different types of Psalms, including lament wisdom, prophetic, and hymnic material.\textsuperscript{185} The poet is clearly distressed by the behavior of those around him and has concluded that “They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one” (14:3; cf. Isa 1; Hos 4; Micah 7, etc.). The sin of those who say, “There is no God” is not the intellectual denial of God but rather the way they live. As Gustavo Gutierrez puts it, “The denial of God that is meant here is not theoretical but practical; it is a rejection of God’s just governance of the world and of the demands God makes on believers.”\textsuperscript{186} The corrupt ones are distinguished from God’s people, the generation of the righteous, and the poor one whose refuge is YHWH. It is this distinction between the wicked and the righteous that allows this to be classified as a wisdom Psalm even though it also has elements of a lament. As Craigie also says, “the more reflective tone of other wisdom psalms (e.g. Ps 1) is exchanged for a lament and the hope of deliverance, which emerge from the initial meditative wisdom (v 1).”\textsuperscript{187}


\textsuperscript{187} Craigie, \textit{Psalms 1-50}, 146.
What distinguishes this psalm from the others we are considering is that it has no 1st person singular subject. Though it may be implied, there is no “I” who is complaining about the deeds of the wicked. It may in fact be a community, namely, God’s people, the generation of the righteous, and the poor mentioned above, who together lament their plight. Mowinckel includes it among the national psalms of lamentations, and vv. 4-6 give him good grounds for doing so.  

Similarly, Gunkel classifies it as a “communal complaint Psalm” (Die Klagelieder des Volkes). Like Ps 3, this one closes with an ending that does not fit easily with the rest of the psalm:

O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad. (14:7)

Just as the psalmist declared at the end of Ps 3, “Deliverance belongs to the LORD,” the psalmist prays that the same victory or deliverance (ישועה) would come out of Zion. The next phrase is more ambiguous because of the meaning of לעמו. It is often rendered “restores the fortunes of” as in the RSV here and elsewhere. But as BDB notes, the phrase can also simply refer to the bringing back of captives. Greenfield similarly says that it “meant originally ‘restitution’ or ‘restoration’ – of territory, health (Job), or a people’s position. In Biblical Hebrew the idiom underwent theological interpretation as [שבית/שבת] ‘to restore a captivity’ as it referred to

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188 Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel’s Worship I, 220-21.
189 Gunkel, Introduction to Psalms, 89.
190 Cf. Job 42:10: “And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job…”
the restoration of Israel to its land.”\textsuperscript{192} Thus, Ps 14:7b might also be rendered, “When the Lord brings back the captivity of his people.” Whatever the translation, this may be a marker that at least v. 7 is exilic or even post-exilic. This cannot be a strong claim, however, because the prayer is generic enough that it could apply to other situations of distress just as well. Gunkel sees in it a prophetic or eschatological element in which the scribe, like many of the prophets, wanted to show that “the wilderness period, with its majestic miracles, will be repeated at the end.”\textsuperscript{193} The rest of Ps 14, like most of the other psalms, is notoriously difficult to date. Some argue for a preexilic date,\textsuperscript{194} while others put it after the exile, during the period when such wisdom literature was more common. While we cannot solve this dilemma definitively, what does seem clear is that v. 7 clearly does not fit in with the rest of the Psalm. The end of Ps 3, as we will see later, is more ambiguous, and it is not easy to make a confident decision based on the textual evidence. In this case the break between verses 6 and 7 in Ps 14 is significant enough for us to regard the final verse as secondary. In his treatment of Ps 14 in \textit{Interpreting the Psalms}, Patrick Miller does not even mention this verse, implicitly recognizing its secondary character.\textsuperscript{195} And as Marttila notes, the “vocabulary in v. 7 clearly deviates from the preceding passages. On this basis it is possible seriously to question the assumption of the literary unity of Ps 14.”\textsuperscript{196} Briggs saw v 7 as a liturgical addition, which was

\textsuperscript{192} Greenfield, \textit{Al Kanfei Yonah}, 25.

\textsuperscript{193} Gunkel, \textit{Introduction to Psalms}, 255.

\textsuperscript{194} See Bennett, “Wisdom Motifs,” 15-21; Craigie, \textit{Psalms 1-50}, 147.

\textsuperscript{195} Miller, \textit{Interpreting the Psalms}, 94-99

\textsuperscript{196} Marttila, \textit{Collective Reinterpretation}, 146.
composed of two layers. The idea that deliverance will come out of Zion echoes the parallel passages in Isa 2 and Micah 4. And for others the juxtaposition of Jacob and Israel to close the psalm calls to mind the use of these two names together in Deutero-Isaiah. If there were a connection between these uses of “Jacob” and “Israel”, it would lend even greater weight to an exilic or post-exilic dating of v. 7.

If Ps 14:7 is secondary as we have shown above, what does this mean regarding the psalm as an instance of collective reinterpretation? There is no clear move from a singular subject to the collective nation as in Pss 22, 69, 51 and in the other psalms we will study shortly. The poet could easily be an individual lamenting his plight in the context of an immoral society (cf. Ps 1) or it could be a community in distress suffering the same fate and praying for deliverance (14:7). Even though it is not explicit, I propose that this psalm was likely originally meant to be prayed by an individual, perhaps as the representative of the people, but not necessarily. The addition of v 7 puts in greater relief the identification of Israel/Jacob with YHWH’s people, the generation of the righteous, and the poor whose refuge is YHWH. Recall again the earlier point that this is the first appearance of Israel and Jacob in the Psalter and that the only occurrences of Israel in the first book of the Psalter are in verses which seem to be additions to their psalms (Pss 22:4, 24; 25:22; 41:13).

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198 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 146-47. See, for example, Isa 40:27; 41:8, 14; 42:24; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 21, 23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 12; 49:5-6. Though less frequently, this parallel use also occurs in First Isaiah at 9:8; 10:20; 14:1; 27:6; and 29:23. Mowinckel also sees a link between eschatological hope, as expressed in this verse, and Deutero-Isaiah. See He that Cometh, 138-149.

2.7 Psalm 130

Ps 130:1-6 is normally categorized in the *Gattung* of an individual complaint or lament. Yet, as Allen notes, “If the verbs קראתי and קוויתי are interpreted as past, ‘I invoked you,’ ‘I waited,’ they belong to a thanksgiving song.”²⁰¹ It is also among seven traditional penitential Psalms in the Christian Church and has been of great importance for many Jews in response to the Shoah, because of its imagery and the emphasis on יְהוָה’s שלום, שלום, and פָדָת. The poet calls out to יְהוָה from the depths (ממעמקים, *de profundis*) and pleads that יְהוָה hear his voice and be attentive. While he does not confess any particular sins, he acknowledges that if יְהוָה were to mark (שמר) iniquities, who could stand? Yet because with יְהוָה is forgiveness, the poet waits for יְהוָה with hope even more than watchmen (שָׁמַרְוִים) for the morning. The psalm could easily end here, yet there is a further exhortation for Israel to hope in יְהוָה (יהוה אל–ישראל). Since this matches the beginning of Ps 131:3a exactly, these were likely penned by a common author or redactor. While the end of Ps 131 does not offer a reason for this hope, Ps 130 does: “For with the L ORD there is steadfast love (חסד), and with him is great power to redeem (פדאת).” Again, this also seems like a natural place for the psalm to end, and yet there is a further verse that again

²⁰⁰ We will consider the Songs of Ascents/Pilgrim Songs as a group and individually later, but this one stands out from others because of the nature of the shift from the individual to the community and so is treated with other similar ones earlier in the Psalter.

brings in Israel. “It is he who will redeem (יהוה) Israel from all its iniquities.” There are several possible ways we can understand these last two verses.²⁰²

Scholars have long suspected that the last two verses are a redactional expansion that has been tacked onto a standard individual complaint song. It is easy to see how this may have happened. An exhortation for Israel to hope in YHWH is added immediately after the individual poet confesses his own hope in YHWH. The redactor extends this hope to all Israel precisely because of YHWH’s steadfast love (חסד) and redemption (יפדה). The verse that follows could also be a separate redactional layer in which the scribe, responding to the יפדה of the previous verse promises that YHWH will redeem (יהוה) Israel from all his iniquities. What makes this final verse particularly interesting is that this is the very same verb that began the final verses of both Pss 25 and 34, the verses that lie outside the acrostic structure and which are also likely redactional expansions. Is this a common redactor spanning the books of the Psalter? This is a hard question to answer. While Pss 25 and 34 may be late, because of their acrostic structure and wisdom themes, they are part of the first book of the Psalter, which was probably compiled relatively early. Ps 130, as one of the Songs of Ascents, is likely post-exilic, probably from the 5th or 4th centuries B.C.E. Given the complex nature of the writing, editing, and compiling of the Psalter, I doubt that we can say with any confidence that there is a common author or redactor to the endings of Pss 25, 34, and 130, but this correspondence is noteworthy to say the least. It seems most likely that the final two verses of Ps 130 were added in one or two stages and that the work was done by the

²⁰² See Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 3, 425-427, 438 and Allen, Psalms 101-150, 253-254 for several of these.
compiler or redactor of the collection of the Songs of Ascents. The reference to Israel, though unusual in an individual complaint, fits perfectly with the broader theology of this collection. Patrick Miller expresses well how these verses function in the Psalm in its final form:

A final note is sounded in this psalm and it is heard over and over again in the Psalter. My experience with God is not exhausted by nor does it end with my personal deliverance and forgiveness. That forgiveness happens not only to bring about the worship of God (v. 4b), but the experience of the self is a witness to larger communities that points them to God’s way of forgiveness and deliverance and calls forth from them a similar worship and praise (cf. 22:22-31; 69:30-36). What God does for the individual is reflected in the Lord’s dealings with the community. Both the individual and the community are recipients of the grace of God, and the experience of one is always a reminder and call to the other to trust in the one who lifts us out of the depths.²⁰³

Ps 130, therefore, does seem to be another instance of collective reinterpretation, though in a different way than in the previous psalm. While corporate Israel speaks the words of the “I” in Ps 129, the “I” in Ps 130 seems to remain an individual, albeit a representative figure. As in Ps 102 earlier, this does not become a communal lament or psalm of thanksgiving, in which the “I” is that of the community.²⁰⁴ Rather the shift to a communal focus near the end, as Skehan and Becker argue, actually distinguishes the speaker from Israel (in contrast to Ps 129).²⁰⁵ It is the individual who exhorts the rest of Israel to imitate his own hope in YHWH. And just as YHWH, with whom is forgiveness,

²⁰³ Patrick D. Miller, Interpreting the Psalms, 143.

²⁰⁴ Croft notes that Pss 123, 129, and 130 all demonstrate a shift from the individual to the corporate, each in different ways. See his Identity of the Individual, 148-149.

presumably forgives his own (the poet’s) iniquities, so will he redeem Israel from all its own.

2.8 Psalm 28

Psalm 28 is generally classified as an individual lament.²⁰⁶ It contains stereotypical language about going down into the pit (בֹּר), verbs such as hear (שָׁמַע) and cry (שָׁעַע), and pleas for vengeance against the psalmist’s adversaries (vv. 4-5). It follows the formulaic pattern of lament psalms in that vv. 1-5 contain the psalmist’s plea for deliverance. This prayer is immediately followed by an actual or anticipated answer to his prayer, leading the psalmist to bless YHWH, because he has heard the voice of my supplications (28:6). These verses of praise could form a fitting conclusion to the psalm, but either the psalmist or a redactor added two more verses expanding the prayer to the rest of the people. The language of the complaint verses is generic enough to encompass a variety of situations. Mowinckel and others see it as a prayer of a sick person.²⁰⁷ As he says, it is probably, “a psalm referring to the king’s sickness, although it may be uncertain whether this psalm was originally made for this definite occasion or whether an older psalm has been adapted.”²⁰⁸ Against reading this psalm as related to sickness, Craigie says, “The danger of death referred to in v 1 (‘those who go down to the pit’) is expressed in formulaic language (cf. Pss 30:4 and 143:7) and should be interpreted

²⁰⁶ See, for example, Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 236.
²⁰⁷ Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel’s Worship I, 74; Dahood, Psalms I, 172.
²⁰⁸ Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel’s Worship I, 74; Westermann, Living Psalms, 56-57.
generally of the threat to the psalmist’s life, without necessarily being identified with sickness.” Eaton, of course, agrees with Mowinckel in seeing this as a royal psalm, but, given his proclivity for seeing royal psalms where others do not, this is no real surprise. Mowinckel’s case rests largely on the designation of “his anointed” (משיחו) in v. 8, but as we will see in the next chapter, the parallelism in this verse makes the identity of the משיח ambiguous. The designation of this as the prayer of a sick person is not without its problems. Again, the psalmist uses the stereotypical language of going down into the pit found in other psalms that may refer to sickness (cf. Pss 30:4; 143:7; Isa. 38:18). Yet vv 3-5 seem to indicate a situation of persecution by evildoers. Given that this forms the bulk of the psalmist’s complaint, it is better to consider this more broadly as a psalm of lament rather than one specifically related to sickness. It may have functioned as a royal psalm at some stage, but Mowinckel’s uncertainty is warranted, and his suggestion that an older psalm has been adapted is probably correct.

The psalm’s interpretation in many ways does hinge on how we read the final two verses, the ones that lead some to regard this as an instance of collective reinterpretation. There is without a doubt a clear break between verses 7 and 8. Verse 7 ends with words of praise following an actual or anticipated deliverance from his distress. Verse 8, depending on how one reads it, changes at least the scope of the prayer, if not the speaker as well.

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209 Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 237.
210 Eaton, Psalms (1967), 87-89.
211 Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 237.
8 The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
9 O save your people, and bless your heritage; be their shepherd, and carry them forever.

If we read the MT as it stands, it says “YHWH is a strength to them/him לולו; he is the saving refuge of his anointed (משיחו). This a perfectly acceptable way to translate these words, but to whom does לולו refer? After v. 7, there is no clear referent that indicates who “he” or “they” are. We could posit a change of speaker here. Perhaps, the king was meant to pray verses 1-7, followed by a refrain by the people who refer to what YHWH has done for him, that is, YHWH’s anointed. Then either the people pray for themselves or the king prays for them, given that their fate is inseparable from his own.

A more likely reading, however, is indicated by early textual evidence. In the critical apparatus to BHS, it is clear that such versions as the LXX, Origen, and the Peshitta suggest that a better reading here is לעמו (for his people) rather than לולו (for him/them). The LXX has, “Κύριος κραταίωμα τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ” (“The Lord is the strength of his people”). Most modern translations follow this reading without comment.

Even though the king is almost always identified with “anointed one,” the juxtaposition of the anointed and the people is found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In

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212 The translation of “people” here presumes the emended reading of לעמו (τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ) rather than לולו. See discussion that follows.


214 See Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 149.
the psalm in Habakkuk 3, for example, one that we will consider in more detail later, the
prophet Habakkuk prays,

| You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed (3:13). |
| יאת לישע עמק לישע אתי-משיח |

If we take this as simple poetic parallelism, then the people are identified explicitly with
the anointed one.215 Even if one were to argue that מְשִיחַ here means king, as it usually
does, it is clear, nevertheless, that Habakkuk regards the fate of the king and his people as
one and the same. The salvation of the king is the salvation of the people and vice
versa.216

To return to the final verses of Ps 28, it does seem that לעמע is the better reading not
only textually but also in the context of this final refrain. Let us set aside for a moment
the question of whether the final two verses are secondary. Were verses 8 and 9 always
together? Was one perhaps part of the original prayer and the second added, or were both
added together? Hossfeld and Zenger, in their commentary, regard these verses as
separate redactional layers, v. 8 being an exilic and v. 9 being a post-exilic redaction.217
Given the parallelism between the verses, however, Marttila is probably correct that these
verses belong to the same layer. According to this reading, verse 8 is simply a
declarative statement about the relationship between YHWH and his people, that is, his
anointed. Verse 9 is a prayer that YHWH will act based on this relationship: “Save your

215 See, of course, James L. Kugel’s extensive treatment of parallelism in The Idea of Biblical

216 As we will see in the next chapter, compare the intertwined fates of King Hezekiah and Israel
in Isaiah 36-39.

217 Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalmen I, 177. See also Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 149.
people, and bless your inheritance; shepherd them and carry them for ever.” If we read, therefore, vv.8-9 as originally linked together, whether or not they were originally part of the Psalm, this gives us strong grounds for at least a close identification between the king and his people. The question of whether the author here is asserting a collective identity for the משיח is more difficult, and we should exercise caution in seeing a movement toward a collective משיח in the post-exilic period.²¹⁸

Ps 28:1-7 is clearly an individual lament, but what is Ps 28:1-9? Apart from the superscription, there is nothing in the first seven verses of the psalm to indicate that it is a royal psalm. It is simply, as James Kugel calls it, the prayer of a “liturgical Everyman,” a composition “consciously crafted to fit a particular common, repeated, circumstance and couched in language sufficiently vague or general as to suit a variety of potential speakers and occasions.”²¹⁹ The mention of משיחך in the final verses, though ambiguous in meaning, is enough to give the final form of the psalm at least a royal flavor. In his treatment of the psalm in the context of the subcollection of Pss 26-32, Zenger says of the final form, “The basic psalm 28, 1-7 acquires a final confession in v. 8 in which the salvation experience of the one praying becomes a paradigm for the community of the pious and in which the restorative royal expectation of Ps 18,51 and 20,7 is further developed with reference to the ‘anointed one of [YHWH].’”²²⁰ When we consider the Davidic superscription, albeit secondary, we are instructed to read the psalm in some way

²¹⁸ Here I differ from Marttila (Collective Reinterpretation, 177-194), who sees in the post-exilic period a widespread attempt to give משיח a collective meaning in the absence of the Davidic monarchy.

²¹⁹ Kugel, “Topics in the History of the Spirituality of the Psalms,” 115. See also van der Toorn, Scribal Culture, 118.

related to David, the preeminent example of YHWH’s מֶשֶׁך. Because of the final two verses, which do seem to be a scribal insertion, and because of the Davidic superscription, it is possible to see this both as a royal psalm and as an instance of collective reinterpretation. What was in its earliest layer an anonymous prayer has become a prayer for both the king and his people, both identifiable as YHWH’s מֶשֶׁך. As we will see in our treatment of King Hezekiah’s prayer (Isa 38), the redactions within Ps 28 are not an isolated incident, and Becker, Marttila, and others are at least partly correct in seeing the phenomenon of collective reinterpretation in the Psalter.221

2.9 Psalm 29

This hymn of praise is the only one of its kind in the Psalter.222 It begins with a call to praise addressed to the אלהים–בני, normally translated “sons of God” (NAB) or “heavenly beings” (RSV, NRSV) and is followed by a litany of praises related to the “voice of the LORD.” It is full of images that call to mind both creation and the Temple. In 1935 H. L. Ginsberg began a conversation that continues to the present day about what kind of hymn this is and where it came from. In his article, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,”223 he argues that Hebrew scribes substantially modified what was once a Phoenician hymn into a hymn of praise or perhaps a victory hymn to YHWH. This

221 See Becker, Israel deutet, 68, n. 96.

222 Note the close verbal parallels in Ps 96:7-8 and 1 Chron 16:28-29.

article inspired a flurry of responses that tried in different ways to situate this Psalm in its Ancient Near Eastern context. Because the scope of our interest is limited to the final verse, we will have to pass over most of this important discussion with little comment.

Because it seems to have undergone so much development it is difficult to speak of the original *Sitz im Leben* of this psalm. The LXX adds ἐξοδίου σκηνῆς to the MT’s common superscription לֹא-דְוָר הַנְּח. Yet, as Craigie notes, “this addition to the title reflects later usage, rather than the psalm’s initial setting.” While the Greek expression is obscure, most commentators, following Delitzsch in the 19th century, see in it a reference to the end of the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Lev 23:36). Since Ps 29 shares language with Ps 96 (29:1-2 // 96:7-8), and since Ps 96 is one of the psalms used by the Chronicler, it is possible that the one who added the superscription as found in the LXX and perhaps even the final verse was either the Chronicler or someone in a common circle.

At the end of this hymn of praise, in which it seems that the divine name was perhaps substituted into an earlier hymn to Baal or Hadad, occurs a final verse that may


be an instance of collective reinterpretation. The most striking thing about this final verse just after considering the final verses of Ps 28 is that the first three words are the very same ones that began Ps 28:8: יהוה לעם צצ. It is likely, then, that Pss 28 and 29 have a common reactor.\footnote{228} In Ps 29:11, though, the clause is one word longer, and, depending how we read it, is either declarative or jussive: “May the LORD give strength to his people” or “The LORD gives strength to his people.” Given its location at the end of a hymn, the jussive is to be preferred here and in the final clause: “May LORD bless his people with peace.”\footnote{229} As in Ps 14, there is no first person singular subject from which to make the transition from the individual to the collective. The hymn is completely focused on YHWH, his voice, and the literally earth-shattering effects of this voice on the natural world. And it is steeped in imagery evoking both creation and the Temple. And yet, also similar to Ps 14, the final verse breaks so cleanly from what has come before, that it is almost certainly secondary. The focus shifts from the recounting of praises regarding the LORD’s voice to a prayer for the strength and peace of his people. As Dahood says, “Just as the LORD achieved a signal triumph over the forces of chaos, so will he grant his people mastery over their foes.”\footnote{230} One could argue that with the

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\footnote{228} It is also noteworthy that both Pss 28 and 29 have connections with the psalm in Habakkuk 3. In the case of Ps 28, the connection is the parallelism between the anointed and YHWH’s people. As John Day notes, Ps 29 shares several themes with Hab 3 including YHWH’s theophany in the storm, YHWH’s exaltation over the cosmic sea, and the upheaval of nature at YHWH’s appearing. Most interesting is the link he sees between the seven thunders of Ps 29 and the “seven arrows” of lightning in the notoriously difficult to translate Hab 3:9. See Day, “Echoes of Baal’s Seven Thunders,” 146-147. In Avishur’s treatment of comparisons between Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms, the two major compositions on which he focuses are Ps 29 and Hab 3. See Avishur, Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms, 39-205.

\footnote{229} See Gunkel, Introduction to Psalms, 228.

\footnote{230} Dahood, Psalms I, 180.
transformation of Baal to YHWH, with the two layers of the superscription, and, finally, with the reference to the LORD’s people in the final verse, that Israel’s transformation of the psalm is complete. Because of the editing and rereading of this psalm for a new context, an older preexilic psalm, could be understood and prayed in a completely different context, though there are remnants of what came before.

In the broader context of the psalms surrounding it, Ps 29, according to Zenger, is a hinge and the “theological kernel” around which Pss 26-32 form a concentric composition. As he says,

Three intercessory prayers mount up to psalm 29: the intercessory prayer of the just person in psalm 26, the combined intercessory prayer of the persecuted (royal) individual (verses 1-6) and of an innocently accused (verses 7 to 13) in psalm 27 as well as the intercessory prayer of one threatened with death in psalm 28. Three songs of thanksgiving stem from psalm 29: the prayer of thanksgiving of a seriously sick person in psalm 30; the prayer of petition in psalm 31 which is bound in (editorial) elements of trust and thanksgiving, and the wisdom prayer of thanksgiving for the grace of forgiveness in psalm 32. Psalm 29 marks the transition from intercession to thanksgiving.231

The Temple imagery, which runs, to use Zenger’s image, like a red thread throughout this subcollection of psalms, reaches its climax in Ps 29 in which the psalmist praises God in the Temple of creation and in the earthly Temple itself. Since Pss 25-34 exhibit such an extraordinary concentration of editorial reworking, both in the text of the psalms themselves and in their superscriptions, the seeds of Zenger’s proposal regarding this section of the Psalter hold the promise of further growth.

Similar to Ps 14, Ps 29 has collective elements at the end, and there is no clear shift from the individual to the communal. Rather the shift that we do see in Ps 28 seems to be replicated almost verbatim at the end of Ps 29. Likewise, both have elements in

common with the victory hymn in Hab 3, which we will look at more closely in chapter 3. In this case the shift to the focus on the LORD’s people at the end of the psalm is not a movement from the concerns of the individual to those of the nation but perhaps rather the final stage of the appropriation of a Phoenician or Canaanite hymn, which now belongs to the LORD’s people, whom he will bless with peace.

2.10 Psalm 25

Similar to Ps 14, this one has long been hard to classify. It has elements of both a protective psalm (cf. Ps 3) as well as some elements of wisdom and lament. The psalmist prays, “Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths” (25:4). Marttila sees the use of the verb זכר (=remember, be mindful) in vv. 6-7 as an indication of Ps 25’s place in wisdom literature and therefore also its late date. It is one of the acrostic psalms and may, with its similar neighbor, Ps 34, indicate a subcollection within the first book of the Psalter. Because of the acrostic nature and setting in the wisdom tradition, it is probably best to regard this psalm as relatively late. With this in mind, Craigie says, “it may be advisable to view the psalm primarily as a literary creation.” Van der Toorn sets this composition in the context of a scribal school and says that this and other

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232 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 147.
234 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 147.
235 Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 217.
acrostic psalms “were in use as teaching material in the schoolroom; hence the references to youngsters and teachers.” ²³⁶ And yet, the postscript, which receives much of our attention here, gives the composition a definite liturgical context in its final form. ²³⁷

Almost the entire psalm is prayed in the 1ˢᵗ person singular with references to personal enemies, personal sins, and a request for personal deliverance. The acrostic structure is complicated by an ambiguous ה in v. 5 along with an additional verse after the ב verse (21) that begins with א. This and the other close acrostic psalm, 34, are interesting cases for our purposes. Not only do their final verses fall blatantly outside the acrostic structure, they also completely change the scope of the prayer from an individual to all of Israel: “Redeem (תַּפֵּד) Israel, O God, out of all its troubles.”

