ABSTRACT

The Psalms of Asaph: A Study of the Function of a Psalm Collection

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the collection of psalms containing the superscription *l^e āsāph*, the Asaph Psalms (Pss 50; 73–83), to understand the messages communicated through it, and to explore the unique contribution the collection makes to the Psalter as a whole. In light of my canonical approach, I will pay attention to issues of placement and arrangement, both of the psalms within the collection and the collection within the Psalter. I also give attention to the influence that the placement of psalms and presence of thematic links between psalms has upon the careful reader of the text. The study begins with a history of scholarship that includes the works of Franz Delitzsch, Harry Nasuti, and Michael Goulder, among others, as they pertain to the study of the Asaph collection and the works of Gerald Wilson and Clint McCann who espouse a canonical reading of the Psalter. I next examine the collection itself with an exegetical reading of each psalm of the collection. In addition, I examine the placement of Psalm 50, which is the only Asaphite psalm outside of the collection. The fact that the psalms within the collection are also within the group of psalms called the Elohistic Psalter deserves attention and is addressed in the discussion of Psalm 50. I then discuss the

numerous linguistic and thematic links that occur throughout the collection in an effort to better understand the message of the collection. Lastly, I move toward understanding the role of the collection in the Psalter. My research tests the thesis that the Psalms of Asaph as a collection guide the reader through the turmoil experienced by the people as a result of the exile.

The Psalms of Asaph: A Study of the Function of a Psalm Collection

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentary Series
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford, 1907
Bib	*Biblica*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentary
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford 1910.
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*

JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*
NIBC	New Interpreter's Bible Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Studies Dissertation Series
Sem	*Semeia*
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I complete this project, I am increasingly aware of the many people who have helped me along the way. To them I offer sincere gratitude; I am humbled by your assistance. First, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. To Dr. Bill Bellinger, my advisor on this project, I am especially grateful for your guidance and constructive feedback on this dissertation. During my years as your graduate assistant, I learned much from you about becoming a teacher-scholar, lessons I am trying to put into practice now that I am a professor. Thank you for giving me the assignment of researching psalms as it was through that research that the idea for this project was born. To Drs. Joel Burnett, Jon Singletary, and Dennis Tucker, thank you for your time, insight, and encouragement. I am honored by your participation in this endeavor.

Second, to my colleagues at Carson-Newman College, thank you for allowing me the time and space to complete my dissertation in a timely fashion. Your listening ears and encouraging words have helped tremendously.

Third, to my many friends and family who helped in ways too countless to number in this short space, I could not have done this without your help along the way.

Most importantly, I thank my husband Greg, and daughters Bethany and Kathryn. You have endured so much to allow me to see this day. I thank you and love you.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The study of the Hebrew Bible through the lens of canonical criticism has become increasingly prevalent among scholars and its application to the Psalter has yielded many insights. Gerald Wilson, Clint McCann and others have begun the task of studying the Psalter as a whole and have even narrowed the study to the individual books of the Hebrew Psalter. The canonical study of individual collections has been called for by Wilson,[1] but few have moved in that direction. An in-depth study of the smaller collections can serve to enhance our understanding of the whole.

Purpose and Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine one such collection, the Asaph Psalms (Pss 50; 73–83), to understand the messages communicated through it, and to explore the unique contribution the collection makes to the Psalter as a whole. I will first examine the collection on its own and then move to understanding the role of the collection in the Psalter.[2] In addition, I will examine the placement of Psalm 50, which is the only Asaphite psalm outside of the collection.[3] The fact that the psalms within the

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[1] Gerald Wilson, "Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of the Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 42–51.

[2] Alastair G. Hunter has taken a similar approach to the psalm collection known as 'Psalms of Ascent.' His goal is to "free the psalms to speak for themselves – to read them, in short, within their own frame." He begins by looking at the evidence for their coherence as a group, then gives a brief discussion of each psalm, and ends by looking at the collection as a whole (*Psalms* [London: Routledge, 1999], 175). I go further by understanding the function of the collection within the Hebrew Psalter as a whole. Robert L. Cole looks at the parallelism within the individual psalms of Book III, the Asaph and Korah collections

collection are also within the group of psalms called the Elohistic Psalter deserves

attention and will be addressed in the discussion of Psalm 50. My research will test the

thesis that the Psalms of Asaph as a collection guide the reader through the turmoil

experienced by the people as a result of the exile.

The first task will be to examine the collection itself. This examination will

necessarily involve an overview of the history of scholarly discourse regarding the

collection. Before the mid-nineteenth century and the work of Franz Delitzsch[4], little

attention was paid the collection as a group. Since Delitzsch, several have attempted to

understand the collection through various interpretive lenses.[5] More recently the works

of Harry Nasuti[6] and Michael Goulder[7] have approached the collection through the

lenses of tradition history. This scholarship has been beneficial in pointing out

numerous linguistic and thematic connections between the psalms within the group. I

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and the entirety of Book III, utilizing rhetorical criticism (*The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73–89)* [JSOTSup 307; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000]).

[3] See Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger (*Die Psalmen 1–50* [NEchtB 29; Würzburg: Ecter Verlag, 1993]; *Psalmen 51–100* [HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2000]; *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005])) and C. Rösel (*Die Messianische Redaktion des Psalters: Studien zu Entstehung und Theologie der Sammlung 2–89* [Stuttgart: Cawler, 1999]) who focus on the placement of Psalm 50 and the Asaph collection (Pss 73–83) in relation to the development of the Elohistic Psalter.

[4] Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (3 vols.; 2d ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871). The discussion regarding the Psalms of Asaph can be found in *Psalms, II*, 140–43.

[5] Much of the work in this area has focused on authorship, date, or origin as they relate to the individual psalms within the collection, (Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* [Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 2/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926]; and Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien* [Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1961] or to the authorship or origin of the collection as a whole (Ivan Engnell, "The Book of Psalms" in *A Rigid Scrutiny* [trans. John T. Willis; Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1969]; and Martin Buss, "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah," *JBL* 82 [1963]: 387–92.).

[6] Harry Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph* (SBLDS 88; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1988).

[7] Michael Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter II* (JSOTSup 288; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) and "Asaph's History of Israel," *JSOT* 65 (1995): 71–81.

propose that the connections do more than provide hints about the history of the writing and collecting of these psalms. I propose that the connections work together to communicate a message to the reader of the collection.[8] To this end, I will undertake an exegetical study of the collection in which the psalms will be addressed individually, but with attention given to how their placement influences the reader. After the individual psalms are addressed, I will address the shared linguistic and thematic elements of the collection.

Next, I will ask what implications the arrangement of the psalms with these shared linguistic and thematic elements has upon the message of the collection and upon the reading of the Psalter as a whole. The current project assumes that the Psalter is a cohesive collection of psalms, a collection which was purposefully edited.[9] Thus, the placement of the collection at the beginning of Book III influences the reading of Book III and the Psalter as a whole. Additionally, placement of the collection after Book II will be considered.

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[8] I will be following the approach of Wolfgang Iser, who understands the reading process as a dynamic interaction between the text and reader (*The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* [Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978]). For an example of this approach see W. H. Bellinger Jr., *A Hermeneutic of Curiosity and Readings of Psalm 61* (SOTI; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995.), 89–107.

[9] The Psalter as a whole was purposefully edited (Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* [SBLDS, 76; Chico, Ca: Scholar's Press, 1985] and "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms" in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* [ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993] 72–82), which influences the reader, thus the reader is able to gain a cohesive understanding of the text. See also, Nancy deClaissé-Walford, *Reading From the Beginning* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997). For a concise outline of recent scholarship on the composition of the Psalter, including the belief that the composition is not random, see Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.

Methodology

The present study will analyze the Asaphite collection using various methods. This project is primarily canonical in its approach. Consequently, all of the methodological tools are utilized in order to read the Psalms together and within the larger context of the Hebrew Bible. I will first focus on reading the psalms of the collection; then I will read the collection within its canonical placement as it stands within the Hebrew Psalter as a whole.

I will study the Asaph collection with attention to linguistic similarities as well as thematic links. Linguistic and thematic similarities abound in the collection and provide a sense of unity to the collection. Previous scholars have sifted through much of this information in an effort to understand the author(s) of the collection, the setting of the writing/recitation, or the history of the collecting of various psalms into the Asaph collection. As a result of their purposes, these scholars have focused only on the aspects that are unique to this collection, thus if a theme or linguistic link occurs elsewhere in the Psalter, it is not useful in the study of the collection. My research will not discount such occurrences, but will study the unique aspects as well as those more common in an effort to understand this collection's place within the Psalter. My research will point to the linguistic and thematic links as evidence that the specific placement of these psalms in relation to one another and to other psalms in Books II and III was purposeful. The thematic links also give hints regarding what that purpose was.

One important aspect of the project will be the impact of linguistic and thematic links and arrangement upon the reader. By reader, I assume a knowledgeable, careful reader of the text. The reader I have in mind lived during or shortly after the exile and

was deeply influenced and concerned about the fate of Judah. It is in the interaction between text and reader that communication occurs, thus a major question of the project is "What message is being communicated?"

Overview of Chapters

The first chapter provides an introduction to the project. The introduction presents the thesis that the Psalms of Asaph were collected as a guide to aid the faithful through the topsy-turvy reality in which they found themselves. It will also present the methodology utilized throughout the study.

The second chapter will explore the history of scholarship regarding the Psalms of Asaph and the use of canonical criticism in the Psalms. The history of scholarship will include the works of Delitzsch, Nasuti, Goulder, and others as they pertain to the Asaphite collection and the works of Wilson and McCann as they pertain to the canonical approach to the Psalter. This chapter provides the necessary background for understanding the contributions of previous scholarship and how previous approaches to the collections differ from the current approach, which has been inspired by canonical approaches to the Psalter.

The third chapter includes an exegetical study of Psalms 73–83. The study will utilize a variety of critical tools (i.e., form criticism), but will pay careful attention to the influence that placement of the psalms has upon the reader. For instance, what impact does the reading of Psalm 78 followed by Psalm 79 have upon the reader, rather than considering Psalm 78 alone?   Chapter four will include a similar exegetical study of Psalm 50 followed by an examination of the placement and role of Psalm 50. Additionally, the location of the collection within the Elohistic Psalter will be discussed,

especially as it pertains to the placement of Psalm 50. Both chapters three and four demonstrate the utilization of the canonical approach within the study of this collection.

The fifth chapter will then examine the internal linguistic and thematic connections that exist. The connections communicate messages to the reader as they are repeated at various points throughout the collection. This chapter illustrates the dynamic interaction between text and reader. The sixth chapter draws conclusions about the arrangement of the collection and the messages communicated by it. It also includes a discussion about the influence of the collection upon the reading of the Psalter as a whole. What role does this small collection play in respect to the whole?

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the results of the project.

CHAPTER TWO

History of Scholarship

The book of Psalms has been studied throughout the centuries for many reasons. The book itself is the largest in the Hebrew Bible with 150 psalms, and though the book contains many themes present in other parts of the Hebrew Bible (attention to law, common historical references, and personas, etc.), its poetic nature portrays these in a new way. The psalms within, meanwhile, are clearly not in chronological order and are not grouped according to genre. Authorship is difficult to ascertain even in cases when a title is present. Despite the difficult nature of the make-up of the book, countless faithful people have recited its contents for centuries. In times of woe and in times of joy the words of the psalmists resonate with those who read and recite the psalms.

How then should one understand the Psalms? Is the book a disparate collection of psalms preserved because of their meaningfulness and best understood individually? For centuries scholars have taken such an approach. That approach has been challenged by recent scholarship, which recognizes an overarching organization to the Hebrew Psalter. The work of Gerald Wilson and others has sought to identify the traits that highlight the possibility that there was purposeful arrangement of the Psalms. Scholars have undertaken this work on the level of the book as a whole and also within smaller groups or collections of psalms.

The present work will focus such efforts at understanding the purposeful arrangement within smaller groups on one specific collection of psalms, the Psalms of

Asaph, by examining the collection and exploring the unique contribution the collection makes to Book III of the Psalter and to the Psalter as a whole. My research will also test the thesis that the purpose of the Psalms of Asaph as a collection is to guide the reader through the turmoil Book III articulates. Before entering into a discussion about the possibility of purposeful arrangement of this collection, it is necessary to present a history of the important scholarship that focuses on the collection as a unit. This chapter will highlight the work of Franz Delitzsch regarding the unity of the Asaphite collection, the work of Harry Nasuti regarding the origin of the collection, and the work of Michael Goulder regarding the origins and the liturgical situation in which the collection belongs. In light of their targeted work on the Asaph Psalms and their influence on the work of Nasuti and Goulder, the work of Martin Buss, Ivan Engnell, and Karl-Johan Illman will be discussed. The work of David Mitchell is the most recent that targets the Asaph collection and will be overviewed especially because of his attention to purposeful editing. In light of the attempt to identify purposeful arrangement in the collection, it will also be necessary to overview the scholarship of Gerald Wilson regarding the shaping of the Psalter and the work of J. Clinton McCann, Jr., as he applies the canonical method to smaller collections, namely Book III.

Scholarship Relating to the Asaph Collection

Franz Delitzsch

We will begin the discussion of the history of scholarship with the work of Delitzsch. His three volume commentary on the Psalms was first published in 1859–60 with three subsequent editions, the last being published in 1883. Delitzsch begins his

commentary with a discussion of the history of psalm composition. David receives

much credit as the divinely inspired poet and musician who not only wrote psalms

himself, but also appointed four thousand Levites to officiate as singers and players

during worship. Over this levitical group, three chief musicians were appointed; Asaph,

Heman, and Ethan.[1] Psalm composition and use in worship saw its height during the

reign of David, its decline from the time of Solomon, and brief revivals during the reigns

of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah. These revivals not only saw an increase in psalm usage,

but also the creation of new psalms, found mainly in the Asaphic and Korahitic

collections. It was not until after the exile that there was again creation of new psalms.[2]

Delitzsch concludes that "the time of David gave birth to psalmody, and the Exile awoke

it from the dormant condition into which it had fallen."[3]

In regard to the collecting of psalms, Delitzsch asserts that the Psalter was a

whole, divided into five books by the time of the Chronicler. This collection, however,

continued to undergo redaction and interpolation, perhaps into the Maccabean period.[4]

The Chronicler, according to Delitzsch wrote during the late Persian period, "but still a

considerable time before the beginning of that of the Greeks."[5] The announcement of

Psalm 72:20 that the prayers of David, son of Jesse, are ended is an indication that there

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[1] Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (3 vols; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 1:10–11.

[2] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:13.

[3] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:14.

[4] Here Delitzsch has been influenced by the work of Hitzig (*Die Psalmen* [2 vols.; Leipzig: C. F. Winter, 1863–65]) who suggests that all psalms from 73 to the end were written during the Maccabean period and, in fact, reflect events from that period in chronological order. Delitzsch grants that it is at least possible that there were psalms written during the Maccabean period (*Psalms*, 1:14–16).

[5] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:19.

was an older collection of Psalms that preceded the present five-book Psalter. It is impossible, according to Delitzsch, for the older collection to consist of Psalms 3–72 because of the span of time represented,[6] but the nucleus of that original collection must lie within Psalms 3–72 because the Psalms of David are so numerous and stand close to one another.[7] Two major groups of Psalms, Psalms 3–72 (from the time of Solomon) and Psalms 73–89 (from the time of Hezekiah), represent the first two stages of the formation of the Psalter. The collection was enlarged during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah to include psalms written during the Exile and shortly thereafter and to add other hymns, namely a Psalm of Moses and additional Davidic psalms (some written during this time, but in the spirit of David's situation).[8] As far as the arrangement of Psalms is concerned, Delitzsch concludes that, "the arrangement is partly chronological and partly according to the subject matter."[9] Though the Psalter does not have a fundamental thought(s) that dominates the whole, according to Delitzsch, it does bear the mark of a single ordering spirit. The Psalter begins with a celebration of those who walk in conformity with the redeeming will of God as revealed in the Torah and closes with a call to magnify that redeeming God.[10]

In Delitzsch's assumptions regarding the collection and arrangement of the Psalter, the Psalms of Asaph and the Korahitic Psalms play an interesting role. Both groups consist of twelve psalms with varied dates of composition. The location of the

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[6] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:20–21.

[7] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:22.

[8] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:22–23.

[9] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:23.

[10] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:24.

two collections in Books II and III of the Psalter cannot be explained on a chronological basis as some psalms of the group are post-exilic.[11] The fact that these two collections are interspersed with Davidic psalms can only be attributed to the compiler's preferred method of arranging according to subject matter (i.e., Ps 50, a Psalm of Asaph is followed by Ps 51, a Psalm of David, because they both disparage animal sacrifice). This pattern can be observed throughout the Psalter, especially in psalms that have similar endings and beginnings and also in the grouping together of the Elohim Psalms (Pss 42–84).[12]

The Psalms of Asaph, though all of the Elohistic type, do not stand together. Delitzsch concludes that Psalm 50 stands after Psalm 51 because of their numerous connections.[13] The collection is unique for several reasons. First, unlike the Korahite collection, the entire Asaphite collection sits within the Elohistic Psalter. In two psalms of the collection, the divine name יהוה does not appear at all and in the others it occurs only once or twice. The collection varies the use of divine names including אל, אדני, and עליון. It also includes the only occurrences of the compound divine name אל אלהים יהוה found in the Psalter (Ps 50:1), and the name אלהים צבאות found in the entire Hebrew Bible (Ps 80:15).

Second, the collection is distinct in its content because of its prophetic and judicial character.[14] God frequently speaks and is pictured in elaborate scenes of

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[11] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:26.

[12] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:26–27.

[13] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:140.

[14] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:142.

judgment. It is true that there are brief divine speeches in sixteen psalms, but the oracles

in the Asaph collection are quite lengthy in comparison.[15] For Delitzsch this prophetic

character is in line with the task of the Asaphites as presented in 2 Chronicles 29:30.

Asaph is described by the chronicler as חֹזֶה (as are the other two musicians

mentioned). He assumes that for the chronicler there is an intimate connection between

lyrical poetry and prophecy.[16]

The third unique characteristic is the emphasis on the historical. Delitzsch

understands this emphasis to be a balance to the visionary prophecies.[17] Psalms 74, 77,

80, 81, and 83 relate the important stories of the ancient people to the present

congregation. This characteristic is even more striking when one considers that the

number of historical psalms in the rest of the Psalter is four (Pss 105–106; 135–136; 95;

114). The fourth characteristic is embedded within the third—the tendency for the

history to recount the stories of Joseph and the tribes descendant from him, rather than

Judah.[18] The references to Jerusalem/Zion within the collection have been the focus of

much discussion; however, the emphasis on Joseph is peculiar to this collection in the

Psalter. The fifth unique characteristic of the collection occurs in the varied designations

used in reference to the people of God. The most common designation is of the people

being a flock which God shepherds (Pss 74:1; 77:21; 78:52; 79:13; and 80:2).[19] This

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[15] Michael Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III* (JSOTSup 233; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 19.

[16] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:142.

[17] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:142.

[18] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:142.

[19] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:142.

particular shepherd/flock image is not found elsewhere in the Psalter, strengthening the uniqueness of the collection.

Though the psalms of the collection contain various connections, Delitzsch does not attribute all to the authorship of Asaph. Asaph did author psalms,[20] but he lived during the reign of David and into the early reign of Solomon. This Asaph could not be responsible for psalms that clearly reflect later events. The reputation and talents of Asaph and his levitical group were passed down through the time of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, the exile, and the return from Exile as attested in Ezra and Nehemiah (Ez 2:41, Neh 7:44).[21]

Delitzsch was one of the first scholars to address the collection as a unified group of psalms that, though written by various authors, can stand together as a collection based on criteria other than their common title. Delitzsch considered the various dates for the psalms of the collection beginning with the works of Asaph, the original leader of the group, and ending with the possibility of the addition of psalms written during Maccabean times, or at least amendments to the collection during Maccabean times. His ideas about the uniqueness of the collection, however, did not attract much attention and were largely forgotten by the time of the rise of form criticism. Though Delitzsch's work does highlight the uniqueness of the collection, he fails to ask important questions of the collection and its authors (Asaph and his literary descendants).[22] For instance, why would the various authors of these psalms of similar nature feel compelled to

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[20] Delitzsch attributes Pss 50 (*Psalms*, 2:143), 73 (2:401–2), possibly 78 (2:413–14), 82 (2:459) to the original Asaph.