Most commentators now agree that v. 22 is an addition to the psalm. Gunkel saw this clearly in the early 20ʰ century,²³⁸ and most other scholars have followed his position. One notable exception is John Eaton who understands the final verse as a choral refrain or conclusion, not unlike a repeated antiphon in contemporary liturgical prayers.²³⁹ While Eaton may be correct in the way this verse may have functioned in the psalm’s final form, it deviates in almost every way from the rest of the psalm and should be regarded as secondary. The very fact that its beginning letter, א, puts it outside the acrostic structure signals to the reader that something different is going on in this verse. It is also interesting that, as we will see in greater detail shortly, the final verse of Ps 34


²³⁸ Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, 123.

begins with the same letter and even the same verb! Likewise, as we saw earlier, Ps 130 closes with: “And he will redeem (יִפְדָה) Israel from all its iniquities.” Whether we are seeing the fingerprint of a single redactor across the collections within the Psalter, it is too early to tell, but it does seem clear that there is a scribal connection between the redactional work in Pss 25 and 34. Some scholars have even sought to read these and the intervening chapters as a distinct collection, though it is beyond the scope of this project to explore this in sufficient detail.  

With all of this considered, because of v 22’s falling outside the acrostic structure and its completely different themes, Ps 25 does seem to exhibit signs of editorial reworking in understanding what was formerly the prayer of an individual in a collective or liturgical sense.

### 2.11 Psalm 34

Like Psalm 25, Psalm 34 is an acrostic, though it is unabashedly a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. It is from the perspective of an individual, though there are several collective elements within it even before the final verse. Like Ps 25, it contains many elements of a wisdom psalm. This combined with the acrostic may suggest a late date, though some defend a pre-exilic date for at least some parts of the psalm. It contains one of the 13 historical superscriptions, which, given its tenuous connection with the rest

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242 Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 278. As he says, “It is possible that the poet utilized and adapted older poetry in this literary creation.”
of the psalm, appears to be an addition. Craigie, taking the opposite view, thinks that its incongruity with the psalm indicates its early association with it. The acrostic itself reveals a few irregularities. As in Ps 25, the י verse has been suppressed. It seems that the כ and יש verses have been inverted. And, most interesting for our purposes, there is an additional verse after the ד verse, beginning with כ, again exactly as in Ps 25. As we will see in the excursus following this section, these many similarities and possible scribal connections between these two psalms seem to signal a subcollection that has been heavily reworked and exhibits particularly strong elements of collective reinterpretation.

The psalm begins as a straightforward individual hymn of thanksgiving. In response to an answered prayer (v 5), the psalmist announces his intention to bless YHWH at all times. Immediately after this, he hopes that those around him will join in his praise, especially the afflicted. While most of Ps 25 is addressed directly to God, vv 8-10 being a notable exception, in Ps 34, the poet declares his praise of God directly to those around him, the congregation of worshipers. Thus, the psalm weaves together the psalmist’s experiences of God’s attention with exhortations addressed to the community. He says, “I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed” (34:5-6). This exhortation to mimic his own behavior persists throughout.

243 See Childs, “Psalm Titles,” 144 and Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding,” 369-370 on the reasons these events from the life of David came to be associated with these particular psalms.

244 Dan Brown has attributed this suppression to a Vatican conspiracy, though few scholars have found his theories credible.
The wisdom flavor is clear in verses 12 and following. The putative audience is a group of young men, presumably being trained in Israel’s wisdom traditions:

“Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

Here and in the verses that follow, the psalmist draws many contrasts between the righteous and the evildoers. Verses 16 and 17 do seem to be inverted, indicating that at some stage in Israel’s history, י and פ were in a different order. Here is the order of verses in the MT as it stands,

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. When they245 cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles (Ps 34:15-18).

Here is the reconstruction with the י and פ verses flipped,

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and his ears toward their cry. When they cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. (Ps 34:15,17,16,18)

Once they are switched back to what was likely the original order, the subject of v. 18 is clear. In the current order of the MT, the ones who cry for help and whose cry YHWH

245 " السنة" = “they cry” with no subject specified. The RSV and NRSV here, following the LXX, have “When the righteous cry for help,” effectively interpreting this verse as if the previous two verses were flipped.
hears are not clearly identified. Are they the righteous from two verses ago, or does it in fact refer to the evildoers immediately preceding this? The LXX and other translations solve this difficulty by inserting “the righteous” (δικαίους) here. This inversion of י and ש is not anomalous in biblical acrostics. The same pattern can be observed in Lam. 2:16-17; 3:46-51; 4:16-17. In the final verses of the psalm, the contrast between the righteous and the wicked continues. The righteous one is assured that, even when troubles eventually arise, and they certainly will, the LORD will deliver him out of them all (34:18). And in a verse alluded to in the Gospel of John, he is assured that not one of his bones shall be broken (34:21).

Now we have noted here and in our treatment of Ps 25 the many parallels between these two acrostic psalms. As we near the end of Ps 34, there are a few important differences. Both psalms have irregularities in their acrostic patterns. They each have a supplementary verse after the final verse of the alphabet, both of which employ the same verb, פדה. In Ps 25 this was clearly a redactional insertion given its lack of association with anything that came before it. After a psalm completely from the perspective of the first person singular comes a prayer: “Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles” (Ps 25:22). While, at first glance, it might seem that the same acrostic irregularity would signal the same sort of collective redaction, this interpretation is made difficult by several factors. First, from the beginning of the Psalm there have been numerous indications that the one praying the psalm is in the context of a community. Rather than being addressed solely to God, the words of blessing God are actually addressed to those around him. He

246 Cf. Syriac and other versions.

247 See Freedman, “Patterns in Psalms 25 and 34,” in Priests, Prophets, and Scribes, at 125.
is telling those around him, “I will bless the LORD at all times” rather than “I will bless you, O LORD, at all times.” He says, “I sought the LORD, and he answered me” rather than “I sought you, O LORD, and you answered me.” Thus, when we get to the final verse, there is no gap at all between what should be the final verse of the acrostic and the actual final verse of the Psalm: “The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned” (34:23).

The other reason we cannot say that the final verse is a simple matter of a collective redaction is the antithetical parallelism between the final two verses.

Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned (יהושע). The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned (לא). (Ps 34:22-23)

There is another deliberate contrast here between the fates of the evil and the righteous (cf. Pss 1-2). The wicked will be put to death and those who hate the righteous will be condemned (יהושע). On the other hand, “YHWH redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned (יהושע).” If this final verse is not original to the psalm, then the scribe who added it made it fit seamlessly with the rest of the psalm and especially with the final verse of the acrostic. We must also consider that without the final verse this psalm of praise and thanksgiving would end in a rather negative way.²⁴⁸ The final verse, then, not only provides the much needed contrast

²⁴⁸ While it is true that Pss 1 and 88, for example, end with negative tones, we must note that Ps 1 is in fact complemented and deeply related to Ps 2, the end of which seems to form an inclusio with Ps 1:1. Ps 88 is an exception to the general rule of laments, which normally shift to praise, whether anticipated or actual, at the end.
between the righteous and the wicked, but it ends in a hopeful key, much like the same contrast (and vocabulary) in the first two psalms themselves. 249

At first glance, then, given its similarities to the endings of Pss 25 and 130, Ps 34 seems to exhibit the same sort of collective reinterpretation we find in those psalms. Yet, as we have seen, the matter is not so simple. While Pss 25 and 130 are prayers from an individual directly to God, with no communal elements until the ends, all of Ps 34 takes place in a communal context, with the psalmist, making his words of praise exhortations to the rest of the community. While the ending of Ps 34 may in fact be from the same redactional hand as those of Pss 25 and 34, there is clearly not the same abrupt shift from the concerns and deliverance of an individual to those of the community.

2.12 Excursus on Scribal Features of Psalms 25 and 34

Anthony R. Ceresko and Victor Avigdor Hurowitz have proposed additional acrostic patterns in Ps 34 that reveal a sophisticated scribal composition. 250 Ceresko borrows a phrase from Patrick Skehan to identify the distinctive “alphabetic thinking” of the author of this psalm. For him it is not merely an organizing principle but a reflection of “the concerns of Israel’s wisdom movement out of which this psalm has most likely


come.”

He is in agreement here with van der Toorn, who, as we saw before, sees a clear link between instances of the acrostic and wisdom literature. Given this psalm’s themes, it is also one of the seven that Roland Murphy classifies as wisdom psalms. Ceresko sees several similarities between Pss 25 and 34, particularly in their mutual suppression of the 1 verse and the addition of a verse beginning with ב after the ה verse. What makes this particularly “alphabetical” is that the first, roughly middle, and final verses begin with the letters א, ל, and פ, respectively. This, of course, forms אלף, which is not only the name of the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (or alephbet) but also a late Hebrew word meaning “to learn” or “to teach.” As Ceresko further points out, there are several word plays in which the names of the letters themselves are found either in the first letter of each verse or elsewhere. Examples include the verb למד (למדכם) in v. 12 and עין (יהוה עין) in v. 16. His further examples of כ and פ as the first two consonants of עpiry and kamim in v. 13 as a possible allusion to the letter מ are not as convincing, but these may in fact be scribal puns.

In addition to the obvious vertical acrostic running down the right side of the text, Ceresko proposes another in v. 1 (v. 2, Hebrew). If one excludes the matres lectionis, as he suggests, the verse has 23 consonants, the first, middle, and last of which are, once again, א, ל, and פ. Given this further possible reference to the verb אלף and the use of

252 See van der Toorn, Scribal Culture, 116.
the verb לָדֹּם in v. 12, the central verse of the entire psalm, the link to wisdom literature, according to Ceresko, is undeniable. Ceresko explains the link between wisdom literature and alphabetic thinking in this way, “The use of the alphabet as a principle of organization in the poems of Israelite wisdom schools may witness to their realization that not only language but writing as well played an important role in their attempt to derive order and meaning out of the fragments and confusion of their everyday experience.”

Building on Ceresko’s work, Hurowitz suggests even more elements of alphabetic thinking in Ps 34, some of which strain credulity but which are interesting nonetheless. He proposes six alphabetizing sequences:

1) an abbreviated alphabetic acrostic with no ש; 2) an overriding מ"ע array made from the initial letters of the first and middle lines of the acrostic and the last line of the psalm; 3) an initial verse with an מ"ע array; 4) a twenty-two verse reversed partial alphabetic mezostic; 5) a twenty-one verse reversed מ"ע telestic; 6) a final verse with an inverted מ"ע array.

He admits that both Ceresko’s horizontal acrostic in 34:2 and his own proposed horizontal acrostic in v. 23 are the least likely. While his proposed “reversed partial alphabetic mezostic” pattern is interesting, and perhaps even convincing for a few verses, it does not persist throughout the whole psalm and must be rejected. His “twenty-one verse reversed מ"ע telestic” is slightly more convincing and may in fact be a deliberate scribal invention.

If even some of these instances of alphabetic thinking in the composition of Ps 34


256 Hurowitz, “Alphabetical Thinking,” 333.
are genuine, then it points to both some real similarities and significant differences between this and Ps 25. These psalms which both seem to exhibit some signs of collective reinterpretation likely have a more complicated relationship than we initially suspected. Though their acrostic structure and use of the verb פדה make them seem at first glance to be similar, or as Zenger proposes, mirror-images of each other, the differences between them are profound. It is possible, but by no means certain, that the author of Ps 34 either penned the final verse of Ps 25 and all of Ps 34, or after seeing an already redacted Ps 25 with the ג verse included, decided to compose his own acrostic psalm of thanksgiving with the collective elements present throughout the psalm. In any case the final verse of Ps 34 cannot without violence be separated from the rest of it, while the final verse of Ps 25 clearly can.

We turn now to the superscription attached to this psalm. It follows the usual pattern of historical superscriptions in which the scribe associates the psalm with a particular event in the life of David. While some connections are clear (e.g. Pss 3 and 51), this one is more tenuous. Commentators normally notice two major verbal similarities between Ps 34 and the events alluded to in the heading from 1 Sam. 21. The first is the root טעם from v. 9 of the psalm: (יְהוָה טוב – כי וראו טעם) “Taste and see that God is good”). This is the root alluded to in the superscription: 'Of David. When he changed his discernment before Abimelech’ = לדוד ובשנותו את-טעם לפני אבימלך. While “changed his discernment/taste” is a more literal rendering of the phrase that connects it more clearly with 34:9, it is normally translated according to the sense of the 1 Sam. narrative: “When he feigned madness…” When David appeared before Achish, he was very afraid (רָאָה וַעֲנָא אֶת-טָעֵם אֵלֵּיכֶם – ואת-טעם לפני אבימלך) and so pretended to be crazy.
The first meaning of נון is simply the biological “to taste, perceive.” The noun has a broader scope of meanings including “taste, judgment, discretion, discernment.” Thus, we can understand the expression from 1 Sam. 21 and Ps 34:1 literally as “to change, disguise one’s judgment.” The use of the same root is clear, but what are we to make of the fact that it is used in completely different ways? Did the scribe simply note that the same root is used in both and seek to make the connection explicit? We must also address the other verbal connection between the Psalm and the narrative, the verb יהוה in 1 Sam. and יהוה in Ps 34. In the text in 1 Sam., the Masoretes point it as a hithpoel, meaning “to act madly, or like a madman.” The verb is pointed differently, however, in Ps 34. It is a straightforward hithpael, meaning “to glory, boast, make one’s boast.” Were these two verbal similarities enough to establish a link between these two seemingly unrelated texts? If so, Childs says, “it would suggest that a purely mechanical connection was operative in forming allusions between words with entirely different meanings.” He finds such a proposal tenuous and suggests a more general parallel between the two: “The psalmist speaks of a poor man crying for help and being delivered.” While this is true, this explanation seems strained. Would a scribe have made a connection between these two texts without the verbal connections, even with

257 BDB, 380-381.
258 Ibid.
259 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
263 Ibid.
divergent meanings? Childs also suggests a less obvious connection between the psalmist’s fear and David’s fear in the Samuel narrative. Ps 34:5 has מָנָאָרָתִי,\(^{264}\) while 1 Sam. 21:13 uses the more conventional ואָרְא. Again, it is not altogether clear why a scribe wanted a community to read this psalm in light of the narrative of David feigning madness in 1 Sam. Oddly enough, this very lack of congruity between the two has led at least one commentator to posit that the superscription was part of the original psalm itself. This is not at all convincing and should be rejected.

The other problem with the title of Ps 34 is the (mis)identification of Abimelech instead of Achish as the king before whom David feigned madness. While this could be a simple scribal error, Craigie notes that “it is most unlikely that so fundamental an error would have been committed by a scribe, or that it would have been perpetuated by subsequent scribes and editors.”\(^{265}\) Perhaps it is unlikely, but scribes did make similar errors, and this could very well be one of them. An alternative that Craigie and several others propose is that “Abimelech” (“my father is king”) was actually “an official title for Philistine kings, just as Pharaoh was an official title for Egyptian kings.”\(^{266}\) Again, this is possible, but as Childs notes, it has an apologetic flavor.\(^{267}\) Sabourin proposes an interesting succession of scribal errors that could have led to the confusion: “Perhaps the original heading read [אָכִיש מֶלֶך גַּת] (Akish, king of Gath) which, through scribal error,
could easily have been shortened to [מלך אכיש], then to [אבימלך].”

Given the presence of the priest [Achimelech] in the pericope immediately preceding this one in 1 Sam., it is easy to see how these may have been conflated and changed to אבימלך. The final interpretation of this (mis)identification also comes from Childs: “By substituting the name of Abimelech the author of the title is calling attention to the Abraham/Isaac stories (Gen. xx and xxvi) which provide a certain parallel to the David story.” He is correct in admitting that the evidence is insufficient to support this, but it is intriguing nonetheless. Given the already tenuous nature of the connection between the psalm and the narrative, did the scribe intend a further allusion to Genesis?

At the end of the day, how do we assess Ps 34 in terms of collective reinterpretation, either individually or in the context of a possible subcollection of Pss 25-34? It is still clearly an individual psalm of thanksgiving, but it is so deeply embedded in a communal context that it is not feasible to separate so-called individual and communal layers within it. In a sense it embodies the movement we have already seen when the prayer of the individual is extended to the community. The one who has been near death and healed, that is, brought out of the pit, seeks to praise God and invite others into this praise (cf. Pss 22:22-23; 35:18; 40:9-10). He hopes to extend what has happened to him to the rest of the community. Unlike other psalms exhibiting collective reinterpretation, Ps 34 does not indicate that it is, in any way, a royal psalm. While David is, of course, mentioned in the superscription, it is in a less than royal context. He is vulnerable, on the run, and afraid for his life. In true royal psalms, the king can speak on behalf of his

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269 Childs, “Psalms Titles,” 144-145.
people as the authorized representative of the people. As this psalm was reinterpreted in
light of its superscription, each individual and the community as a whole can empathize
with David’s plight and pray the words of the psalm according to their own situations of
prayer and distress.

2.13 Psalm 3

This is the first Psalm with a superscription, and if we accept the view that Pss
1 and 2 function as an introduction to the Psalter as a whole, Ps 3 begins the first book
within the Psalter (Pss 3-41). Its genre is clearly an individual Psalm of lament as the
psalmist is besieged by various personal foes and pleading for YHWH’s intervention to
save him. Unlike other Psalms in which the Psalmist is already in severe distress, this
one looks ahead toward an impending danger, possibly a military engagement. For
such a category Mowinckel distinguished between psalms of lamentation proper and
protective psalms, which “pray for the protection of YHWH against an imminent

270 Patrick D. Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” Pages 83-92 in The Shape and Shaping of the
Psalter; Miller, Interpreting the Psalms, 81-93; Hossfeld and Zenger, Die Psalmen I, 45-46.

271 See Brevard Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress
Press, 1979), 513; Van der Toorn, Scribal Culture, 103; G. H. Wilson, The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter,
204-207; David M. Howard, Jr., “Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State-of-the-Field Survey,” in The
Shape and Shaping of the Psalter, 52-70.

272 See Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 71; Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 144-45.

273 Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 71-72.
danger. The tone of such protective psalms “is brighter” and “the confidence and assurance of getting help is more prominent in them.”

The final verse of the Psalm extends the scope of the individual concerns that came before: “Deliverance belongs to the LORD; may your blessing be on your people! Selah” (3:9). Why does the Psalmist all of a sudden bring in a prayer for God’s blessing of his people? Scholars have long been divided about this verse, how it functions in this Psalm, and whether it is part of the original layer of the Psalm or secondary. Those who argue that it is secondary point out the clear change in focus between it and the previous 8 verses. Everything before was in the first person singular. They were my enemies, the many were standing up against me and saying “there is no salvation for him in God. One common answer to this is that it is the first of the royal Psalms. Given its attribution to David, it should be understood as the prayer of a king, the representative of the people.

While it may have been a general prayer before a battle or even a common morning prayer (3:5), the prayer is given a more definite context by the addition of the superscription. If it were a royal Psalm, then, it would make sense to extend the LORD’s victory, deliverance, and blessing to all the people. The king is a representative figure, and what happens to him, happens to the people. As Mowinckel says, “The concerns of the king, therefore, are the people’s concerns, his honour is their honour, his defeats their shame. King and people have common interests, and are, in a sense, identical, since the

275 Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship I, 220.
entire people is embodied in their king.”277 Others argue, though, that it is not a royal psalm. It has these connotations because readers associated it with David, even going so far as to ascribe authorship to him. It may have been simply the prayer of an anonymous individual invoking God’s protection against impending danger. Though we must remember now and often that psalms do not always fit nicely into the particular forms which modern scholars have created for them, these forms are nevertheless useful for categorizing Psalms into their given types.278 This psalm is an individual lament or complaint, and one of the ordinary features of such psalms is that they end on a note of praise or thanksgiving. In the context of Ps 3, this could account for the presence of the final verse in the original composition. Yet it does seem to be more of a protective Psalm than a standard lament Psalm.

Craigie suggests that the beginning of v. 9 is a military cry on the way into battle: “Victory belongs to the Lord!”279 One could also read the final verse as the psalmist’s response to those who were earlier threatening to attack him: “Many are rising (ךָֽמִים) against me. Many are saying to me, ‘There is no help (יִשועתָה) for you in God.’ Selah.” To counter their threats, he prays in v. 8, “Rise up (ךָֽמוֹת), O L ORD! Deliver me (הָושיעֵנִי).” And in a final move that renders their threats impotent, he affirms that victory belongs to YHWH and prays directly to YHWH that his blessing be on his people.280 In the end, therefore, it is not entirely clear whether the final verse should be

277 Mowinckel, He that Cometh, 70.


279 Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 71, 74-75.

280 On the close link between salvation and blessing here and in Ps 28:9, see Patrick D. Miller, “Psalms and Inscriptions,” 318-319.
regarded as original. As Howard Wallace says, the final verse is important for two reasons: “It provides the vow of praise so familiar at the end of laments and broadens the effect of the prayer.”\textsuperscript{281} In any case, it shows a strong connection between the psalmist, be it David as king or an anonymous individual, and YHWH’s people. Mowinckel also speaks of the “mutual participation in each other’s soul which, in ancient thought, existed between the leader and the community.”\textsuperscript{282} It is enough, according to Marttila, to show that “the collectively oriented redactors were in close co-operation with the redactors who edited the Psalter in its present form and to its present extent.”\textsuperscript{283} He further amplifies his claim, saying that since Psalm 3 stands at the head of the first major collection of mostly Davidic prayers, “when the redactors gave a national reinterpretation to this particular psalm, they at the same time gave a collective emphasis to the whole Davidic Psalter.”\textsuperscript{284} Marttila may indeed be correct, but at this stage, such a claim is too bold given the diversity of material in the Psalter and how little evidence we have so far considered.

While we will look more generally at the issue of superscriptions or Psalm titles in the next chapter, we should consider briefly here how this particular incident in David’s life came to be associated with this Psalm and how the addition of a superscription is part of the process of collective reinterpretation. In his landmark article on the topic,\textsuperscript{285} Brevard Childs shows how the process of adding historical superscriptions


\textsuperscript{282} Mowinckel, \textit{He that Cometh}, 70.

\textsuperscript{283} Marko Marttila, \textit{Collective Reinterpretation}, 145.

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{285} “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis,” \textit{JJS} 16 (1971): 137-150
to the Psalms is an early form of midrashic exegesis. He notes several conceptual parallels that link Ps 3 to the narrative of David and Absalom in 2 Sam 15-18: “A host of enemies have arisen in a conflict of war against him (v. 2; II Sam. xv. 12; xviii. 31); many have abandoned any hope for him (v. 3; II Sam. xvi. 8); yet he has placed his trust in God (v. 4; II Sam. xv. 25 f.).” Childs acknowledges that these are not conclusive, as many other Psalms could just as easily be associated with this event. His final suggestion is that perhaps the reference to lying down and sleeping in Ps 3:6 is related to 2 Sam 16:14 where David “arrived weary at the Jordan, spent the night there, and arose just before daybreak to cross the river.” Slomovic, building on Childs’ article, further explores the formation of the historical titles of the Psalms. He notes the same conceptual parallels that Childs did, but he also finds a direct linguistic parallel that Childs missed. In Ps 3:2, the psalmist laments the many “rising against me” (עלי קמים). This exact phrase also occurs in the David/Absalom story at the end of 2 Sam 18:31. Because of the title, which links the a-historical psalm with a historical event, those who read the psalm are instructed to read and pray the psalm with this event in mind. Likewise, those who read the narrative in 2 Samuel can see in this psalm something of the inner life and piety of David as he flees from his son. A further indication of the connection between psalms and narrative is that “in a large number of the cases the historical narrative referred to in

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286 Childs, “Psalm Titles,” 143.
287 Childs, “Psalm Titles,” 144.
the psalm title has a פסוק באמצע פסוק, or an intersentential lacuna.” While it is notoriously difficult to know precisely what the פסוק means, Fishbane notes how remarkable it is “that in over 40 per cent of the cases—half a dozen instances—a פסוק occurs in those historical texts referred to by the psalm titles, and in precisely those contexts where one might expect or presume a prayer.”

When we consider the Psalter in its final form, we see, as Wallace notes, the results of a long and complex process. The three parts of this, he says, are the movement from individual to corporate prayer, the attribution of the psalms to David, and the juxtaposition of some psalms with others based on verbal or thematic connections.

John L. McKenzie offers an even more thorough list, which we saw at the beginning:

There is a special difficulty in handling the Ps, because the book was obviously submitted to an unceasing process of development and adaptation: individual Ps become collective, private prayers become liturgical, songs of local sanctuaries are adapted to the temple of Jerusalem, royal Ps become messianic, historical Ps become eschatological. Modern interpreters speak of the ‘rereadings’ of the Ps; an earlier Ps which has in some way become antiquated (e.g. by the fall of the monarchy, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the loss of political independence) is reworked to fit a contemporary situation and given a direction to the future which was not present in the original composition.

In Ps 3, the beginning of the first book of the Psalter, we see clearly the movement from individual to community, its attribution to David and to a specific event in his life, and a private prayer becoming liturgical.

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291 See Wallace, “King and Community,” 270.

2.14 Other Songs of Ascents

The last few psalms we will consider are from the “Songs of Ascents” or “Pilgrim Songs” (Pss 120-134), the final major subcollection within the Psalter and one characterized by similar themes and language.\(^{293}\) Each contains the superscription שיר המעלות, normally translated “A song of ascents,” though some, presuming the interpretation that these songs indicate a pilgrimage, translate it as “A Pilgrimage Song.”\(^{294}\) Another common interpretation is that, since these psalms are likely post-exilic, they may come from the time of Nehemiah, and thus the מעלות refer to those in exile returning, that is, going back up to Jerusalem. As Goulder says, “The word מעלות is common for a step; but it is also used at Ezra 7.9 for an expedition of exiles returning to Palestine.”\(^{295}\) There are several other features that bind this collection together. In his article “The Coherence of the Ma’alot Psalms,” Hendrik Viviers has done a great service by distilling enormous amounts of research, including much of Seybold’s monograph, into a single article. He notes several of these other unifying factors including the noticeably shorter length of these psalms, a network of word repetitions, similar figures of speech, and the pervasive theme of trust in YHWH. In his creative argument linking the collection to the first person narrative from Nehemiah, Goulder lists several other


\(^{294}\) For variations on this, see Briggs, *Psalms II*, 444ff; Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, 235ff (*Wallfahrtslied*); Seybold’s book and article from the note above (*Wallfahrtspsalmen*); Kraus, *Psalm 60-150*, 422ff.

unifying factors, which lead him to believe that they come from the hand of a single author (brevity, Jerusalem, courageous optimism, homely similes, and Aramaisms). Viviers also includes this complicated-looking but actually enormously helpful figure that highlights the links between the Songs of Ascent.

FIGURE 1: THEMATIC AND VERBAL CONNECTIONS IN THE COLLECTION

The links between these psalms are so pervasive that if these do not come from the pen of a single author, or perhaps school, then they certainly have a common redactor.

As we saw briefly before, the most commonly accepted theory about the origin and purpose of these songs is that they are somehow related to a pilgrimage up to Jerusalem. The songs, according to this view, are meant to accompany pilgrims as they approach and eventually stand inside the city (cf. Ps 122:1-2). Apart from the superscriptions, though, the theme of pilgrimage is simply not part of many of these

297 Excerpted from Viviers, “Coherence of the Ma’alot Psalms,” 287.
psalms. Another way of interpreting the superscription translates מעלות as “steps” instead of as “ascents.” This is, of course, another legitimate translation of the term. If this is the preferred translation, according to certain rabbinic traditions, for example, the songs correspond to the steps at the Temple. Thus, there would be a song for each step going up. The problem for both of these theories is that there is little internal or external evidence to support them in a way that takes into account all of the textual evidence.

In his article “The Songs of Ascents and the Priestly Blessing,” Leon Liebreich shows how “this entire group of Psalms is related, directly or indirectly, to four key words of the Priestly Blessing, namely: שבעון, יتحقق, ישמר, וברך.” As he says, one or more of these words show up in each of the Psalms, and some of the correspondences are indeed striking. According to his relatively terse verbal tallies, “the unifying principle in the process [of gathering the psalms into a collection] was their verbal connection with the Priestly Blessing.” He even proposes that the number of psalms directly related to the blessing, twelve, was expanded with the three only indirectly related to it to make 15, the number of words in the Priestly Blessing, and the number of Songs of Ascents. While this is interesting, the evidence simply cannot bear such a strong conclusion. There may in fact be some inspiration from the prayer from Numbers 6 or links to priestly circles, but to argue that it is the unifying principle of the collection strains credulity. As Zenger says,

299 See, for example, 2 Kgs 20. Crow, Songs of Ascents, 14.
300 Crow, Songs of Ascents, 26-27.
Liebreich’s observation that Psalms 120-134 are related to the Aaronic blessing is correct in principle, but it by no means explains the overall program of their composition. Above all, the close linking of the collection to the course of the Temple liturgy posited by Liebreich is rather implausible. In contrast to Num 6:24-26, Psalms 120-134 also lack the theologoumenon of “YHWH’s countenance,” which speaks against a direct correlation of the two texts.304

Even so, Zenger finds Liebreich’s proposal compelling in terms of the milieu which it presumes. The Pilgrim Psalter for them comes not from the Temple singers as do the preceding Hallel Psalms (Pss 113-118), but rather from the priestly circles. Zenger notes again the connection to the Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6. The blessing bears strong connections to the songs even if it is not the unifying factor. He also notes that the final three psalms in the collection (Pss 132-134) “give a strikingly powerful emphasis to the role of the priests” (Pss 132:9.16; 133:2; 134:1-2).305

Given the many late features of the language in the songs of ascents ( imperfect instead of present and other Aramaicisms) and the commonly accepted late dating of the collection, Goulder tries to link them directly to the first person narrative from the book of Nehemiah. His four (characteristically bold) propositions are worth quoting in full,

(1) The Songs of Ascents are a unity, coming from the hand of a single author. (2) The author of the Songs composed them to celebrate the achievement of Nehemiah. (3) Psalms 120-27 follow the stories in the original, first-person, so-called Nehemiah memoir, Neh. 1.1-7.5a, in sequence, as do 133-34 its continuation in Neh. 12.27-43; 128-32 follow that part of the original Nehemiah ‘memoir’ for which Neh. 7.5b-12.26 has been substituted— principally Neh. 13.4-31, which has been displaced. (4) Nehemiah's 'memoir' was in fact his testimony, proclaimed to the people evening and morning through the feast of Tabernacles in

304 Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 3, 291-292.
305 Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 3, 294.
306 On which, see Crow, Songs of Ascents, 148; Goulder, “Songs of Ascents and Nehemiah,”45. Pss 122:3-4; 123:2; 124:1.2.6; 129:6-7; 133:2-3.
and the Songs of Ascents were responses to those testimonies, sung at the fifteen services through the week.\(^{307}\)

In spite of the evidence he presents, his proposal is simply not compelling. As Zenger says, Goulder’s proposals (along with others) suffer from two fundamental methodological deficits:

(1) They do not reconstruct the history of the psalms’ origins from the psalms themselves but import them into the text from outside. That, of course, is the general problem involved in the historical dating of texts when there is no existing external evidence. (2) They extract individual aspects of the psalms and use them as the basis for a general hypothesis.

As with some of his other proposals,\(^{308}\) Goulder is often creative and thought-provoking, but rarely do his proposals have sufficient textual support and normally involve imposing something from outside on the text itself.

Given recent interest in canonical criticism and in the process of editing of the Hebrew Psalter,\(^{309}\) it is no surprise that many scholars have looked at the place of the Songs of Ascents in the context of Book V of the Psalter. While there are certainly several ways to divide up the books around the beginning and end of Book V, it is notable that Psalm 119, by far the longest Psalm, occurs in the middle of this final book of the Psalter and is sandwiched between the so-called Hallel Psalms (113-118) and the Songs of Ascent (120-134). While Pss 135-136 do not bear the superscription of the


\(^{308}\) Similarly bold, interesting, yet problematic works include Goulder, *The Prayers of David*; Goulder, “The Fourth Book of the Psalter.”

Songs of Ascent, they are clearly related to them and indeed function as a closing hymn to the collection. The opening words of Ps 135 are almost identical with those of Ps 134, and many of the themes later in the Psalm hark back to the Hallel Psalms. Ps 136 echoes some of the salvation history of Ps 135, and its calls to praise are the same as those in Ps 107 (the opening of book V) and Ps 118 (the end of the Hallel Psalms). M. Millard suggests that in the late Second Temple period, reading from some of the works in what would eventually become the final third of the Psalter substituted for actual attendance at Temple liturgies. Building from this insight, Zenger wonders “whether the sequence Psalms 113-118, 119 and 120-36 is indeed not inspired by the succession of the three great feasts of the Jewish calendar, Pesach (Pss 113-18), Shabuoth (Ps 119) and Sukkoth (Pss 120-36), and at the same time is meant to be a meditative actualization of the canonical history of the origin of Israel (Pss 113-18: the Exodus; Ps 119: Sinai; Pss 120-36: entry into the Promised Land with Zion/Jerusalem as the heart of the Land).”

While this is an interesting hypothesis, it may be an attempt to read too much intentionality into the minds of the redactors. The placement of Ps 119 has always presented a challenge to interpreters of the Psalms, but whether the placement of the Hallel Psalms and the Songs of Ascents around it are intentional and meaningful, perhaps doubly so, will have to remain unanswered for now. Let us turn then to some of the collective elements in the individual Songs of Ascents and see whether these might be the result of redaction or if they are simply part of the theology of the collection.

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2.15 Psalms 125 and 128

Each of these psalms ends identically with the words שלום על–ישראל, “Peace be upon Israel.” Commentators have long suspected that in each case it is a gloss. In both cases it falls outside the poetic structure and the theme of the rest of the psalm, and effectively comes out of nowhere. Yet, earlier in the collection, the poet exhorts the congregation to “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (שלום ירושלם). Should we simply regard these glosses as attempts to fulfill the earlier call to pray? Psalm 125 is a psalm of confidence related from the beginning to Jerusalem/Zion and concludes with the distinction, from the wisdom tradition, between the good and the evildoers. The final gloss does seem to come out of the blue, though it does not add any collective emphasis to what was already a song of confidence about YHWH’s relationship to his land and people.

Ps 128 begins with a macarism similar to those at the beginning of Pss 1 and 112. Unlike those, however, it immediately becomes a 2nd person address to the blessed one, instead of a 3rd person reflection. It informs the blessed one that both his labor and his family will be blessed as the result of his fear of YHWH. It is possible that, at an earlier stage, this song ended at v. 4 with the conclusion: “Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.” The final two verses, though not at all unusual in the context of the

\[\text{11QPs}^\ddagger \text{ XXIII, lines 10-11 has שלום על–ישראל at the end of Ps 133:3 as well. See Sanders, }\]
\[\text{Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPs) (DJD IV; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, 44); Flint, Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls, 78.}\]
collection, change the scope of the blessing: “The L ORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel!” While in the other similar blessings, the blessing simply exists and is not localized. Here the prayer is that the L ORD’s blessing will come from Zion and that the blessed one will see the prosperity (טוב) of Jerusalem all the days of his life. Again this focus is not out of place here in the collection, so it is difficult to know whether we should regard this as a separate redactional layer. In the psalm, as it stands, the blessing begins with the one who fears YHWH, extends to his labor and family, and is ultimately linked to the prosperity of Jerusalem. As Zenger says, “In the view of Psalm 128, the well-being of individuals and the well-being of Jerusalem are closely related: the happiness of the individual culminates in his or her rejoicing in the well-being of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem’s prosperity is complete only when the individuals who love Jerusalem as their focal center are happy.” The blessing has a ripple effect and expands in concentric circles from the one blessed to the nation (cf. Pss 22; 51; 69; 102; 130). However we assess the status of ישראלי whether in Ps 125, 128, or in Ps 133 in 11QPs, it can easily be regarded as simply a collective addition to the psalm of an individual. It does though reiterate the focus on Israel broadly and Jerusalem/Zion more specifically that predominates in the Songs of Ascents.

313 Note how similar this is to the dynamic in the book of Tobit, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter.

314 Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 3, 403-404.
Ps 129 is unique in the Psalter in that the first person singular subject is explicitly identified with Israel. Those who argue that the speaker of most of the “I” psalms is a corporate one invariably appeal to this psalm for support.\(^{315}\) The phrase יִנָּאָר–נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל (“let Israel now say”) in v. 1 is identical to that from Ps 124:1. Some indeed have argued that this phrase itself and the corporate personality it implies were added to a straightforward individual lament.\(^{316}\) While the curse in v. 5 (“May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward!”) would seem to suggest that a corporate speaker was written into the psalm at its earliest layer, if we remove the word “Zion,” it would function perfectly well as an individual lament: כל שנאי (all who hate me) instead of כל שנאי ציון (all who hate Zion). Given the prevalence of the former throughout the Psalter, this is certainly a plausible earlier layer.

As Marttila notes, “The mixture of individual and collective features in Ps 129 has been a great problem for scholars who have strictly followed Balla and thus tried to dispute any justification for collective interpretation.”\(^{317}\) Indeed, one of the reasons why some scholars argue that it is possible to see the “I” of the psalms as collective Israel is because of this psalm and other similar passages (e.g. Isa. 12:1-2; Isa. 61:10; Jer. 10:19-20; Mic. 7:7-10; much of Lamentations). Even those who think that in most cases the “I” actually refers to an individual must reckon with this and similar passages. If this psalm

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\(^{315}\) Smend normally spends a paragraph or more making his case for a collective reading of the “I” in the Psalms. In this case, however, he says simply, “Ps 129 bedarf keener Erörterung” (= “no debate necessary) in Smend, Über das Ich der Psalmen, 137. Even the normally reluctant Gunkel (Introduction to Psalms, 122) concedes the point here.

\(^{316}\) See Allen, Psalms 101-150; Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalms 3, 409-410.

\(^{317}\) Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 170.
is an instance of collectivization, it seems that the redactor took an earlier psalm of an individual and put it into the mouth of Israel by adding יִמְרָא לְאָדָם, as in Ps 124. In his commentary, Dahood describes it in this way, “The history of Israel is here, as in some other biblical texts such as Hos ii 3, 15; Jer ii 2, compared to the life of an individual. Israel’s life began in Egypt, and from the period of Egyptian bondage on, it has repeatedly been oppressed by enemies.”

Like H. W. Robinson, Mowinckel draws several conclusions from this dynamic about the relationship between the individual and the nation in ancient Israel. As Mowinckel explains it, “The basic reality in human life is, for the Israelite, not the individual, but the community.” Like a Platonic form, the nation is not a collection of individuals but “the real entity which manifested itself in each separate member.” Mowinckel also shows how, in many Ancient Near Eastern cultures, ‘Traditions about the life and wanderings of the tribe, its social and religious institutions, its borders, rights of possession to wells, and so on, are usually in some way or other connected with the person of the ancestor.’ This is clear with many of the patriarchs in Genesis, especially Abraham. And the name “Israel” itself is etiologically linked to the person of Jacob who receives Israel as a new name after his nighttime wrestling with a mysterious stranger (Gen. 32:28). In his book, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, Jon Levenson cites the traditional Jewish saying: “The

319 Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship I, 42.
320 Ibid.
321 Ibid.
Patriarchs are the archetype; their descendants, the antitype." In his analysis of the patriarchs throughout the book, he often shows how what happens to an individual in the book of Genesis prefigures and foreshadows what will happen to Israel in the book of Exodus. If then Israel can be understood as a collective individual elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, it is plain that she can pray the psalm of an individual as in Ps 129. According to Gunkel, though, we should exercise caution when attempting to read individual poetry in this allegorical way and do so only when “the poet makes it explicit.” He says, even more strongly, that it was “the gravest mistake that psalm research in general could have made, when they completely misunderstood such lively individual poetry and universally related the ‘I’ of the complaint songs to the ‘community.’” In the end, then, it seems that Ps 129 is one of the clearest instances of collective reinterpretation in the Psalter.

2.17 Psalm 30

Psalm 30 is a unique instance of collective reinterpretation and recontextualization and warrants a longer treatment than previous psalms. The genre itself is straightforward. It is an “individual psalm of thanksgiving” or “an “individual

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322 Death and Resurrection, 53.
323 Gunkel, Introduction to Psalms, 122.
324 He clearly has Smend (1888) in his sights here.
325 Gunkel, Introduction to the Psalms, 122.
declarative psalm of praise." What is distinctive, as we will see toward the end of our treatment of this psalm, is the superscription and its significance. In the opening verses, the psalmist praises the LORD for having drawn him up from some sort of illness or oppression and healed him. The language is stereotypical and is found in other similar psalms (e.g. Isa. 38:9-20). It appears that this psalm has undergone significant scribal development, both in the text of the prayer itself and in its superscription, thus making it a particularly fascinating example of the reappropriation of an earlier psalm for a new context.

Most of the psalm is in the first person singular (vv. 2-4, 7-13) rendering its form as an individual psalm of thanksgiving clear. The description of the psalmist’s ailment and subsequent recovery give no clue as to any precise situation. The expression נליתני (“for you have drawn me up”) indicates that he has been in Sheol or the pit (v. 3). While the verb רפא in v. 3 seems to indicate sickness and subsequent healing, we should not rule out a simple state of oppression by enemies (v. 2). Dahood sees in איבי (“my enemies”) an instance of “plurale excellentiae referring to Death, the archfoe of the stricken poet.” He sees other similar instances in Pss 18:4; 7:6; 13:3; 31:9; 61:4; and 9:14. His reading is supported by the use of the terms Sheol and the pit in v. 3, which are often used to describe either death or a near death experience. If this reading is correct, then vv. 2-4 would simply describe a sickness that seemed to be leading to death and an unexpected healing. This is certainly one legitimate reading of the text, but we should

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327 Dahood, Psalms, 182.
not give too much weight to Dahood’s *plurale excellentiae*. Given the many and consistent uses of the term “enemies” throughout the Psalter, it would be difficult to pick individual cases, even convincing ones, and argue for this reading, when a more literal reading of “enemies” also suffices.\textsuperscript{328} The first three verses can also be read from the point of view of an individual being oppressed by enemies, again in a situation leading to death, from which YHWH intervenes to save him. Given the imagery and the parallels between this psalm and other similar occasions and prayers in the Bible, one could easily use this as the prayer of Hezekiah following his sickness and recovery.\textsuperscript{329}

The call to sing praises to YHWH in v 5 is not surprising given the context of thanksgiving after a near death experience.\textsuperscript{330} This is followed by the reason for praise in v. 6. While one would expect such verses in a psalm of thanksgiving, they fit a bit awkwardly in this context. They interrupt the flow of first person singular praises and descriptions and introduce a communal aspect to the praise. If one reads directly from the end of v. 4 to the beginning of v. 7, the transition is seamless.\textsuperscript{331} If vv. 5-6 are in fact additions to the Psalm, whether together or separately, the first word of v.7, ואני, then serves to emphasize a return to the first person singular subject: “As for me…” (NRSV). Marttila is likely correct, therefore, in his assessment that the “communal praise in v. 5-6

\textsuperscript{328} For a more detailed discussion, see Croft, “The Antagonists in the Psalms,” chapter 1 of *The Identity of the Individual*, 15-48. And on the three dimensions of the lament psalms (God, lamenter, enemies), see Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 54-56.

\textsuperscript{329} Levenson also shows how this psalm could also be placed in Joseph’s mouth after the ordeal with his brothers’ casting him into the pit (Death and Resurrection, 150-151). See also Gary A. Anderson, “Joseph and the Passion of the Lord,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Eds. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 198-215, at 206-207.


\textsuperscript{331} Marttila notes the same in *Collective Reinterpretation*, 156.
is better understood as a later literary insertion that reflects the latest stratum within the
psalter. “He also notes, “It is possible but not necessary that v. 5-6 derive from the
same layer as the secondary superscription.” Given the complexity of this psalm and
its development, it is not at all clear how one could confidently pass judgment on this. In
any case, if the first person singular parts of the psalm constitute an original layer, then it
seems that vv. 5-6 are secondary, even if they do fulfill a stereotypical role in a psalm of
thanksgiving. How we assess the status of vv. 7-13, however, will affect the status of vv.
5-6.

How do vv 7-13 function within the psalm as a whole? If we were to remove them,
vv 2-6 do form a complete, albeit small, psalm of thanksgiving. According to Zenger, vv
7-13 are “an intentional continuation” (Fortschreibung) to the basic psalm, which
consists of vv 2-6.” Similar to the chronology-bending tendencies of Quentin
Tarantino, the psalmist in vv. 7ff recounts what happened before his ailment, what
caused it, and the contents of his prayer, which YHWH subsequently answered. After
YHWH had blessed him, establishing him as a strong mountain (עז לחרות עַז)
he became complacent and self-assured. As a result of this, the LORD hid his face, and
the psalmist was dismayed. In vv 8-10, the psalmist recounts the act and contents of his
prayer. Evoking the images of death and the pit from vv 2-4, he asks, “What profit is
there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your

332 Ibid.
333 Ibid.
334 Hossfeld and Zenger, Psalmen I, 186.
335 As seen in Reservoir Dogs, Pulp Fiction, and Kill Bill, for example.
faithfulness?” (30:10). If the psalmist goes down into the pit, he will not be able to praise the LORD and proclaim his faithfulness as he does in vv 5-6 (cf. Pss 6:6; 88:11-13; 115:17; Sir 17:27-28; Isa 38:18). After the psalmist’s prayer ending in v. 11, he seems to have been answered. The final two verses of the psalm reprise the acknowledgement of answered prayer from the first three verses. We noted earlier how the psalm moves seamlessly between verses 4 and 7. Yet if we see in vv. 7-11 some kind of inner-biblical exegesis, that is the filling in of what led to the prayer of thanksgiving in vv. 2-4, we might also see an original psalm of thanksgiving in vv. 2-4 and 12-13. Mowinckel notes how the elements in this psalm, the introductory hymn of praise, the recital of distress, and finally the thanksgiving, directly parallel the royal thanksgiving psalms used among the Phoenicians and Egyptians.

The superscription for the psalm is

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The LXX provides a witness to a slightly longer title as seen above, with the commonly used להמנצח at the beginning. The use of both מזמור and שיר together in the title is common elsewhere, particularly in the Korahite and Asaphite collections (Pss 45:1; 46:1; 48:1; 75:1; 76:1; 83:1; 87:1; 88:1; also in Pss 65:1; 66:1; 67:1; 68:1; 92:1; and 108:1).

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336 For a similar expression, see 11Q5 XIX 2-3, Plea for Deliverance: “For a maggot cannot give thanks to you, nor a worm recount your mercy, (but) only the living can give thanks to you, all those whose feet stumble can give thanks to you” (Translation from Eric D. Reymond, New Idioms within Old: Poetry and Parallelism in the Non-Masoretic Poems of 11Q5 (=11QPs) (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 155. See also his relevant notes on pages 156-157.

337 Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel’s Worship II, 186.
Since the title in this case seems to indicate its liturgical usage, the closest parallel is Ps 92:1: “A Psalm. A song for the day of Shabbat.” As Craigie says, “The title of the psalm indicates that the initial function and setting of the psalm changed radically at a later period in the history of the psalm’s use in the cult.” Or, as Mowinckel says, its “attested liturgical use, according to the heading, does not correspond to its original purpose.” The experience of an individual’s suffering and subsequent deliverance was later used to give voice to the (re)dedication of the temple.

Marttila, representing the majority opinion regarding the title’s date, sees it as “an extremely late addition, because it clearly refers to the Maccabaean era, mentioning the rededication of the Jerusalem temple (חנכה).” Mowinckel agrees, seeing the reappropriation of the psalm also as an indication that the Maccabees restricted themselves to the canonical psalm collection. He describes the decision to use the psalm for the festival in this way,

When the festival for the re-consecration of the Temple, the Hanukka festival (feast of dedication)—was instituted after the deliverance of the city from the Syrians, no new festival psalm was composed for that day, but the most suitable psalm from the Psalter was chosen and given a new meaning, namely Ps. 30.

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338 See, for example, Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship I*, 3 and 5.


342 Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 199. With the publication and analysis of the scrolls from Qumran, it is clear that the designation of “the canonical psalm collection” at the time of the Maccabees is problematic.

343 Ibid. See also A. Kaminka, “Quel est le Psaume de la dedicace du Temple?” *REJ* 43 (1901): 269-272.
Though it is certainly not a historical title in the same way as the 13 titles relating the psalms to the life of David, Slomovic looks at this one in the context of the others. He recognizes that the psalm seems to bear no connection to the title but still seeks to understand how it may have functioned liturgically. He says, “It is suggested, on the basis of linguistic and thematic correspondence, that the title refers to the event described in 1 Chr 21-22:1, which preceded the dedication of the area on which the Temple was built.”\(^{344}\) In this case it does not matter so much that he associates it with the dedication, rather than the rededication of the Temple.

It seems that the majority opinion, placing the title in the second century B.C.E., is correct, though it is certainly possible that the title could have been added earlier (i.e. at or shortly after the initial dedication of the Second Temple). The same interpretive move, giving the voice of the “I” a corporate reference, is made in either case. As Slomovic says, “The author of the title saw in the personal experience of the Psalmist—his distress, his cry for help and in God’s response—a reflection of the situation described in the Chronicle narrative.”\(^{345}\) What the individual experienced is analogous to the experience of the Temple itself, and thus also the people. In this way the psalm takes into itself a communal focus, which is present to some extent in v 5, and which comes to fruition with the addition of the title and its corresponding liturgical usage. In his treatment of motifs and exile within the psalms, Ackroyd highlights how older psalms became applicable to new contexts. His words about Becker’s scholarship on eschatological reinterpretation are just as relevant for the reinterpretation of Ps 30, “Such attempts are of interest in that

\(^{344}\) Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding,” 369.