[21] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:143.

[22] Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985), 28–29.

ascribe their work to one person? Also, why are other works that are quite similar not

ascribed to this person? Many of the scholars who have taken up the study of the

Asaphite psalms through the tradition history method have done so in search of answers

to these questions. Their findings will be reviewed later.

Martin Buss

Much time passes before there is a renewed interest in the Asaph collection.[23]

Martin Buss places focus on the Psalms of Asaph again in his 1963 article, "The Psalms

of Asaph and Korah."[24] The purpose of this article is to clarify the form-critical

designations for these collections. Generally, form criticism focused on the genre or

Gattung of the Psalm; with such an emphasis these two psalms collections appear to

have little unity as they contain multiple types of psalms including wisdom, individual

lament, and communal lament. Form criticism pays little attention to psalms titles when

endeavoring to classify psalms, a fact which Buss believes should be remedied.[25] Buss's

method is essentially making use of tradition history in order to create a new

understanding of genres in the Psalter.

Buss begins by establishing a connection between the psalmists represented in

the Asaphite and Korahite collections and the cult organization. According to Buss the

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[23] In the meantime there are occasional mentions of the uniqueness of the Asaphite collection. Briggs and Briggs indicate that the title suggests a collection created in Babylonia during the early Greek period. They note the common features of a vivid description of nature, emphasis of divine providence in the life of the individual, use of history with a didactic purpose, exalted spiritual conceptions of God, and sublimity of style. They suggest such commonality is indicative of selection by an editor with a set purpose. They do not speculate on that purpose (Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [ICC; 2 vol.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1907]).

[24] Martin Buss, "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah," *JBL* 82 (1963): 382–92.

[25] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 382.

strong personal elements of Pss 42/43; 84; 49; and 45 (all Korahite) point to a longing

for the temple and a desire to return to cultic duties.[26] In reference to Psalm 73, Buss

draws a strong connection between wisdom, the Temple, and the psalmist's expressions

indicating a place among the temple personnel.[27] Many of the psalms in these

collections seem to have been composed for use, not by laity, but for the singer's own

presentation.[28] Buss continues by noting several basic types of utterance that support his

argument.

First is the relation of the singer to the sanctuary mentioned previously (Pss

42/43; 73; 84). It is interesting to note that these psalms introduce the three main

groupings of the collections (Ps 42/43, the first Korahite collection; Ps 73, the Asaphite

collection; and Ps 84, the second Korahite collection).[29] Second, the collections contain

communal laments; one following the opening psalm of each grouping (Pss 44; 74; 85)

and others scattered mainly in the Asaphite collection.[30] At this point the genres

represented in the collections diverge with the Korahite collection containing (secular)

wisdom psalms,[31] Songs of Zion, and a throne-ascension psalm and the Asaphite

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[26] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 382.

[27] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 382–83.

[28] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 383.

[29] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 383.

[30] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 383.

[31] Buss distinguishes between the wisdom present in the Asaphite collection and that of the Korahite collection. "The Asaph psalms are full of wisdom themes and forms of address which exhibit a tone of exhortation proper for a religious instructor . . . a special kind of religious wisdom." ("Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 387.)

collection featuring historical and judgment themes that are clearly connected with a holy place.[32]

All of these psalm types can be connected with those who are considered keepers of sacred space or to the tasks of religious leadership. Communal laments, historical recitation and judgment songs were the work of religious leadership within the Israelite cultus.[33] What then can be said about the historical development of such tasks? This historical development, Buss argues, is best understood by exploring the origins of these collections. The Asaph collection contains several psalms that indicate a North-Israelite origin, or at least an interest in the affairs of the northern kingdom.[34] The traditions expressed in these psalms suggest a levitical group whose activity was centered in the northern kingdom. "They may be described as forming a sizeable class of religious leaders who were largely engaged in exhortation and in the propagation of the memory of ancient events—in short, in the religious education of the people."[35] Moses was the archetype of these Levites who also import a number of Exodus traditions.[36] These levitical traditions were continued in the south after the fall of Samaria. Numerous Asaphite psalms appear to belong to this stage of the group's work, including Psalms 50;

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[32] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 383.

[33] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 384.

[34] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 384.

[35] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 386.

[36] The connection with Moses and the Exodus tradition can be seen most clearly in the correspondence between the Song of Moses in Deut 32 and the beginning of Ps 78 and to references to testing in Deut 33 and Pss 81 and 78 (Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 386). It is interesting, though, that Moses is never mentioned by name in the collection.

73; 75; 76; 82; and 83. Psalms 74 and 79 likely refer to the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century.[37]

The Korahite tradition is more difficult to define. Many of the Korahite psalms, including the Songs of Zion, seem to suggest a pre-exilic date, but two of the Yahwistic psalms (Pss 85 and 87) reflect postexilic situations. A northern provenance for the Korahite collection has been suggested,[38] but because of their connection to Zion, this suggestion appears to be speculative.[39] Buss concludes that the Korahite and Asaphite traditions differ geographically in the traditions they represent and functionally in the roles they play. The Asaphite tradition is originally North-Israelite deuteronomic-levitical tradition while the Korahite tradition is related primarily to Jerusalem and more specifically to the service personnel of the temple.[40] Buss uses this information to suggest a new psalm classification, that of "clergy or professional psalmist."[41]

Buss's suggestion that these psalms are the work of the Israelite clergy is in line with previous scholars' assessments; however, Buss differs from these scholars in that the basis of his argument rests on internal criteria rather than comparisons between the Asaphite title and the work of the Chronicler. Buss develops his theory by focusing on the character of the Israelite clergy (i.e. the Asaphites belong to a higher clergy), an

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[37] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 386.

[38] See Michael Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (JSOTSup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1982. See also, Gary Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (SBLDiss 43; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 51–60.

[39] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 387.

[40] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 388.

[41] Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," 392.

approach unique to him.[42] Buss, like other scholars, does not address the issue of the importance of the name Asaph and why it would be chosen as the title for these twelve psalms or the arrangement or purpose of the collection.

Ivan Engnell

Writing around the same time as Buss, Ivan Engnell brings up the issue of the title "of Asaph" and the unity within the collection.[43] Unlike Buss, Engnell is influenced by the mention of Asaph in Chronicles.[44] Engnell's conclusions about this psalm title is influenced by his understanding of the growth of the Psalter. Against what he considers the "general assumption," Engnell believes that the canonization of the Psalter was most likely completed by 300 BCE or at least before 100 BCE.[45] The Chronicler, whose work can be dated no later than 300 BCE, was aware of the Psalter, from which he quotes the doxology of Book IV (I Chron 16:36). The author of Ben Sira (ca. 200 BCE), likewise, makes mention of the Psalter.

Engnell ascribes to the idea that the canonization of the Psalter did take place gradually and was tied to cultic (both temple and synagogue) use. Early collections did exist and were gradually combined.[46] The Psalter began with the first Davidic collection (Pss 3–41); the second Davidic collection was added (51–72) followed closely by the

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[42] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 35.

[43] Ivan Engnell, "The Book of Psalms" in *A Rigid Scrutiny* (trans. and ed. by John T. Willis; Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ., 1969), 68–122.

[44] Engnell, "Book of Psalms," 74. Though Engnell relies on the Chronicler's mention of Asaph in regard to the authorship of the psalms in the Asaph collection, he does not use the Chronicler's information in an effort to understand the *traditio* behind the collection (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 33).

[45] Engnell, "Book of Psalms," 69.

[46] Engnell, "Book of Psalms," 72.

Asaph collection and Korahite collections. The second Davidic collection, Asaph collection and two Korahite collections underwent editing by the Elohist who also added Psalms 84–89. Finally, the Songs of Ascents were added. Engnell also mentions the possibility that the psalms preserved in the Psalter are but a very small portion of Israel's psalmody.[47]

According to Engnell, psalms originated within the official priestly and prophetic classes that operated at the various sanctuaries in Canaan and Jerusalem. Several of these guilds are mentioned in Chronicles, including the Asaphites. The psalms produced by these groups were altered when they were adopted for use in the temple at Jerusalem and then revised again for use in the synagogue. Consequently, the original cultic situation of the groups is almost completely lost. In reference to the Asaphite collection of Psalms, Engnell asserts that the title $l^e\bar{a}s\bar{a}ph$ is original[48] and does provide real information concerning the authorship of the psalms.[49] The basis for his assertion is the presence of similarities within the psalms of the collection: the mention of Jacob/Joseph, which indicates a North Israel origin; an idea of God that is inseparably connected with the history of Israel; an emotional, personal prophetic tone; prominence of covenant; and prominence of national lament.[50]

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[47] Engnell, "Book of Psalms," 72.

[48] Engnell classifies headings into two types. Primary headings indicate authorship, cultic situation, literary-cultic category, or musical terms. Secondary headings are additions that provide historical interpretation. ("Book of Psalms," 77).

[49] In contrast to the title "Sons of Korah," which does not indicate authorship, but the use of the psalm in that particular guild (Engnell, "Book of Psalms," 80).

[50] Engnell, "Book of Psalms," 79–80.

Karl-Johan Illman

Karl-Johan Illman, like the scholars before him, begins his work with the fact

that Psalms 50, 73–83 can be distinguished from the rest of the Psalter by virtue of their

common superscription. That fact creates a question for Illman; do the psalms of the

collection exhibit features that go beyond features common to all the psalms?[51] Given

the fact that these psalms are formally diverse, Illman seeks commonality in themes,

features, and/or motifs. If the answer to the question is yes, then one must search to see

whether the commonality derives from a common tradition and must consider the

connection between the common superscription and the bearers of the tradition.[52] In

light of these questions, one may locate Illman's methods within a tradition-historical

framework.

Illman's search is for a shared common content (*Inhalt*) that is significantly

unique to the collection. Illman begins by summarizing the work of Delitzsch, Graetz,[53]

Briggs, Gunkel, Mowinckel, Engnell, Westermann, Buss, and F. N. Jasper[54] as their

work pertains to the Asaphite collection and/or those who created it. Illman notices that

the scholars share several conclusions.[55] First, most of the scholars have pointed out the

important role that history plays within the collection. Second, many also note the

prophetic nature of several of the psalms within the collection. Third, because of the

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[51] Karl-Johan Illman, *Thema und Tradition in den Asaf-Psalmen* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1976), 7.

[52] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 7–8.

[53] Heinrich Graetz, *Kritischer Commentar zu den Psalmen* (Breslau: S. Schott Laender, 1882), 16ff.

[54] F. N. Jasper, "Early Israelite Traditions in the Psalter," *VT* 17 (1967).

[55] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 14.

unique mention of "Joseph," many scholars suggest a northern Israelite origin while also noting that the collection was later adapted for the Jerusalem cult. Fourth, many, especially Buss, have tied the collection to the Levitical cult.

Though previous scholars have pointed out numerous aspects of the collection that seem to make it unique, Illman is concerned to ascertain whether there are themes or motifs with enough in common that they may be used to establish a tradition that could be labeled "Asaphite." After defining the essential terms,[56] Illman proceeds to examine the collection focusing on themes and motifs that commonly occur. The first theme is that of creation (*Schöpfung*), which he distinguishes from history (*Geschicte*) because, though the ancient Israelites did not distinguish between a mythological *Urzeit* and an historical *Zeit*, it is proper for later research to do so.[57] Within the theme of creation, two motifs can be recognized, the chaos battle (*Chaoskampf*)[58] and "the bringing forth of the cosmos" (*Hervorbringung des Kosmos*).[59] He locates the creation theme in an old Jerusalem tradition stemming from the pre-Israelite era of the city.[60]

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[56] Illman defines the following: theme – content closed narrative unities, which is not as appropriate for use in psalms as motif; motif – a concrete thought which exhibits structural firmness, is typical and repeated, functions in a way that points backward and forward in time, and contains specific content that is suited to certain genres; tradition – material that stems from a group of individuals who have certain interests that they are looking to transmit through their work. Tradition implies a rallying point such as geography, culture, sociology, or religions and chronological continuity between the origin of the tradition and its subsequent literary occurrences (Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 15–16).

[57] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 17.

[58] Psalms 74:12ff; 77:17–19 (Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 17–18).

[59] Found by itself in Ps 75:4 and together with the chaos battle in Ps 74:12–14 (Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 18–19).

[60] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 19.

The second theme in the collection is history (*Geschichte*), which has four

motifs: election and covenant, exodus, wilderness wandering, and Zion and David.[61]

The motif of election and covenant appears as election in Psalm 74:2, Psalm 78, and

Psalm 80:9–12 and as covenant in Psalm 50, Psalm 74:2, Psalm 78, and Psalm 81.

Illman links this motif with ongoing cultic activities, rather than a covenant renewal

ceremony.[62] The motif of exodus is not only a reference to the flight from Egypt, but

also to the events related to that flight such as the plagues. The exodus motif is often

combined with other motifs in the Asaphite collection, especially the chaos battle.[63] The

motif of wilderness wandering is found in Psalms 78 and 81, both of which have a

didactic purpose according to Illman.[64] The final motif Illman discusses under the theme

of history is Zion and David.[65] At the conclusion of his discussion on the theme of

history within the Asaph Psalms, Illman notes that the motifs do occur frequently in the

collection, but that their occurrence is concentrated in a few psalms (Pss 78 and 81) with

other psalms only having isolated references to individual motifs. Thus, for Illman, the

occurrence of historical motifs in the collection is not evidence that the motifs are

essential for the Asaphite psalms.[66]

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[61] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 19–29.

[62] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 22.

[63] Found in Psalms 74:12–14; 76:7; 77:16; 78; and 81 (Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 23–25).

[64] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 25–27.

[65] Zion is referenced as the divine dwelling place in Psalms 74:2; 76:3; 79:1; and 78:54ff where it is linked with David as the divine choice for king (Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 27–29).

[66] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 29.

The theme of judgment, as regarded by Illman, has three motifs. The first of these is God as judge (*špṭ* or *dîn*), either directly judging as in Psalms 50:6 and 75:8 or within a scene of divine judgment as in Psalms 50:4, 21b; 75:3; 76:9–10; and 82:1, 8. In these situations judgment is declared against both Israel and the nations (and their gods).[67] The second motif encompasses the opponents or those hostile to God (Psalms 74, 79, 80, 81, and 83), including at times Israel (Psalms 76 and 78) and even more specifically the wicked within Israel (Psalms 75 and 73).[68] The last of the judgment motifs is "dispute and punishment" (*Streit und Strafe*) in which the punishment that has been, is, or will be is described.[69] In some instances the punishment is vague (Pss 50, 73, 74, 77, 79, 80, 81), while in others the terms are specific and concrete (Pss 76, 78, 82, and 83).[70]

Illman identifies trust (*Vertrauen*) as a theme under which he distinguishes two motifs. The first is the oft noted shepherd/flock motif.[71] Though this motif is used in the Asaphite psalms more than any other place in the Psalter, Illman does not grant it any uniqueness. He argues that it is too similar to Psalm 23 and to Jeremiah 23:1ff and it is always tied to another motif, and thus it is not as helpful as others (i.e., Delitzsch) have supposed.[72] The second motif, the nearness of God, is found only in Psalm 73 and is tied to expressions of Levitical privileges. This one instance supports Buss's conclusion

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[67] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 30–31.

[68] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 30–35.

[69] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 35.

[70] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 35–38.

[71] Psalms 74:1; 77:21; 78:52, 71; 79:13; and 80:2 (Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 39).

[72] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 40.

that Psalm 73 was composed for the private use of the Asaphite singers, but Buss's theory cannot be extended to the collection as a whole.[73] The last theme Illman points out is "insight" (*Einsicht*), a theme of Psalm 73. Illman distinguishes insight from wisdom; in fact, he denies the presence of a wisdom theme in Psalm 73 and the collection as a whole. This denial is in direct opposition to Buss who views Psalm 73 as "a wisdom song."[74]

In light of his analysis of theme and motif in the Psalms of Asaph, Illman makes the following observations: 1) In no psalms are all of these themes represented; the closest would be Psalm 74, which is only lacking the theme of insight. 2) In light of the sporadic distribution of these themes and motifs, no far-reaching conclusions can be made about the Psalms of Asaph as a collection.[75]

Despite his negative assessment of the use of theme and motif for defining the tradition behind the Asaph Psalms, Illman pursues other avenues of analysis. The first of these is common terminology, namely didactic terminology. Following Buss's work, Illman searches for linguistic links between the Asaphite Psalms and the Deuteronomic tradition. His search again leads him to disagree with Buss and find that only Psalm 78 contains a real concentration of Deuteronomic terminology.[76] Illman turns next to the claim that the Psalms of Asaph are of Northern Israelite origin.[77] This claim is complicated by the fact that many psalms in the collection refer explicitly or implicitly

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[73] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 41.

[74] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 41. See Buss, "Psalms of Asaph," 382.

[75] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 42–43.

[76] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 46–50.

[77] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 50–52.

to Jerusalem. In fact, only three Asaphite psalms have references to Joseph – the main support for Northern provenance. This evidence, Illman believes, is insufficient for arguing for a Northern provenance; thus Illman urges that we stay with the notion that psalms were written and presented in the temple at Jerusalem.[78]

Illman continues his search by studying the designations for God, which are used in the collection.[79] Because the collection appears within the Elohistic Psalter, Illman narrows his analysis to the occurrences of the more unique designations (listed previously). These designations are varied and include titles that are genuine Israelite, common Canaanite, and Jerusalemite in origin. In light of the variety, the names cannot be used to identify a single tradition; rather they are evidence of a lengthy process that occurred in the Jerusalem cult in which the richness of expressions has been established.[80]

In light of his research, Illman has difficulty saying anything specific about the Asaphites as authors of these psalms.[81] There are certainly characteristics, such as the connection to the Jerusalem temple, didactic interest (at least in 73 and 78) and cult prophecy, that can be gleaned from the collection but these prove unhelpful in identifying who the Asaphites were.[82] For that, Illman turns to the work of the Chronicler. After a brief examination of the occurrences of "Asaph," Illman concludes

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[78] *Contra* Buss who states that, in addition to Deuteronomic language and mention of Joseph, the collection has ties to Hosea, Joshua 24, Deuteronomy 32, and Jeremiah, all of which share a similar northern tradition (Buss, "Psalms of Asaph, 385). See Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 51–52.

[79] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 52–55.

[80] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 54–55.

[81] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 55.

[82] Illman lists eight characteristics in all, many in agreement with previous scholarship; *Thema und Tradition*, 55.

that the Asaphites were a group that had returned from the exile and were traceable to pre-exilic times. They were the leading (perhaps only) class of singers in early post-exilic times who sang hymns that they may or may not have composed.[83] Illman's examination of the Asaphite collection and the work of the Chronicler lead him to suggest that the group had a strong connection with the Jerusalem cult and they practiced cult prophecy.[84] The superscriptions in the psalms may be a bridge to the Chronicler's material, but the superscriptions are so disputed that they cannot be used as conclusive evidence. Illman is unable to isolate one specific tradition within the collection; the collection contains the cry of many voices.[85]

Harry Nasuti

Illman injects a level of uncertainty about the Asaphite collection and its origin that upsets the trajectory of Asaphite scholarship up to this point. With few exceptions, scholars have looked to the commonality of the collection as a help for understanding it. Illman, though accepting the collection as a unit, emphasizes the variety found within and points to that variety as evidence for a diverse past in the Jerusalem cult. Harry Nasuti recognizes this shift and uses his 1983 dissertation to move Asaphite scholarship back toward unity and to redefine tradition-historical terms more accurately in order to locate a tradition behind this collection. Nasuti is not bothered by the diversity within the collection because, "when one looks at either ancient or modern *traditio* groups, one

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[83] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 55–58.

[84] He does not see any educational function for the group beyond the didactic interests of cult prophecy (Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 60).