\(^{345}\) Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding,” 369.
they recognize the probability that older psalms have not only continued to be used, but have been understood and in some measure modified in a new situation.”\textsuperscript{346} It is precisely because of the conventional and stereotyped language of distress in the psalms, as he and many other commentators have noted, that material from one situation of distress is so easily applicable to others. Fishbane’s description of the rereading of psalms through the addition of superscriptions is also helpful. In addition to being a form of inner-biblical exegesis, it also involves the “historicization of the nonhistorical.”\textsuperscript{347} In Ps 30 in particular, he says, the heading “nationalizes and historicizes the psalm—thereby transforming it from one of personal lament and hope into one that reflects on the sorrow and hope of the nation in exile without a temple at the joyous time of its rededication.”\textsuperscript{348}

As we saw earlier in the chapter, Gunkel was often suspicious of the attempt to make the “I” of the psalms that of the community. He designated as “psychologically impossible” the statement that “the I of the poet merges into the I of the community.”\textsuperscript{349}

In Ps 30 he sees an instance of an early form of this allegorical reinterpretation. He says,

One can see from Ps 30 how old this reinterpretation is. Originally an “individual thanksgiving psalm,” Ps 30 was reinterpreted in the Maccabean time to refer to Zion according to the superscription and was used for the temple festival. By contrast, this reinterpretation should not be accepted in places where components of communal poetry have been added to the song of an individual, either by the poet himself (Pss 69:36ff; 130:7f) or by a later hand (Pss 25:22; 51:20f; 131:3).


\textsuperscript{348} Fishbane, “Torah and Tradition,” 287.

\textsuperscript{349} Gunkel, \textit{Psalms}, 123.
Notice how he distinguishes between the reinterpretation in Ps 30 and that found in the other psalms we already treated in this chapter. The reinterpretation in Pss 30 and 129 does in fact give the voice of the “I” a communal focus, while in many of the others, the individual “I” himself extends his prayer to include the community. Similar to Miller’s words about Ps 130, Gunkel says, “Rather, it is quite natural that the pious poet would also consider his own people when he has finished with himself, or that he first speaks of Israel and then of himself, or even that he mixes the two together.” The point again is that the kind of collective reinterpretation present in Ps 30 due to the addition of the superscription is different in character from the examples from earlier in the chapter.

One final way of understanding the title of Ps 30, though it is admittedly more speculative, is seeing it not as the superscription to Ps 30 but rather as a colophon to Ps 29. Because of the incongruity between the content of Ps 30 and its heading, readers have long been puzzled why the Maccabaeans would have chosen this psalm as the most fitting for the rededication of the temple. Given its proximity to Ps 29, not to mention the broader context of Pss 25-34, one can see the plausibility of the superscription to Ps 30 originally being a colophon to Ps 29, one with clearer connections to the Temple. As Kaminka says, “la suscrition נמרים שיר חנכת בית appartient, en réalité, au psaume précédent, auquel elle convient fort bien.” Slomovic raises the same possibility in his

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350 See again Miller, Interpreting the Psalms, 143.
351 Gunkel, Psalms, 123.
352 See again Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel’s Worship II, 199, as already cited above.
353 See again Zenger’s treatment of these chapters vis-à-vis the Temple in “New Approaches,” especially 45-54.
treatment of the heading.\textsuperscript{355} Though he does not address these psalms in particular, Thirtle’s idea about the proper placement of some psalm titles bears mention here. In trying to understand the meaning of לְמַנְצַח, normally translated “for the director” or “for the choirmaster,” Thirtle sees the key to understanding it in Habakkuk 3. As he says,

Being alone, it cannot have taken anything from a preceding composition, nor can any concluding words have been misconstrued as belonging to some succeeding composition. It proclaims itself as normal—as a model, a standard psalm. And its striking features are these: it OPENS with—

‘A PRAYER OF HABAKKUK THE PROPHET UPON SHIGIONOTH,’
and it ENDS with—

‘TO THE CHIEF SINGER ON MY STRINGED INSTRUMENTS.’\textsuperscript{356}

Thus, for Thirtle, many of what we normally regard as superscriptions or titles are actually colophons for the preceding psalms. This is precisely how he treats most of them throughout his book. For the majority of these, his way of reading these is inconsequential. Yet in the case of Pss 29-30, it could be an explanation of how the title of Ps 30 initially became attached to it.

In his treatment of Pss 25-34, and even more particularly, Pss 26-32, Zenger sees a theology of the temple running through the collection like a red thread. He sees Ps 29 as the apex or theological kernel of this section and one toward which and from which the others move in a chiasm.\textsuperscript{357} If his reading is correct and a redactor shaped this

\textsuperscript{355} Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding,” 368. Note also the words of H. Torczyner in “Anmerkungen zum Hebraischen und zur Bibel,” ZDMG 64 (1912): 389-409, at 402: “Nach der Anschauung des Chronisten und folglich auch unseres Psalmensammlers war also nicht Ps. 30, wohl aber Ps. 29 wirklich ein מֶתָּנָה שֶּׁל מִצְוָה בְּנוֹת לְדוֹר וַלְדוֹר.“

\textsuperscript{356} Thirtle, Titles of the Psalms, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{357} Zenger, “New Approaches,” 45-46. See again Flint’s assessment of this section in his Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls, 196-197.
subcollection deliberately, then it is not too much of a leap to see a colophon from Ps 29
become a superscription to Ps 30. For Zenger the temple theology of Ps 29 casts its
influence on the three psalms on either side of it, especially, in this case, Ps 30. He says,

A historical redaction-analysis should and could demonstrate in detail that the aim
of this composition is twofold: on the one hand already existing psalms were
deliberately re-arranged (iuxtoposito), on the other hand their scope was to some
extent broadened so that the theological agenda unifying them could be more
effectively implemented (concatenatio).\(^{358}\)

In the case of Ps 30, then, if Zenger’s proposal is correct, its meaning in its final form is
influenced not only by its heading, however it came to be attached, but also by its
location in a broader collection, which itself seems to exhibit a theology related to the
Temple. Though the many of the psalms certainly began simply as individual
compositions, redactors and compilers eventually put them into a collection whose order
is sometimes, though not always, significant. Flint’s words of skepticism are worth
repeating here: “I am not convinced that Zenger’s method of historical redaction-analysis
accounts for the structure of the entire MT-Psalter, since it tries to find links and
elaborate thought-patterns whose intricacy sometimes surpasses the intention or
methodology of ancient compilers.”\(^{359}\) It is always a danger to take what we know from
modern research and project our findings onto the minds of ancients. As tempting as this
is, it simply does not always work. At the same time Flint acknowledges that Zenger’s
approach “has much to commend it, and appears valid for understanding the structure of
some collections such as Psalms 26-32.”\(^{360}\)

\(^{358}\) Zenger, “New Approaches,” 47.

\(^{359}\) Flint, Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls, 197.

\(^{360}\) Ibid.
This emphasis on looking at individual psalms in the context of the canon is one toward which Psalms research has been shifting for the past 20-30 years. In his review of Gunild Brunert’s dissertation, which she wrote under Zenger, Walter Brueggemann notes this tension between older and newer methods, which arises precisely here in our treatment of Ps 30.\footnote{Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 112-115.} While acknowledging that the field of holistic or canonical interpretation is one very much in dispute, Brueggemann says of Brunert’s work that it “gives voice to a radically changed paradigm of study” and “contributes to that new model in important ways.”\footnote{Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 115.} The difficulty he articulates with Brunert’s work is one that applies just as much to this one. Brueggemann says, “If we are obligated to reiterate all older methods and their conclusions while at the same time valuing what is new, studies can only grow more and more complex and longer and longer.”\footnote{Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 115.} There is no easy solution for this either for Brunert or for any of the other current generation of Psalms scholarship. It is enough at this point to be aware of the tension and, like the wise scribe of Matthew’s Gospel, to continue to bring out from the storeroom\footnote{Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 115.} both the new and the old (cf. Matt 15:52).

Whether it was through a redactor from the time of the Maccabaeans or even earlier picking the most suitable psalm for the dedication of the temple, a simple statement about its liturgical usage, or a borrowing from Ps 29 and the temple theology of its surrounding collection, in its final form, Ps 30 does exhibit a special kind of collective

\footnote{Why is it always so difficult to think of a good synonym for “thesaurus?”}
reinterpretation. It gives the voice of its “I” to the Temple and thus the whole community. The near death experience and deliverance of the individual from the psalm was similar enough to the experience of the people that his words could effectively become their own.

2.18 Summary and Conclusion

In the previous chapter we began by looking broadly at the scribal culture of the Second Temple period and how this applies to the Psalter in particular. According to van der Toorn and others, we should expect to find scribal interventions at the seams of individual psalms and between the books and subcollections in the Psalter. This turned out to be the case for several of the psalms we studied in the present one. We saw what seemed to be major redactional work in Pss 51, 69, 102, and 22 and noted common features that seemed to link these additions to each other (e.g. Zion/Israel, servants, eschatological motifs). There were also several occasions where a final verse or two seemed to expand the scope of the prayer of an individual to the people/community (Pss 3, 28, 29, the paired acrostics: Pss 25 and 34, and the various Songs of Ascents). And finally, in the cases of Pss 129 and 30, we see the community effectively taking the voice of the “I” as her own, a move we see elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and one which contains the seeds of later Jewish and Christian allegorical interpretations of the psalms. It seems that McKenzie, Wilson, Becker, Childs, Marttila, and others are correct in seeing a general movement where psalms of the individual become collective. And, as Wilson and Brueggeman have noted, there also seems to be a clear movement from lament
psalms of the individual, which predominate in the first two books of the Psalter to communal psalms of praise and thanksgiving, which predominate in the final two books. In the next chapter, we will look again at the movement between the individual and the corporate in psalms outside the Psalter. This will also give us an occasion to look at the intersection of poetry and prose and what this means for the way psalms were being read and interpreted in the Second Temple period. This is crucial for understanding how early Christians and Rabbinic Jews came to read the psalms in the early centuries of the Common Era.
CHAPTER 3:
EXEGESIS OF SELECTED PSALMS/HYMNS/POETRY SET IN NARRATIVE OR
PROPHETIC CONTEXTS

In this chapter I hope to kill two birds with one stone, to look broadly at the interaction between psalms and narratives and specifically at the relation between the individual and the corporate within three selected instances of these. This will be an important link between the psalms as they were originally used in a cultic or scribal context and how they were later used in early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. It is widely known that poetic songs occur frequently in biblical narrative and that the songs and surrounding prose are meant to shed light on each other.\(^\text{365}\) Since we often forget how well Gunkel could paint pictures with his words, it is worth citing his description of this practice: “The authors of the narrative books were quite aware of the delightful effect made by the river of beautiful verse when it interrupted the footpath of prose. Thus the authors inserted songs at certain points and placed them in the mouths of the heroes of their narratives.”\(^\text{366}\) I do not think he is incorrect, but as we will see, there is more to it.


\(^{366}\) Gunkel, *Psalms*, 3.
than this. Because of the 13 historical superscriptions in the Masoretic text of the Psalms, the other side of this process is also visible, as references to the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible have been placed in the context of a book of poetry. Childs characterizes this as an early form of midrashic exegesis, and scholars since his article have largely followed suit.  

Because of this process of incorporating psalms into preexisting narratives, we can learn something of the way Jews in the Second Temple period read psalms and were able to read and understand them in a flexible way, whatever they may have meant in their original context. Daniel Boyarin says that “the intertextual reading practice of the midrash is a development (sometimes, to be sure, a baroque development) of the intratexual interpretive strategies which the Bible itself manifests…. The intertextuality of midrash is thus an outgrowth of intertextuality within the Bible itself.”

The intertextuality exhibited in this juxtaposition of psalms and narrative or psalms and prophecy is crucial for understanding how later readings of the psalms developed. And since several instances of such psalms also indicate a clear relationship between the individual praying the psalm and the broader community of which he or she is a part, we will consider these as part of the broader discussion of the relationship between narrative and poetry.

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367 Childs, “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis;” Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding.”


369 The “she” here is not simply an attempt to be politically correct by giving both genders their due. Rather the frequent presence of female victory songs throughout the Hebrew Bible (Miriam, Deborah, Hannah), the Deuterocanonical books (Judith), and even the New Testament (Mary) is a crucial part of this conversation and an often overlooked source of female voices in the Bible. See Eunice Blanchard Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel” (Ph.D. Diss.: Union Theological Seminary, 1985).

370 In his work on biblical poetry, Kugel has raised the important point that “the dividing line between what we call biblical ‘poetry’ and biblical ‘prose’ is from from clear” and that they are often
Scholars have longed noted this interaction between narrative and poetry in commentaries on the Psalms. It was not until the 1990s, however, that two scholars dedicated monographs to this topic in its own right. In the published version of his dissertation, James W. Watts acknowledges this lack of material and announces his intention to fill the gap in scholarship.\(^{371}\) He dedicates a chapter to each of the songs set in a narrative context.\(^{372}\) His methodology is straightforward. He first seeks to study each psalm’s “position and effect on the prior and subsequent events and speeches in the narrative.”\(^{373}\) In other words, why did the author or redactor put the psalm in its current position? To what extent does it affect the surrounding narrative? As he says elsewhere, “Most inset poems in Hebrew prose have no impact on the narrative plot. The narratives do not anticipate the poems (except with brief prose introductions) nor does the poetry impact the subsequent action.”\(^{374}\) Secondly, he ascertains “the degree to which the psalm and its immediate and extended contexts share vocabulary and themes.”\(^{375}\) If the author

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\(^{372}\) e.g. 1 Sam 2:1-10; Exod 15:1-21; Deut 32:1-43; Judg 5; 2 Sam 22; Isa 38:9-20; Jonah 2:3-10; Dan 2:20-23; 1 Chr 16:8-36.

\(^{373}\) Watts, *Psalm and Story*, 17.


\(^{375}\) Watts, ibid.
or redactor is using a preexisting hymn, does he do so because of clear connections between the vocabulary and themes of the two? And finally, Watts looks at “the psalm’s contribution to the characterization of its speaker(s) and sometimes other characters in the narrative.”\textsuperscript{376} While prose accounts generally avoid any revelation of the emotional lives of their characters, such inset songs fill out the characters by revealing this normally hidden information.\textsuperscript{377} After methodically studying each of these psalms from narrative contexts, Watts looks at how this literary practice influenced later Second Temple writings such as Tobit, Judith, and 1 Maccabees. In one of his concluding chapters, he makes an interesting observation, which he gleaned from a private conversation with E. F. Davis, namely that Broadway musicals are a good modern analogy for the literary juxtaposition of song and narrative. As he says, “The bulk of a musical play’s dialogue is usually spoken, but the action is periodically punctuated by musical numbers involving song and dance either by the main actors alone or with a chorus.”\textsuperscript{378} Since we, as modern readers, do not often encounter a performative reading of such biblical texts, it is important to stress how important this literary device must have been in a culture where reading such stories was performative.\textsuperscript{379} To carry the analogy a bit further, he also notes that musicals often end their major sections with their best songs. In many of the songs Watts analyzes, the songs occur either at the beginning or end of books or major sections therein and serve to interpret the action around them. For example, near the beginning of

\textsuperscript{376} Watts, ibid.

\textsuperscript{377} See also K. L. Noll, \textit{The Faces of David} (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{378} Watts, \textit{Psalm and Story}, 187

\textsuperscript{379} See Giles and Doan, \textit{Twice Used Songs}.  
the books of Samuel occurs the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10), which is matched near the end with David’s long psalm of praise (2 Sam. 22 = Ps 18). Similarly, the song of Moses (Deut 32) comes at the end of Moses’ life, the book of Deuteronomy, and the whole Torah.

Though Watts does not make the following move with his analogy to modern musicals, it seems to be a fitting one. The songs in most Broadway musicals are composed specifically for the shows in which they will appear. They have a clear connection to the broader narrative context, because the same author(s) put them together.\textsuperscript{380} The songs often take on wider popularity as independent songs, but they receive their meaning and power from their narrative context. A striking example of this is the song “I Dreamed a Dream” from \textit{Les Miserables}.\textsuperscript{381} The character who sings the song, Fantine, was a beautiful and carefree youth whose life took a turn for the worse when she became a single mother who was later forced by economic circumstances into prostitution to support her daughter. This song of lament gives a bird’s-eye view of her life and how, to put it bluntly, “Now life has killed the dream I dreamed.” Like many of the psalms set in narrative contexts in the Hebrew Bible, the song is such that people often sing it independently of the context for which it was composed. The most well known example of this in popular culture is when Susan Boyle sang it on the British television program “Britain’s Got Talent” in 2009. Given her appearance and mannerisms, most of the audience members along with the show’s hosts wrote her off

\textsuperscript{380} One might also compare this to Tolkien’s use of poetry in both \textit{The Hobbit} and \textit{The Lord of the Rings} trilogy.

\textsuperscript{381} It should be noted that the modern musical is based on the 19\textsuperscript{th} century French novel by Victor Hugo.
and made fun of her. Once she began singing, however, she brought the audience simultaneously to their feet and to tears. This was not simply because she had a lovely voice and was singing a beautiful song, it was because, to some extent, Fantine’s words had become her own. She too had crushed dreams, and, because of her appearance, people did not take her seriously. Thus, a song written for a completely different context became meaningful in another one. In the same way, almost every psalm from a narrative context in the Hebrew Bible and in the Septuagint is now a significant part of the Church’s regular prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. The prayers of Moses, Hannah, David, Hezekiah, and the three young men from Daniel have become the prayers of the Church.

There is another kind of musical that is actually closer to the dynamic we find in biblical narratives. We noted above that most songs in musicals are written precisely for a particular context. This is different than many of the psalms in biblical narrative in which it seems that the author or redactor took a preexisting hymn and placed it in the narrative for important reasons. There is a closer analogy to this in the relatively recent genre in musical theater, the jukebox musical. In this genre, of which some of the best known examples are *Mamma Mia!, Movin’ Out, Jersey Boys*, and *Rock of Ages*, the creator of the musical takes preexisting songs and creates a narrative around them. In the first three examples above, they include songs from a single artist or band (ABBA, Billy Joel, The Four Seasons), while the final musical includes a selection of hits from the same genre, 1980s rock music. While the analogy is certainly not exact, it is closer to what we find in the mixture of narrative and psalm in the Hebrew Bible in that the songs
have a more tenuous connection to their narrative context, for which they were not
originally composed.

To conclude this overview of Watts’ book, we should note a final theme
that links many of the psalms set in narrative contexts. In the psalms of thanksgiving in
Isa 38, Jonah 2, Daniel 2, and Dan 3 (LXX), “[t]hey appear at points in the story where
the main character has been led to expect divine deliverance, which is not yet
accomplished or, at least, complete.”³⁸² As we will see later in Isa 38, notwithstanding its
noticeably awkward chronology, Isaiah gives orders to make a cake of figs to heal the
boil after Hezekiah’s prayer of thanksgiving for his recovery (38:21).³⁸³ And the psalm in
Jonah 2 praising God for deliverance occurs while Jonah is still inside the fish! Yet, as
Watts notes, “The effect of placing hymns or thanksgivings at precisely this point is to
highlight the speakers’ trust in God’s willingness and ability to save them, and thus cast
them as models of piety.”³⁸⁴ This is the very dynamic we have already seen in many of
the lament Psalms where the Psalmist praises God for a deliverance that has not been
fully accomplished.³⁸⁵ In Ps 22, as we saw earlier, the Psalmist vows to praise God

³⁸² Watts, Psalm and Story, 189.

³⁸³ Isa 38:21-22 was not present in the original Great Isaiah scroll but was added by a later hand.
Both here and in the parallel 2 Kgs 20:7, this is almost certainly secondary. On the textual issues related to
the composition of this chapter and its parallel in 2 Kgs 20, see S. Talmon, “The Textual Study of the
Talmon and Frank M. Cross (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), at 328-332; Y. Zakovitch,
181-185; Emanuel Tov, Textual Criticism, 340-342. Many thanks to Gene Ulrich for pointing this out in a
private correspondence.

³⁸⁴ Watts, Psalm and Story, 189.

³⁸⁵ For more on this, see Tony W. Cartledge, “Conditional Vows in the Psalms of Lament: A New
Approach to an Old Problem,” Pages 77-94 in The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in
honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. Eds. Kenneth G. Hoglund, Elizabeth F. Huwiler, Jonathan T. Glass,
among the congregation, even while still in the throes of his suffering.\textsuperscript{386} And in the similar Ps 102, which may have a common redactor, the hymn of praise unnaturally interrupts the lament and remains sandwiched within it. According to Watts, the dynamic of these psalms’ positions “prior to the resolution of plot tension suggests that this became an established literary convention in ancient Hebrew literature.”\textsuperscript{387}

Building on and responding to the work of James Watts is Steven Weitzman who also wrote a dissertation on this topic in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{388} Weitzman covers new ground and makes his own original contributions to the discussion, and there is considerable overlap between the two books, although he goes about it in a slightly different way. He looks back at Ancient Near Eastern conventions that seem to have shaped the literary convention of poetry in a narrative context, the clearest example being Exod 15 and its similarity to Egyptian victory hymns. Weitzman attempts to highlight distinctions between the various psalms, which, according to him, Watts simply did not make. Thus, Exod 15, Judg 5, 1 Sam 2, and 2 Sam 22 are clearly songs of victory,\textsuperscript{389} while Deut 32 fits nicely into the genre of “last words” of a dying hero (cf. 2 Sam 23:1-7 and, again, 2 Sam 22).\textsuperscript{390} In contrast to his looking back at ANE parallels, he also considers later liturgical and rabbinic readings of these texts. The insertion of songs of praise in the mouths of heroes at key points is because of a perceived problem in the text. If God has

\textsuperscript{386} On this change of mood (\textit{Stimmungsumschwung}) and the possibility of a priestly salvation oracle, which we already considered in the previous chapter, see Marttila, \textit{Collective Reinterpretation}, 71-75; Craigie, \textit{Psalms 1-50}, 200

\textsuperscript{387} Watts, \textit{Psalm and Story}, 189.

\textsuperscript{388} Weitzman, \textit{Song and Story}.

\textsuperscript{389} Weitzman, \textit{Song and Story}, 15-36.

\textsuperscript{390} Weitzman, \textit{Song and Story}, 37-58.
accomplished some great work and the heroes do not acknowledge it, then they cannot be
the models of piety that they should be.\textsuperscript{391} Note that this follows the same dynamic we
saw in the first chapter in which a song of praise/thanksgiving is the fitting response to
YHWH’s act of deliverance or healing (cf. Pss 22; 30; 35; 40; 69; etc.). The author of Isa
36-39, for example, when recounting the same narrative from 2 Kgs 18-20 realized that
Hezekiah, if he were to be a true model of piety, should have a song of praise as a fitting
response to his healing. Hezekiah’s psalm, therefore, though awkward in its current
context, fills this gap by giving the king the appropriate words of thanksgiving for his
(anticipated) healing, which is explicitly linked to the deliverance of the people (Isa
38:6). For Weitzman, this is also evidence of “canon consciousness.”\textsuperscript{392} Only in
authoritative books would the redactors care enough to include a song of praise they
perceived to be lacking. Later authors, aware of this literary convention, shaped their
books based on previous authoritative books. Thus, the author of 1 Chronicles 16 took
parts of Book IV of the Psalms (Pss 105:1-15; 96:1-13; 106:1.47-48) and used them in his
narrative where there is a complete lack of songs in the passage in 2 Samuel 6 on which it
is based. The continuation of this practice in late Second Temple works such as Tobit
and Judith, according to Weitzman, shows that these later authors were imitating the
practice of books that were then recognized as authoritative.\textsuperscript{393} As we will see in further
detail later in this chapter, Tobit’s prayer in chapter 13 contains many parallels to other
psalms in narrative (e.g. 1 Sam 2:1-10 and Deut 32). Most interesting as Weitzman

\textsuperscript{391} Weitzman, \textit{Song and Story}, 93-123.
\textsuperscript{392} Weitzman, \textit{Song and Story}, 101-108.
\textsuperscript{393} Weitzman, \textit{Song and Story}, 65-70.
notes, however is that both the song of Moses and the prayer of Tobit are written responses to commands from God and Raphael respectively (Deut 31:19.22; Tob 12:6-15; 13:1). Let us now turn to the first of three psalms outside the Psalter, King Hezekiah’s prayer in response to his healing.

3.1 Isaiah 38:9-20: King Hezekiah’s Prayer

The psalm in a narrative context we consider first is remarkably similar in theme to many of the psalms of lament and thanksgiving from the book of Psalms itself (e.g. Pss 6, 30). The prayer of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:9-20 has been incorporated into the preexisting narrative of Hezekiah’s sickness and recovery and the danger to Israel from Assyria in the preceding chapters. Isaiah 36-39 is a parallel account of the events recounted in 2 Kings 18-20, though it is beyond the scope of this question to argue which account came first or if both are independent developments of an earlier tradition. Chapters 36-37 immediately precede the account of King Hezekiah’s sickness and recovery, though the actual chronological relationship between 36-37 and 38-39 is not entirely clear. Most


commentators note the chronological irregularities in these chapters, namely that the events of 36-37 occur later than Hezekiah’s sickness. If this is true, then the author’s arrangement of them is that much more noteworthy. Perhaps, given their current arrangement, it is best to understand these as contemporaneous accounts.

In chapter 36 the author recounts the events of 701 B.C.E. when Sennacherib and the Assyrian armies were about to attack Jerusalem. In chapter 37, Hezekiah offers a prayer for deliverance in which he acknowledges that God alone is the Lord of this world and asks that God answer the prayer, “so that all the kingdoms of the world will know that you are the LORD alone” (37:20). Hezekiah then receives an oracle from Isaiah telling him that his prayer will be answered, and, shortly thereafter, the Angel of the Lord slays 185,000 Assyrians in their camp (37:36).

As chapter 38 begins, King Hezekiah is sick and at the point of death. Again, this abrupt introduction makes the chronology of the chapters even more ambiguous. Isaiah tells him to get his affairs in order and prepare to die, but, rather than resigning himself to his fate, Hezekiah prays a relatively short prayer (v. 3) and it is granted, giving him 15 more years of life. The chronology of what follows is also noteworthy. The Psalm in vv 9-20 so interrupts the flow of the narrative that many translations of the Bible have taken the liberty of moving vv. 21-22, which is clearly secondary, from the end of the chapter to between verses 6 and 7 (cf. 2 Kgs 20:6-8). As Talmon says,

398 “Remember now, O LORD, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.”

399 As Tov says, “The fact that Isa 38:21-22 is in the nature of an addition can still be recognized by an examination of IQIsa, in which these two verses were added in a different hand in the open space at the end of the line, and continuing on into the margin” (Textual Criticism, 341). See also DJD 32, Part 1, col. XXXII, pp. 64-65; Part 2, p. 110. As Tov, Talmon, and Zakovitch all note, these two verses are out of
Neither the summary in 2 Chr. 32:4 nor the full narrative in 2 Ki. 20:1-11, reflected also in both the MT and 1QIs\(^a\) of Is. 38, exhibit any hint that would make the reader expect the additional psalm – מכתב – which follows in Is. 38:9-20 upon the conclusion of the narrative. This obvious addition which elaborates on Hezekiah’s short prayer (ib. vv.2-3) bears witness to a paraphrastic tendency that affected the prophetic narrative, most probably after it had been incorporated into the Book of Isaiah.\(^{401}\)

Yet in the narrative as it stands, Hezekiah’s psalm immediately follows the sign of the sun going back ten steps and precedes the command to make a poultice of figs as the instrument of healing. As we saw in chapter 1, Hezekiah’s psalm has its own superscription that is in the same style as the kind in the psalms with historical superscriptions. Identified as a מכתב, that is a writing or an inscription, it stands in the text as though it were a verbal stele.

To go back to Weitzman’s observation, even though Hezekiah has already received the promise of his healing and deliverance, he has not yet been healed when his prayer of thanksgiving occurs (cf. Jonah 2:1-10). His psalm, therefore, begins in the same way as a conventional Psalm of lament by recounting his previous state of distress and desolation (e.g. Ps. 30). After pouring out his laments as if from Sheol, Hezekiah acknowledges his deliverance in vv 19-20. He writes, “YHWH will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our life, at the house of YHWH” (38:20). The promised deliverance begets songs of praise with stringed instruments. Again, as in place both here in Isaiah and in the parallel verse in 2 Kgs 20:7. See their previously cited works for the fuller discussion about these chapters.

Tov raises the further possibility that the first hand from 1QIs\(^a\) could have omitted vv 21-22 because of homoioteleuton, since vv 20 and 22 both end with יָהּ וְיִשְׂרָאֵל (Tov, Textual Criticism, 341-342). See also Talmon, “Textual Study,” 330.

\(^{400}\) e.g. NAB, 2nd ed.

\(^{401}\) Talmon, “Textual Study,” 329.
chapter 1, praise itself is an acceptable sacrifice in response to God’s act of salvation. God has saved both Israel from the hands of the Assyrians and King Hezekiah from certain death. While there was no adequate response to this in the account in 2 Kgs 20, the author or editor of Isa 36-39 corrected this by including this poetic outpouring of thanksgiving.402

Let us note how the implicit theology of Isa 36-39 parallels the kind of collective reinterpretation we find in the Psalms. Many of the Psalms of lament within the Psalter are, in the superscriptions, identified as Psalms of David. According to the model of Becker and Marttila with which we are working, these Psalms of an individual, often the King himself, were reinterpreted, redacted, and expanded to refer to the whole community. Thus, the king and the people are inextricably linked. The parallel events of Isaiah 36-37 and 38 acknowledge the same link between the fate of the king (Psalmist) and that of the nation. In Isa 36-37 it appeared that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. He had no good reason to hope for deliverance, but Hezekiah prayed for it anyway, and his prayer was answered. Whether we understand this as prior to, contemporaneous, or after the events of Isa 38, it is clear that they are linked. Like Jerusalem, the king had received his death sentence and had little hope for survival (see beginning of his prayer). His prayer as an individual as well as his subsequent deliverance and healing are inseparably linked in the text to the fate of Israel. Therefore, when the king was healed from his sickness, Israel was also healed from hers (cf. Isa. 1:5-6). As Watts says, “The imagery of being near death and of miraculous deliverance thus serves as a poetic reprise of the entire set of Hezekiah narratives, emphasizing God’s control over all destructive

and creative forces, both personal and political.” And as Peter Ackroyd points out, the connection between personal and political elements in the prayer is heightened by the vocabulary shared by it and Lamentations and some parts of Jeremiah. Hezekiah’s prayer provides a pointer to that longed-for restoration of the temple and its worship. The illness of Hezekiah and the death sentence upon him thus become a type of judgment and exile, and in that measure they run parallel to the theme of judgment which is found in the ambassador story which follows; but the theme of restored life and continuing rule which follows upon Hezekiah’s strong appeal to the deity, is a pointer to the possibility of such a restoration for the community.

Note the similarity between Ackroyd’s observation and the very same dynamic we already saw above regarding Ps. 30. Though the psalm is not part of a narrative context, the plight, prayer, and subsequent deliverance of an individual sufferer is understood in a new way through the superscription, which makes it a “song for the dedication of the temple” (Ps 30:1). The nation in exile, seeing the restoration of a nearly dead representative figure, can hope for the same to occur for the people as a whole.

As we have seen, the prayer of Hezekiah is an excellent example of both a poetic text set in a narrative context (which is itself set in a largely poetic book!) and as an individual representative figure who in some way serves as a type of the nation. Because of the nearly identical doublet in 2 Kgs 18-20, we know that there was a previous version of this story without any sort of prayer and that the scribe who penned this section of Isaiah inserted a fitting prayer into his version of the narrative. The prayer, then, interprets not only Hezekiah’s plight as an individual but also that of the nation on the brink of exile and prepares fittingly for the second major section of the book of Isaiah.

Watts, *Psalm and Story*, 123.

3.2 Habakkuk 3

Similar to Habakkuk 3 itself, the treatment of this psalm outside the Psalter sits uneasily in this chapter in the midst of the treatments of Isaiah 38 and the book of Tobit. This unusual psalm is attached, perhaps secondarily, to the end of Habakkuk’s vision and is connected to a prophecy rather than to a broader narrative.405 Both Hezekiah and Tobit, as we shall soon see, are representative figures whose fates are tied up with those of Israel. In the psalm of Habakkuk the poet seems to identify YHWH’s משיח with his people.406 We noted this already in our treatments of Pss 28 and 29, and there are several other parallels with these psalms, which are beyond the scope of this inquiry.407 As in the case of Ps 29, many scholars have also seen in the psalm of Habakkuk similarities to Canaanite or Ugaritic works.408 Hiebert sees it as an ancient hymn of victory, which has been incorporated into the Habakkuk corpus, most notably by the addition of a psalm

405 For opinions on the relationship of Habakkuk 3 to chapters 1-2, see bibliography in Theodore Hiebert, God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

406 Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 190-191.


The most recently articulated and nuanced view is that of John Anderson who says that Hab 3 in its final form reflects multiple stages of editorial and redactional activity, indicative of a history of reshaping and reinterpreting the chapter for the various contexts it held: a pre-exilic theophany (vv. 3-15), a psalm (the addition of vv. 1-2, 16a, 18-19), its inclusion into the Habakkuk corpus (“Habakkuk” in v. 1) and into the Book of the Twelve (vv. 16b-17).

In this section we will focus primarily on the relationship between Habakkuk 3 and the first two chapters and the possible identification of the “anointed one(s)” with YHWH’s people in 3:13.

Habakkuk 3 has long fascinated commentators because of its many unusual features. It contains a superscription (והבוק עלה לפני ה녀) identical in form to those in the Psalter and the only instances of “selah” (סלה) outside of it (Hab 3:3, 9, 13). What is also interesting is that it bears a postscript (למע住房和�), which is also similar to many of the headings in the Psalms. As Watts says,

Placed after prophetic oracles that share with it the usual characteristics of Hebrew poetry, this piece exhibits more explicit markers of its hymnic status than any other text in the Hebrew Bible. The technical jargon contained in both the superscription and colophon (Hab 3:1, 19)—together with the repeated liturgical interjection Selah (vv. 3, 9, 15)—make its psalmic nature impossible to miss, even if readers do not recognize its similarity to other hymns of victory (Exodus 15,

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409 Hiebert, God of My Victory, 129ff. See also Watts, “Psalmody in Prophecy.”


411 Delitzsch notes this already in his commentary: Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Psalms, Vol. 1, 133. See also Rembert Sorg, Habaqquq III and Selah (Fifield, Wis.: King of Martyrs Priory, 1968); Anderson, “Awaiting an Answered Prayer,” 63-65.

412 In an interesting move that demands further exploration, Thirtle sees the Psalm of Habakkuk as a model psalm and a key to interpreting many of the headings in the Psalter. Most notably, he sees the evidence from Habakkuk as indicating that many of what we have normally read as Psalm titles are actually postscripts from previous psalms. See Thirtle, Titles of the Psalms, 10-16.
Deuteronomy 33, Judges 5, Ps 77:16-20), most of which appear outside the Psalter.\textsuperscript{413}

Because of the difference in genre between what is clearly a psalm and a prophetic oracle, which is nonetheless poetic, many commentators long assumed that chapter 3 was not composed by the author of chapters 1 and 2 but was an independent hymn that either Habakkuk himself or a later redactor attached to the rest of the corpus.\textsuperscript{414} Some argue, on the other hand, for the original unity of the book of Habakkuk.\textsuperscript{415} Those who argue that the psalm is secondary point not only to its different genre but also to its omission from the Habakkuk Pesher (1QpHab) at Qumran. Yet, as Robert Haak says, “While it is possible that the evidence of 1QpHab indicates a Hebrew Vorlage which omitted Hab. 3, this is not a necessary conclusion.”\textsuperscript{416} William Brownlee, for example, points out the unsuitability of the psalm “to an existential application to contemporary history.”\textsuperscript{417} While the prophetic oracles in chapters 1 and 2 lend themselves to the pesher genre nicely (however troubling this may be to our current historical-critical sensibilities), the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{413} Watts, “Biblical Psalms Outside the Psalter,” 298. For his fuller treatment of the psalm, see Watts, “Psalmody in Prophecy.”
\item \textsuperscript{414} For some of the immense bibliography on this chapter, see Hiebert, God of My Victory and Margulis, “Psalms of Habakkuk,” 440-441; Richard D. Patterson, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” Grace Theological Journal 8 (1987): 163-194.
\end{itemize}
psalm, because of its very nature, defies such application.\textsuperscript{418} Or as Marttila argues, “Omission of the third chapter from the Pesher may be caused by the stylistic difference of this chapter as compared with the two preceding chapters.”\textsuperscript{419} Furthermore, as Haak notes, “The appearance of the third chapter in the Murabba’at Scroll and the Greek scroll from Nahal Hever indicates that the chapter was included in roughly contemporaneous traditions.”\textsuperscript{420} While it is tempting to regard the exclusion of the hymn from the Habakkuk Pesher as evidence for its secondary nature, we must admit that it is inconclusive in determining whether the hymn was original to the book.

3.2.1 The Psalm of Habakkuk and the Editing of the Book of the Twelve

The last several decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the Book(s) of the Twelve, known also as the Minor Prophets in the Christian Tradition. While critical scholarship has generally looked at each of the books within this collection on its own terms, recent scholars have reawakened the ancient practice of reading these as a single book, albeit composed of many parts.\textsuperscript{421} The earliest witness to this collection as a unit occurs in the “praise of the fathers” section of the book of Ben Sira where the author refers to the “bones of the twelve prophets” (49:10). Moving into the New Testament, there are some references in the Acts of the Apostles that also suggest that this collection

\textsuperscript{418} While we must acknowledge that there are pesher commentaries to at least a few psalms at Qumran (4Q171, 4Q173), not all psalms are equally well disposed for the genre.

\textsuperscript{419} Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 190.

\textsuperscript{420} Haak, Habakkuk, 8.

\textsuperscript{421} For a summary of recent scholarship on the Book of the Twelve, including bibliography, see Paul L. Redditt, “Recent Research on the Book of the Twelve as One Book,” CR:BS 9 (2001): 47-80.
was viewed as a single book. In Acts 7:42, for example, Luke quotes from Amos 5:25-27, but before citing this, he says, “As it is written in the book of the prophets.” Surely he knew that this was from Amos, yet, without explanation or argument, he cites from the book (singular) of the prophets. Luke does the same thing in 15:15-17 when he quotes from Amos 9:11-12.

Moving back to the Jewish tradition, it is notable that, whenever ancient authors talked about the emerging canon of the Hebrew Bible, they included the Book of the Twelve as a single book. No doubt part of this was to keep the number of books, at least by some numberings, at 22, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. But were there other theological reasons why this collection should be viewed as a single book rather than as a “thematized anthology” as David Petersen calls it?422

Before we get to the question of theological reasons, there is the very practical matter of the nature of writing at the time. Since the scribes who wrote, edited, and handed on what would become the biblical texts wrote on scrolls, there is a practical reason why these twelve individual books, some of which are exceptionally small, would be combined onto a single scroll. The scribes wanted to make sure that no part of the collection was lost. It is easy to imagine someone accidentally dropping the tiny piece of parchment containing the “book” of Obadiah. Yet if we put Obadiah in a larger collection, perhaps sandwiched between Joel and Jonah, it is less likely to become lost. Since the three other latter prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had their own scrolls, it was only fitting that the Book of the Twelve have its own scroll as well. In any case,

422 David L. Petersen, “A Book of the Twelve?” in Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve (Eds. James Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 3-10.
the length of the Twelve is comparable to that of Isaiah, itself a composition that stretches through several centuries.

Because the different works within the Book of the Twelve were often written on the same scroll, it stands to reason that scribes often edited them in light of each other. Several scholars have noted links between Nahum and Habakkuk that are worth exploring vis-à-vis the psalm in Habakkuk 3. Smith says,

Habakkuk and Nahum were contemporaries, Habakkuk slightly later than Nahum. There are similarities between their books and messages as well as contrasts. Each of their books consist of three chapters. Nahum begins with a psalm; Habakkuk ends with one. Each spoke to a crisis situation and was convinced that [YHWH] was Lord of the universe and history.\(^{423}\)

Childs goes further and compares and contrasts the two books not only in light of the original function of their oracles but also of the canonical shaping of each book. The final canonical shape of each book cannot be understood apart from the placement of the psalm in each. Nahum begins with the psalm, while Habakkuk ends with it.\(^{424}\) Of this difference Childs says,

Although the theological understanding of God and his eschatological purpose for the world is similar in both psalms, the final effect of the canonical shaping of the two books does vary considerably. In Nahum the reader begins with the theocentric perspective of the hymn and secondarily derives the meaning of human events from the divine purpose. In Habakkuk the order is reversed. The reader begins with the problems of human history and only subsequently are they resolved in the light of a divine oracle.\(^{425}\)


This does not necessarily indicate that they have a common editor, but their canonical placement encourages one to read them in light of each other. Anderson draws from the work of both Nogalski and Schart when considering the question of the redaction of the book of the Twelve and how it relates to Hab 3. When looking at what he sees as the different layers of Hab 3 and how it was incorporated into both the book of Habakkuk and the book of the Twelve, Anderson agrees with Nogalski and Schart and sees it as closely tied to its connection to Nahum. In addition to some of the features we have already noted comparing Nahum and Habakkuk and the apparent inclusio between them, Anderson also notes that the “very elements natural to theophany occur in Hab 3 in exactly the reverse order as they do in Nah 1, forming a series of successive inclusions that further tie these two together.” He shows this in a helpful chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nahum</th>
<th>Habakkuk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sea/rivers (v. 4a)</td>
<td>rivers/sea (v. 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affect on specific locales (v. 4b)</td>
<td>affect on specific locales (v. 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mountains/hills (v. 5a)</td>
<td>mountains/hills (v. 6b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earth (v. 5b)</td>
<td>earth/nations (v. 3b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anderson goes on further to distinguish between Nogalski’s and Schart’s respective proposals in ways that are beyond the scope of our treatment here. It is enough at this point to step back and recognize that Hab 3 is a model example of a psalm outside the psalter, in which a preexisting hymn has been successfully incorporated into another work, albeit with other redactional and hymnic elements. As Watts says, “Comparison of


428 Ibid.
Habakkuk’s psalm with other inset hymns reveals a writer and intended readers familiar with the literary conventions of Hebrew narrative, hymnody, and prophecy, and capable of appreciating the effects of their mixture in novel ways. Since each of the three psalms in this chapter of the dissertation are not only instances of inset hymns but also relate in some way to the relationship between the individual and the collective, we must also attend to the relevant verse in this psalm, before moving on to the book of Tobit.

3.2.2 Habakkuk 3:13

In our treatment of Ps 28 in the first chapter, we saw that in Habakkuk’s psalm as in Ps 28, there is parallelism between “the anointed one” and the LORD’s people.

| The LORD is the strength of his people, he is the saving refuge of his anointed. | יוהו עז למל ימעונ ישועות משיחו הוא-
|---|---|
| O save your people, and bless your heritage; be their shepherd, and carry them forever. | ושמ תזע יהוה הוא-
| You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed (Hab 3:13). |診ת לישע עמק-
| | לישע את-משיחך-

This could be simple poetic parallelism in which the people and the anointed one are meant to be one and the same. The other possible interpretation, of course, is that “anointed one” here refers to the king as it does in nearly every other occurrence in the Hebrew Bible. Even if the latter is the correct reading, both instances of parallelism

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429 Watts, “Psalmody in Prophecy,” 222.

430 As in the previous chapter of the dissertation, the translation of “people” here presumes the emended reading of לעם ( tou λαου αορου) rather than לעם. See discussion under treatment of Ps 28.
show a close link between the king and his people, much like what we just saw in Isa 36-39. Marttila takes up this verse in his book and argues that, because of this and similar verses, הנני “very likely received a national content in the exilic and post-exilic periods.”\(^{431}\) To bolster his case, he notes not only the parallelism but also the witness of the Septuagint, which interprets the Masoretic text by making הנני plural (τοὺς χριστοὺς). As Marttila says of the LXX translation,

> The plural concept ‘anointed ones’ can sensibly mean nothing else than the citizens of Israel, because the Ἀ stichos mentions the people. Parallel structure between the stichoi is indisputable. The Septuagint shows explicitly the same content as is already included in the singular form in the Hebrew text. No matter whether singular or plural reading is preferred in this case, the word הנני refers in this context unambiguously to a collective object, the people of Israel.\(^{432}\)

Based on the LXX text he seems to be correct, and, even in the Hebrew, one cannot ignore the parallelism between הנני and עם. Marttila acknowledges, however, in response to those who urge a strict reading of הנני as “king,” that the parallelism still functions even if it means simply “king.” The same is true for the parallelism in Ps 28. Eaton also has another suggestion to explain the plural translation in the LXX: “Perhaps the plural was preferred to avoid the notion of God having to save the Saviour Messiah, a motive which may have prompted other VSS to take את as preposition.”\(^{433}\) And even more significantly for interpreting 3:13a is his observation that the Greek text “frequently renders a Hebrew singular with a plural in this chapter (v. 2 ἐργὰ, v. 4 χερσίν, v. 7 κοπῶν, v. 11 ὀπλῶν, vv. 13 and 14 κεφάλας etc.).”\(^{434}\) With this in mind, we simply cannot read

\(^{431}\) Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 191.

\(^{432}\) Marttila, Collective Reinterpretation, 191.


\(^{434}\) Ibid.
too much into the plural reading of “anointed ones” in the LXX and presume that the tradents of either the MT or the LXX necessarily intended מְשִיחַ to have a collective connotation, as desirable as this would be as an example of collective reinterpretation. Therefore, even though there may be an attempt by the authors of these psalms to extend the identification of מְשִיחַ from the king to all the people, the evidence is simply not strong enough to bear such a conclusion. Even so, the close relationship between the king and the people as found in many of the psalms and in Isa 36-39 is reaffirmed.

3.3 Tobit

Though, unlike Hezekiah, Tobit is not a king, in many ways his songs of praise function in the context of the broader narrative function in a way similar to the psalm of Hezekiah in the narrative of Isa 36-39. In Tobit’s two major prayers (Tobit 3; 13), as in many of the Psalms, his sins, subsequent punishments, and final deliverance are closely linked with those of Israel. While Tobit experiences redemption within the book itself, Israel still awaits her redemption and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, for which Tobit prays in chapter 13. Tobit thus functions as both a model and a paradigm for the nation of Israel, though this is brought into relief explicitly in his prayers and but only implicitly in the larger narrative. This fits nicely with what Watts says of inset hymns in general:

435 Marttila sees other collective instances of מְשִיחַ in Pss 2 and 84, but I do not find these compelling (Collective Reinterpretation, 177-189).

“The poems emphasize themes overtly which the narrative may depict more subtly, and sometimes give expression to ideas in tension with those of the prose.”

Throughout the narrative, Tobit is a model in that he is a man of exemplary character whose faith in God is expressed through his charitable deeds, most importantly almsgiving. More than this he is a paradigm, by which I mean that Israel’s narrative pattern of exaltation and humiliation becomes his own (and vice versa). Likewise, the deliverance which he experiences in the context of the story is a foretaste of what Israel as a nation will one day experience. Whatever the overall merits and deficiencies of Richard Bauckham’s argument that the book of Tobit is a parable for the exiles of northern Israel, this view of Tobit (the book) as a parable presumes that Tobit (the man) is a paradigm. As Harrington says,

the character Tobit “expresses the classical theology of sin, exile, repentance and return promoted in the book of Deuteronomy. In 13:6b-7 Tobit begins to speak in the first person singular. “In the land of my exile I acknowledge him…. As for me I exalt my God.” Tobit becomes an example or paradigm for Israel’s experience in exile and for its hopes regarding what God might do for it.

As we saw in chapter 1, many Psalms function in a similar way to both the book of Tobit and his prayers. That is, they begin as the prayer of a single individual and at the end unexpectedly expand their scope to include the nation Israel. Since much of the redaction of the Psalter took place around the time when Tobit was composed and even later, it is fitting to consider the inset hymns in the book of Tobit. Not only are these excellent

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437 Watts, “This Song,” 352.


439 Daniel J. Harrington, Invitation to the Apocrypha (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 23.
instances of psalms set in narrative, but in this case, they also show an individual, similar to the psalmist, who serves as a representative figure for Israel. It is clear that the narrative sections of the book of Tobit are full of allusions, both explicit and implicit, to other biblical texts. The prayers also spring from the tradition of biblical Psalms and hymns such as the songs of Moses and Hannah. In this section, then, we will consider how the prayers in chapters 3 and 13 present Tobit as a paradigm for Israel and how this is analogous to the psalmist as a paradigm for Israel.

### 3.3.1 Integrity of the Text

Since there is some hesitation about affirming the integrity of the book of Tobit in the scholarly community, let us review the evidence briefly. Some have argued that chapters 13 and 14 are additions to an earlier version of the book. If this were true, they would not be integral to the initial story and would not, at least to some readers, carry the same meaning as they would if they were in the original composition. Frank Zimmerman argues that chapters 13 and 14 are secondary accretions and claims that the prayer in 13 “depicts little of Tobit’s affairs or state of mind.” He sees in this prayer a sharp distinction between the fate of Tobit and his family on the one hand and that of the nation.