[85] Illman, *Thema und Tradition*, 60.

rarely finds them to be distinguished by exclusive concern for one topic."[86] On the

contrary, one finds diverse concerns that are usually related to each other.[87]

Nasuti evaluates previous criteria for suggesting a *traditio* behind the Asaphite

psalms and provides an extensive linguistic and form-critical analysis of the Asaphite

collection. The purpose of Nasuti's study is to develop controls, which can be applied

when using the tradition-historical method, that contribute to verifiable conclusions

rather than theoretical conclusions. "Such controls may be two-fold, consisting of those

internal to the units of the *traditum* [that which is handed down] themselves, similar to

those which exist in form criticism or transmission history, or those external to either the

traditum or the *traditio* [the process of handing down], such as those provided by extra-

biblical evidence."[88] Internal controls are difficult to establish because of their possible

speculative nature, but should not be ruled out. One such control would be focusing on

word connections or repeated word groups.[89] External controls may come from specific

biblical statements, which provided a means for determining whether a concept is purely

modern or did exist in the biblical period as well, or from extra-biblical comparisons.

An extra-biblical source may help define the scope of a concept or the means by which a

concept was incorporated into ancient Israel, but only inner-Israelite (inner-biblical)

evidence can verify the continued usage of the concept in Israel's streams of tradition.[90]

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[86] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 52.

[87] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 52.

[88] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 21.

[89] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 21.

[90] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 22.

Nasuti uses the Asaph collection as a test for internal and external controls for tradition history.

He begins by overviewing the work previously done regarding the Psalms of Asaph.[91] The works of Delitzsch, Heinrich Graetz, Briggs, Duhm, Kittel, Gunkel, Mowinckel, Engnell, Westermann and Buss are briefly discussed in relation to these scholars' conclusions regarding the collection. The bulk of Nasuti's discussion on previous scholarship is centered upon the work of Illman because Illman is working under a tradition-historical system, which differentiates between motif (schema of a concrete situation) and theme (abstract concept) and ties tradition to a group of individuals with certain transmission interests.[92] Nasuti is not satisfied with Illman's application of tradition history to the Psalms of Asaph. Nasuti's critique centers on Illman's overly abstract understanding of theme and motif; ". . . many of Illman's categories are so broad as to make their appearance in a text meaningless in terms of attributing that text to any historically definable tradition."[93] Nasuti suggests the need for better handling of linguistic analysis: "a widening of the linguistic analysis and a more subtle handling of that analysis."[94] Also noted is Illman's failure to address the common superscription of this group; why was this group singled out with a specific

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[91] Nasuti only discusses the work of scholars mentioned by Illman, though Illman's survey is quite extensive (*Tradition History*, 27–38).

[92] Illman, *Thema*, 15; Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 39.

[93] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 51.

[94] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 53.

superscription?[95] Nasuti then presents a new tradition-historical study of the Psalms of

Asaph.

This new tradition history study seeks to "understand better the tradition-

historical significance of the existence of Psalms 50, 73–83 as a group of psalms with

the superscription *lĕ ʾāsāp*."[96] In this framework, the common superscription becomes

the center of the discussion for, according to Nasuti, the superscription is a possible

external control from the time of ancient Israel.[97] The question that must be asked of the

superscription is whether the superscription is indicative of the psalms themselves

(*traditum*) or of the group that is responsible for these psalms (*traditio*). The fact that

these psalms were collected together by someone in ancient Israel (whether the group or

a later editor) is a safeguard against incorrect moves made by the modern critic.[98]

Because of the inability of previous scholarship to explain the grouping in terms of the

group's internal controls (form and content of the *traditum*), Nasuti shifts focus to the

traditio (the ones responsible for the psalms).

Nasuti's approach is not bound by the presence of common content within the

collection, for if that commonality cannot be defined, the superscription loses the

function of differentiating these psalms from others. Though it is possible that the

superscription is the result of random attribution of individual psalms to Asaph, it is not

probable. Asaph occupies a specific sphere of interest and the number ascribed to him

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[95] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 55.

[96] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 55.

[97] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 55.

[98] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 55.

remained stable, unlike the psalms ascribed to David.[99] Furthermore, even if the

superscriptions were traced to separate individuals, the individuals are still connected by

way of their common interest in Asaph. In light of these issues and the fact that other

sources mention an Asaphite group in relation to psalmic activity, the burden of proof is

placed on those who would deny that the superscription could point to *traditio*.[100] Nasuti

classifies the superscriptions as a form of external control that "groups together

otherwise disparate materials under a single *traditio*."[101] Once this external control is

established, one can comb through the psalms of the Asaphite collection in search of

information about the *traditio* responsible for them.[102] During this task, internal

elements such as form and content, though unable to define *traditio*, are now useful for

providing insight into its nature.[103]

Nasuti approaches these psalms from two avenues of investigation. First, he

turns to the psalms themselves in order to identify elements which corroborate the

existence of a single definable *traditio*. [104] Language is seen as the pre-eminent element,

as it is least subject to critical manipulation. Once the existence of a *traditio* is

established, he moves to describing the *traditio* whose existence has been corroborated.

Again, language is important, but so are form and content as they inform the description

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[99] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 56.

[100] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 56.

[101] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 56.

[102] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 56–57.

[103] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 57.

[104] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 57.

of the *traditio*. Second, Nasuti looks to the superscription itself and the connection suggested by it.[105]

In an effort to corroborate the existence of the *traditio*, Nasuti undertakes a detailed linguistic analysis of the psalms within the Asaph collection. In this analysis he focuses on specific words and phrases that have a sufficient tradition-historical distinctiveness, rather than on those that have an "all-Israel" scope.[106] Within the psalms of the collection, eight psalms contain language that has its dominant and sometimes exclusive occurrence in the Asaph collection.[107] Nine contain language that has its dominant and sometimes exclusive occurrence in the Ephraimite tradition stream.[108] Interestingly, the two groups do not coincide and psalms lacking in one list may be found in the other (i.e., Ps 73 does not contain Ephraimite language, but is linked strongly to others in the Asaphite collection). Two psalms are not represented; Psalm 75, which contains possible but not determinative Ephraimite references and Psalm 82, which can be considered "tradition-historically neutral datum."[109]

Nasuti continues by conducting a form-critical analysis of the collection. Because the forms present in the collection are not different from the forms represented in the remainder of the Psalter, form cannot be used to corroborate the existence of a *traditio*; rather it provides reliable information regarding that *traditio*.[110] Deviations

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[105] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 58.

[106] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 59.

[107] Psalms 50; 73; 74; 77; 78; 79; 80; 81 (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 115).

[108] Psalms 50; 74; 76; 77; 78; 79; 80; 81; 83 (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 115).

[109] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 116.

[110] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 117.

from the common form may be a clue to the distinctive functional or theological interests of the *traditio* group.[111] Nasuti first classifies the psalms form critically and discusses the setting indicated by such forms. He then attends to the characteristics in the Asaph forms that set them apart from their uses in other parts of the Psalter and comments on what implication these distinctions may have on the description of the *traditio*. Finally, he correlates his findings with the Ephraimite tradition stream.[112] The question of the life setting of the forms is important and requires appropriate comparisons with material from the ancient Near East and from modern anthropological works in order to clarify the social and formal possibilities.[113]

The Asaph collection consists of psalms classified as collective lament,[114] prophetic psalms,[115] and four psalms that are difficult to classify.[116] The most common aspect of the forms in the Asaphite collection is their communal nature. The collection has a high proportion of communal laments when compared to the remainder of the Psalter, which is the best indication of the collection's communal tendency.[117] The communal aspect, however, is also present in the prophetic psalms. The communal

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[111] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 117.

[112] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 118.

[113] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 118.

[114] Psalms 74; 79; 80; and 83.

[115] Psalms 50; 75; 81; and 83. More accurately it should be said that they contain prophetic elements, (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 127).

[116] Psalm 73 is a mix of wisdom, meditation, personal narrative and lament (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 149); Psalm 76, usually classified as a song of Zion, is more specifically a song about the God who is manifested in Zion (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 151); Psalm 77 begins in individual lament and ends as a communal hymn (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 154); and Psalm 78, which contains an extended historical narrative, but classifies itself as instructional with terminology associated with wisdom (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 155).

[117] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 157.

aspect does not necessarily indicate the mode of performance, as many of the psalms were likely sung by individuals, but does show that the individuals were greatly concerned with the situation of the nation as a whole.[118] On the basis of the forms, Nasuti concludes that the Asaphite *traditio* had some connection with cultic prophets (not necessarily all of the *traditio*).[119] The Asaphites were also linked to the Levites and their instructional activity.[120] The group was also quite concerned about the political-religious state of the nation.[121]

The communal concerns of the Asaphites come across in a unique way. It is interesting to note that in the prophetic Psalms 50 and 81 and the instructional Psalm 78 the focus is inner-Israelite correction and warning. Nasuti believes this focus indicates a real theological concern of the Asaph *traditio*, which may indicate an historical setting in a period of reform.[122] In regard to the Ephraimite tradition stream, the intercessory nature of the communal laments, the prophetic possibilities presented, and the historical account of Psalm 78 have clear parallels in Ephraimite literature.[123]

After dealing with the internal evidence of linguistic analysis and form, Nasuti turns to the external evidence, namely that found in the work of the "Chronicler."[124] He

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[118] According to Nasuti the individuals did have functional status in the national cult, but the nature of that status is unknown and it is not necessary that the entire Asaph *traditio* belonged in the same functional status (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 157–8).

[119] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 158.

[120] There are hints at Levitical connections in Psalms 73 and 78 (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 158).

[121] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 158.

[122] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 159.

[123] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 159.

[124] Under the title of the "Chronicler," Nasuti includes 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Though these books are the result of much redactional activity, the main level of activity is referred to as

points out that rarely have these texts been studied with a view to how they fit into the larger Israelite religious movement. In the same way that the psalms are considered without reference to the Asaphite links in their superscription, now the Asaphite texts in the Chronicler are considered on their own in an attempt to understand their tradition-historical connections.[125]

These references that are found outside of the Psalter[126] suggest several things about the history and nature of the Asaphites. First, the Asaphites were a group involved in the liturgical functions of Israel; more specifically they are singers and musicians whose primary task is to praise and thank God. Their appointment to this role happened during the reign of David and was renewed by subsequent kings. Though the existence of a man in pre-exilic times named Asaph is uncertain, the existence of a pre-exilic group of Asaphite singers is likely and supported by the mention of this group in the list of those who returned from exile. Nasuti suggests that the Asaphite group was the only singing group in the early post-exilic period; the groups associated with the name of Jeduthun and Heman were added by the time of the Chronicler.[127] The Asaphite group retains its primacy for a time, but by the time of the latest additions to the Chronicler's work, the Heman group had surpassed them.[128]

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belonging to the "Chronicler" out of convenience and does not diminish the extensive tradition process (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 161).

[125] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 161.

[126] References outside of the work of the Chronicler and Psalms include 2 Kgs 18:18,37 and Isa 36:3,22; references within the work of the Chronicler include Ezra 2:41; 3:10–11; Neh 7:44; 11:17, 22; 12:35, 46; 1 Chr 6:16–33,39; 9:15; 15:16–24; 16:5; 25:1–9; 2 Chr 5:12; 20:14; 29:12–14; 35:15.

[127] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 187.

[128] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 187.

According to the work of the Chronicler, the Asaph singers are tied to the institutions of the ark and cultic prophecy and, perhaps, holy war.[129] The pre-exilic tradition that is most closely connected with these institutions is the Ephraimite tradition.[130] The Ephraimite tradition is also suggested by the connection between the singers and Hezekiah and Josiah. This link with the Ephriamite tradition accords well with the internal analysis of the Asaph psalms.

In the comparison of the internal and external evidence regarding the Asaphites, there is one major disagreement. In the external evidence the main function of the Asaphites is to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving; the psalms they sing are almost all hymns. In the Psalter, however, the dominant genres are communal lament and prophetic psalms. The only songs of the collection that have hymnic ties are Psalms 75, 76, and 81 and those are weak ties. The Asaphite psalm collection consists of psalms dating from pre-exilic through post-exilic times and was most likely fixed before the time of the Chronicler. How, then do we account for the discrepancy? Nasuti's response is that the Chronicler's work reflects the role of the Asaphites during the Chronicler's time, that of praise and thanks.[131] The psalms reflect an earlier stage in the Asaphites' history during which communal lament and cult prophecy were their primary function. The psalms and the Chronicler both reflect the same tradition stream only at different stages of its development.[132]

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[129] Nasuti links the prophetic response of Jehaziel in 2 Chron 20 with the form critical category of holy war, which is linked to the pre-exilic Levites and the ark (Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 185).

[130] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 188.

[131] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 189–90.

[132] Nasuti does not suggest a firm chronology for the shift from cult prophecy to praise, except to say that it occurs by the time of the Chronicler. Nor does he offer a suggestion as to why the shift

Nasuti's work has provided a thorough analysis of both the Asaphite psalms and the references to Asaph outside the Psalter. His work, however, was undertaken in an effort to test a method of tradition historical criticism that would be less subjective than methods of scholars such as Illman. Nasuti's work does not limit all work regarding the Asaphite psalms to tradition historical categories. In fact, he concludes his book by acknowledging the usefulness of literary methods in their ability to understand themes and motifs. He cautions interpreters to know their method and the appropriate tools they need to be successful.[133] The present work does not seek to understand the tradition history of the Asaphite collection, but to look at the collection as it stands within the Psalter, thus, in addition to literary analysis, theme and motif will be utilized in interpretation.

Michael Goulder

Michael Goulder addresses the issue of the Asaph collection in multiple works. Goulder first presented his ideas regarding the Psalms of Asaph in a 1994 *JSOT* article entitled, "Asaph's History of Israel (Elohist Press, Bethel, 725 BCE)."[134] The title of the article, which is in the form of a bibliographic reference, cleverly hints at Goulder's conclusion, namely that the Psalms of Asaph, functioning as a unified collection, present an Elohistic version of history that was known at Bethel in the 720's BCE.[135] He points

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occurred. He acknowledges that it has to do with Israel's changed historical circumstances, but admits that evidence does not allow a more concrete suggestion (*Tradition History*, 191).

[133] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 197.

[134] Michael Goulder, "Asaph's History of Israel (Elohist Press, Bethel, 725 BCE)," *JSOT* 65 (1995): 71–81.

[135] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 81.

to four characteristics that work together to indicate that the Psalms of Asaph form a unified collection. First, the psalms refer to the people of God as Joseph several times.[136] Second, within the collection there is a marked preference for אלהים as the name for God as well as increased occurrences of אל and the use of עליון.[137] Third, there are linguistic uses common in the collection including covenant, God's חסד, and the sheep/flock image.[138] Fourth, the collection is dominated by a mood of impending crisis.[139] With these characteristics in mind, Goulder proceeds to hypothesize about the origin of the collection. The limitation of the community to Joseph (Ephraim, Benjamin, or Manasseh) suggests a time between 732 and 722 BCE when Israel was divided from Judah and it had already lost its northern and eastern tribes to Assyria.[140] The northern location is further supported by evidence that the more common name for God in the northern sanctuaries of Shechem (Salem) and Bethel was אל.[141] Shechem is also associated with covenant, especially in Judges 9:46 with the temple of El-Berith and in Judges 24:25 when Joshua makes a covenant between Israel and Yahweh at Shechem.[142] The setting of the collection in the 720's would adequately account for the mood of

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[136] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 72.

[137] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 73.

[138] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 74.

[139] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 75.

[140] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 75.

[141] Jacob erects a shrine in Shechem/Salem to אל (Gen 33:20) and an altar in Bethel (Gen 35:7) (Goulder, "Asaph's History," 76).

[142] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 76.

impending crisis for the people would have been aware of the threat of Assyria.[143] In

addition to evidence for a northern location, the recollection of history from creation (Ps

74) to wilderness stories (Ps 81) to settlement accounts (Pss 78 and 80) accords well

with the Exodus–Numbers story often associated with the Elohist.[144]

Goulder expands his work in his 1996 monograph, *The Psalms of Asaph and the

Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III*. The monograph is the third in a series by

Goulder, who previously dealt with the Korahite collection (1982) and the Davidic

Psalms 51–72 (1990). Goulder begins by reviewing the work of Delitzsch and

concludes that Delitzsch's work seems to "bind the Asaph collection *together* even more

firmly than [Delitzsch] had thought."[145] Goulder, however, is unsatisfied with

Delitzsch's conclusion that the collection of the psalms written at various times occurred

after the exile.[146] Therefore, Goulder proceeds by suggesting that the features not only

bind the group, but locate the group within a specific location and earlier time period—

Northern Israel from 732–722.[147] Goulder does not rest his conclusions upon Delitzsch

alone; he exegetes each psalm within the collection. This task yields three further

conclusions: 1) The psalms provide details into Israelite life in the 720's; 2) The psalms

are actually a worship outline for an autumn festival of that time; 3) They provide a key

to the riddle of the history of the Pentateuch.[148]

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[143] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 77.

[144] Goulder, "Asaph's History," 77–80.

[145] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 34.

[146] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 15.

[147] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 35.

[148] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 36.

Goulder's theory that the Asaph collection is a liturgical outline for an autumn festival fits well with his proposal that the Songs of Korah correspond to the Dan Festival as he sees the first few psalms of the collection corresponding well with the psalms of the Dan Festival.[149] Psalm 50 is a call for the people to gather for sacrifice, and also, a time when the people are rebuked for their sins. Psalms 73 and 74 are laments performed by the king before the festival begins in which he laments national ruin. All three of the opening psalms of the collection are public.[150] Psalm 75 expands the royal re-consecration for the nation's defense.[151] God's power in battle is praised in Psalm 76. At this point the Korahite pattern is not as apparent for the present crisis (the approaching Assyrians) demanded a series of less triumphal psalms.[152] Psalm 77 presents a religious solution to the present situation by recalling the Exodus story; the king then proclaims this solution to the people with admonitions in Psalms 78, 79, and 80. Psalm 81 returns to the festival's focus with a traditional, yet forced, rejoicing for the New Year. Psalm 82 removes the listeners from the unsavory reality and presents an imagined eternity in which the fortunes of the gods are reversed. Psalm 83 concludes the collection summing up the festival by stating who was involved, when, and where.

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[149] The connection is furthered by the fact that Goulder sees Pss 42 and 84 as the only other psalms that introduce festivals. Psalm 42 is the first psalm of the first Korahite collection and Psalm 84 is the first psalm of the second Korahite collection. He ties all of these to the opening of an autumn festival held in the month of Bul in Northern Israel (*The Psalms of Asaph*, 74).

[150] In Goulder's theory, Pss 73 and 74, both national laments, correspond to Pss 44 and 85, the national laments of the first and second Korahite collections, respectively (*The Psalms of Asaph*, 75).

[151] Again, Goulder sees a connection between the Korahite and Asaphite psalms by aligning Psalm 75 with Psalm 45 with the theme of the responsibility of the king for leading the army to victory. Psalm 45 is addressed *to* the king while Psalm 75 is addressed *by* the king. Goulder notes that most commentators do not make such a connection (*The Psalms of Asaph*, 34).

[152] Though not so striking, Goulder connects Pss 77–78 to Ps 47 because they share the basic theme of praising Yahweh the supreme God (*The Psalms of Asaph*, 129.)

Goulder believes the collection was completed by 722 by the Asaphite psalmist who felt that the usual liturgical pattern (Korahite) was not sufficient. The psalmist adapted a common liturgy to meet the new needs of a people in crisis.[153] The collection was so endearing to his successors that they reused the collection with some amendments during the Babylonian crisis. Its usefulness was still realized by the Asaphite successors living in the time of the Maccabean revolt.[154]

In addition to the liturgical theory, Goulder asserts that the Asaphite collection can provide insight into the reconstruction of the Pentateuch. "As we have sifted through these ancient prayers, a golden key has fallen into our lap: we have, for the first time, independent, datable evidence of the earliest form of Israelite historical traditions."[155] The search for a history of the Pentateuch has been slowed by the lack of external evidence. Goulder presents the Psalms of Asaph as the necessary external evidence as derived from two elements: 1) the wording of the psalms, and 2) the passages from the Pentateuch that the psalms imply.[156]

The Asaphites had access to a number of traditions that correspond to the history of Israel outlined from Exodus 1 to 1 Kings 5. Their history extends to the loss of the Ark at Shiloh (Ps 78:59–64) and to the rise of David and the Davidic-Solomonic empire (Ps 78:65–66, 70–72 and Ps 80:11–12). The Asaphites also have a creation account (Ps 74:13–14), but their account does not correspond to the Genesis accounts; rather it

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[153] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 146.