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442 Following the practice of most commentators, I will rely primarily on the Greek text of the longer recension found in Sinaiticus but may consult other manuscript traditions when appropriate.

on the other. Because of this, he posits a three-stage theory of composition in which chapters 1-12 were the first written, followed by 14 and later filled in with 13 some time after the fall of the Second Temple. I agree with Doran\textsuperscript{444} and Fitzmyer\textsuperscript{445} and maintain that Zimmerman misreads the prayer and its force and that this misreading influences his decision about the integrity of the work. After looking at the evidence presented throughout this section, we should be able to agree with Bauckham’s assessment: “It is clear that, so far from ch. 13 being unrelated to Tobit’s own story, there is a close correlation and connection between Tobit’s own experience and his celebration of Israel’s future in this hymn.”\textsuperscript{446} Zimmerman also argues that these chapters are secondary based on a medieval Aramaic manuscript of the text that does not include them. Yet we should also note the presence of parts of all fourteen chapters at Qumran. This is by no means definitive, since there were often longer versions of books that clearly grew from earlier and shorter versions (e.g. the longer version of Jeremiah). Thus, our working hypothesis will be that chapters 13 and 14 are not additions to the book but integral to its character and theology. Even if they are secondary, we are still left to read and interpret the book as it stands, whatever the history of its development may be.


\textsuperscript{445} Joseph Fitzmyer, \textit{Tobit} (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 44-45.

\textsuperscript{446} Bauckham, “Tobit as a Parable,” 144.
3.3.2 Unexpected Praise: Chapter 3:2-6

2 “You are righteous, Lord, and all your deeds are just; All your ways are mercy and fidelity; you are judge of the world.
3 And now, Lord, be mindful of me and look with favor upon me. Do not punish me for my sins, or for my inadvertent offenses, or for those of my ancestors. “They sinned against you, 4 and disobeyed your commandments. So you handed us over to plunder, captivity, and death, to become an object lesson, a byword, and a reproach in all the nations among whom you scattered us.
5 “Yes, your many judgments are right in dealing with me as my sins, and those of my ancestors, deserve. For we have neither kept your commandments, nor walked in fidelity before you.
6 “So now, deal with me as you please; command my life breath to be taken from me, that I may depart from the face of the earth and become dust. It is better for me to die than to live, because I have listened to undeserved reproaches, and great is the grief within me. “Lord, command that I be released from such anguish; let me go to my everlasting abode; Do not turn your face away from me, Lord. For it is better for me to die than to endure so much misery in life, and to listen to such reproaches!”

Let us look first at Tobit’s initial prayer in chapter 3. The understanding of Tobit as a paradigm for the nation Israel is based on both this and chapter 13, though either alone would suffice to demonstrate this relationship. In the first prayer Tobit recognizes his sharing in Israel’s communal sin, no matter how innocent he is as an individual. In

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447 NAB-RE.
the second he acknowledges that his fate is tied to Israel’s and Israel’s to his. As many scholars have noted, the prayer in chapter 3 is a bit startling, since one would expect a lament rather than a song of praise. After undergoing a series of unfortunate events reminiscent of the book of Job, one would expect Tobit to lament his plight, even given the possibility that it might end with a note of deliverance as in Psalm 22 and most of the other Psalms of lament. In such Psalms there is the initial plea of distress, which, at some point in the Psalm, God clearly has answered. The Psalmist then moves to praising God for His intervention and deliverance. Instead, in Tobit 3, Tobit begins by praising God for his righteousness and justice. Unlike the Psalmist, his lament never makes it into his formal prayer; it functions more like a narrative detail immediately before the prayer: “Then in my grief I wept, and I prayed in anguish, saying…” (Tob. 3:1). This introduction makes the dissonance between verses 1 and 2 all the more jarring. As the prayer progresses, rather than argue his innocence as he could well have done, he asks for mercy for his sins, which he links to those of the nation. He prays, “Punish me not for my sins, nor for my inadvertent offenses, nor for those of my fathers. They sinned against you, and disobeyed your commandments” (Tob. 3:3b-4a). The link between his personal sins and those of his ancestors is seamless. He does not separate himself from the nation either in sin or in punishment. “So you handed us over to plundering, exile, 


450 See, again, Anderson, “Did Jesus Confess His Sins?”, especially 465-468.
and death, till we were an object lesson, a byword, a reproach in all the nations among
whom you scattered us” (Tob. 3:4b). As Stefan Beyerle says, “The strong emphasis on
the relationship of Tobit to his people connects the lament about Tobit’s own suffering—
especially highlighted through his captivity in exile, his blindness and the reproaches of
his wife Hannah—with the lament over Israel’s sins and God’s judgments.”451 These two
streams, according to Beyerle, follow each other in tension throughout the book and are
ultimately resolved only in the prayer in chapter 13.

3.3.3 The Prayer in Chapter 13

Then Tobit said:
‘Blessed be God who lives for ever,
because his kingdom lasts throughout all ages.
2 For he afflicts, and he shows mercy;
he leads down to Hades in the lowest regions of the earth,
and he brings up from the great abyss,
and there is nothing that can escape his hand.
3 Acknowledge him before the nations, O
children of Israel;
for he has scattered you among them.
4 He has shown you his greatness even there.
Exalt him in the presence of every living being,
because he is our Lord and he is our God;
he is our Father and he is God for ever.
5 He will afflict you for your iniquities,
but he will again show mercy on all of you.
He will gather you from all the nations
among whom you have been scattered.
6 If you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul,
to do what is true before him,
then he will turn to you
and will no longer hide his face from you.
So now see what he has done for you;
acknowledge him at the top of your voice.

451 Stefan Beyerle, “‘Release Me to Go to My Everlasting Home…’ (Tob. 3:6): A Belief in an
Afterlife in Late Wisdom Literature,” pp 71-88 in The Book of Tobit. Text, Tradition, Theology: Papers of
Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2005), at 83.
Bless the Lord of righteousness,  
and exalt the King of the ages.  
In the land of my exile I acknowledge him,  
and show his power and majesty to a nation of sinners:  
“Turn back, you sinners, and do what is right before him;  
perhaps he may look with favour upon you and show you mercy.”
As for me, I exalt my God,  
and my soul rejoices in the King of heaven.
Let all people speak of his majesty,  
and acknowledge him in Jerusalem.
O Jerusalem, the holy city,  
he afflicted you for the deeds of your hands,  
but will again have mercy on the children of the righteous.
Acknowledge the Lord, for he is good,  
and bless the King of the ages,  
so that his tent may be rebuilt in you in joy.
May he cheer all those within you who are captives,  
and love all those within you who are distressed,  
to all generations for ever.
A bright light will shine to all the ends of the earth;  
many nations will come to you from far away,  
the inhabitants of the remotest parts of the earth to your holy name,  
bearing gifts in their hands for the King of heaven.
Generation after generation will give joyful praise in you;  
the name of the chosen city will endure for ever.
Cursed are all who speak a harsh word against you;  
cursed are all who conquer you  
and pull down your walls,  
all who overthrow your towers  
and set your homes on fire.
But blessed for ever will be all who revere you.
Go, then, and rejoice over the children of the righteous,  
for they will be gathered together  
and will praise the Lord of the ages.
Happy are those who love you,  
and happy are those who rejoice in your prosperity.  
Happy also are all people who grieve with you  
because of your afflictions;  
for they will rejoice with you  
and witness all your glory for ever.
My soul blesses the Lord, the great King!
For Jerusalem will be built as his house for all ages.  
How happy I will be if a remnant of my descendants should survive  
to see your glory and acknowledge the King of heaven.  
The gates of Jerusalem will be built with sapphire and emerald,  
and all your walls with precious stones.
The towers of Jerusalem will be built with gold, and their battlements with pure gold. The streets of Jerusalem will be paved with ruby and with stones of Ophir. The gates of Jerusalem will sing hymns of joy, and all her houses will cry, “Hallelujah! Blessed be the God of Israel!” and the blessed will bless the holy name for ever and ever’ (Tobit 13:1-17, NRSV)

The beginning of the prayer in 13 follows the traditional beginning to Jewish prayers, “Blessed be God.” Beginning in 13:2, though, the reference to Hannah’s song in 1 Sam. 2:1-10 is unmistakable. The fact that the author repeats this theme just three verses later only underscores this allusion. What is it about Hannah’s song that demands this reference? When we consider the full song of Hannah, it is hard to imagine that the author of Tobit could have found a better song of praise from which to quote. One thing that is not so immediately apparent is the way Hannah’s song moves from praise to God related to her individual plight to praise to God related to His cosmic actions. In other words, what has happened to her as an individual is a microcosm of what God has done and will do in the macrocosm of the world. This is precisely, I argue, what happens in Tobit’s prayer vis-à-vis the nation Israel. This appropriation of the song of Hannah is not an aberration in Second Temple Judaism. It has long been recognized that Mary’s “Magnificat” in Luke’s Gospel (1:46-55) is also based on Hannah’s song. Leaving aside for now the question of whether this song is actually from Mary’s lips or is a stylistic composition by the evangelist or an earlier scribe, Luke’s version of it recapitulates this same dynamic. It is worth mentioning that Mary has also functioned as a paradigm figure in the Christian tradition just as Tobit does in the context of his own story. Yet Tobit’s

452 I acknowledge that the author is also relying on Deut 32.
relationship to the nation is not simply paradigmatic; it is also real on a concrete level because of the flesh and blood relationships highlighted throughout the book.

3.3.4 Tobit’s Social Circles

The other interesting way Tobit is connected to the nation throughout the book of Tobit is through the various concentric circles of relationships that the author deems important. Tobit as an individual is important, of course, insofar as he alone of his kinsmen takes seriously the Mosaic Law even while in exile. The most important of the commandments for Tobit, as he emphasizes throughout the book, is almsgiving. Following and even developing the theology that first appears in Proverbs 19:17, he tells his son that almsgiving atones for sin and delivers one from death (4:7-11; 14:9). His emphasis on this in both chapters 4 and 14 makes him a model for Jewish piety, especially in the context of exile. He exemplifies the individual’s duty to keep the commandments. To understand properly the book of Tobit, therefore, it is essential to see Tobit in the context of each of these circles of relationships simultaneously. To separate them artificially or pit them against one another violates the integrity of the book.

The next layer in the concentric circle is family, one of the most important themes in the book by any account.453 In his commentary, John Craghan argues that the book is more concerned with family life than the fate of the nation. He goes so far as to pit the book of Tobit, “a study in Jewish family life,” against the book of Judith, “which looks to

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Family life is certainly important, but it seems to be a false dichotomy to say that it is more important than the fate of the nation, which is so prominent in the final two chapters. Zimmerman’s position is similar to that of Craghan, and this is one of his reasons for denying the integrity of the whole book. Tobit never chooses his family, tribe, or nation to the exclusion of the others. He seems to understand them as interrelated in the context of his religious duties. To impose this false dichotomy is even more problematic when we consider the external grounds, as shown by Fitzmyer and others, for accepting the integrity of the book, including chapters 13 and 14. Once we accept these chapters as integral to the book, we cannot deny the importance of the fate of the nation for Tobit. Craghan, as we saw above, made a distinction between the respective emphases of Tobit and Judith; Nickelsburg makes a similar distinction between Tobit and Job, though he takes it in a different direction. He says, “Whereas the book of Job confines its treatment to an individual, the fate of the nation is of great concern in the book of Tobit, which focuses on it exclusively in the last two chapters.” Since we have two scholars distinguishing Tobit from other biblical books by not being focused on the nation on the one hand and focused on it on the other, we might say that Tobit is not about family or nation; it is about both. Tobit provides for his family, first by his faithfulness to the law, second by his financial responsibility, and finally by inadvertently making arrangements to provide a proper spouse for his son,


455 It is clear that many of Craghan’s decisions regarding Tobit are based on his reading of Zimmerman.

Tobiah (cf. Abraham in Gen. 24).\textsuperscript{457} Tobit’s “personal” restoration is never simply about him as an individual but is inseparable from the fate of his family. The importance of family and its etiology also come out in the prayer of Tobias and Sarah in chapter 8 with the reference to the primordial parents, Adam and Eve.

The next circle of relationships is his tribe. Tobit makes clear that he is part of the tribe of Naphtali (1:4)\textsuperscript{458} and places great importance in taking care not only of his family but also of any “poor man from among our kinsmen” (2:2). Recall that Tobit leaves his dinner in great haste to bury a kinsman who had been murdered by strangulation. This is also prominent vis-à-vis the identity of Raphael who presents himself to Tobit as “one of your own kinsmen” (5:13). When Tobit and Raphael first meet, Tobit responds to Raphael’s joyful greeting with what some might call a less-than-cheerful response: “What joy is left for me any more? Here I am, a blind man who cannot see God’s sunlight, but must remain in darkness, like the dead who no longer see the light! Though alive, I am among the dead” (5:10). Yet, the moment Tobit learns that Raphael is one of his own kinsmen and the son of fellow pilgrims no less, he is comforted and affirms Raphael’s noble pedigree (5:14). The importance of a common tribe is also prominent in the meeting of Tobiah and Sarah (7:3; cf. Gen. 24). Before they even met, Raphael told Tobiah about Sarah and that she was his kinswoman and in need of a husband. Yet even after voicing his quite reasonable objections, Tobiah confesses his love for her after hearing Raguel’s words, namely that Sarah was his kinswoman (ὅτι ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἀδελφή).

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\textsuperscript{457} Though Tobit did give his son, Tobiah, the proper advice in 4:12-13 to take a wife from among their kinsmen, the primary purpose of the journey on which Tobit sends his son is to recover his deposit. The subsequent meeting of Tobiah and Sarah was orchestrated via divine intervention.
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\textsuperscript{458} For more on the special significance of the author’s choice of Naphtali for Tobit’s tribe, see Bauckham, “Tobit as a Parable,” 152-53.
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The final concentric circle is that of the nation Israel which is expressed fully in the prayer in chapter 13. In this prayer he links his own fate to that of Israel, especially in terms of the divine pattern: “For he scourges and then has mercy; he casts down to the depths of the nether world, and he brings up from the great abyss. No one can escape his hand” (13:2). While this is a general statement of fact in 13:2, it is a prediction of a future ingathering in 13:5: “He scourged you for your iniquities, but will again have mercy on you all. He will gather you from all the Gentiles among whom you have been scattered.” As Nickelsburg says, “the formulation ‘scourge-have-mercy’ is paradigmatic for this author, in the context of Israel’s sin.”459 Richard Bauckham likewise affirms, “Thus the four occurrences of the formula (11.15; 13.2, 5, 7) describe God’s ways in general and apply it to the particular cases of Tobit himself, Israel and Jerusalem. This creates a strong parallel between Tobit’s story and that of the nation.”460 Therefore, against Zimmerman who sees a sharp distinction between Tobit the individual and the nation Israel, it is better to see a continuum of relationships within each of which Tobit is a model character in his observance of the Mosaic law, especially almsgiving. Tobit, then, is a paradigm not simply for the nation but also for the family and the tribe. These circles of relationships call to mind what we already saw in Psalm 22. The psalmist’s


deliverance begins with himself (22:24), echoes within the great congregation (22:22.25), spills out throughout Israel (22:23), and finally to the ends of the earth (22:27-28). And as Westermann notes of these “ever wider circles” of praise, they are not only spatial but temporal as well.\(^{461}\) He says that this “summons to praise must make headway both into the past and into the future” and that “the praise of God knows no bounds either in time or space.”\(^{462}\) In the same way, the concerns of the author of Tobit move seamlessly between Tobit the individual, the family member, tribe member, Israelite, and one scattered among the nations. His prayers likewise move from the confession of his personal sins in chapter 3 to uninhibited praise “before the nations” in chapter 13.

In light of the prayers of Tobit in chapters 3 and 13, what is the best way to characterize Tobit in relation to Israel? As we have seen, many commentators have called him a “model” or a “paradigm.” There can be no doubt that he is a model. By his behavior and in his exhortations, he shows Jews how they are to live if they want to fulfill God’s law, even in times of great trial and suffering. The story itself, as Irene Nowell says, “forms a model of righteous living for an audience living in the Diaspora during the second century B.C.E. and for all the generations between their time and ours.”\(^{463}\) He is a model, but he cannot be reduced to a mere model. Because of this dynamic linking the individual Tobit to the nation of Israel, “paradigm” is a better word to describe his function in the story. The humiliation and exaltation, the death and resurrection, which

\(^{461}\) Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 90.

\(^{462}\) Ibid.

Tobit experiences in the narrative will be fulfilled, according to the prayer in 13, when God again rebuilds Jerusalem and cherishes those within her for all generations to come.

Now that we have looked at these three major psalms outside the Psalter (those of Hezekiah, Habakkuk, and Tobit), let us turn to the opposite side of this interaction, those places within the Psalter, where bits of narrative from the books of Samuel make an appearance through the historical superscriptions.

### 3.4 Historical Superscriptions and Exegesis: Prose within Poetry

Throughout chapters 1 and 2, from the introductory material about scribal culture and redaction in the psalms, to psalms such as 51, 34, 3, and 30, we have already touched several times on the role and significance of superscriptions in the psalms. Some of this section, therefore, will be repetitive, but the important thing to take from it in the context of this chapter is that the historical superscriptions in particular are the flip side of the inset psalms we saw in the first part. In that case, authors and redactors inserted preexisting poetry into prose narratives; in this one, redactors of the psalms call to mind events drawn from the Deuteronomistic history, primarily from the books of Samuel, to read those psalms in the context of a particular event from the life of David. For the past century and more, most commentators have agreed that the superscriptions are secondary and do not contain valuable information for determining the original historical setting of the Psalms.\(^{464}\) While many of the superscriptions that seem to relate to musical

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\(^{464}\) See, for example, James L. Kugel, “Topics in the History of the Spirituality of the Psalms,” Pages 113-144 in *Jewish Spirituality. Vol 1: From the Bible through the Middle Ages.* Ed. Arthur Green
instructions may have been more closely related to the original composition of a Psalm, those related to specific events in the life of David are certainly later. In this section we will consider how these superscriptions may have developed, their importance in interpreting the Psalms, and what they might mean in understanding the relationship between the individual and the community in the final redaction of the Psalter. Since we will pay especial attention to the 13 historical superscriptions, those that refer to a specific event in David’s life, we will also consider the phenomenon of the mingling of poetry and narrative.

By bringing in references to events from the prose of other biblical books, the scribes responsible for editing and compiling the Psalter, direct the reader or pray-er of the Psalms to consider the pericope to which the superscription refers and to read the Psalm in light of it. Likewise, when the reader returns to that narrative, she will have the Psalm in mind and understand the narrative through it. Consider, for example, the best-known of the penitential Psalms, 51, which we already studied in depth in the first chapter. The superscription relates it to David’s sin with Bathsheba and implicitly his subsequent murder of Uriah. While readers are now conditioned to read the Psalm in light of the narrative from 2 Samuel, one notices that there is nothing explicitly about this story in the Psalm itself. Like most of the prayers in the Psalter, it contains stereotypical language that could be applied to many different situations. Whether because of certain semantic associations or for some other reason, an anonymous scribe likely took this

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(New York: Crossroads, 1986); Childs, “Psalm Titles”; Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 31-35; Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 403-407; Flint, Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls, 117-134; Watts, Psalm and Story, 182-185; Weitzman, Song and Story, 70-74.

penitential Psalm of an anonymous individual and reinterpreted it through the life of David. It is easy to imagine his prayer of repentance (2 Sam 12:13a) containing the words of this Psalm, even if its words are applicable to almost any situation of sin and repentance. Fishbane refers to this method of connecting two seemingly disparate parts of scripture as סמוכין.

In his 1971 article, “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis,” to which we have already alluded and from which Fishbane, Slomovic, and others draw, Brevard Childs considers whether the Psalm titles might be a form of inner-biblical exegesis and thus a link between the Bible itself and full-blown midrash. Whether it is midrash depends on how broadly one defines it, but his reflections are intriguing nonetheless. Similar to what I have hinted at above, he looks at the intersection between poetry and narratives and what this means for interpreting each. He acknowledges that, though the historical superscriptions do not convey important historical information, they are important literary and theological devices that helped a given community reinterpret texts to apply to situations other than the ones for which the texts were originally composed.

Psalms are, by their very nature, non-historical, stereotypical, and conventional prayers able to be applied to a variety of situations. As Matthias Henze says, with most other sections of the Bible, a commentator or homilist would feel obliged to say at least a few words about the narrative context of the chosen pericope and its place within the composition of the biblical book. The psalms, by contrast, can easily be taken “out of context,” as it were, with no explanation necessary, because there is no context.466

466 Henze, “Patristic Interpretations,” 136-137.
This is both the benefit and the drawback of the book of psalms, which certainly originated out of a definite historical context or contexts, but which now exists apart from it/them. This brings us right back to one of the initial questions from chapter 1, who is the “I” speaking in the psalms, and what happened to him to bring forth such words? This can be a problem, as Anderson notes, if we attempt to pray the psalms of imprecation, for example, without a broader narrative context in mind.\textsuperscript{467} Yet, by reading the psalms in the context of the narrative from the books of Samuel as the psalm titles direct us to, we have access to a new level of meaning that would not otherwise be present. Because of the midrashic exegesis or inner-biblical interpretation through the titles of the psalms themselves, the editors of the psalms instruct us to read the psalms with David’s life in mind. Just as, in the case of the psalms within narrative, we read or pray the words aware of the broader narrative context, so too in the psalms with historical superscriptions, we call to mind that part of David’s life when we read the words from the Psalter.

\textbf{3.5 Summary and Conclusion}

This chapter highlights an important link between the psalms in their original cultic or scribal contexts and the ways they were later understood by both Jewish and Christian readers. The practice of reading the psalms in light of a hero’s life, whether that be David, Moses, Miriam, Hannah, Hezekiah, Jonah, Judith, Mary, or Jesus, is an ancient one that begins in the Hebrew Bible itself and extends in creative ways into the

\textsuperscript{467} Gary A. Anderson, “King David and the Psalms of Imprecation.”

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intertestamental literature, the New Testament, and the midrashim. In the final two
chapters we will see how this plays out in each of the two major traditions arising out of
the ruins of Second Temple Judaism, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. In the former
case, Christians, from the very beginning, understood the book of Psalms in light of their
experience of Christ and made the words therein his own. In the latter, Jews continued
the process of midrash begun in the psalm titles themselves and read even more Psalms in
the context of David’s life.
CHAPTER 4:

THE PSALMS IN LATE SECOND-TEMPLE JUDAISM AND AT QUMRAN

In the first three chapters we looked at several ways the psalms were reinterpreted in new contexts during the Second Temple period. One of the ways this happened was through collective reinterpretation or rereadings in which a psalm of an individual was given a communal focus either through the addition of one or several verses or of a superscription. For some of these psalms, the shift to a communal focus may be part of the original layer of the psalm and could be related to the shift from lament to praise.\footnote{Wilson, “Shape of the Book of Psalms,” 139.}

Another way of giving psalms new meanings, as seen in chapter 3, is through the mingling of prose and poetry, on the one hand through psalms set in the midst of narrative and, on the other, through the historical titles later attached to 13 psalms in the Masoretic text. Previously anonymous compositions can now be read out of a definite historical context. In many of these stories, the individual praying the psalm can be seen as a model or representative figure for the nation as a whole (e.g. Moses in Deut 32; Hannah in 1 Sam 2;\footnote{Regarding this in particular and the genre of female victory songs more generally, see Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, \textit{On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible} (Leiden: Brill, 1993), especially 32-48, 90-103; Eunice Blanchard Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel” Ph. D. Diss. (Union Theological Seminary, 1985); George J. Brooke, “Power to the Powerless: A Long-Lost Song of Miriam,” \textit{BAR} 20 (1994): 62-65.} David in 2 Sam 22; Hezekiah in Isa 38; Tobit throughout his
eponymous book). In this final chapter, we will look at a few ways this question of the relationship between the individual and communal arises in the interpretation of the Psalms and other related literature from roughly 200 B.C.E. until 100 C.E. and in the later midrashim on the psalms. To do so, we will look at a few of the relevant scrolls from Qumran and at some of the ways the evangelists and other NT writers use the psalms as a way to understand Jesus. After this we will gesture toward some representative examples of psalms interpretation in both Jewish and Christian traditions and how their readings of the psalms are not as fanciful as they may initially seem. Rather, they grow out of the interpretive strategies already present in the Hebrew Bible itself. These later interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, were certainly engaging in creative work that likely could not have been foreseen by the psalms’ original authors. At the same time, those responsible for redacting the books that would become the Hebrew Bible would have recognized the attempts to appropriate psalms from an older context to be relevant to a new one.

The book of Psalms is represented by more scrolls than any other book among those found at Qumran and is likewise the most quoted scriptural text in the New Testament, accounting for approximately one third of quotations from and allusions to

\[\text{\footnotesize 470 There may be an analogy here between later midrashic readings and the growth of the text itself. As Ulrich says, ‘‘The text’ is evolutionary. Its development is organic and logical, but unpredictable’” (‘Pluriformity in the Biblical Text,” 35). The same could be said of many branches of exegesis, both Jewish and Christian.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 471 For Sanders, this reuse of psalms is characteristic of the canonical process itself, in which the text must demonstrate its stability and adaptability in order to survive. See, for example, his “Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon,” Pages 531-560 in Magnalia Dei (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976). See also Ulrich, “Pluriformity in the Biblical Text.”}\]
the Old Testament. In addition to the Psalms Scrolls themselves (e.g. 11QPs, 4QPs, 5/6HevPs, 4QPs, 4QPs, 4QPs), many other works at Qumran are clearly influenced by the psalms and other hymnic poetry from the late Second Temple period (e.g. 1QpPs, 4QpPs, 4QpPs, 4QFlor, 4QTanh, 4QCatena A, 11QMelch, 1QH, 1QS, etc.). Given importance of the book of Psalms in the Gospels and in the epistles, it is no surprise that it was often a central exegetical text for later Christian interpreters. Near the very end of the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus appears to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he says to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). This is not only an early possible witness to the tripartite canon of the Hebrew Bible; it also points to the way early Christians saw the prophetic character of the Psalms. If at least some of the psalms prophetically refer to Christ, as the evangelists, Paul, and other New Testament writers indicate, then it is perfectly natural that early Christian writers would mine the Psalms for further references, allusions, or

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473 On which, see Flint, Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls, 46-47.