[154] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 176.

[155] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 190.

[156] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 191.

corresponds with texts in Job and Isaiah.[157] The history presented in Genesis is largely

missing with the exception of the equation of the people of Israel with Jacob and the

mention of "the arm to the children of Lot," in Ps 83:9.[158]

Goulder next turns his attention to a discussion about who the "sons of Asaph"

are. At this point he lists the ten fragments of the Asaph line found in works outside of

the Psalter. After establishing a genealogy that suggests the Asaphites are heirs to a

prophetic ministry from the Bethel days and that covers several generations and the

length of time from 725 through 450,[159] Goulder takes up the topic of the Levites and the

connection between the Levites and Asaphites. From the time of David, the Levites

were recognized as temple staff in charge of singing and during the reign of Hezekiah it

is these Levites who take up the work of the great reforms.[160] In light of the genealogies

in Chronicles, Goulder determines that the line of Asaph (descendants of Gershon son of

Levi) is the prominent levitical line until the seventh century when they were

overshadowed by the sons of Korah.[161] The Asaphite line had remained around

Jerusalem and had not been influenced by the more priestly Pentateuchal traditions of

the Korahites who had been exiled and returned with Ezra.[162]

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[157] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 192.

[158] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 192.

[159] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 313-316.

[160] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 317–18.

[161] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 321.

[162] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 327.

Goulder uses the history presented in the Asaph collection and his conclusions about the history of the sons of Asaph, as well as information from the Korahite collections[163] to make the following conclusions:

> The Asaph and the Korah psalm collections come from the eighth century, and are the earliest forms we have of the Exodus-Numbers tradition. It has been possible to trace the development of these two independent sources in seventh-century Jerusalem; and to see their further elaboration by Merarite (priestly, Jerusalem) tradents during the Exile. The seventh-century northerners were heirs to a proto-Deuteronomic style which we find in Psalm 78 and other Asaph psalms; hence the widespread occurrence of D-type phrasing in their story-telling. That is the whole history of the development of the Pentateuch, insofar as we are given a lead-in from the Psalter.[164]

Goulder presents a thorough study of the Psalms of Asaph as well as an in-depth look at the occurrences of "sons of Asaph" outside of the Psalter. His conclusions about the group and their role in developing the Pentateuch, however, are dependent on extreme speculation regarding the history of the Asaph guild, their place among the Levites, and their interest in presenting a history. Though history is one major theme occurring in the collection, it is not the concern of the collection as a whole. In fact, the only theme occurring in all of the psalms of the collection is prophecy/judgment. Goulder does not address the place of judgment within this "history" of the Asaphites. He also does not adequately address the idea that the group was somehow tied to cult prophecy (Buss, Illman, and Nasuti).

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[163] Goulder outlines the Korahite traditions and notes two differences. First, there is not mention of or reference to the Exodus. Second, the people of God are referred to as Jacob, never Israel. Goulder concludes that the Korahite group from Dan was an older, established group that had not experienced the Exodus (*The Psalms of Asaph*, 195–98).

[164] Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph*, 311.

David Mitchell

One last scholar deserves attention at this point, David Mitchell. Mitchell's work, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, adds to the debate on the purpose and message of the Psalter by suggesting that the redactors' purpose was to communicate an eschatological message to the audience.[165] After two initial chapters which provide background to both the plausibility of eschatological prediction and the possibility of purposeful arrangement in the Psalter, Mitchell turns to the Asaph collection as a test case for his theory. Mitchell approaches the twelve psalms of Asaph as an "independent literary category," which he believes is justified by their common heading, the consecutive placement of Pss 73–83, and their shared linguistic and stylistic characteristics.[166] He also includes the three 'deutero-Asaph' psalms (96, 105, 106) [167] in his investigation because they also share some characteristics of the Asaph group.

Mitchell begins his discussion about the Asaph psalms by focusing on the heading and tradition related to Asaph and his descendents. He affirms, as does Nasuti, the prophet-musician role of the Asaphite group. In light of the connection of musical and prophetic gifts in other biblical texts and later Jewish and even Islamic references to such a combination,[168] Mitchell believes that "it appears likely that ancient Hebrew

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[165] David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 15.

[166] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 90.

[167] Mitchell borrows the term "deutero-Asaph" from Nasuti. Psalms 96, 105, and 106 are attributed to Asaph in 1 Chron 16 but do not contain the Asaphite superscription in the Psalter. Psalm 95 is a bridge between the Asaphite psalms and the deutero-Asaphite psalms (*Tradition History*, 190).

[168] Mitchell mentions Miriam (Exod 15:20-21), Deborah (Judg 4:4; 5:1), prophets in Saul's time (1 Sam 10:5), David's harp playing (1 Sam 16:23), Elisha's call for a harpist (2 Kgs 3:15-16), and

writers regarded the psalms ascribed to the Asaphite musicians as future-predictive."[169]

While it is true that four of the twelve Asaph psalms contain divine oracle, a relatively

high percentage compared to the remainder of the Psalter, Mitchell's assertion that the

ancient Hebrew would consider them 'future-predictive' seems weak. None of the

biblical examples Mitchell gives connects music and prophecy in a cultic setting such as

temple worship in a way that suggests that the Asaphites would be known as future-

predictive prophets. In fact, the Chronicler, from whom most of our information about

the Asaphites comes, stresses the Asaphites' function of thanking and praising God more

than their prophetic role.[170] Even if Mitchell is following Nasuti's argument that the

cult-prophetic role of the Asaphites is pre-exilic while their praise and thanksgiving role

can be traced to the time of the Chronicler,[171] Mitchell's 'future-predictive'

understanding is weak given that the ancient Hebrews' view of the Asaphite fluctuated

over time with their prophetic role being surpassed by their praise and thanksgiving.

Additionally, Mitchell notes the connection between the Asaphites and the office

of *mazkîr* and the related *zikhron* ritual. He reinterprets the role of the *mazkîr* as being

one who remembers rather than a scribal recorder as the role of scribe is listed in other

biblical texts as a separate position.[172] The function of a *mazkîr* might be better

understood as a cult official whose job it was to ensure that Yahweh remember the plight

comments about Ezekiel being 'like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument' (Ezek 33:32) as examples from the biblical text, while mediaeval Islamic mystic al-Ghazali comments about how music can bring about religious states (Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 92).

[169] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 92.

[170] 1 Chron 16 and 2 Chron 5 stress the role of the Asaphites in thanking and praising God.

[171] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 185.

[172] 2 Sam 8:16; 20:24; 1 Kgs 4:3; 1 Chron 18:15 (Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 92).

of the people and act on their behalf in times when deliverance was needed. As such,

Mitchell suggests that the *zikhron* ritual, bringing remembrance before Yahweh (Num

10: 8-10), would be a likely time for the *mazkîr* to participate.[173] This idea is enhanced

by the importance of remembering in the Asaphite Psalms.[174]

Another characteristic of the Asaphite group is a concern regarding ingathering.

The Asaphite tradition has several connections to the theme of gathering: 1) the name

Asaph means 'gather' and the psalm heading could be a play on words or may be

translated better as "For the Ingathering;"[175] 2) The first word in Psalm 50 is a command

to ingather, while the last psalm of the Asaph collection is about a ten nation alliance

gathering against Israel suggesting that gathering is a significant theme for the group;[176]

3) The name Joseph, which is a cognate of Asaph, is common in the Asaph collection

and the deutero-Asaph psalms but nowhere else in the Psalter; Joseph acts as an

ingatherer both of the tribes of Israel and of the harvest of the earth;[177] 4) Jacob, who

also has a reputation as an ingatherer, is mentioned frequently in the Asaph Psalms;[178] 5)

Psalm 81 mentions the sounding of the *shofar*, a signal for gathering (v 4).[179]

In line with his work to uncover the eschatological framework of the Psalter,

Mitchell moves next to the eschatological elements present in the Asaph collection. He

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[173] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 94.

[174] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 98.

[175] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 99.

[176] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 100.

[177] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 100.

[178] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 101.

[179] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 101.

first notes that several psalms within the collection refer to "latter-day" events. Psalm 50 depicts God coming in storm and fire to judge the righteous and wicked (vv 1-7, 16), an event that suggests a consummation of history.[180] Psalm 81 mentions "a son of man" which might be a reference to an eschatological figure (vv 17-18).[181] In Psalm 82 God pronounces judgment on the other gods in a way that suggests "the final dispatch of all cosmic supernatural opponents of God's *malkut*."[182] Of the Asaph psalms that suggest eschatology, Mitchell cites Psalm 83 as the most illustrative example because of its quality of ultimacy, the presence of the traditional eschatological motif of a ten-nation confederacy, and its connection to Jehoshaphat's battle (2 Chron 20), which was regarded as prefiguring an ultimate war.[183] Mitchell admits that the degree to which these psalms are intentionally eschatological may vary, but they were perceived by later Jewish interpreters to be eschatological and thus it is not unreasonable to think that the redactors of the Psalter perceived them as such.[184]

Mitchell ends his study of the Asaph Psalms by considering the possibility that a narrative sequence of events exists in the collection. That such a task is possible is supported by the fact that there are numerous thematic links between the psalms of the collection. Psalm 50 contains all of the major themes and acts as an introduction while Psalm 83 with its theme of ultimate war and the advent of God's universal dominion act

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[180] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 103.

[181] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 103.

[182] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 103.

[183] Mitchell points out that the event relating most closely with the enemies listed in Psalm 83 was an alliance of Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, possibly Ishmaelites who threatened invasion during Jehoshapat's time. (Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 101-102).

[184] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 104.

as a conclusion; the introduction and conclusion share themes of judgment and gathering. Psalm 50 and Psalm 82 share envisaged court scenes. Other prominent themes include the Exodus and the destruction of the temple. Mitchell tentatively suggests the following narrative sequence:

Psalm 50: God commands the ingathering of Israel and pronounces sentence; the righteous are delivered while the wicked are torn to pieces;

Psalm 73: The wicked prosper now but God will destroy them when God rises up;

Psalm 74: The nations destroyed the temple and continue to mock God. God is reminded of such deeds and exhorted to repay them;

Psalm 75: Praise because God's judgment is near;

Psalm 76: Remembering that God has delivered in the past;

Psalm 77: God is called to remembrance and urged to act on Israel's behalf on the basis of God's former lover for Israel;

Psalm 78: Recalling that Israel has failed but God is merciful;

Psalm 79: The nations have invaded and destroyed Jerusalem;

Psalm 80: A plea for God to restore the nation; in return the people promise future obedience;

Psalm 81: In an oracle God announces that the condition of deliverance is obedience;

Psalm 82: God responds by judging the deities of the nations;

Psalm 83: A ten-nation confederacy gathers against Israel signaling that the day of hostility spoken in Psalm 50 has arrived.[185]

While Mitchell's narrative sequence highlights the thematic connections within the collection, especially those of judgment and remembrance, it seems that his narrative sequence does not function well sequentially. The psalms of the collection move in the ebb and flow of waves of despair over the reality that the wicked are still present and threatening and waves of remembrance that God delivered before and can/will deliver again. The collection also seems to show some ambiguity over whether or not that deliverance will come soon or whether it will be eschatological. In light of evidence that suggests that the Asaph collection as part of the Elohistic Psalter was created during or shortly after the exile,[186] it is possible that the people were still counting on immanent deliverance rather than focusing on the eschatological deliverance. Mitchell may be correct about the eschatological hope of the final redactors of the Psalter, but injecting this hope into the narrative sequence of a collection that was likely solidified long before the final redaction of the Psalter seems out of place.

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[185] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 106-107.

[186] Joel Burnett, "Forty-two Songs for Elohim: An Ancient Organizing Principle in the Shaping of the Elohistic Psalter," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 81–101.

Scholarship Relating to the Canonical Shape of the Psalter

In light of the aim of this dissertation to understand the shaping of the Asaph collection and its place at the beginning of Book III of the Psalter, the history of scholarship will now address scholarship relating to the canonical shape and shaping of the Psalter. Of primary interest in this section are the works of Gerald Wilson and Clint McCann.

McCann states in the preface to *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* that "there is a growing interest among scholars in attempting to understand the book of Psalms not only as a collection of liturgical materials but also as a coherent literary whole."[187] This enterprise is characterized by the search for editorial activity within the Psalter. "This purposeful placement of psalms within the collection seems to have given the final form of the whole Psalter a function and message greater than its parts."[188]

Gerald Wilson

Gerald Wilson pioneered the search for purposeful arrangement in his dissertation, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*.[189] He concludes that the Psalter as a whole has undergone a unifying editorial process that resulted in its five-book structure. This editorial activity is confirmed by the presence of doxologies at the end of book divisions, change of author and genre designations, and the placement of royal psalms at

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[187] J. Clinton McCann, "Preface" in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed, by J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 7–10; quote from page 7.

[188] McCann, "Preface," 7.

[189] Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, Calif.: Scholar's Press, 1985).

critical points in the first three books.[190] Wilson begins his work by studying Sumerian

and Babylonian collections of hymns. During the course of his study he noticed explicit

and tacit evidence of editorial organization; Wilson then applies what he has learned to

the Hebrew Psalter. In this comparison, Wilson finds that explicit evidence of editorial

concern and purpose is lacking. In fact, only one explicit statement exhibits an

organizational function – Ps 72:20, "Finished are the prayers of David son of Jesse."[191]

The superscriptions supply information about authorship, genre, manner of performance,

and other similar information, information that has been used by the editor to organize

and structure the Psalter.[192] In reference to the superscriptions, Wilson focuses on the

use of author designation and genre categories.[193]

For Books I–III the primary organizational concern is authorship, but authorship

is not the primary organizational concern of the Psalter as a whole.[194] The authorship

designations do mark disjunctions in the first three books, which is most noticeable at

the "seams" between the books. There is a change in authorship between the Davidic

psalms of Book I and the "sons of Korah" psalms that begin Book II. The changes

between Books II and III are more striking with the end of the second Davidic collection

in Ps 71, a psalm of Solomon (Ps 72) and the beginning of the Asaph collection at the

start of Book III. Thus, at the change of books there are not only book divisions and

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[190] Gerald H. Wilson, "Evidence of Editorial Divisions in the Hebrew Psalter," *VT* 34 (1984): 337–52; see also Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85–94.

[191] Wilson, *Editing*, 138, 182.

[192] Wilson, *Editing*, 182.

[193] Wilson, "Evidence of Editorial Divisions," 337.

[194] Wilson, "Evidence of Editorial Divisions," 338.

doxologies (tacit evidence of organization), but also disjuncture created by author changes. This disjuncture is absent in the division between Books IV and V. [195] Genre categories that are contained in the superscriptions do not constitute a primary organizational principle for the Psalter as a whole, but they do serve to ease the transition between groups of psalms. At points where authorship forms a disjuncture, genre categories are the same at the end of the one group and the beginning of the next (i.e., Pss 82 and 83 at the end of the Asaph collection and Pss 84 and 85 at the beginning of the second Korahite collection all bear the genre term *mzmwr*). [196] This binding technique does not occur at the divisions between books (with the exception of Book I to Book II). [197]

Tacit evidence of the organization of the Psalter includes the doxologies of Books I–IV. Wilson addresses two questions in reference to the use of doxologies as an editorial tool. 1) Were the doxologies original to the psalms they are now attached to or were they latter additions by an editor inserted for the purpose of indicating the end of the book? 2) If the doxologies were original, were these psalms utilized by the editors at the end of books or were the books determined by the accidental positioning of these psalms? [198] After comparing the four doxologies, Wilson concludes that based on the variety in wording, length and formal makeup these doxologies have diverse origins. [199] He also concludes that they are not later insertions, but are integral parts of the psalms in

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[195] Wilson, "Evidence of Editorial Divisions," 339.

[196] Wilson, "Evidence of Editorial Divisions," 345–46.

[197] Wilson, "Evidence of Editorial Divisions," 347.

[198] Wilson, *Editing*, 183.

[199] Wilson, *Editing*, 183–4.

which they lie and have their origin in cult liturgy.[200] The use of the psalms that contain

doxologies is not random; they are used in conjunction with internal breaks (author

designations and genre categories) and represent "editorially induced methods of giving

'shape' to the [psalms] corpus."[201]

In addition to doxologies, the presence of *hllwyh-hwdw* psalms groupings in

Books IV–V provide evidence of purposeful shaping.[202] There are four groups of *hllwyh*

psalms, each marking the end of a Psalter segment: Pss 104–106; Pss 111–117; Ps 135;

Pss 146–150. In each of the first three instances, the group is related to an immediately

following *hwdw* psalm that serves to introduce the next section. There is no *hwdw* psalm

following Psalms 146–150 because there is not a new section to introduce.[203] The

juxtaposition of the *hllwyh* and *hwdw* psalms at the ending/beginning of psalm segments

lends further support for purposeful choice and arrangement.

Wilson continues the discussion of tacit evidence by pointing out several groups

of psalms that are linked by theme. Though thematic groups are subject to individual

interpretation, there are a few instances of clear thematic juxtaposition that bear further

discussion. The first group consists of Psalms 65–68 all of which share a common

interest in praise which stands out in relation to the psalms around it which are prayers

[200] Wilson, *Editing*, 185–6.

[201] Wilson, *Editing*, 186.

[202] The presence of "praise" and "blessing" often concluded documents or sections in the Mesopotamian hymns and catalogues that Wilson studied, thus he wasn't surprised to find a similar technique in the Hebrew hymnic literature. Wilson found that *hllwyh* Pss were used in 11Qpsa to indicate internal divisions. He extends the discussion to the Psalter (Wilson, *Editing*, 186).

[203] Wilson, *Editing*, 187.

of deliverance.[204] The second group, Psalms 93 and 96–99, are designated as "enthronement" psalms based on internal verbal and thematic parallels, which include references in all five psalms to the kingship of Yahweh.[205] Psalms 105–106 are linked by their concern with Yahweh's acts in the history of Israel, more specifically Yahweh's gracious activity on behalf of Israel in Psalm 105 in contrast to the rebellious attitude of Israel in Psalm 106.[206] Lastly, Psalms 145–150 are linked as *hllwyh* psalms with a common theme related to the praise of Yahweh that functions as an answer to the exhortation of David in Psalm 145:21.[207]

Up to this point, Wilson has focused on individual instances of editorial activity within the Psalter. Evidence of editorial shaping in regard to the Psalter as a whole is found in three areas. First is the recognition that Psalm 1 has been added to serve as a hermeneutical introduction that provides the interpretive lens through which to understand the psalms, namely as a source of divine communication to humans.[208] "It stresses private, individual meditation as an important mode of access to the theological message of the psalms and, in so doing, shifts the function of these compositions away from public, communal cultic performance."[209] Second, Wilson believes that the five-

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[204] Wilson, *Editing*, 190.

[205] Wilson, *Editing*, 191–2. For a thorough study of the Enthronement psalms see J. D. W. Watts, "Yahweh Malak Psalms," *TZ* 21 (1965) 341–48.

[206] Wilson, *Editing*, 193.

[207] Wilson, *Editing*, 193.

[208] Wilson, *Editing*, 204. Gerald H. Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms" in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, (ed. by J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 72–82.

[209] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 74.

book division of the Psalter points to its shaping.[210] Third, evidence of editorial shaping

is found at the end of the Psalter. The concluding *hwdw* Psalms (146–150) provide

closure to book five as well as the Psalter as a whole.[211]

Wilson suggests that the royal psalms at the seams of Books I–III provide an

interpretative framework for those books, a framework that is concerned with the

frustration by the failure of the Davidic covenant and kingdom, which Wilson calls a

"Royal Covenantal Frame."[212] These psalms portray a continuing appeal for God to

restore the covenant and kingdom. He also suggests that Books IV–V respond to that

concern by offering a new theological perspective and resolution.[213] The psalms of the

last two books are shaped by the concerns of wisdom.[214] Wilson has argued that, though

the two segments of the Psalter have undergone separate editorial processes, "there is

evidence that these two segments have been editorially bound together as a whole."[215]

This evidence begins with the continuation of the royal covenantal frame found

in Psalm 144. In this psalm David returns with praises to Yahweh and a call for God's

deliverance.[216] The evidence continues with the placement of Psalm 1 as an introduction

to the entire Psalter, an extension of the wisdom frame and with the placement of Psalm

145 as a conclusion to the collection. Both psalms juxtapose the way of the righteous

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[210] Wilson, *Editing*, 204.

[211] Wilson, *Editing*, 189–90; 225–28.

[212] Wilson, "Royal Psalms," 85–94.

[213] Wilson, *Editing*, 214–28.

[214] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 80.

[215] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 80.

[216] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 80.

and the way of the wicked.[217] Psalm 73, the opening psalm of Book III and another

wisdom psalm, provides further evidence for a final wisdom framework.[218] The final

shape of the Psalter preserves the tension between the royal covenantal frame and the

wisdom frame, but according to Wilson, the wisdom frame has the last word.[219] Wilson

suggests that, in light of this editorial activity, the designation of the Psalter as a

hymnbook should be changed in favor of a designation that highlights the "harmonious

whole." Wilson states, "While each individual composition may stand on its own . . . the

whole has an integrity that cannot and must not be ignored."[220]

Clint McCann

McCann, in "Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Hebrew Psalter," seeks

to build upon Wilson's suggestion that the purpose of the final form of the Psalter was to

address the failure of the Davidic covenant in light of the exile, the Diaspora, and the

oppression of Israel during the postexilic era.[221] In contrast to Wilson who asserts that

Book IV is the "editorial heart" of the Psalter because it begins to answer the problems

set forth in Books I–III, McCann believes that Books I–III already begin to answer the

problem posed by the exile, Diaspora, and oppression of Israel during the postexilic

era.[222] McCann's work also focuses on the "seams" of the books, that is the psalms that

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[217] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 80.

[218] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 80–81.

[219] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 81.

[220] Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 82.

[221] J. Clinton McCann, "Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Psalter" in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, (ed. by J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 93.

[222] McCann, "Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Psalter," 95.

begin these books (rather than those that end the books as is Wilson's focus).[223]

McCann suggests that when one considers Psalms 1 and 2, Psalms 42–44, and Psalms

73–74, "one discovers a pattern that serves to instruct the postexilic community not only

to face the disorienting reality of exile but also to reach toward a reorientation beyond

the traditional grounds for hope, that is, beyond the Davidic/Zion covenant theology."[224]

McCann's work focuses on Book III.

McCann begins by making some fundamental assertions about the nature of

Book III: 1) It begins with Psalm 73, a personal expression of one in trouble, but is able

to maintain hope; 2) Psalm 73 is linked to the psalms that follow it by repetition,

including the title *le asap* common to Psalms 73–83 (a Levitical collection) and

numerous links between Psalms 73 and 74;[225] 3) Book III is dominated by psalms of

community (Pss 73, 77, 86, and 88 would be the exceptions); 4) Most of the community

laments in the Psalter appear in Book III.[226] Based on these fundamental assertions,

McCann suggests that it is safe to claim that Book III was shaped by the experience of

exile and dispersion.[227] McCann proceeds with a closer look at the book in order to

confirm that view.

McCann continues by pointing out that, with the exception of Psalms 79 and 80;

the communal laments in Book III do not appear in consecutive order. They are

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[223] McCann, "Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Psalter," 95.

[224] McCann, "Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Psalter," 95.

[225] McCann relies on the work of Nasuti (*Tradition History*, 63–66) and A. Caquot, ('Le Psaume LXXIII,' *Sem* 21 [1971], 46).

[226] McCann, "Books I–III," 95–96.

[227] McCann, "Books I–III," 96.

interrupted by psalms that "grasp for threads of hope amid the experience of exile and dispersion by celebrating God as judge of all the earth or by rehearsing God's past deeds on Israel's behalf despite Israel's faithlessness."[228] In fact, the first psalm of the book (73) sets the tone for this movement from lament to hope.[229] The lament to hope pattern found throughout Book III leads McCann to suggest that "Book III has been *decisively shaped* by the experience of exile and dispersion."[230] The experience of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, as well as the experience of utter rejection is expressed in Psalms 74, 79, 80, 83, 85:1–8 and 89:39–5. The trying times of exile also brought about new expressions of hope that would carry the community through such desperate times.[231]

McCann acknowledges that he is not the first to point out that the bulk of Book III is community oriented and reflective of the exilic experience;[232] however, he is not satisfied with these observations as a final assessment. He moves beyond them to suggest that Book III also helps the people to reach new orientation by rejecting the Davidic/Zion theology, which was the previous ground for hope.[233] There is a canonical juxtaposition of traditional Davidic/Zion theology with communal psalms of lament that

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[228] McCann, "Books I–III," 96.

[229] The movement from lament to hope may be contained within one psalm (Ps 73:1–13 – lament; Ps 73: 18–28 – hope) or may be carried over several psalms (Pss 79 and 80 – lament; Pss 81 and 82 – hope). McCann, "Books I–III," 97.

[230] McCann, "Books I–III," 98 (italics mine).

[231] McCann, "Books I–III," 98.

[232] McCann points to E. Beaucamps (*Le Psautier* [2 vols; Paris: Gabalda, 1979], 2:4), J. H. Eaton (*Kingship and the Psalms* [London: SCM Press, 1976], 76), Illman (*Thema und Tradition*, 55–64), and A. F. Kirkpatrick (*The Book of Psalms* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1921], 427–430).

[233] McCann, "Books I–III," 99.

works to signal a rejection of this theology as a hope for the people. Example of this juxtaposition can be found in Psalm 78: 68–72 and Psalm 79 and within Psalm 89, which starts out with the traditional theology but has an abrupt shift in v 39 with its rejection.[234] Though the traditional theology is abandoned, hope is not. Hope is rightly directed toward God, a hope repeatedly voiced in Book III as the people acknowledge that God is the judge of all the earth and God has been faithful to Israel in the past, even when Israel was not faithful to God.[235] Therefore, in response to Wilson's claim that the editorial purpose of the Psalter was to address the failure of the Davidic covenant, McCann asserts that the answer is being proposed as early as Book III (in contrast to Wilson who sees the answer in Books IV and V).[236]

McCann has also found evidence for the answer to the failure of Davidic/Zion theology in Books I–II. Again, McCann focuses on the beginning psalms of the books rather than the closing psalms. He finds that Psalm 42–43, like Psalm 73 is a personal expression of one in trouble who is trying to maintain hope.[237] Psalm 44, like Psalm 74 is a communal lament that is tied to Psalm 42–43 by several literary commonalities. Psalms 42–43 and 44 work together to set the tone for Book II.[238] Book I also begins with two psalms, linked by literary commonalities, that provide literary context for reading Book I and the Psalter as a whole.[239] In light of the presence of answers to the

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[234] McCann, "Books I–III," 99–100.

[235] McCann, "Books I–III," 100.

[236] McCann, "Books I–III," 100.

[237] McCann, "Books I–III," 101.

[238] McCann, "Books I–III," 102–3.

[239] McCann, "Books I–III," 103–4.

problem of Davidic/Zion theology in Books I and II, McCann deepens Wilson's thesis to include Books I–III in the answer.[240] McCann even goes so far as to suggest that the evidence he has found in Book III may also point to one of the groups involved in the editing of the Psalter—the Asaphites.[241] Based on Nasuti's research that locates the Asaphites in liturgical life (primarily communal lament) from a pre-exilic time and continuing after the exile, McCann supposes that the exile would have been a major crisis for the group and that the group's concerns would have suited them to respond to such a crisis.[242] He asks the following question: "Is it possible that Psalms 73–83 in particular were not collected randomly but were selected and arranged to address a crisis in the national life?"[243] Nasuti, as we have seen above, does not address the purposeful arrangement of the collection, but McCann believes that "it makes sense that they would do so [address the crisis of exile] by purposefully selecting and arranging their own primary sources."[244] McCann, however, has yet to elaborate on this issue.

Summary

This chapter has focused on the history of scholarship related to the Asaphite collection specifically and to the canonical approach to the Psalter as a whole. Beginning with the work of Franz Delitzsch, the Asaphite collection has often garnered special attention because if its apparent unity. Scholars such as Buss, Engnell, Illman,

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[240] McCann, "Books I–III," 104–5.

[241] McCann, "Books I–III," 105.

[242] McCann, "Books I–III," 105–6.

[243] McCann, "Books I–III," 106.

[244] McCann, "Books I–III," 106.

Nasuti, and Goulder have mined the text for clues that provide some suggestions as to who might be responsible for such a collection, essentially looking at the text and working backward. While yielding interesting results, these studies did not address questions of the arrangement of the psalms within the collection or the placement of the collection, nor did they acknowledge thematic or linguistic links that indicate a purpose for the collection. Mitchell begins moving in the direction of arrangement and purpose of the collection itself. Their scholarship has yielded the following insights:

1. This collection, bound by a common superscription, can be viewed as a unified collection connected by common themes and language.

2. The psalms of the collection include: a preference for the divine name Elohim as well as several other unique combinations of divine name, an emphasis on the history of Israel, a preference for referring to the people as Joseph/Israel, shared imagery including the flock/shepherd image, prophetic nature/tone, dominant communal aspect, and vivid descriptions of nature/creation.

3. Many scholars consider the Asaphite guild to be a levitical group with roots dating back to the time of David, though the date of the psalms may range from the time of David through the exile. The function of the group was tied to singing in the temple and perhaps prophecy.

4. There is no consensus on the origin of the collection, but the most common suggestion is a northern origin.

The canonical approach, on the other hand, has provided much insight into the shaping of the Psalter into the five-book collection it has become. Questions of arrangement and purpose are at the forefront of canonical studies. What is lacking in the

canonical approach to the Psalter is attention to arrangement and purpose within smaller collections, like the Asaphite collection. Is there purposeful arrangement of the psalms within the Asaphite collection and does this collection communicate a message that is influenced in part by its unified content and location within the Psalter? The following chapters will address these questions in a variety of ways—reading the psalms from a canonical perspective, recognizing linguistic and thematic links, and understanding the collection within its context in Book III and the Psalter.

CHAPTER THREE

Reading Psalms 73–83

We turn now to the heart of this project, the reading of the Asaphite Psalms. As noted previously, Psalm 50, though very closely tied to the rest of the collection, will be dealt with separately. The focus of this chapter is on the group of psalms that open Book III of the Psalter, Psalms 73–83, which are tied together at first glance by the superscription *lĕʾāsāp*. Given the unified nature of this psalm collection, can more be said about its purpose? Do they function as a group to communicate a message? This chapter will begin to answer these questions as we focus on a careful reading of the Asaph psalms using a canonical approach, paying careful attention to how the arrangement of the psalms affects their reading. Attention is paid to the affect upon the reader because it is in the interaction between reader and text that meaning is communicated. Each psalm will be addressed individually.

Psalm 73

For the reader of the Psalms, Psalm 73 represents a change as indicated in several ways. First, Psalm 73 is the first psalm of Book III. If one agrees with Wilson that the five book division of the Psalter is evidence of its shaping,[1] then the occasion of a change in books alerts the reader to something new. Second, the reader has recently encountered a series of changes in psalm superscription from "of David" in Psalm 70 to

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[1] Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 204.

"of Solomon" in Psalm 72 and an announcement that the prayers of David, son of Jesse have ended (Ps 72:20).[2] Third, the transition to Psalm 73 presents yet another superscription change (now to Asaph), thus by the time the reader finishes Book II and reads the first verse of Psalm 73 she is anticipating something different. Fourth, though arguably relating collective experiences,[3] Psalm 73 is written from the vantage point of one person, thus we enter into the psalmist's very personal struggle.

There are several aspects about Psalm 73 that have led scholars to locate it as the center of the Psalter, both theologically and canonically.[4] Walter Brueggemann boldly asserts that Psalm 73 "may be the most remarkable and satisfying of all the psalms."[5] This psalm echoes the beginning of the Psalter and its juxtaposition of the righteous and the wicked. The wicked in Psalm 73, however, are prospering in every earthly way while the psalmist wonders if his righteousness has been in vain. The genre of the psalm is debated with options ranging from wisdom psalm, individual lament, individual

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[2] Wilson suggests that Ps 72:20 is the only explicit statement of editorial organization (*Editing*, 209) and points out the presence of authorial disjuncture at the transitions between Books I and II, Books II and III, and Books III and IV ("Evidence of Editorial Divisions in the Hebrew Psalter," *VT* 34 [1984]: 339).

[3] Erhard Gerstenberger considers the psalmist to be the "exemplary believer" who is voicing the experience of the "Jobian minority," those faithful Israelites whose experience of suffering is counter to their beliefs. "They perceive a dangerous contradiction between the community's conviction and real life (*Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* [FOTL 15; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 71).

[4] Walter Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon," *JSOT* 50 (1991): 63–92 and *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 204–10. See also, J. Clinton McCann, "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 4; Leander Keck, et al., ed.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 641–1280; and *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 142–45.

[5] Walter Brueggemann, The *Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 115. For Brueggemann part of the psalm's remarkableness is the way that this one psalm demonstrates the process of moving from disorientation to orientation, a movement made in faith and marked by trust.

thanksgiving,[6] or profession of faith used for instruction.[7] Though one genre cannot be

agreed upon, it is fair to say that the psalm is a reflection in autobiographical style which

highlights the struggles of the righteous during a time when the wicked seem to have the

advantage. The reflection turns to thanksgiving as the psalmist is assured of God's

nearness and faithfulness to the righteous. The performance of such a psalm in a

liturgical setting would have no doubt provided instruction and encouragement to those

choosing to remain righteous in the face of the prosperity of the wicked.[8]

The proverb of the opening verse "Surely God is good to Israel/to the upright,[9] to

those who are pure in heart," is both a problem for the psalmist and a confession of

faith.[10] In the beginning it is a naïve statement first uttered before an encounter with

hurt, doubt and anguish.[11] It is a problem, as we find by reading further, because the

realities of life present an entirely different scenario;[12] they render the established

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[6] Marvin E. Tate presents the most frequent options (*Psalms 51–100* [WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990], 233).

[7] McCann, "The Book of Psalms," 968.

[8] James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 241.

[9] The Hebrew reads טוֹב לְיִשְׂרָאֵל but many have emended to the text to read טוב ל ישר אל. The emended text is often preferred because it sets up a parallel with the second phrase. Mitchell Dahood (*Psalms II, 51–100* [AB 17; Garden City: Doubleday, 1968], 188) and Brueggemann (*The Message of the Psalms*, 116) retain the original. Ernst Würthwein points out what is at stake in changing the reading, namely shifting toward reward vs. punishment rather than the grace of God (*Wort und Existenz: Studien zum Alten Testament* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970], 167).

[10] Many commentators (Mays, *Psalms*, 241; Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* [CC; trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 87) accept the statement only as a statement of faith, but to do so undermines the struggle of the psalmist. Both Craig C. Broyles (*Psalms* [NIB; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999], 299) and McCann ("The Book of Psalms," 968) point out the precarious nature of the statement given the psalmists current situation. In light of the conclusions of the psalmist that God remains near to the righteous and will punish the wicked, the statement can be seen as a confession.

[11] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 116.

[12] Broyles, *Psalms*, 299. See also, Robert L. Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73–89)* (JSOTSup 307; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 16.

assumptions of Israel suspect.[13] The wicked not only prosper (v 3), their bodies are sound (v 4) and the people around them praise them and overlook their violence, oppression, and arrogance (vv 10; 6–9). Verses 4–11 are dominated by the pronominal suffix "they," which emphasizes the divide between the psalmist and the wicked. Their actions are described in great detail, a fact that Brueggemann suggests indicates "not only that the speaker is a careful observer, but that he has been intensely, almost obsessively, fascinated with the subject."[14] The psalmist is jealous of their prosperity.[15]

While the wicked are living a fine life, the psalmist who has remained clean of heart and innocent (v 13) is plagued and punished (v 14). In fact, the word נֶגַע "plague" is used in v 5 referring to the wicked who are not plagued like other people, and in v 14 in reference to the righteous psalmist who is plagued all day long. Everything in the psalmist's tradition suggests that these people are the ones who should encounter suffering. The fact that the claims of the tradition seem to be mistaken makes it seem provincial.[16] Apparently, living the fine life works and works well! The psalm provides no answers to the psalmist about why things are such.[17] The psalmist's predicament— remain faithful and suffer or give in, become like the wicked, and prosper—is difficult to

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[13] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 117.

[14] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 117.

[15] Martin Buber, "The Heart Determines: Psalm 73" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Issues in Religion and Theology 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 109–118.

[16] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 118.

[17] Brueggemann, *The Psalms*, 64.

solve based on life experience alone.   Yet the psalmist knows that following the way of the wicked means abandoning generations of God's children (v 15).[18]

After personally struggling with the issue (vv 2–14) the psalmist turns to address God directly in v 15, the problem is not solved at this point, but the psalmist is now looking in the correct direction.[19] It is with the realization that he is a member of God's community (the circle of God's children) and he must act responsibly toward this community (v 15)[20] and that he is in the presence of God that the situation is clarified (v 17). Verse 17 is the pivot point of this psalm, what comes before is a largely negative assessment of the current situation and what follows is strikingly more positive.[21] It is important to note that the place in which clarification was received was the sanctuary of God; being in the place where God dwells put life into perspective for the psalmist.[22]

It is not the present situation that provides the answer to the psalmist's dilemma, but the reality that in the end the wicked will fall (vv 17–20; 27). The allure of the fine life has lost its appeal.[23] This realization frees the psalmist to notice that his wavering was ignorant (v 21) for God had been with him guiding and counseling (vv 23–24). The psalmist's focus now shifts from "I/they" to his relationship with God.[24] No longer are

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[18] Artur Weiser suggests that survival of the faith in general is at stake in Psalm 73 (*The Psalms: A Commentary* [OTL; trans. Herbert Hartwell; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962], 507).

[19] McCann, "The Book of Psalms," 969.

[20] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 118.

[21] Broyles, *Psalms*, 299.

[22] Mays, *Psalms*, 243. McCann disagrees stating that the psalmist would not have entered the temple if the decision to be faithful had not already been made. He believes it was the psalmist's identity within the children of God that brought about change ("The Book of Psalms," 969).

[23] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 119.

[24] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 118.

earthly things desirable (v 25) for "it is good to be near God" (v 28). The alternative to nearness is being far from God and ultimately perishing (v 27). The psalmist ends by confessing that he has made God his refuge which will result in the psalmist's recounting all of God's deeds (v 28). In light of this change of attitude, the proverb of the first verse becomes a confession of faith, "Surely God is good to Israel/to the upright, to those pure in heart." The circumstance of the psalmist did not change, but his understanding did. Through the passion of the psalmist's struggle, the case is made that the old claims of God's faithfulness are claims of vitality that can carry those who are struggling in this new situation.[25] God's presence and reality give the psalmist the strength to remain faithful in the face of the prosperity of the wicked.[26]

As the first psalm of Book III and the Asaphite collection, Psalm 73 has presented one of the central issues facing the audience—remain faithful and righteous or give in to wickedness. The psalmist also presents the hoped-for response—to remain faithful, as well as the results of either decision—nearness to God or distance from God.

Psalm 74

This psalm opens with two desperate questions: why do you cast us off forever and why does your anger burn against the sheep of your pasture? Gerstenberger comments that the lack of invocation, a traditional trait of this genre,[27] and the sentence construction which places the "why?" in the first place and Elohim in the second place,

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[25] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 117.

[26] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 969.