475 For a similar recognition at Qumran see 4QMMT (C 9-11): “And] we have [written] to you [יתבלת] so that you may study (carefully [יתבלת]) the book of Moses and the books of the Prophets and (the writings of) David [and the events of] ages past.” Translation from E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, eds. Qumran Cave 4. V: Miqsat Ma’ase Ha-Torah (DJD 10; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 59. See also Ulrich, “Pluriformity in the Biblical Text,” 33-36.

\section*{4.1 The Psalms as Prophetic or David as Prophet}

Even though the book of Psalms is situated in the third part of what would become the canon of the Hebrew Bible, those at Qumran recognized its prophetic
character. In the prose epilogue of 11QPs\(^8\), now called *David’s Compositions*, the author says,

And David, the son of Jesse, was wise, and a light like the light of the sun, and literate, and discerning and perfect in all his ways before God and men. And the LORD gave him a discerning and enlightened spirit. And he wrote 3,600 psalms; and songs to sing before the altar over the whole-burnt perpetual offering every day, for all the days of the year, 364; and for the offering of the Sabbaths, 52 songs; and for the offering of the New Moons and for all the Solemn Assemblies and for the Day of Atonement, 30 songs. And all the songs that he spoke were 446, and songs for making music over the stricken, 4. And the total was 4,050. *All these he composed through prophecy* [נביא] which was given him from before the Most High.\(^{478}\)

This final line of the epilogue characterizes not only the character of the book but also its author and provides an important point of comparison between the Qumran community and the authors of the New Testament. The book of Psalms does not belong to the collection of the prophets in either canon, but both Jews and Christians in the first century of the Common Era acknowledged that it had prophetic elements.\(^{479}\)

In her article, “Sweet Singer of Israel,” Esther Menn looks at “three not entirely reconcilable depictions of David’s relation to the psalms: as royal sponsor of corporate liturgy, as private man of prayer and praise, and as inspired author of revelatory literature.”\(^{480}\) To some extent each of these is important when considering how the

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\(^*\) See again Ulrich, “Pluriformity in the Biblical Text,” 36. Note also Flint’s words of caution regarding the Psalms as a prophetic book: “Moses—the figure that is pre-eminently associated with the Pentateuch—is also described as a ‘prophet’ in the Torah [Deut 18:18], in the New Testament [Acts 3:22], and by Philo [Mut. 125 and Mos. I 57; ii 2-7], which confirms that the designation was not always applied in a narrow sense” (*Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls*, 219).

\(^*\) Esther M. Menn, “Sweet Singer of Israel: David and the Psalms in Early Judaism,” Pages 61-74 in *Psalms in Community*, at 61. Cooper sees these categories as on the right track but too narrow. He suggests three alternative views of David in the psalms: king of yore, longed-for Messiah, and the “Everyman of the present.” As such, David can “represent the life experiences of any reader who chooses to identify with them” (“On the Typology of Jewish Psalms Interpretation,” 80).
psalms and their putative author were understood in the late Second Temple period, but it is the final one that concerns us here. David is not identified as a prophet in the Hebrew Bible. So the question arises: What happened that precipitated this shift in the last two centuries before the Common Era? It would be easy simply to place the blame for this on the shoulders of the New Testament authors who frequently cite either David or the book of Psalms as prophetic (cf. Mark 12:36-37; John 19:24; Acts 1:16; 2:29-30; 4:25), but as Menn, Kugel, Mays, Gillingham, Daly-Denton, and Reymond show, this is something that arose before the time of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{481}

Drawing from Kugel, Menn argues that this shift can be dated to somewhere between the second century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.\textsuperscript{482} In his many words about David, Ben Sira never refers to David as a prophet (Sir 47:1-11). Yet, about a century later in the Great Psalms Scroll, as we saw above, David’s words are associated with prophecy.\textsuperscript{483} Kugel sees the seeds for this reading already in the Hebrew Bible itself: “[A]lthough the biblical accounts do not specifically designate David as a prophet, a number of late biblical texts open the door, as it were, to this interpretation.”\textsuperscript{484} For

\textsuperscript{481} Menn, “Sweet Singer”; James L. Kugel, “David the Prophet,” Pages 45-55 in Poetry and Prophecy, especially at 45-47; James Luther Mays, “The David of the Psalms,” Interpretation 46 (1992) 143-155; Joseph Fitzmyer, “David ‘Being Therefore a Prophet...’,” CBQ 34 (1972) 332-339; Sue Gillingham, “From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism,” CBQ 64 (2002): 470-489; Margaret Daly-Denton, “David the Psalmist, Inspired Prophet: Jewish Antecedents of a New Testament Datum,” ABR 52 (2004) 32-47. Reymond, New Idioms, 194-198. As Kugel says, “[F]or Christians to assert that this or that Davidic psalm was to be interpreted in terms of the Gospels was ipso facto a claim that David spoke through some form of prophecy, and to assert that he was a prophet was to put him on a par with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel (incidentally, another case of promotion to prophet) and others who had foretold the coming of a Messiah” (“David the Prophet,” 46).

\textsuperscript{482} See Menn, “Sweet Singer,” 69-70.


\textsuperscript{484} Kugel, “David the Prophet,” 47.
example, in 2 Chron 8:14 and Neh 12:24 and 36, David is identified as אִישׁ–הַאֲלָלָהִים (‘man of God’), one of the most common titles for prophets in the Deuteronomistic History (e.g. 1 Sam 2:27; 9:6-10; 1 Kgs 12:22; 13:1-31; 17:18-24; 2 Kgs 4:7-42; 23:6-7). Furthermore, as we saw when looking at Ps 28 and Hab 3 in the earlier chapters, מְשִיחַ almost always refers to the king. In addition to those two examples in which מְשִיחַ is in poetically parallel with YHWH’s people, there is another notable example where in the plural it is paralleled with the prophets. Ps 105:15 says, “Touch not my anointed ones (משיחי), do my prophets (נביאי) no harm!” As Kugel says, David, the Hebrew Bible’s preeminent ‘anointed one,’ might have acquired a quasi-prophetic coloring as the lexical range of this term broadened.

The final promising example from the Hebrew Bible occurs in the preamble to David’s last words in 2 Sam 23:1-7. It is a matter of some debate how this composition along with the one preceding it (2 Sam 22 = Ps 18) came to be in their present positions. In any case, in their final form, these poetic compositions near the end of the books of Samuel serve an important function. As Watts says, “While the psalm emphasizes David’s personal piety and thanksgiving, the Last Words reveal the didactic orientation of a wisdom poem, emphasizing for the Davidic dynasty the necessity of just

485 See Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 28-29 for this and other prophetic titles used throughout the Hebrew Bible.

486 Kugel, “David the Prophet,” 48

487 See, for example, Weitzman, *Song and Story*, 117; Daly-Denton, “David the Psalmist, Inspired Prophet,” 35. As Daly-Denton says here, these chapters (2 Sam 22-23) are “probably a later redactional insertion at the point where the books of Samuel and Kings are separated.”
rule. David is cast as a prophet and singer, a depiction similar to that in Chronicles. It is the language introducing the poem that is distinctively prophetic.

| The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the strong one of Israel (2 Sam 23:1b). | נאם דוד בן-יש לandom הכה élevé על משיח אלהי עק ענום ומרות ישראל |

is well attested throughout the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Gen 22:16; Num 14:28; 1 Sam 2:30; 2 Kgs 9:26; 22:19) with even higher frequency in the prophetic corpus (e.g. Isa 1:24; 3:15; 41:14; 43:10; 59:20; 66:2; Jer 1:8, 15, 19; 2:3, 9, 12 and numerous others). The formula in 2 Sam 23:1 finds its closest parallel, as Kugel notes, in Num 24:3, 15. In this other context, the same expression introduces Balaam’s prophetic words:

Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. Then the spirit of God came upon him, and he uttered his oracle, saying:

“The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is clear,
the oracle of one who hears the words of God,
who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, but with eyes uncovered”

(Num 24:2-4).

In addition to this verbal parallel between Balaam and David, we should also note the prophetic feel of the beginning of David’s last words:


489 Kugel (“David the Prophet,” 48) notes some problems with the traditional translation (“sweet singer/psalmist”) and proposes others: “the hero of the songs of Israel” and, from another study, “the one granted an affirmative omen by the Mighty One of Israel.” See also Menn, “Sweet Singer,” 68 on this same point.

490 Apart from the handful of examples from the narrative books (including the Hebrew Bible’s former prophets here) nearly all of נאם’s 376 occurrences occur in the prophetic books, normally in the expression נאם (“Thus says the Lord” or, more literally, “An oracle of the Lord”).
The Spirit of LORD speaks through me,  
his word is upon my tongue.  
The God of Israel has spoken,  
the Rock of Israel has said to me… (2 Sam 23:2-3a).

David himself confesses that his words are not his own but that the Spirit of the LORD speaks through him, that it is the LORD’s word upon his tongue. Because of this, his words, not only here, but ultimately throughout the whole Psalter, can be seen in a prophetic light. If the LORD speaks through David in the psalms, then their meaning cannot simply end with him or his contemporaries, but extends to all Israel for all time.  

As Kugel concludes,

[T]here can be no doubt that to readers and listeners living at the end of the biblical period, the combination of assertions and epithets, together with David the divine harpist and the double-entendres “David the anointed” and “David the man of God” seen elsewhere in the Bible, must have encouraged, if not led straight to, “David the prophet,” even if this particular phrase is not found in the Hebrew Bible.

This distinctively Jewish backdrop provides a helpful witness if we consider the way David is seen as a prophet in the New Testament and what this ultimately entails about who Jesus is and how, for the evangelists and other NT authors, he relates to the psalms.

\[491\] cf. *Midr. Teh.* 18:1; 4:1; 24:3.

\[492\] Kugel, “David the Prophet,” 48-49.
4.2 Pesher Psalms and Connection to New Testament

The existence of the few extant pesher commentaries on the Psalms found at Qumran likewise testifies to this early understanding of the psalms as prophetic. While most of our knowledge of pesher techniques in the late Second Temple period has grown out of the Habakkuk Pesher (1QpHab), several other biblical books also have pesharim. This method of interpretation, which closely parallels the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the NT, seeks to understand prophetic texts in light of contemporary events and characters without consideration of their original historical contexts. Or, as Lim puts it, “[I]t is that form of exegesis, practised by the Qumran community that identifies events and people in the biblical texts with contemporary historical figures.” VanderKam and Flint link the pesher method to the approach found among fundamentalist modern authors who “assume the prophet was predicting events in the commentator’s time.” Horgan offers a more developed definition when she says that the pesher “is an interpretation made known by God to a selected interpreter of a mystery


495 See George J. Brooke, “Aspects of Matthew’s Use of Scripture in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls.” in A Teacher for all Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam: Volume Two (eds. Eric F. Mason et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 821-838; Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Biblical Exegesis in the Passion Narratives and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” Pages 117-130 in Biblical Interpretation in Judaism and Christianity. Schiffman acknowledges many of the parallels between the pesharim at Qumran and the NT but also draws several careful distinctions between them. He notes that even when the NT quotes from or alludes to a biblical text, it is not a sustained verse-by-verse commentary as are the pesher texts at Qumran.

496 Lim, Pesharim, 13.

497 VanderKam and Flint, Meaning of Dead Sea Scrolls, 222.
revealed by God to the biblical prophet concerning history. In light of the discoveries at Qumran, it is not at all surprising to see the consistent application of the psalms to Christ throughout the New Testament. Both the authors of the texts at Qumran and the New Testament authors were engaging in common interpretive practices, albeit through different lenses.

We have already alluded to the evangelists’ use of the psalms in the context of the practice of using inset hymns and pesher exegesis, both of which were current in the late Second Temple period. The only full inset hymns in the New Testament are actually the canticles of Mary and Zechariah in Luke 1. As both Watts and Weitzman show, it seems that Luke is consciously imitating the books of the Hebrew Bible by mimicking this practice, thus placing the words of what were likely preexisting hymns into the mouths of his speakers. In Jesus’ case, he does not get his own full psalm to pray. Rather, his language often contains vague allusions to the psalms. The association of psalms with Jesus comes to a climax in the passion narratives, both because many details from the psalms, particularly Ps 22, are sprinkled throughout the narrative itself but most importantly because Jesus’ last words from the cross are explicit citations from Pss 22:2

498 Horgan, Pesharim, 229.


500 VanderKam and Flint make the same point specifically with regard to Paul’s interpretation of Scripture: “In the Pauline corpus, as elsewhere in the New Testament, the ways in which Scripture is interpreted remind one of Qumran exegetical methods…. The points being made in Romans and the Qumran commentaries are different, but the technique is the same” (Meaning of Dead Sea Scrolls, 350).

and 31:5 (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46; Luke 23:46).\textsuperscript{502} Just as in the case of inset hymns in the Hebrew Bible, the authors here take preexisting texts and place them in the mouth of the protagonist, giving both the psalm and the story a new point of reference and allowing each to interpret the other. In the case of Ps 22 in the passion narratives, it is so thoroughly woven into the story, that it is impossible to remove it without great violence to the text. In the imagination of the early Church, their reflection on the mystery of Christ became inextricably linked to the words of the psalms. Because of these links, just as with the proto-midrashic exegesis present in the psalm titles, one cannot read one without thinking of the other. Just as a pious Jew cannot read the narrative of 2 Samuel without thinking of Ps 51 and vice versa, so a Christian cannot read the passion narratives without constantly being reminded of Ps 22. And when a Christian opens to Ps 22, she cannot read through it without being transported directly to Golgotha.\textsuperscript{503}

\textsuperscript{502} On which, see Esther Menn’s excellent article, “No Ordinary Lament.”

4.3 Psalmic Literature at Qumran

4.3.1 1QS: The Community Rule

In the first chapter, in the context of Pss 22, 69, and 102, among others, we saw that the sacrifice of praise as the publication of the works of God initially accompanied but then gradually replaced the animal sacrifice prescribed for the Todah offering as in Leviticus 7. This making known of God’s mighty deeds seems to be one of the grounds for seeing the shift between the individual and the communal in the Psalms. In the initial plea for deliverance, the psalmist vows to make God’s act of deliverance known to the congregation. And as we saw in Ps 22 and others, this act of praise is meant to ripple out to the rest of the nation and ultimately to the ends of the earth. It begins through oral recitation but to extend to a “people yet unborn,” it must be written down (Pss 22:32; 102:19). In the same section of the first chapter we also saw the parallels many scholars have noted between thanksgiving inscriptions on steles and thanksgiving psalms. These steles serve as a public witness that makes known the acts of a beneficiary. Thus, for example, King Hezekiah’s prayer, as it is presented in the text, is not spoken. Rather it is introduced in its superscription as a מכתב, or an inscription. The act of writing down what happened in God’s act of deliverance suffices to fulfill one’s vow of praise to

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504 Though the psalms manuscripts from Qumran and all the scholarship they have inspired inform much of the research in these chapters, we will not look here at any of the psalms scrolls themselves. Many of the works already cited (especially Flint, The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms) cover these manuscripts and the important questions they have raised. VanderKam’s observation that, for the Qumran community, the psalms were likely used for “worship, meditation, and proofexting” seems to be accurate and can just as well describe the way believers continue to use the psalms today. See James C. VanderKam, The Dead Sea Scrolls Today, (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 50.

505 See again Childs, “Analysis of a Canonical Formula.”
the community. When, because of the destruction of the temple or the fact of being away from it, animal sacrifices were not possible, the sacrifice of praise became the preeminent way of worshipping God.

One of the first scrolls discovered in 1947, the Rule of the Community or the Manual of Discipline (1QS, 4QS, 5QS), was a sort of constitution for the community at Qumran.\textsuperscript{506} According to VanderKam and Flint’s concise summary, the most complete copy, 1QS, begins with a statement about the nature and purpose of the community (1.1-15), continues with a ritual for entry into the covenant community (1.16-2.18), instructions for the yearly renewal of the covenant (2.19-25), a section on sincere repentance (2.25-3.12), an explanation of the community’s dualistic, predestinarian views (3.13-4.26), regulations for communal organization (5.1-7.25 [including rules for meetings and admission of new members, punishments for breaking rules]), a section regarding the nature of community (8.1-10.5 [going into the wilderness, the community as temple, spiritual sacrifice, duties of the Instructor and times for praise]), and ends with a hymn of praise offered by the Instructor (10.5-11.22).\textsuperscript{507}

The communal and sectarian focus of the whole document makes the first-person singular prayer at the end particularly interesting as we consider the shift between the individual and the communal in the Psalter. Carol Newsom has tried to understand the communal identity of the sect at Qumran in light of the dynamics between the community and the individuals therein.\textsuperscript{508} The Rule of the Community and the Hodayot are the two

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documents from which she draws many of her ideas. In 1QS, she sees a combination of both polemical and non-polemical language whose purpose is to construct, “the identity of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the Yahad’s worldview.”509 Both 1QH and 1QS make use of first person singular prayers similar in many ways to the biblical psalms. Just as in the psalms, the hymns in these documents do not simply articulate the subjective prayers of the community’s leader, even if in a representative way. In their final form, they also articulate something on behalf of the whole community and help to constitute its identity.510 As Newsom says,

The patterns of subjectivity that are established through hodayot511 such as the ones examined here constitute the experience and knowledge of the self required by the disciplines of the Qumran community, especially the disciplines of speech. This is not to make causal claims or functionalist ones but only to recognize that selves and communities are mutually produced through discourse and stand as emblems of one another.512

The hymn at the end of 1QS is relevant to our earlier chapters not only because it relates to the interplay between the identities of an individual praying and his or her community; this may be another instance of a pre-existing hymn attached secondarily the rest of 1QS. By comparing 1QS with the other Rule of the Community scrolls from Cave 4, Metso has been able to reconstruct some aspects of the text’s development. She says,

The final psalm in 1QS with its calendrical section at the beginning had an independent existence before its insertion in the composition. This can be demonstrated with the aid of the material reconstruction of the manuscript 4QS.e,

Discourse,” in Defining Identity: We, You, and the Others in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Eds. Florentino García Martínez and Mladen Popovic; STDJ 70; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 13-21.


510 See Sarianna Metso, Textual Development.

511 The same is true, she would acknowledge, for the concluding hymn of 1QS.

which concluded with a different calendrical text 4QOtot. The manuscript 4QSo shows, in addition, that the calendar of prayer times in 1QS IX.26b-X.8a did not originally belong with the sections addressed to the wise leader (1QS IX.12-26a), but was introduced into the composition together with the psalm. The first sentence at the beginning of the calendrical section (1QS IX.26b-X.1a) functions as a link, and it was presumably created by the compiler.\(^{513}\)

As we saw in chapter 3 when looking at inset psalms, placing the psalm in the broader context of the rest of the Rule allows each to cast light on the other. Both help to form the identity of the yahad, just as the psalms themselves helped to form the identity of Israel as part of the canonical process. As Metso says, “The psalm provides an intimate portrait of Essene piety, which is both humble and celebratory, conscious of profound human sinfulness, but conscious also of the richness of divine mercy and their special chosenness as recipients of heavenly secrets.”\(^{514}\)

In an excursus in chapter 1, we saw how the offering of praise, which would have initially accompanied the thanksgiving offering, gradually came to replace it. There may be further testimony to such a spiritualization of sacrifice in a phrase from the final hymn of 1QS, an expression that also occurs in Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. The speaker, presumably the Instructor, says, “With the offering of lips [תורמת שפתים] I shall bless him, in accordance with the decree recorded for ever…. And in all my existence the precept will be engraved on my tongue to be a fruit of eulogy, and a portion (of offering) of my lips” (1QS X, 6, 8).\(^{515}\) Likewise, shortly before the final prayer, the Rule says, “and prayer rightly offered shall be as an acceptable fragrance of


\(^{514}\) Metso, Serekh Texts, 14.

righteousness, and perfection of way as a delectable free-will offering” (1QS ix 4-5).516

In biblical Hebrew, תרומה occurs most frequently in the Priestly source and in the closely related material in Ezek 40-48 but can be found elsewhere as well.517 From the root רום (“be high, exalted, rise”518), it is normally translated as “offering” (RSV), “contribution” (NAB), or “donation” (NRSV).519 Whatever its theological implications in either biblical Hebrew or Qumran Hebrew, it is certainly associated with sacrifice and may point to the idea that, apart from the Temple and the sacrifices associated with it, prayer can be a legitimate substitute for sacrifice. In discussing this hymn as well as the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, Nitzan notes this on several occasions. As she says regarding the rule quoted just above (1QS ix 4-5), “This rule reflects a religious outlook recognizing the ‘offering (or: “exaltation”) of the lips’ and the ‘perfection of way’—i.e., prayer and punctiliousness in the fulfillment of the commandments—as ways of pleasing God, highly valued as sacrifices for the atonement of sin.”520 And she refers later to “the term ‘offering of lips,’ used in the writings of the Qumran sect to define the blessings offered to God, which are equivalent to sacrificial offerings.”521 Nitzan notes Qimron’s objection to this connotation. He says that תרומה “has the meaning ‘exaltation’ both in


518 *BDB*, 926-928.

519 We would be remiss to neglect all the pleasant connotations of the KJV’s translation of “heave offering.”

520 Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer*, 47 (cf. 60).

ShirShabb and in other Qumran works.”⁵²² He continues, “There is no necessity to explain these phrases theologically—i.e. that what is referred to here is prayers which are a substitute for the offering (תרומות)…. I should rather explain this use of תרומות as having evolved from the meaning ‘to lift (the voice),’ as we find in the word רומם…”⁵²³ Given the meaning and use of תרומות in biblical Hebrew, as well as elements of the spiritualization of sacrifice in the psalms and elsewhere (Pss 50:7-15; 119:108; 141:2; Hos 14:3), it is a bit puzzling why he makes this move. I share Nitzan’s assessment that “this phrase clearly refers to prayer as an equivalent to sacrifice, as is suggested by the context. At most, the term תרומות here is ambiguous, and may be read as both ‘exaltation’ and ‘offering.’”⁵²⁴ By its very nature, the sacrifice of praise, as the publication of the works of God, demands a communal context. Thus, this final hymn, which the compiler of 1QS attached to the rest of the Community Rule, not only gives voice to the Instructor’s words of praise in the context of the yahad, it also gives the yahad its identity as a people dedicated to the praise of God.

4.3.2 1QH: Hodayot or the Thanksgiving Hymns

According to Newsom’s reading, we find a similar interplay between the construction of individual identity and the concerns of the community in 1QH⁵, one of


⁵²³ Qimron, “Review Article,” 356-357.

⁵²⁴ Nitzan, Qumran Prayer, 47, n.1.
the first scrolls to be discovered by Eliezer Sukenik in 1947. Most of the approximately 30 hymns therein begin with the phrase “I thank you, Lord” (אודה אדוני), hence the name of the collection, *hodayot* (הודיות). Since these hymns resemble and draw from the book of Psalms more than from any other book, and since they show a similar movement between the concerns of an unknown individual, perhaps the Teacher of Righteousness, and those of the community, the discussion of the identity of the “I” in these hymns has closely resembled similar discussions in Psalms scholarship to a remarkable degree. The questions surrounding the implied identity of the speaker (Teacher of Righteousness, any given person, the community itself?) and those of the context of the prayers (liturgical or private?) are to a large extent the same.

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Though the hymns are anonymous, the earliest opinion was that the Teacher of Righteousness had composed them. Dupont-Sommer articulates this view well:

To my mind, he unquestionably presents himself in several of the canticles as the leader of the sect of the covenant…. How is it possible to avoid concluding that such a person must be the Teacher of Righteousness himself whom the Damascus Document and the biblical Commentaries from Qumran (notably the Commentary on Habakkuk) present as the founder and lawgiver of the sect, the Prophet par excellence whose tragic destiny and exceptional prestige they describe.

Mansoor notes one of the difficulties of this view, namely that the Teacher of Righteousness “is never mentioned in the Hodayot.” Oddly enough, immediately after this, Mansoor notes J. P. Hyatt’s sensible remarks: “This conjecture is made very plausible if one compares what is said about the Moreh Sedeq [Teacher of Righteousness] in 1QpHab and CD with passages in the Hodayot that are obviously autobiographical.”

Even though the Teacher of Righteousness is not explicitly named, it is precisely the links to his portrayals in these other documents that tipped off scholars to his possible identity as the “I” of the Hodayot.