[27] Psalm 74 is frequently classified as a communal lament/complaint or corporate prayer for help (Broyles, *Psalms*, 306; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 77; Kraus, *Psalms*, 96; Mays, *Psalms*, 244; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 972).

give the "impression of a hasty opening that ignores etiquette."[28] These questions are a

shocking shift from the end of Psalm 73 where the psalmist is celebrating the nearness of

God. In Psalm 73 nearness to God is a privilege of the righteous; distance and

destruction is reserved for the wicked. What is even more shocking is that God's anger

is not directed at God's enemies, but at God's own flock![29] As we read the psalm it is

clear that the situation for such lament is the loss of the temple. The psalmist laments

more than the loss of a special building or the situation of invasion by another power, it

is a lament about the loss of a key symbol in Israel's belief system—their center had

been destroyed.[30]

The questions of verse one introduce the feeling of crisis that dominates this

communal lament, a crisis that is attributed to God's anger rather than the actions of the

enemy.[31] The questions do not require an answer from God; they require a change in

God's actions.[32] It is interesting, however, that a psalm so concerned about the

destruction of the temple does not first address the details of that destruction or even talk

of the enemies who carried it out, those are secondary issues. The psalm starts with the

subject of God, the source of the trouble and the only possible source of hope.[33] The

petition of the community is uttered in verse 2: God, remember! God is urged to

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[28] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 78.

[29] Tate, *Psalms 51–150*, 248.

[30] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 68. See also, Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

[31] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 69.

[32] Ingar Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 86.

[33] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 69.

remember the people who are referred to as God's congregation, a people acquired long-ago and purposefully redeemed to be God's heritage. God is also urged to remember the place of God's dwelling, Mount Zion. Next God is asked to "direct your steps" toward the ruins implying that God must return to the scene in order to see the destruction. God's remembrance will surely set up a contrast between how things are and how things used to be with the hoped for result being God's action to make things right.[34]

Verses 4–11 present the crisis at hand, the Temple has been destroyed. The destruction is complete, a realization that is enhanced by the detailed description.[35] The foes "roared" within it (v 4), they hacked at wooden trellises with their axes (v 5), they smashed carvings with the hammer (v 6), and they burned the place to the ground (v 7). The enemies are always acting against "your," that is God's, temple. God may not act against the people's enemies, but perhaps God would act against God's own enemies. It seems to Israel that, though God has motivation to act, God has remained indifferent. [36] In these verses the temple is never referred to as "the temple," rather several synonyms are used to express the special nature of that place. It is referred to as God's "holy place" (v 4), "sanctuary" (v 7), and the "dwelling place" of God's name (v 7). The total destruction of that place signifies total religious defilement.[37]

Despite the mocking of the foes and the damage being done to God's reputation (שֵׁם), God does not act (v 11). God's reaction, or more accurately, God's lack of action

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[34] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 69.

[35] McCann, "The Book of Psalms," 973.

[36] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 69.

[37] Tate, *Psalms 51–150*, 248.

mystifies the community as evidenced by their frequent voicing of the questions,

"Why?" (v 1, two times; v 11 two times) and "How long?" (v 10). The destruction of

the temple calls into question God's rule and God's relationship with this special

congregation.[38] At this point in the life of the people, no prophet and none among the

people could give an answer for the dilemma facing the people (v 9).[39]

The only recourse the people have is to recall a time in the past when God did act

and was victorious over the forces of chaos. The recollection of God's past deeds seems

to serve two purposes. It assures the people that God does indeed have the power to

right the situation, but it also works to jog God's own memory. If seeing such

destruction is not motivation, maintaining God's character and keeping past

commitments should be.[40] Verses 12–17 at first seem to be out of place in this lament

about the destruction of the temple, but they direct the people and God to remember

another time when chaos was all around and God was able to soundly defeat it in the act

of creation. The creation account described has been equated with a description of

God's salvific actions during the exodus from Egypt[41] on the one hand, or of God's

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[38] Mays, *Psalms*, 246.

[39] Tate, *Psalms 51–150*, 249.

[40] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 70.

[41] McCann suggests that the reference to the mythical forces of chaos and creation implies that God's salvific acts during the exodus were on behalf of Israel and of all creation. God's universal sovereignty is proclaimed ("The Book of Psalms," 974). This interpretation fails to account for the mention of the establishment of day and night, luminaries and sun, and seasons (vv 16–17). It is likely that the mention of God's domination of the sea and its monsters is meant to recall the exodus, but not only the exodus.

contest with the chaos monster in the initial creation, on the other.[42] In either

interpretation, God is sovereign and powerful, able to defeat the forces of chaos that

would threaten creation, whether that creation was of Israel specifically or the world in

general. This interlude not only assures the people of God's capabilities, but it also

assures them that God is still the sovereign ruler of all creation. It also serves to remind

God that once upon a time God took the destruction of chaos and the establishment of

order seriously,[43] a task God needs to get back to in light of the present situation for

chaos is lingering in the form of national enemies.[44]

Verses 18–23 present a series of imperatives laying out what God should not do

based upon what God has done in the past.[45] Do not deliver (to the wicked) (v 19), do

not forget (v 19 and 23), and do not let them be shamed (v 21). In verse 18 God is again

called to remember, this time the scoffs of the enemies who are regarded as fools. The

destruction of the sanctuary has put God's name/reputation in question and God's

relationship with the people (your dove, v 19) is likewise compromised. God's

inactivity is equated with forgetfulness, a problem the psalmist is trying to overcome by

recalling events for God such as the acquirement of the congregation and their

redemption (v 2), the defeat of chaos and establishment of the earth (vv 13–17), the

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[42] Broyles associates the story with the ancient Near Eastern tradition of divine kingship where the sovereign gains control by defeating chaos (*Psalms*, 308). Elmer Smick uses this example in Psalm 74 to point out that Israel did not hesitate to use the mythopoetic language of the Canaanites to metaphorically describe Yahweh's victory in history ("Mythopoetic Language in the Psalms," *WTJ* 44 [1982]: 88–98). For further discussion of Israel's understanding of chaos and cosmos see also, Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (trans. R. Graeme Dunphy; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 186–90.

[43] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 79.

[44] William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 109.

[45] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 70.

taunts of the enemy (vv 18, 23), the covenant (v 20), and God's subsequent

responsibility to those who keep it (v 21). In the end God is urged not to forget (v 23).

Brueggemann points out the "double vision" of this psalm. On the one hand, the speaker

is passionately committed to the temple and is greatly distressed by its destruction. On

the other hand, even though the visible center of religious life has been destroyed, God is

still present. The temple is important, but it is God, "my king," who is ultimately

important.[46] "There is one to address who is still credible, who has a known past, who

can receive imperatives, and who is therefore the ground of hope."[47]

Many scholars debate the date of this psalm suggesting a time period after the

destruction of a northern sanctuary (the psalm would have been found applicable after

the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and edited accordingly),[48] after the destruction of

the Jerusalem temple,[49] or even after the desecration of the temple in the Maccabean

era.[50] The liturgical use of the psalm as a song of mourning used in services that focused

on the destruction of a/the temple is surer.[51] Gerstenberger suggests that, "some day of

mourning gave rise also to our psalm, its main purpose being to overcome grave

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[46] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 71.

[47] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 71.

[48] Michael Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III* (JSOTSup 233; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 63.

[49] McCann acknowledges the range of dates but suggests that the earlier date is more likely with a renewed significance during the Maccabean era ("The Book of Psalms," 972); Mays suggests the exilic period (*Psalms*, 244); Kraus suggests 520 BCE, enough time after the destruction to establish a public ceremony of remembrance, but not as late as the Maccabean revolt (*Psalms*, 97); Tate states that a 587 date is highly probable (*Psalms*, 247).

[50] Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (3 vols; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 2:373–74.

[51] McCann, "The Book of Psalms," 244; Kraus, *Psalms*, 97; Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 79–80.

problems of survival in a rather hostile world."[52] As in Psalm 73, life is not how it

should be and the people are left struggling for an answer. Unlike Psalm 73, there is no

sanctuary in which to seek an answer.

Psalm 75

The struggles of Psalms 73 and 74 seem to fade at the beginning of Psalm 75.

The focus in the beginning of Psalm 75 is praise (v 2) but the psalm continues with

oracles from God (vv 3–6) and a prophet/liturgist (7–9). Again God (God's name) is

near to the people despite the fact that after reading the entire psalm, it does not seem

that the people's situation has changed significantly from that of Psalms 73 and 74. The

boastful and wicked are still present (v 5) but in Psalm 75 the people are assured by God

that God is (still) sovereign and that the boastful and wicked people will be held

accountable. The psalm is propelled by the expectation of a day of reckoning.[53]

The psalm begins with a statement of thanks to God. As with Psalm 73:28 there

is a correlation between the nearness of God and the telling of God's works (73:28–

מל אכותיך) and wondrous deeds (75:2–נפל אותיך).[54] Verse 3 represents a shift in

speaker. God is speaking up in what seems to be an answer to the question "How long?"

of Psalm 74:10. "How long" is for God to decide, but in the meantime the people can be

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[52] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 80.

[53] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 84.

[54] The syntax at the end of v 2 is confusing. "Your name is near" is joined to the previous statement by a vav conjunction. The verse ends with the statement about recounting God's wondrous deeds, in which the verb is 3rd person plural in contrast to the 1st person singular verbs at the beginning of the verse. There is no plural subject that suggests who is recounting. It is unclear whether this syntax is a product of the liturgical nature of the psalm, which shifts voice several more times. Gerstenberger suggests that the line is uttered by the officiant, who led the congregation in communal thanks but then dissociates himself by reporting the actions of the people that is their telling of God's deeds (*Psalms, Part 2*, 82).

assured by two things: 1) that God will steady the earth and 2) when God judges, God will judge with equity. The scoffers in Psalm 74, whose actions relegated the people of God to the status of poor and needy, will surely be judged.

God's sovereignty is again highlighted by pointing to God's cosmic power. In Psalm 74, God's creative power was highlighted and in Psalm 75 God's power to maintain the stability of the earth during seemingly unstable times is highlighted. It is God who keeps the pillars of the earth steady; thus God is the sovereign ruler of the earth's inhabitants.[55] Psalm 75 also highlights the belief that even the timing of things, in this case judgment, is determined by God—God is in total control.

In verse 7 there is another shift in speaker in which the worship leader or a cult prophet takes up the theme of God's judgment. The speaker emphasizes the fact that "lifting up" comes not from this place, whether that is in the east, west, north or south,[56] but from God alone and it is God who lifts up and puts down (vv 7–8). The psalmist uses the image of a cup foaming with wine as an image of the judgment that awaits those who drink from it.[57] The wicked will drink up the contents of the cup even down to the dregs, but the righteous will be left to rejoice and sing praise to God (vv 9–10). The utilization of drinking wine from a cup as a symbol for judgment is also found in the prophets including Isaiah 51:17–23; Jeremiah 25:15–29; Ezekiel 23:31–35.[58] In all of

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[55] Mays, *Psalms*, 248.

[56] Mitchell Dahood points out that two cardinal points are explicit (east and west) while two are inferred by understanding desert as south and mountains as north ("The Four Cardinal Points in Psalm 75,7 and Joel 2,20," *Bib* 52 (1971): 397.

[57] Harry Nasuti outlines the development of the "cup" as a symbol of punishment (*Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph* [SBLDiss 88; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], 73.)

[58] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 83; Mays, *Psalms*, 249.

these instances, the judgment includes God's people in Jerusalem/Judah, thus McCann's assertion that Babylon should be thought of as the wicked is not necessarily the case.[59] Though the wicked would likely include Judah's enemies, it also included many from within Judah.[60]

This psalm closes with another symbolic statement presumably from God; "All the horns of the wicked, I will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted" (v 11). In verses 5–6 the wicked are accused by God of trying to lift up their own horns, that is to elevate themselves in power. In this case "horn" can symbolize political and/or economic power.[61] In verse 11 it is clear that it is up to God alone to lift up and only the righteous will receive such an action; those who think otherwise are denying reality.[62] This threat is appropriate in light of the main idea of the psalm, divine punishment of the wicked.[63]

Psalm 76

Psalm 76 extends the ideas of Psalm 75; God is worthy of praise for God is victorious over the armies who fight against Zion and God will establish judgment, saving the oppressed of the earth. While the image of God in Psalm 75 is creator God, in Psalm 76 the image is of a warrior God. No specific battle is discussed; rather the psalm is drawing on the mythic notion of a divine warrior gaining capital through

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[59] McCann, "The Book of Psalms," 977.

[60] Gerstenberger agrees, "these are certainly members of the psalmist's own ethnic and religious group" (*Psalms, Part 2*, 83).

[61] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 83.

[62] Tate, *Psalms*, 259.

[63] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 83.

victory.[64] There is much discussion concerning the date and subject of this psalm.

Broyles suggests that the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army in 701 BCE

may have been the catalyst for the psalm.[65] McCann argues that a specific event is not

intended and that when read with Psalm 74, Psalm 76 has an eschatological thrust.[66]

Regardless, the emphasis of the psalm is on God's sovereignty, not only over

Jerusalem[67] but also over the whole earth (vv 10, 13).

The psalm begins by establishing God's greatness in Judah and Israel (v 2) and

God's presence in Jerusalem (v 3). The words used to describe Zion are used elsewhere

of a lion's den invoking images of a mighty warrior in lion form.[68] This warrior is

powerful enough to break the weapons of war—arrows, shield, and sword (v 4).[69]

Though the word "there" (שָׁמָּה) at the beginning of verse 4 suggests that the location is

in Zion, the language is vague enough that many situations in Israel's past may apply.[70]

These opening verses focus on God rather than Zion, a focus that continues in the praises

that follow.

The psalm turns to praise of the divine warrior in verses 5–7. Verse 5 praises

God for being more majestic than the mountains. The reference could be alluding to the

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[64] Mays, *Psalms*, 250.

[65] Broyles, *Psalms*, 312.

[66] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 979.

[67] Many have classified Psalm 76 as a "Song of Zion," but Gerstenberger points out that the focus of the psalm is not Zion itself, but the warrior God of Zion. Zion remains a secondary theme but nowhere is the city addressed or its temple praised. He suggests that "confessional hymn" is a more accurate classification (*Psalms, Part 2*, 87).

[68] See Psalm 104:22; Amos 3:4; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 980; Tate, *Psalms*, 265.

[69] God/Yahweh also breaks weapons in Ps 46 (Tate, *Psalms*, 265).

[70] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 980.

fact that God is more majestic than the most majestic creations of earth or it could be a reference to God's priority over other deities.[71] God has rendered the enemy utterly useless. The enemy is not identified specifically but as the "stouthearted," which lends further support to the suggestion that this psalm is not about one incident but is celebrating God's sovereignty for all time against any enemy. There is no mention in these verses of Israel's army; God alone has been victorious and has definitively ended the battle.[72]

Verse 7 again praises God, this time for being awesome. The fact that no one can stand before God when God is angry testifies to God's awesomeness. From heaven God judges all the earth, a fact that brings the earth to be still with fear (v 9). The purpose of God's actions is to bring justice and salvation to all the oppressed of the earth.[73] Psalm 76 carries over the theme of judgment from Psalm 75, which also praises God for executing judgment. The statements in verses 8–10 stand in contrast, however, to the cries of Psalm 74. In Psalm 74 the oppressed cry out urging God to act but they see no results, presumably God is either not listening or God is too far away to act. In Psalm 76, however, God has already acted as the divine warrior and has put an end to the fighting. God has saved the oppressed, an action only hoped for in Psalm 74. It is difficult to say whether Psalm 76 is praise for the answering of the cries of Psalm 74 or a celebration of the renewed hope that the people have found in relation to another matter.

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[71] Contra. Broyles who suggests the mountain in question is Mt. Zion and thus God is greater than the earthly place on which God dwells (*Psalms*, 313.)

[72] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 980.

[73] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 980.

The final verses of the psalm illustrate God's power to use human wrath for divine purposes. In response to that power, the people are called to make vows to God, making sure to carry them out, and to give gifts to God who is sovereign over the princes and kings of this earth. God's universal sovereignty is highlighted throughout the psalm as God is praised for defeating the foe, judging all the earth from heaven (not Zion),[74] and being more powerful than earthly princes and rulers. Though God's dwelling place is identified as Zion, the oppressed are not identified specifically as Judahites/Israelites and the enemies are not mentioned by name; thus the psalm is applicable to any who are oppressed. There is no doubt, however, that the congregation that worshiped the God of Zion identified with the oppressed,[75] especially during and after the exile.

Psalm 77

The praises of Psalm 76 are dimmed by the anguished cries of Psalm 77. Again we are met with a psalm uttered in a time of distress which seems as if it might continue forever (v 8). This time the psalmist goes as far as wondering if God's lack of response is evidence that God has changed (v 11). Psalm 77 is difficult to categorize as far as genre is concerned. The first eleven verses can be classified as an individual lament,[76] but there is a major shift that occurs with verse 12. Verses 12–21 are more positive and can be classified as a hymn of praise or thanksgiving.[77] Gerstenberger rejects the lament categorization pointing out that there are no complaint elements (invocation, direct

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[74] Broyles, *Psalms*, 313.

[75] Mays, *Psalms*, 251.

[76] Broyles, *Psalms*, 314; Kraus, *Psalms*, 114; Mays, *Psalms*, 251; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 983; Tate, *Psalms*, 274.

[77] Broyles, *Psalms*, 314; Kraus, *Psalms* 114; Tate, *Psalms*, 274.

prayer language). He instead classifies the psalm as a "meditative hymn."[78] In light of

the abrupt shift, some scholars have suggested that Psalm 77 consists of two separate

psalms that have been joined together.[79] John Kselman disagrees pointing out

similarities in vocabulary (voice – vv 1, 17–18; hand – vv 3, 20) and setting up a chiastic

structure that unifies the seemingly disparate parts of the psalm.[80] Broyles suggests that

Psalm 77 represents a composite psalm that came about when worshippers in the exilic

period adopted individual prayers to express corporate lament. In this case the "I" of the

psalm is actually the nation personified.[81]

The psalm begins with a psalmist in great distress, but the cause of the distress

remains unnamed. There is no mention of enemies or illness that might be causing the

psalmist to cry out both day and night (v 3). Despite the continued prayers, the

psalmist's soul is inconsolable. Thinking of God produces more anguish and not solace

and rest (v 4), a desperate situation indeed.[82] Tate points out that the vocabulary points

to a perpetual crying, thus the distress is not sudden or past, but is characteristic of the

psalmist's whole life.[83] It is interesting that at this point in the psalm, the psalmist does

not address God directly about the distress, instead he narrates his experience of

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[78] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 90–91.

[79] William Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 33. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 90.

[80] John Kselman, "Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus," *JANESCU* 15 (1983): 51–58.

[81] Broyles, *Psalms*, 314.

[82] Kraus, *Psalms*, 115.

[83] Tate, *Psalms*, 274.

praying.[84] The psalm seems to reflect an internal struggle that the psalmist is working out.

In an effort to bolster his faith the psalmist remembers the past, meditating upon it and searching his spirit. Surprisingly, the result is further turmoil and questioning. Will Yahweh spurn and withhold favor forever (v 8)? Has Yahweh's love ceased (v 9)? Have Yahweh's promises stopped (v 9)? Has God forgotten to be gracious because God's anger has stopped God's compassion (v 10)? These intense questions are evidence of the struggle within the psalmist; they are not meant to move God to act as other question are (e.g., Psalm 74:11–12).[85] The meditations of the psalmist only lead to the disappointing and grievous conclusion that God is no longer powerful—God has changed (v 11). The psalmist is no longer sure of God's fundamental character.[86]

In light of verses 1–11, the reader is not prepared for the words of verses 12–21. There is a shift in attitude and again the psalmist recalls the deeds of God, but this time the deeds are considered "mighty" (v 13) and "holy" (v 14), invoking praise rather than disturbing questions about God's character. What could have provoked such a change? Has a change really occurred or is the psalmist reciting these deeds in an effort to provoke God to act similarly in the present?[87] These questions regarding the change in attitude are difficult to answer. In any case, the recollection of God's wonders is the focus of the psalmists' utterance; in these verses everything said is positive and spoken

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[84] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 88.

[85] Broyles, *Psalms*, 316.

[86] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 983–4.

[87] Broyles, *Psalms*, 315; Tate, *Psalms*, 275.

about God.[88] In verses 12–15 the deeds are left unnamed but are celebrated as wonders,

mighty deeds, God's holy way, a display of God's might. It is not until verse 16 that the

psalmist reveals the nature of God's work, the redemption of God's people, the

descendants of Jacob and Joseph. The only question that the psalmist raises in this

section is "What god is as great at our God?" (v 14), a very different outcome of the

recollection of God's deeds.

The recollections continue with an account of what can be taken as a reference to

either creation or the exodus.[89] The account is quite vivid, but according to

Gerstenberger, it is difficult to tell whether the descriptions of the natural elements are

mentioned as if they are emanations from God or are exhibiting a frightened response to

God's coming.[90] The introduction to the section in verse 17 seems to suggest the latter

for the waters see God and then they tremble. The picture painted in these verses is of a

great storm with thunder (vv 18, 19), lightning (vv 18, 19), and great wind (v 19). The

storm was so great the earth trembled (v 19).[91] God's presence was felt but God was not

seen; God left no footprints (v 20). In the end, after again recalling God's power, the

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[88] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 90.

[89] McCann points out the numerous allusions to the Exodus ("Book of Psalms," 984) while Kraus believes this "archaic insertion" includes a mix of mythical and salvation historical traditions (*Psalms*, 116). Gerstenberger suggests that these verses are modeled after the Yahweh-kingship hymns (cf. 93:3–4), which tell about the struggle between God and the powers of chaos in mythological language and ignores the questions of national history (*Psalms, Part 2*, 90). F. N. Jasper ties the theme of God's rule over chaos to the New Year Festival, which implies God's original act of creation and is subsequently tied to the Exodus ("Early Israelite Traditions and the Psalter," *VT* 17 (1976): 50–59. Adele Berlin suggests that Psalm 77, like Psalm 114, combines the exodus and creation mythemes in a way that is significant for the post-exilic audience who is experiencing a new exodus of sorts ("Myth and Meaning in Psalm 114" in *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time, Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms* (ed. J. S. Burnett, et al; New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 67–80.

[90] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*. 90.

[91] Tate classifies these verses as a theophany (*Psalms*, 275) as does Kraus (*Psalms*, 116).

psalmist can confess that God through the earthly leadership of Moses and Aaron led the people as a shepherd leads a flock. The hope is that God will lead the people again. Broyles points out the abruptness with which the psalm ends; the story is left incomplete. He suggests that the ending may aptly fit the situation of the psalmist.[92]

The divided nature of this psalm seems to be a mirror of the life of the faithful after the exile. They are torn between the present reality and the promises and actions of God in the past. The remembrance of the past, which is so prominent in this psalm,[93] is the source of both spiritual controversy and renewed faith.[94] Remembrance brings the people's expectations about God and what God should be doing into stark contrast with God's apparent lack of action. This meditative hymn testifies to "the shaking of spiritual foundations in the exilic and postexilic period."[95] Remembrance also serves to bolster faith by pointing out times when God did redeem in the past; those recollections are the only source of hope available to the faithful. The question to be asked is: Are the people really convinced?

Psalm 78

The recollection of Israel's past continues in Psalm 78. The genre of this psalm is difficult to define; it is both historical and didactic.[96] Verses 1–2 announce the

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[92] Broyles, *Psalms*, 317.

[93] זכר in the first person singular is found in vv 4, 7, 12–2x's; each time it is paralleled by סיח and with other synonyms in v 6a (consider) and 13a (meditate). See Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 88.

[94] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 89.

[95] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 91.

[96] Campbell points out that history, hymn, and wisdom are all applicable ("Psalm 78: A Contribution to the Theology of Tenth Century Israel," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 51–79.

didactic nature of the psalm,[97] which scholars believe would have been used in a public

setting.[98] Kraus points out that the psalm is a "riddle" in which many facts are concealed

in a way that only attentive hearers would grasp.[99] The historical aspect of the psalm is

interesting. First, we must not think of "historical" in the modern sense of the term,[100]

rather this poem is "a creative retelling of Israel's story"[101] in a way that teaches the

present audience. Gerstenberger points out that the psalm is an "elaboration of [God's]

marvelous deeds, not according to their historical chronology and enumeration, nor with

extant canonical writings, but in line with their contents and significance for

contemporary believers."[102] The historical psalms (78, 105, 106, and 136) draw upon

the narrative of Genesis-Samuel but each is distinct, focusing on different aspects with

the purpose to inform, correct, and nurture faith.[103] Psalm 78 uses one tradition not

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[97] Kraus, *Psalms*, 122. See also, R. P. Carroll, "Psalm LXXVIII: Vestiges of a Tribal Polemic," *VT* 21 (1971): 133–50.

[98] On the public or communal performance of Ps 78 see Kraus, *Psalms*, 123; Broyles, *Psalms*, 319 and Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 94.

[99] Kraus, *Psalms*, 125.

[100] Mark S. Smith provides a helpful discussion about our understanding of the narratives of the past in the biblical text. He considers these narratives the collective memory of the people recorded for pedagogical purposes, to provide religious lessons (*Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 126. Psalm 78, though poetic, certainly fits into that category.

[101] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 990.

[102] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 94.

[103] Mays, *Psalms*, 254. Robert Alter points out that the historical psalms are actually summaries or rehearsals of Israel's history and their intelligibility is dependent on the audiences detailed knowledge of the events (*The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic Books, 1985], 27).

found in the Pentateuch, the incident on the fields of Zoan, other events are out of

chronological order, and some of the plagues are omitted.[104]

In light of Psalm 77 and the initial ineffectiveness of "remembering," Psalm 78 is

a bit puzzling. McCann suggests that Psalm 78 provides instruction regarding how and

what to remember so that remembering may be effectual.[105] Broyles suggests that

learning should take place on two levels: the personal and the corporate. On the

personal level, the present generation is urged to recall the actions of God in the past as

it informs their current dilemma about faith. On the corporate level, the psalm

emphasizes the reality of God's election of Jacob-Israel.[106] Interestingly, the pattern of

each generation is one of God's providing, the people failing to obey, and God's

graciously forgiving them. How is the present generation to learn from the failures of

the past and then move toward hope? They can do so by focusing on God's faithfulness

and forgiveness[107]

The psalm begins with the plea of the psalmist/teacher who urges the audience to

listen. The plea begins with the phrase "give ear," which is in parallel to "incline your

ear," both phrases are commonly used to urge God to pay attention to a psalmist's

lament. In the case of Psalm 78, the people are supposed to listen for the psalmist is

about to present a parable or riddle. The psalmist refers to the parable as "dark sayings

of old." How odd for a recitation of history to be referred to as "dark." Perhaps the

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[104] Kraus, *Psalms*, 127, 129; and Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Trans. Keith Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 59–62.

[105] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 991.

[106] Broyles, *Psalms*, 319.

[107] McCann, "Book of Psalms, 992.

darkness comes by way of the people's repeated disobedience, a darkness that will continue if the people fail to learn from the mistakes of their ancestors. The parable consists of stories that the people already know and stories that they will surely pass to the next generation about God's "glorious deeds" and wonders (see Psalm 75:2; 77:11). These stories go beyond the typical glorification of God based upon God's deeds on behalf of Israel because they not only highlight God's deeds, but also the deeds of the people, which are in stark contrast to God's deeds. The listeners need to evaluate their own actions in comparison. A contrast is created between the past and the future in hopes that a special insight of great importance will be communicated to the audience.[108]

The purpose of the psalm and the recitation of history in general are given in verses 5–8. God established a decree in Jacob and then commanded the ancestors to teach their children about it so that the next generation and the next would know about God's decree and find hope in it. They were not to forget the works of God as their stubborn, rebellious ancestors did. That generation was not steadfast and faithful. The psalmist doesn't specify to which generation verse 8 refers. It could be one of several disobedient generations, but for the exilic and post-exilic readers the verse perhaps recalls a very recent generation. The purpose of the recitation of history is so that the people would set their hope in God (v 7) and remain steadfast and faithful (v 8). The psalm repeatedly warns contemporary believers that acting contrary to Israel's God will always lead to catastrophes.[109]

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[108] Campbell, "Psalm 78," 53.

[109] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 96.

What follows are numerous stories of how the people forget God's covenant, laws, good works, and miracles. The Ephraimites[110] forgot God's work in the Exodus (v 11), how God divided the sea and led and provided for the people in the wilderness (vv 12–16). Instead they tested God by demanding the food "they craved" (vv 17–20) and the result of their testing was God's rage at their unfaithfulness and lack of trust (vv 21–22). Though God did send the food they craved (vv 23–29), God also punished their unfaithfulness (vv 30–33) which resulted in the people's repentance (v 34–35). God's provision proves that the disbelief of Israel is unjustified.[111] The cycle repeats itself in subsequent generations.

The psalmist's depiction of God in verses 38–39 is compelling. First, God is compassionate. Though God has every reason to do so, God does not destroy the people; instead, God forgives (v 38). Second, God is exercising restraint; God does not stir up all the divine wrath (v 38)! Third, God remembers that the people are but flesh, they pass away quickly (v 39). The relationship of God and the people is depicted as being constant on God's part as God redeems them (v 42) and varied on the people's part as they test God repeatedly (v 41) and often forget God and God's work on their behalf (v 42).[112]

Verses 42–51 rehearse God's signs and miracles in Egypt. The psalm mentions the following plagues: rivers turned to blood, swarms of flies and frogs, caterpillars and

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[110] These verses (9–11) relate a story in which the Ephraimites turn back in battle, however, there is no record of the Ephraimites being cowardly in battle, leading to the suggestion that the reference is to all of the Northern tribes (Robert Bratcher and William Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1991], 684).

[111] Campbell, "Psalm 78," 55.

[112] Tate, *Psalms*, 291.

locusts destroying crops, hail, frost, thunderbolts, a company of destroying angels, and

death of the first born. This tradition of the plagues varies from those listed in the

Pentateuch and elsewhere in the Psalter in number and order.[113] Verses 52–53 return to

the Exodus event (vv 13–16) again mentioning the crossing of the sea, but in these later

verses God's guidance is symbolized with the shepherd/flock motif that is prevalent in

the Psalms of Asaph and it has been seen already in Ps 77:20, also in regard to God's

guidance in the wilderness. This second account of the wilderness wandering concludes

with a mention of the conquest (God drove out the nations before them) and the

settlement of the tribes of Israel (v 55).

Verse 54 is interesting in that it mentions God's holy hill/mountain, but fails to

name exactly what hill that is. In light of the previous verses, one would assume that

verse 54 is in reference to Mt. Sinai. It is curious, though, that the verse does not

mention the giving of the law; in fact, the establishment of the covenant is not mentioned

at all in Psalm 78.[114] The psalm mentions the law (vv 5, 10), statutes (vv 5, 56),

covenant (vv 10, 37), and commands (v 7), [115] but the psalm does not mention them in

relation to the giving of the law/establishment of the covenant at Mt. Sinai as one might

expect, especially in verse 54. The lack of covenant language in verse 54 leaves open

the possibility that anther hill is being referenced. Perhaps the hill/mountain being

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[113] Psalm 78 includes caterpillars, frost, and thunderbolts. See Broyles, *Psalms*, 324; Campbell, "Psalm 78," 69; Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 96; Kraus, *Psalms*, 129.

[114] Broyles, *Psalms*, 324.

[115] Broyles, *Psalms*, 324.

referenced is Zion[116] or an allusion to the subsequent election of Zion.[117] In light of the rebellion mentioned in the verses that follow, the hill could also be a reference to another center of worship like Shiloh (v 60).[118]

The second depiction of the exodus and wilderness accounts ends no better than the first. The people still test God, disobey, and are faithless like their ancestors (vv 56–57). Again, the anger of God is provoked, but this time it is their high places and idols that move God (v 58) rather than impatient requests (v 18–19). The heart of the problem in both cases is the lack of trust that the people show God; they put God's power into question.[119] The mistakes of the past are clear, but will God's people learn from those mistakes?

The result of this second account of rebellion is the rejection of Israel (v 59). God abandons God's dwelling and removes God's protective hand (v 60–61). God's dwelling in this case is at Shiloh. Shiloh was the sanctuary of Eli whose destruction is only mentioned in Jeremiah 7:12–14 and 26:6, 9. Gerstenberger suggests that this reference has symbolic value in this passage representing a prototype of Jerusalem.[120] In light of God's departure from Shiloh, the people were left open to attack from their enemies who proceeded to destroy them (vv 62–64). God's anger toward the people was not permanent however, and God responded by routing the enemy (vv 65–66).

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[116] Dahood, *Psalms 51-100*, 245; Kraus, *Psalms*, 129.

[117] The election of Zion is explicitly mentioned in verse 68.

[118] Jeremiah 7:12–14 and 26:6.

[119] Mays, *Psalms*, 257.

[120] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 97.

The final verses of the psalm recount the rejection of Joseph/Ephraim and the election of Judah, the establishment of God's sanctuary on Mt. Zion, and the rise of David from shepherd of sheep to shepherd of God's people.[121] In some sense the verses provide great hope. In a psalm that repeatedly points to the failure of the ancestors, the last word is of God's provision in Judah and Zion.[122] The verses could also be evidence of the tension between the Northern tribes and Southern tribes in which the Southern tribes ultimately receive God's blessing while the North is abandoned.[123]

When read in light of the exile, the point of the last verses is less clear. On first reading the psalm seems to celebrate the Judean takeover of Ephraim's position as God's elect.[124] Thus, on the one hand, the people of the exile can gain religious identity from the recollection of Judah/David's election.[125] On the other hand, the psalm has set up a pattern—God's gracious activity, the people's rebellion, God's anger and punishment. The election of Judah would fit into the first part of the pattern leaving the exilic and post-exilic readers fully aware of what happens next in the pattern, punishment. The people who witnessed the destruction of the temple would likely relate more closely to the fate of Israel in verses 59–64. There is still hope, though. God does wake up and God does restore a relationship, albeit in a new way (vv 65–72).

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[121] Susan Gillingham suggests that the function of the psalm as it was used after the fall of Israel in 722 BCE, was to turn the theme of judgment against Israel, which is dominant throughout much of the psalm, into a theme of the election of Judah (vv 67-72). The judgment liturgy gives the southern editor the material needed to legitimize Judah ("The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody," *SJT* 52 (1999): 19–46.

[122] Mays, *Psalms*, 258.

[123] Tate, *Psalms*, 295; Broyles, *Psalms*, 326; Kraus, *Psalms*, 130.

[124] Carroll, "Psalm LXXVIII," 135.

[125] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 97.

Psalm 79

The apparent celebration of the last verses in Psalm 78 does not last for long.

Psalm 79 confirms that the pattern set up in Psalm 78 does in fact continue, though the

rebellion of the people is not spelled out as clearly and the result, the punishment of the

people, is mentioned before the sin of the people. The transition from the almost

triumphant tone of Psalm 78:67–72 to the cries of Psalm 79 is jarring for the reader and

calls for a reassessment of the Zion–David theology.[126]

Psalm 79 is a communal lament[127] most likely relating to the destruction of

Jerusalem by the Babylonians.[128] The situation of this psalm seems to be the same as

Psalm 74, but is described with "more venom."[129] The first three verses communicate

what "they," the nations or גוים, have done.[130] They have entered God's inheritance,

they have defiled the temple, they have ruined Jerusalem, they have left the bodies of

God's servants where animals could scavenge them, and they left no one who could bury

the dead. "They" did atrocious things and God needed to be reminded about them. God

cannot afford to be a disinterested party.[131] The "they" of the first three verses is

contrasted by the "we" in verse four; the shame suffered by the people is all of a sudden

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[126] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 994.

[127] Psalm 79 fits the structure of a communal lament so well that Gerstenberger calls it a "communal complaint par excellence" (*Psalms, Part 2*, 100).

[128] Though the destruction of Jerusalem is the likely choice (McCann, "Book of Psalms," 994; Tate, *Psalms*, 299), some scholars have suggested the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Ephiphanes partly because a portion of the psalm (vv 2–3) also appears in 1 Macc. (Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 102).

[129] Brueggemann, *Message of Psalms*, 71.

[130] The actions of the enemy are in line with ANE warfare that left sanctuaries profaned, cities destroyed, and the inhabitance shamed (Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 100).

[131] Brueggemann, *Message of Psalms*, 71.

spoken of in first person plural discourse.[132] "We" have been on the receiving end and the result is the mocking and derision of neighbors and onlookers. The psalmist is calling on God, but God has apparently had little to do with the "they" and the "we" during this destructive time, the result of which is the questioning of God's sovereignty.[133]

The psalmist does not recount any activity of God nor request God's activity in the first four verses. In fact, the invocation of verse 1 is the shortest possible, ʾĕlōhîm, "O God."[134] The diminished presence of God changes in verse five when the psalmist questions God. From that point on God is a key character in the psalm and the desired action is for God to avenge the destruction. Verses 5–7 are a striking summary of the injustice that God's people see in the present situation. God, in anger, has turned on the one people who worship God (v 5). The destruction mentioned in verses 1–4 is traced to God's wrath.[135] Broyles points out that the problem is not so much that God has acted against the people in anger, but that the wrath has lasted for so long and was wrought with such intensity.[136] The people urge God to turn that anger against the nations and kingdoms that do not know God or call upon God's name (v 6). It does not make sense that God would allow the chosen people and dwelling to be destroyed but fail to seek vengeance (v 7).

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[132] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 101.

[133] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 995.

[134] Gerstenberger gives several options for such a short invocation: familiarity with God, urgency, liturgical necessity to place an invocation before the complaint (*Psalms, Part 2*, 100).

[135] Broyles, *Psalms*, 327; Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 101; Kraus, *Psalms*, 135.

[136] Broyles, *Psalms*, 328.

The next verses make is quite clear that the people do not claim to be innocent of wrong-doing.[137] In fact, Psalm 79 is the only communal lament that contains a confession of sin.[138] Verse 8 refers back to the iniquities of the ancestors, iniquities with which the reader is now quite familiar and then continues with a plea for God's compassion. The post–exilic congregation is counting on the fact that God's actions in the past, showing compassion even when the people disobey, will follow the same pattern in the present. Their appeal is not based on their merit, but on God's compassion.[139] For judgment to be matched by compassion is their only hope.[140] Not only do the people rely on God's past actions, for that might not be enough after such total destruction, but they also bring up the issue of God's honor, the glory of God's name (v 9).[141] If God will not restore based upon God's pattern of deliverance in the past, perhaps God will deliver and forgive for the sake of maintaining God's honor. The nations have destroyed the people and their city and now they mock, "Where is their God?" They are reminding God that the enemy's hostility toward them is also a declaration of war against God.[142] Surely God will answer this question regarding

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[137] Broyles, *Psalms*, 327; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 995.

[138] Mays, *Psalms*, 261.

[139] Broyles, *Psalms*, 328.

[140] Tate, *Psalms*, 301.

[141] McCann ("Book of Psalms," 996) and Kraus (*Psalms*, 135) describe the shift from the people's self concern to concern for God's reputation in terms of the people's relinquishing their own needs in favor of God's honor. I would disagree. It seems to me in this desperate situation that the people are piling on reasons for God to act on their behalf. Brueggemann points out that the prayers of Israel are never disinterested and states, "The Psalmist believes that there is a convergence of interest, Israel's self-interest, but also the transcendent interest of God. This troubled prayer is the activity of locating and articulating that convergence of interest." (*Message of Psalms*, 72).

[142] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 101.

sovereignty and power and will avenge their destruction (v 10). In their requests for

God's action there is both self-interest, seen in their request for salvation and

deliverance, and a transcendent interest, seen in their concern for God's reputation.[143]

The concerns about their relationship with God and about the perception of God's

sovereignty are separate but intricately intertwined. Their identity as a chosen people of

God is useless if God is not sovereign; on the other hand, their wellbeing as a nation is

perceived to be an indication of God's sovereignty.