Similar to the move Smend made vis-à-vis the psalms, Holm-Nielsen seeks to extend the identity of the “I” to the rest of the Qumran community.


530 Mansoor, Thanksgiving Hymns, 45.


532 See Holm-Nielsen, Hodayot, especially at 329-331.
psalms and other prayers in the Hebrew Bible, the people at Qumran could speak the “I” of these prayers as if with one voice. Charlesworth notes a middle position between these two. He says, “It is more probably that the ‘I’ reflects the personal experiences of the Teacher of Righteousness in some hymns but that in other passages it represents the collective consciousness of the Qumran community.” He continues, “This insight was researched by G. Morawe, who showed that the Hodayoth collection contains more than one Gattung and was not composed by one person. This idea was developed by G. Jeremias and P. Schulz with regard to the hymns of the Teacher of Righteousness, and by J. Becker and H.-W. Kuhn with regard to the hymns of the community.” Schuller and Newsom distinguish between the different voices in the “Teacher Hymns” and “Community Hymns” in this way. In the former, “The ‘I’ voice seems very personal and to be speaking of the experience of an individual who was chosen by God to receive special knowledge of divine mysteries, who suffered persecution and opposition, and who served as a medium of revelation for a community.” While in the latter, “The ‘I’ voice speaks less about personal experience and suffering and more about general

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533 Charlesworth, “Jewish Hymns, Odes, and Prayers,” 413. See also J. T. Milik, Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea (Trans. J. Strugnell; SBT 26; London: SCM Press, 1959)


535 Schuller and Newsom, Hodayot, 2.
declarations of the knowledge and salvation received, combined with confession of profound human weakness and sinfulness.”

In her extensive treatment of the Hodayot not merely from a textual or historical perspective, but one that draws freely from critical theory and anthropology, Carol Newsom suggests taking a step back from the many questions surrounding the real or implied author of the hymns. “Ultimately,” she says, “I do not think that the evidence exists either to disprove the hypothesis about the Teacher of Righteousness or to prove the alternative. It is important, however, to loosen the grip that this hypothesis about the Teacher of Righteousness has had on our scholarly imaginations.” She suggests reframing the discussion to look at the Hodayot as prayers that helped to construct the sectarian identity of those in the yahad. Many of the documents at Qumran, particularly the Community Rule, shed light on the self-understanding of the community. If one were able to go back in time, she suggests, to talk with one of the sectarians, one could get a sense of the community’s self-image simply by listening to one of the members speak. She says, “As the sectarian continued to speak, it would become apparent that a distinctive form of self-understanding and distinctive patterns of community were embedded in his language, not only in the direct assertions of his statements but also in his choice of figures of speech, metaphors, and even verbal style.”

Vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and the things we talk about are not universal but particular to

536 Schuller and Newsom, Hodayot, 2.


539 Newsom, Self as Symbolic Space, 91.
communities, and language forms the community just as the community forms language. James Boyd White says, “There is an intimate and necessary connection between the organization of language and the organization of community—between ‘text’ and ‘constitution’—and between both of these and the organization of the individual mind.”

This should be no surprise to Jews and Christians, those whose identity is at least in part formed by a book, which was itself edited and put together by the community. The TaNaK and the Christian Bible continue to shape their respective communities in self-understanding, theological reflection, and perhaps most importantly, liturgical prayer.

Newsom notes the ordinary ways everyday actions such as movement, food, and clothing can shape the identity of a community. She says,

> Persons develop a sense of who they are in many ways. Social norms for bodily practices are one significant means, because of the close identification of a person with his or her body. How one positions and moves the body helps to form a sense of the self in terms of gender, social position, religious identification, and so forth. How one clothes the body and what foods one eats or does not eat—and with whom—join any number of other symbolic practices to construct identity.

The ways a police officer moves around a shopping center are different than one who is simply shopping. The police officer’s speech while in uniform is different than when she is home with her family. Likewise, the foods we eat often distinguish us from other groups. This is true at a natural level and also at a religious one, if we consider Jewish dietary laws ( anus) or the Catholic practice of abstaining from meat on Lenten Fridays and the traditional “Fish Fry” gatherings that occur as a result. A vegan is not merely one who avoids animal products but is implicitly part of a larger community of vegans who

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541 Newsom, *Self as Symbolic Space*, 92-93.
share a similar mindset. As important and indispensible as these many physical and nonverbal practices are in the construction of identities, Newsom says,

[L]anguage takes pride of place among the symbolic tools for the fashioning of selves and worlds. The terms used to refer to self and others, the vocabulary of insult and praise, the words that locate a person in relation to a larger community, those that articulate aspirations or fears, the little narratives that connect events in meaningful sequences and construct possible futures all work together to create a richly textured world in which the person locates him or herself. Such discourses that shape self and world are not developed in isolation but are fundamentally social practices.

For Newsom, the *Hodayot*, along with the *Community Rule*, are the preeminent means of expressing the sectarian identity of those at Qumran, not only in the so-called Community Hymns, but especially in the hymns of the unnamed individual, whether or not this was the Teacher of Righteousness.

As in the psalms, the *Hodayot* are literary compositions, not spontaneous or extemporaneous outpourings of praise. Also similar to the psalms, the first-person style of the *Hodayot* “facilitates the identification of the reader or hearer with the subjectivity constructed in the text because it blurs the distinction between the speaking subject who actually produces the speech, the subject of speech produced within the discourse, and the spoken subject who ‘agrees’ to be signified by the discourse.” Because of this, Newsom says, the “I” of the *Hodayot* “is an unstable construction that defies representation as a unitary consciousness.” The very nature of the poems in their sectarian and communal context destabilizes the self that prays them. Newsom is aware

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542 i.e. Portland, OR.

543 Newsom, *Self as Symbolic Space*, 93.


of the potentially problematic application of postmodern categories onto ancient authors, but her point is compelling nonetheless. The consciousness of the “I” becomes a “decentered self.” She says,

> In a way that is far more radical than what one finds in the Psalms the initial impression of the speaking subject as a coherent source of experience, meaning, and expression is progressively dismantled. Knowledge and discourse are finally validated, not by the reconstitution of a unified self but precisely by the sacrifice of such a self.  

From this perspective, the *Hodayot* are not simply the prayers of an unnamed individual, whether the Teacher of Righteousness himself or simply a liturgical leader, but are constitutive for the self-understanding of the whole sectarian community. Newsom’s use of critical theory, linguistics, and anthropology in approaching the *Hodayot* and the *Community Rule* are anomalous in the field of Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship. Nevertheless, they are a welcome addition to the other strictly historical treatments of these documents and can help us understand the community in new ways. Her insights here are also relevant as we glance back at the many psalms of the individual and the shifts to a communal focus within them. Perhaps we have been too focused on historical questions about the real or implied author(s) of the psalms and not enough on how the psalms have shaped and continue to shape the self-understanding of the communities that pray them.

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546 “I certainly would not want to say that the authors of the Hodayot were proto-postmodern deconstructionists…” (Newsom, “The Case of the Blinking I,” 16). Or perhaps she would.

4.4 Midrash Tehillim

When discussing the relationship between the individual and the community in the Psalms from a Jewish perspective, it is common to refer to one of three similar passages in Midrash Tehillim. At the very beginning of his book on the Psalms, Sarna cites one of these: “Said Rabbi Yudan in the name of Rabbi Judah, ‘Whatever David says in his book pertains to himself, to all Israel, and to all times.’”\(^{548}\) The same idea is set forth as a dialogue between rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud:\(^{549}\)

The rabbis taught: (The following is valid for) all the songs and praises that David announced in the Book of Psalms:

Rabbi Eliezer says: He said them of himself.

Rabbi Joshua says: He said them of community.

And the wise say: Some of them he said of community, some others of himself.

Those which he formulated in the singular, he said of himself; those which he formulated in the plural, he said of community.\(^{550}\)

Even though the tradition of Davidic authorship was strong in Rabbinic Judaism just as it was in early Christianity, the rabbis were sensitive readers and recognized the frequent shifts between individual and communal voices and concerns. As Sarna says in response to the passage cited above,

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\(^{549}\) bPes 117a.

\(^{550}\) As translated in Marttila, *Collective Reinterpretation*, 2.
What this astute observation about the Psalter conveys is that each psalm is multifaceted; it yields several levels of interpretation. It may be understood as a personal statement, as a manifestation of the soul-life of an individual, or it may be construed as an expression of the concerns and the life of faith of the entire community.\footnote{551 Sarna, \textit{Songs of the Heart}, 4.}

In the first chapter we looked at the shift between the individual and the community in the Psalms’ original context or at least in the context of their final redaction. What Sarna’s statement points to is that each psalm, even the most personal, is also part of Israel’s communal expression of faith. As Maurice Samuel says,

\begin{quote}
What is characteristic of the psalms—of those attributed directly to David, and those not attributed to him at all—is that the individual very often changes places with the community, and you can’t tell whether it is a man who is offering up a prayer, or whether it is a communal prayer. This is characteristic of Jewish worship generally, by the way, in which the individual as a rule is certainly not eclipsed, but made to mingle with the congregation. That is, the congregation carries him, and he carries the congregation.\footnote{552 Mark Van Doren and Maurice Samuel, \textit{The Book of Praise: Dialogues on the Psalms} (ed. Edith Samuel; New York: John Day, 1975), 40.}
\end{quote}

What was true for David as the traditional author of the psalms is now true for any member of a congregation who now prays them. Their “I” is now fluid. “The people of Israel and David become fused…. In other words, this man speaks for himself, and by the \textit{intensity} of his concentration on his own problems, becomes an utterance for his people, and—as it has turned out—for the whole of the Western world.”\footnote{553 Samuel, \textit{Book of Praise}, 51. See also Rowley, \textit{The Faith of Israel}, 100-102.}
CHAPTER 5:
CONCLUSION

5.1 The State of the Field and Future Directions

As I sat in the library at Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem nearly finished with Chapter 2, which is in many ways the center of gravity of this dissertation, I came across Walter Brueggemann’s review of the published version of Gunild Brunert’s dissertation, which was helpful for looking at Ps 102 and its location in the Psalter.554 This review was an occasion for a major “aha moment,” or to use St. James’ example, was like looking in a mirror (James 1:23-24). Toward the end of what was largely a positive review, his apparent confusion about Brunert’s gender notwithstanding, Brueggemann offers four modest criticisms, all of which I suspect can be applied to this project as well. He first says that her study is “unnecessarily repetitious.” Since a major reason for this is simply that this falls into the genre of dissertation, “[p]erhaps it is time to reconsider the genre of dissertation, especially of a German variety, which because of genre, at times must labor what in effect has become obvious.”555

Brueggemann’s second point is that, “if the poetic ‘speaker’ [of the psalms] can be as subjective and inventive as Brunert rightly allows, can the outcome of a poem be so

554 Gunild Brunert, Psalm 102 im Context des vierten Psalmenbuches (SBB 30; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997).

rigorously tied to conventional form-critical dissection?"556 This is a difficult question to raise, because Psalms scholarship since Gunkel has been almost thoroughly tied up in form-critical distinctions, which at one level are so important but on another inadequate. Brueggemann asks,

Is it necessary that the “original” should be lament to which praise is added? There is nothing that supports such a judgment except conventional assumptions of genre. Could not the original piece have aimed precisely at the juxtaposition of lament and praise? This is a point at which we may usefully reconsider older methods, as our more recent sense of the text as a creative act might indeed permit holding together what older methods have endlessly rent asunder.557

Brueggemann’s penetrating questions here are not an indictment of Brunert as much as they are a call for all scholars to reassess our presuppositions and methods during a paradigm shift in the field.

Brueggemann’s third critique is related to the tension between giving full weight to the text’s final form and making conjectures about the text’s prehistory. Is not this also at the heart of the many 19th and 20th century debates about the documentary hypothesis? Yes, of course the hypothesis is indispensable for seeing the many sources within the text and for speculating about how, when, and why a late editor brought them together. Yet at the end of the day, we have in our hands not various sources but a text that demands to be read as it stands, however messy may have been the process of its composition and editing. As Brueggemann says of Brunert, I confess that my procedure here “constitutes an embrace of new method and perspective, accompanied by an uncertainty or timidity about relinquishing older methods.”558 This tension between older

556 Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 114.
557 Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 114.
558 Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 115.
and newer methods, not only in biblical studies, but also in scientific ones, is one it seems we will always have with us. It is enough, I think, to continue to be aware of it, and, in this case, to offer some speculations on the text’s prehistory and also read the text in its final form.

Brueggemann’s fourth point, related to the last one, is about the “whole approach of holistic, canonical interpretation.” As he says, Brunert’s work is a witness to a new approach to studying the psalms that has developed in the past three decades. Because of this, as Brueggemann himself acknowledges, his criticisms here are not simply directed at Brunert and her work, nor can I simply apply them to my own work. Brueggemann’s questions lay bare “the mix of assumptions now operative in the field.”

None of this is meant to be an act of self-deprecation or to negate or downplay any of the research that went into this. It is important, however, to take a step back and look at how much psalms scholarship has shifted in the past generation and to wonder might be next as the field continues to evolve. In his article, “Patristic Interpretations of the Composition of the Psalter,” Matthias Henze raises an important related question: “In the eyes of the Fathers, is the biblical Psalter a contingent collection of individual psalms whose order is for the most part arbitrary and remains obscure, or is there a structural and hence theological coherence to the arrangement of the psalms which gives meaning both to the Psalter as a whole and to the individual psalms by virtue of the place they have within that composition?”

To answer this, he looks at how Augustine, Diodore, and

559 Brueggemann, review of Brunert, 115.

Gregory of Nyssa address this topic in their respective commentaries on the Psalms.

Toward the end of the article he makes an interesting observation: “In the case of the renewed interest in the composition of the Psalter all the attention is focused on the ‘final form’ of the text, while little if any interest is given to the reception history of the psalms.” If, as Brian E. Daley notes, “Patristic exegesis has become almost fashionable again,” why have so few biblical scholars attempted to make a connection between the canonical shaping of the text and its reception history? Given that the very editing and shaping of biblical books is part of the text’s reception history, these are in fact inextricably linked, and the study of each can inform the other. If we take anything from the first chapter about scribal culture and the formation of the Psalter, it should be that the lines between the biblical texts themselves and their reception history is blurred if not erased entirely. Perhaps one of the next shifts in the field will involve a reappraisal of Patristic and Rabbinic readings of the psalms to see what light these can shed on dynamics already present in the psalms in nuce.

561 Henze, “Patristic Interpretations,” 146.


5.2 Who Am I

It should be clear by now that it is long past the time to move beyond the merely historical questions about the identity of the “I” in the psalms. Many scholars have begun to do this already.\(^565\) This requires branching out from the study of the psalms themselves to anthropology, philosophy, and even politics. As Cottrill says, “Individuals do not create their identities \textit{ex nihilo}. Identity-making is a culturally embedded activity, and identity-shaping languages are culturally specific.”\(^566\) To see the psalms as identity-making texts, it is first necessary to be self-reflective enough to articulate at least \textit{an} understanding of the self that predominates in the contemporary Western world. As Di Vito says, “Only by explicitly articulating what is involved in the modern construction of personal identity, with its commitment to a language of the self, can scholars place the OT’s construction in a proper historical perspective and see clearly the distance that separates the two.”\(^567\) Anthropologist Clifford Geertz offers one such account:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness,

\(^{564}\) Even though the new film adaptation of \textit{Les Misérables}, directed by Tom Hooper, is due to come out next month (December, 2012), no reference to Jean Valjean should be inferred by this question.


\(^{566}\) Cottrill, \textit{Language, Power and Identity}, 2.

emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures.\textsuperscript{568}

A quick glance at Apple’s many “i” products (e.g. iPod, iPad, iPhone, etc.) provides one of many confirmations of the distinctly Western individualistic notion of the self. From time to time one even hears assertions of individual rights in political contexts. Consider the examples of gun control, abortion, universal health care, freedom of conscience, the legalization of recreational drugs, and taxation. Those on all sides of the political spectrum invoke individual rights, often in explicit contrast to any notion of the common or collective good. Yet as Di Vito says, “Over against the relative atomism, self-sufficiency, and disengagement of the modern self—which demands recognition as an individual even in the context of family—the ancient Israelite stands at the center of ever-widening circles or relation defined by kinship, beginning with the ‘family.’”\textsuperscript{569}

The one who enters into the world of the Psalter begins to encounter this other context of selfhood. It might be tempting for a modern reader to assume without critical assessment that the psalmist’s “I” is roughly equivalent to our modern conceptions of “I.” Perhaps such a naïve assessment may also lend credibility to certain strains of religion that are distinctively modern creations (“Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?”). For such Christians, salvation is merely a personal reality. For these, salvation is a reality for the individual \textit{as} individual, perhaps even apart from any

\textsuperscript{568} Clifford Geertz, \textit{Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology} (New York: Basic, 1983), 59.

\textsuperscript{569} Di Vito, “Construction of Personal Identity,” 221. See again the example of Tobit’s social circles in Chapter 3.
believing community. In light of the preceding chapters, one cannot enter into the “I” of the psalms and remain comfortable with the Western conception of self as articulated by Geertz and Di Vito above. The movement within the Psalter pulls one out of isolation and the despair that comes from it into the context of a congregation, a nation, and ultimately to the ends of the earth.

The Psalter contain deeply personal prayers, which, if read in a certain way, might make us feel like we were reading someone’s diary or prayer journal. Yet the psalms were never private even if they are always personal.\textsuperscript{570} Remember that these are not simply spontaneous prayers but carefully crafted scribal and liturgical compositions designed to be recited, memorized, prayed, and studied. The very fact that the psalms were copied and recopied, edited, and appropriated from one generation to the next is itself a communal act.\textsuperscript{571} Each psalm of the individual has become part of Israel’s prayer book, and the “I”s therein became ever more expansive. As David Ford puts it so beautifully,

\begin{quote}
[O]f course individual worshippers have always identified with this ‘I’ in most diverse ways. So the Psalmist’s ‘I’ accommodates a vast congregation of individuals and groups down the centuries and around the world today. They are all somehow embraced in this ‘I’. A vast array of stories, situations, sufferings, blessings, joys and deaths have been read and prayed into the Psalms by those who have identified with their first person. It amounts to an extraordinarily capacious and hospitable ‘I’…. The liturgical ‘I’ suggests a concept of selfhood, in line with earlier chapters, which does not simply see itself as separate from all other selves and groups worshipping through the same liturgy or the Psalms.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{570} Many thanks to John Cavadini who raised the important question about whether there can even be such a thing as purely private poetry (especially one that is alliterative at the same time). Perhaps this would be akin to a private language, something that might exist in theory but which would have no practical use.

\textsuperscript{571} Van der Toorn says that for much used books, such as Deuteronomy (and would also be true for the book of Psalms), a new master copy would have to be prepared “every forty years or so” (\textit{Scribal Culture}, 149).
Seeing oneself as one among the many who indwell the Psalms by singing them encourages one to consider how the others might be related to oneself. To see (in the flesh or in imagination) the faces of others who receive and perform their identity through singing the Psalms can lead along the path I have followed through a hospitable self, rejecting idolatries, to a worshipping self for whom the orientation to the face of God and the face of other people is primary.\(^{572}\)

Note all the experiences he says can be “read and prayed into the Psalms.” The depth of prayer, feeling, and insight into the psalmist’s relationship with God in the context of community is enough to bear the weight of all the experiences of “the community of God’s people from Abraham to the last Christian saint.”\(^{573}\) His ‘I’ is “capacious and hospitable.” And perhaps most importantly, he notes how the liturgical ‘I’ subverts the very Western notion of self as articulated above. In the liturgical enactment of the psalms one cannot help but see oneself in relation to others, even if only in the imagination (e.g. one who prays the breviary privately). To join in this communal prayer is to enter a process of reorientation “through a hospitable self, rejecting idolatries, to a worshipping self for whom the orientation to the face of God and the face of other people is primary.” Is not this the movement of nearly all the psalms of lament? The psalmist who begins in isolation and despair experiences in some way God’s salvation and then offers thanksgiving among the congregation. One moves from preoccupation with the self and its troubles, albeit real and pressing, to a focus on God and others.


5.3 Psalms as Word of God

Though they mean different things by it, both Jews and Christians regard their respective versions of the Bible as the revelation or Word of God. The process of the Bible’s composition, editing, compilation, and ultimately canonization was without a doubt a complicated one and something we will not ever fully understand.\textsuperscript{574} Even so, the two communities born of Second Temple Judaism continue to speak of the Bible as a divine revelation. It is a bit unusual that, sandwiched within this book, is a book of prayers to God. How are we to understand this? Should the psalms be considered a revelation from God as well, or should we simply take them for what they are, a human collection of prayers that have arisen out of the people of God?

Sarna approaches this question by seeing the Psalms as the human response to God’s initiative through the Law and the Prophets. He says,

\begin{quote}
In the Law and the Prophets, God reaches out to man. The initiative is His. The message is His. He communicates, we receive…. In the Psalms, human beings reach out to God. The initiative is human. The language is human. We make an effort to communicate. He receives; He chooses to respond or not, according to His inscrutable wisdom. He gives his assent or withholds it.\textsuperscript{575}
\end{quote}

Given the five-book structure of the Book of Psalms, this seems to be a reasonable way of understanding it, as a response to God’s revelation in the five-book Torah. In the midrash to Ps 1, the rabbis already begin to draw up a list of comparisons between Moses and David: “You find that whatever Moses did, David did…. As Moses gave five books

\textsuperscript{574} See, for example, Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., \textit{The Canon Debate} (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).

\textsuperscript{575} Sarna, \textit{Songs of the Heart}, 3.
of laws to Israel, so David gave five Books of Psalms to Israel.”\(^{576}\) Torah is not a major focus in the Psalter, to be sure, but the fact that a late editor of the collection placed Ps 1 at the head of the collection, along with its five-book structure, make this later view plausible. Thus in this view, the Psalms can be seen either as a response to Torah or as another Torah.

From a Christian perspective, 20\(^{th}\) century Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer begins his reflections on the psalms with a phrase from the Gospels: “Lord, teach us to pray!” (11:1).\(^{577}\) As he says, “The disciples want to pray, but they do not know how they should do it. It can become a great torment to want to speak with God and not to be able to do it—having to be speechless before God, sensing that every cry remains enclosed within one’s own self, that heart and mouth speak a perverse language which God does not want to hear.”\(^{578}\) For Bonhoeffer, as for the disciples, Christ is the one who teaches us to pray. In the immediate context of Luke’s Gospel, in contrast to the parallel passage in Matthew 6:9, Jesus’ giving of the “Lord’s Prayer” is a response to the request “Teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1). Jesus gives us not only the Lord’s Prayer but also a unique way of accessing the Psalms, the prayerbook of the Bible.

The psalms are obviously a collection of human prayers to God. In what sense can Christians then speak of them as something God has revealed? Bonhoeffer offers an analogy based on a parent and a child. He says, “The child learns to speak because the


\(^{577}\) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together; Prayerbook of the Bible (ed. Geffrey B. Kelly; trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 155

\(^{578}\) Bonhoeffer, Prayerbook of the Bible, 155.
parent speaks to the child. The child learns the language of the parent. So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken and speaks to us. In the language of the Father in heaven God’s children learn to speak with God. Repeating God’s own words, we begin to pray to God.”

Because Jesus Christ prays the Psalms, they have become the preeminent place where we can meet God in prayer. He continues, “Jesus Christ has brought before God every need, every joy, every thanksgiving, and every hope of humankind. In Jesus’ mouth the human word becomes God’s Word. When we pray along with the prayer of Christ, God’s Word becomes again a human word.”

For Bonhoeffer, the book of Psalms is the text, which, like Jesus himself and like the ladder in Jacob’s vision, is a mediator between God and humankind (cf. 1 Tim 2:5; Gen 28:10-17; John 1:51). To see as Israel (Jacob) sees is to see the face of God (cf. Gen 32:30; 33:10; Ps 24:6). To enter into the “I” of the Psalms demands turning from a narrow self-centered understanding of oneself, as Ford says, and moving from selfishness to a “hospitable self” and to a “worshipping self for whom the orientation to the face of God and the face of other people is primary.”

This Fall is the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. Nostra Aetate, particularly section 4, was an occasion for the Church to reflect anew on her relationship with the Jewish people. The steps forward in Jewish-Christian dialogue since then have been unprecedented in the history of these two peoples. One of the places where Jewish and Christian interaction is most apparent, even though it is often

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579 Bonhoeffer, Prayerbook of the Bible, 156.


overlooked, is precisely in biblical studies and Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship. Ever since 70 B.C.E. Judaism and Christianity have grown away from each other in divergent traditions, liturgical celebrations, and self-understanding. As we seek anew reconciliation and friendship, I hope it is a consolation that we continue to share the same book of prayers, even while we understand it sometimes in divergent ways. The various reconciliations in the book of Genesis have often provided images that facilitate our own attempts at reconciliation, particularly that of Jacob with Esau and Joseph with his brothers. As we pray the words of the Psalms, whether together or in our respective congregations, let us hope that Jacob’s words to Esau can be ours as well: “For truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor” (Gen 33:10).


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