Again the people plead for God's action in verses 11–12, this time from the

standpoint of prisoners. They affirm God's great power and their reliance on the fact

that it is God's power that can save them from death. The taunts of their neighbors are

emphasized again, "the taunts with which they taunted you, O Yahweh!" God must

show great power or their taunts will be confirmed. In response to God's vengeance, the

people will give thanks. Verse 13 contains two interesting occurrences. First, the people

are again referred to as the "flock" of God's pasture, a familiar Asaphite term. The

people know that God does not tolerate unfaithfulness and they know just as strongly

that God will not let them go; they are still God's flock and as such they still feel

sheltered with God or at least realize that if shelter is available it will only come from

God.[144] Second, the people will praise from generation to generation. The mention of

generations harkens back to Psalm 78, especially verses 5–8 in which the people are

commanded to teach their children so that the coming generations would not abandon

God. In Psalm 79 God is being called upon one more time to forgive and deliver and the

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[143] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 996.

[144] See Kraus, *Psalms*, 136 and McCann, "Book of Psalms," 996.

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people are committing one more time that the future generations will know about God's deeds and will recount them in praise. The alternatives are for God to continue to be angry and hear the cries of God's people forever, or for God to answer the people and hear the praises of the people forever.[145] Gerstenberger sums up the intention of this psalm accurately:

> Like all days of mourning and remembering in the world, commemorations of this dire sort are designed to relive the frightening past, to work through its pains and terrors, in order to restore the balance and standing of the group, and win a new future. Struggling with God, the one at least co-responsible for all calamities, also helps to verify one's own postures and possibilities in an ongoing test of faith, will, and strength to survive.[146]

Psalm 80

Psalm 80 is another communal lament offered up in a time of national disaster. The questions and petitions of the psalmist make it clear that the disaster is ongoing with no end in sight.[147] Kraus and others point out that the historical situation fits best into a pre-exilic northern Israelite setting.[148] McCann, however, points out that though the psalm was not likely an exilic response originally, in its present context it does function as such.[149] The opening verses tie Psalms 79 and 80 together through the repeated use of the image of the people as God's flock (79:13 and 80:2).[150] They also share a concern both for the strained relationship between God and God's chosen people and for God's

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[145] Broyles, *Psalms*, 329.

[146] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 102.

[147] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 106.

[148] Kraus, *Psalms*, 139.

[149] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 999. See also Gerstenberger who highlights the longstanding suffering that is communicated throughout (*Psalms, Part 2*, 106).

[150] In fact, the shepherd/flock theme is present in Psalms 77, 78, 79, and 80.

reputation which is jeopardized by God's apparent lack of sovereignty. The repeated refrain of Psalm 80 highlights the dual concern—restoration of relationship (restore us) and re-establishment of God's sovereignty (let your face shine).

The psalm begins with a plea for God to hear. This plea, unlike the terse invocation of Psalm 79, has an image-filled description of the one being addressed rather than referring to God by name.[151] The psalmist is crying to the "Shepherd of Israel" (v 1), the one enthroned on the cherubim (v 2). The shepherd image evokes the idea of protection and guidance, a more personal image.[152] The image of one enthroned on a cherubim can evoke several ideas.[153] First, mobility, the cherubim throne was mobile; thus if God is enthroned upon it God is also mobile. Second, power, it could be referring to the image of a divine warrior.[154] Third, protection, the winged cherubim could provide protection under the wings.[155] In any case God's "enthronement" ultimately highlights God's sovereignty. The plea of the psalmist is for God to give ear (v 2), shine forth (v 2), arouse (v 3), and come (v 3); all verbs are in the imperative. McCann points out the people's perception that they need to plea for God to "give ear" and "shine forth" implies that they believe God is inattentive and absent. Despite this perception they still call out to God.[156]

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[151] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 104.

[152] Kraus, *Psalms*, 141.

[153] Tate, *Psalms*, 313.

[154] The cherubim throne recalls the ark and the tradition of carrying the ark into war. The symbolic throne-ark led the people to victory. This tradition fits well into Psalm 80 which often refers to YHWH/God of hosts (vv 5, 8, 15, 20) (Broyles, *Psalms*, 330). The ark is also a symbol of God's presence during a threatening time (Mays, *Psalms*, 262).

[155] Tate, *Psalms*, 313.

[156] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 999.

The refrain, which occurs for the first time in verse 4, also makes a plea to God. The refrain is in two parts, in the first God is urged to restore (hiphil impv of שׁוּב) the people.[157] In the second phrase the people urge God to make the divine face shine[158] (hiphil impv of אוֹר), a request made in the realization that it is God who is able to save. The people are aware of their broken relationship with God and the need to restore it.[159] Though the refrain maintains much of its contents when repeated in verses 8 and 20, the invocation expands with each repetition. In verse 4 the people call to God, in verse 8 to God of hosts, and in verse 20 to Yahweh, God of hosts. The accretion of names acts almost as a crescendo in the repetition of the refrain.

Following the first refrain in verses 5–7 the psalmist presents the lament. Again the psalmist questions God. How long? The question is not why. The people understand why and do not debate the punishment; rather they do not understand the length of it.[160] The harsh reality of the present is linked to God's anger thus making God directly responsible[161] as did Psalms 78 (vv 21, 31, 59, 62 – God's anger is linked with punishment) and 79 (v 5). In fact the questions of 79:5 and 80:5 are very similar. A major difference between Psalm 79 and 80 is that Psalm 79 begins with the enemy

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[157] Exactly what God is to restore is unclear. It could refer to the relationship between God and the people or to the fortune of the people. (Broyles, *Psalms*, 331). In Israel's mind, however, the two often go together.

[158] Gerstenberger links the request for God's face to shine with a priestly blessing like the one found in Num 6:24–26 (*Psalms, Part 2*, 104), while Brown associates shining with solar imagery and God's power of salvation and justice (*Seeing the Psalms*, 86).

[159] Tate, *Psalms*, 314.

[160] Tate, *Psalms*, 314.

[161] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 105.

(them) and later shifts to the relationship between God and the people (God and us). Psalm 80 begins with God and the people with the entrance of the enemy in verse 7.

The statement in verse 6 reveals much about the people's confusion regarding God's role in the present situation. Instead of giving the "bread of angels" (78:25), God was feeding the people with the "bread of tears" (80:6). Instead of letting them "drink abundantly from the deep" (78:15), God was giving them tears to "drink in full measure" (80:6). The bread of tears and drink from the deep are reminiscent of God's provisions in the wilderness, but God's present inactivity/activity is in harsh contrast with God's care in the wilderness.[162] In addition to God's or possibly as a result of God's present stance toward the people, they have become a laughing stock for their neighbors and enemies (v 7). Their only recourse is to cry out for restoration (v 8, refrain).

In verse 9 the psalmist introduces an image that is used to illustrate the relationship between God and the people.[163] In this parable of the vine,[164] God is the vine keeper and the people are the vine.[165] Verses 9–12 recall God's savings acts in the Exodus and the conquest, and the establishment of the people in the land with their subsequent flourishing. The great care shown by God is a stark contrast to the present situation where the people are eating the bread of tears and drinking tears.[166] The

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[162] Tate, *Psalms*, 314.

[163] For a treatment of the vine metaphor in the larger cultural vocabulary, see John Brown, "The Mediterranean Vocabulary of the Vine," *VT* 19 (1969): 146–70.

[164] Gerstenberger points out the rarity of poetic parables in the Psalter (*Psalms, Part 2*, 105).

[165] The vine/vineyard symbol of the relationship between God and God's people is widespread in the HB. Isaiah 5 presents a similar parable about the vinedresser removing protection from the vineyard (esp. 5:5). For Judah symbolized by a vine, see also Jer 12:10 and Ezek 17:1–10; 19:10–14.

[166] Tate, *Psalms*, 314. Claus Westermann suggests that the 'contrast-motif' between what God has done in the past and what God is doing in the present functions to persuade God (*Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 215.

psalmist takes great care in describing the reaction of the vine after it was transplanted. The vine takes root deeply and spreads to fill the land including its mountains and trees. It spread as far as the sea and the river (the Euphrates). The people of God had been a great nation whose borders reached from the sea to the river. It is interesting that God is given credit for transplanting the vine in verses 9–10a, but is not mentioned in relation to the vine's growth in 10b–12. The question of verse 13 puts the action back upon God— Why have *you* broken down its walls? God's role consisted of uprooting the vine, clearing the new land, planting the vine, and protecting it. The vine was then allowed to grow and flourish, but in the absence of protection (walls) it was ruined (v 13–14). The parable highlights the "contrast and contradiction between what God began and what [God] now has done."[167]

The recourse of the people is to cry out to God who planted the vine. The people call upon God to look down and see what has happened (v 15) as if God is unaware or unconcerned about their plight. In this prayer for intervention the psalmist refers to God's right hand (v 16) and the one on God's right hand (v 18). The right hand is the hand of power and mention of it serves to prompt God to show power again, as well as to assure the people that God is still powerful. The "one on God's right hand" refers to the people of God and serves to remind them of their relationship with God, the one who made them strong (v 18). These verses show how intricately intertwined God's sovereignty and God's relationship with Israel are.

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[167] Mays, *Psalms*, 263.

The psalm ends with a vow and the last refrain both of which show that, despite their belief that it is God who is afflicting them, they still desire to cling to God.[168] If God will regard the people and their present situation, and act (vv 15–18) the people will not backslide (סוּג). If God will again give life then the people will call on God's name (v 19). In the end, the act of restoration is God's. God need simply let God's face shine and salvation may occur. Without this restoration, the people have no future.[169]

Psalm 81

Psalm 81 seems to combine hymnic praise (vv 2–6a) with an oracle to the people (vv 6b–17).[170] Verse 3 mentions a festal day, perhaps the feast of Tabernacles, which places the psalm in a liturgical setting.[171] The beginning of the psalm is a sharp contrast with the end of Psalm 80 but once the reader reaches the oracle, its placement makes sense. McCann points out that Psalm 81, which is in the middle of Book III and follows two communal complaints, explains the suffering and gives an encouraging word to Israel if she will respond.[172]

The opening praise focuses on the strength of God, specifically the God of Jacob (vv 2, 5). The people celebrate with singing and the playing of numerous instruments including the tambourine, lyre, harp, and trumpet. One can imagine the jubilant sounds

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[168] Broyles, *Psalms*, 331.

[169] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1000; see also, Tate, *Psalms*, 316.

[170] See, Broyles, *Psalms*, 333; Mays, *Psalms*, 265; Kraus, *Psalms*, 149.

[171] Broyles, *Psalms*, 333; Kraus, *Psalms*, 149; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1003; Tate, *Psalms*, 322. See also, Th. Booij who echoes the idea that the psalm was used in the sanctuary and suggests that it most certainly has a late pre-exilic date, especially in light of the fact that the exile is not mentioned in the judgment ("The Background of the Oracle in Psalm 81," *Bib* 65 [1984]: 465–75).

[172] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1003.

that filled the worship place. The praise occurred during a festival (v 3), which would be

an apt time to call upon God and hear from God.

Verses 5–6 are unclear for several reasons. The particle at the beginning of verse

5 (כִּי) suggests that we have come to the motive for such praise or perhaps the subject of

praise. Are the people praising because they are following a statute to do so? Or, are the

people praising God because God has given them a statute by way of their deliverance

from Egypt. Gerstenberger points out that the terms used in reference to divine

ordinances (חק, מִשְׁפָּט, and עֵדוּת) are each tied to a different name for the community:

Israel, Jacob, and Joseph.[173] Absent are designations such as תּוֹרָה and דָּבָר.

Gerstenberger suggests that the terms in Psalm 81 are in reference to the basic will of

God for God's community rather than the enforcement of ritual law.[174] Thus the people

pray because they want to participate in God's will, not because God decreed that they

praise.

The shouts of praise are silenced as the orator rises to communicate the oracle

from God to the people.[175] The last phrase of verse 6 makes it clear that the orator is

speaking not of himself but is speaking for God. The speaker gives no self

introduction[176] and makes clear that the language or message (שָׂפָה) heard is not known

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[173] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 108.

[174] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 108.

[175] Psalm 50, another Asaphite psalm, also records a speech from God (Brueggemann, *Message of Psalms*, 94; Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 108; Tate, *Psalms*, 321). Psalm 50, however, takes the form of an indictment and has quite a different tone. God's speech in Psalm 81, though accusatory, depicts God almost pleading with the people. Its tone is more redemptive.

[176] Unlike oracles given by Moses where Moses stays visible at all times (Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 110).

(יִדַע) previously.[177] Verses 7–17, then, are the words of God spoken to the people

presumably by a cult official or prophet. Through the speaker, God is able to approach

the congregation as both witness and judge.[178] God begins by reminding the people of

divine action in the past. In previous psalms (74, 77, 79, 80) the people have begun their

pleas to God by reminding God of the past, now God does the reminding. In the past

God relieved burdens, freed their hands, listened to their calls of distress, and responded

by rescuing them.

In verses 7–8 God establishes the fact that God has been faithful to the people.

God heard their cries and did answer them "in the secret place of thunder." The mention

of the burdens of the people is a reference to their burdens while enslaved in Egypt.[179]

The place of thunder could be a reference to Sinai specifically or the deliverance from

Egypt in general.[180] The mention of the testing of the people at Meribah is a reversal of

the tradition, which usually states that the people were testing God.[181] The theophany at

Sinai and the provision in the wilderness are evidence that God does answer the cries of

the people. God then turns to examine the faithfulness of the people toward God. Does

their past indicate that they have listened to God?

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[177] Mays, *Psalms*, 266; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1004; Tate, *Psalms*, 323.

[178] Kraus, *Psalms*, 151.

[179] Exodus 1–6 recalls the oppressive burdens of the people's enslavement in Egypt (Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 109).

[180] Tate, *Psalms*, 324.

[181] Exod 17:7; Num 20:13; Deut 6:16; Pss 78:20; 95:8–9; 106:32. Tate suggests that testing by God is part of a variant tradition (*Psalms*, 323).

"Hear, my people!" The central message of the oracle is the appeal for the people to listen.[182] God does more than invite the people to listen; God demands that the people listen because it is essential to their identity.[183] If only they would listen. God's admonition in verse 10 focuses on the problem—bowing down to other gods. Verse 10 is reminiscent of the Decalogue, and is a fundamental command in the relationship between God and Israel.[184] It underlines the fact that God alone is sovereign. Verse 11 underscores the basis of the command, namely that God brought them out of Egypt and is thus worthy of their loyalty.[185] If the relationship between the people and God is maintained then God will maintain the provisions for the people.

Verse 12 makes it clear that the relationship was not maintained because Israel would not submit to God's sovereignty. In fact, the tone of verses 12–17 is that of lament as God and the people reflect upon the relationship.[186] Instead of seeking God the people sought their own counsel (v 13), which led to the removal of God's protection. Judgment is a reasonable response within this relationship.[187] In earlier Asaphite psalms, the psalmist has tied the desperate situation of the people to God's anger. In this psalm and from God's perspective, the destruction of the people is tied to God's allowing them to follow their own counsel.[188] Israel wants to follow other gods,

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[182] Mays, *Psalms*, 265.

[183] Mays, *Psalms*, 266.

[184] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 92.

[185] Broyles, *Psalms*, 334.

[186] Tate, *Psalms*, 324.

[187] Broyles, *Psalms*, 334.

[188] Brueggemann reminds us that both the laments from the people concerning what they understand as God's inactivity *and* the laments from God concerning what God understands as the

which God commands against but nonetheless allows and the result is oppression.[189] God squarely places the responsibility upon the people and again reminds them that if they would listen and follow God's ways rather than their own counsel God would quickly intervene. God's intervention would be swift and sure. The enemies would be subdued and the doom of those who hate Yahweh would last forever. In contrast to God's response to the enemies, God's response to the people would be the return of provision. They would eat the finest wheat and honey and be satisfied.

Psalm 81 is a definitive response to the cries of the people who are wondering just what God is doing while they are being destroyed. God is not absent and God's past actions testify to the fact that God does hear the cries of the people, thus God is not deaf. God is identified in the psalm in a way that connects God with action.[190] God is not inactive; God is waiting. If Israel would submit to God and walk in God's ways, God would quickly act against the enemies. The psalm ends with a look to the future and the realization that though the people have not remained faithful, God still refers to them as "My people" (v 8, 11, 13).[191] Israel's not listening has been a recurring part of their relationship with God as has God's punishment.[192] The present congregation has a decision to make and the hope is that they do not make the mistakes of their

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disobedience of the people remain in tension in the Psalter. It is not that the people's assessment is correct and God's wrong or vice versa. "Both judgments are biblical and both need to be heard." (*Message of Psalms*, 94).

[189] Brueggemann, *Message of Psalms*, 93.

[190] Tate, *Psalms*, 324.

[191] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1004.

[192] Mays, *Psalms*, 268.

forbearers.[193] There is still hope and an opportunity for restoration. "The remarkable

thing about this psalm is that Yahweh moves on. . . . [B]y the mercy of God . . . Israel

need not linger in the mess . . . which Israel has made for itself."[194]

Psalm 82

Of Psalm 82, Tate states, "There is no other psalm like it."[195] Broyles points out

that beginning with verse 2, "We enter a world very foreign to us."[196] Suggestions about

its genre vary from cultic-prophetic utterance[197] to temple liturgy parallel to Yahweh

kingship psalms.[198] Gerstenberger names the genre "report of trial" or "enactment of

trial;"[199] McCann describes it as a trial metaphor.[200] The trial in reference takes place in

the divine council, a scene that is foreign to later monotheistic assessments of Israel, but

was common throughout much of Israel's history.[201] Tate suggests that in order to

properly understand Psalm 82, one must understand the characteristics of reports of the

divine council. First, these reports have a visionary character; they report what has been

seen. Second, they contain a direct and immediate style of narration and the narrator is a

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[193] Broyles, *Psalms*, 334.

[194] Brueggemann, *Message of Psalms*, 93.

[195] Tate, *Psalms*, 332.

[196] Broyles, *Psalms*, 336.

[197] Kraus, *Psalms*, 155.

[198] Broyles, *Psalms*, 335.

[199] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 114.

[200] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1006.

[201] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 115.

direct observer. Third, the narrator may or may not be identified.[202] There are other

accounts of divine council meetings in prophetic literature such as Isaiah 41:21–29 and

Zechariah.[203] In fact, Psalm 82 is parallel to Isaiah 41, where Yahweh is challenging the

gods of the nations.[204] Important in Psalm 82 (and other instances of divine council) is

that God is the presiding God, the sovereign over the other gods.[205]

The psalm opens and closes with the words of the liturgist (vv 1, 8).[206] Verse 1

provides several points about the setting of the psalm. First, God is in charge of the

meeting. Second, it is a meeting of divine beings. Third, not only is God in charge, but

God's role in this meeting is to judge those present. Verses 2–7 do not identify God

further;[207] verse one has succinctly set the stage with the appropriate information. Verse

8 is the cry of the liturgist for God to do what the other gods could not do, that is, for

God to judge the earth properly. The basis for the psalmist's petition is that God

possesses all nations. [208]

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[202] Tate, *Psalms*, 332–33.

[203] Tate, *Psalms*, 333.

[204] Broyles, *Psalms*, 336.

[205] Kraus, *Psalms*, 155. Tsevat points out that there are differing views on monotheism in the HB. The most dominant view is that the other gods are non-gods; however, a less prominent view is that God is the most supreme God of the many gods that exist and God has assigned them subordinate roles. It is the second view that is presented by Psalm 82 ("God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82," *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–70): 123–37. Mark S. Smith addresses this text and suggests that God is not the presiding deity; rather God is one of the sons of that deity. As such God, as well as the other sons, is given a nation to rule. This interpretation is line with the LXX and DSS manuscripts of Deut 32:8-9 where Elyon allots each of his sons a people. Ps 82 deposes this theology by ending with the statement that God is now the judge over all nations (*The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48–49.

[206] Broyles, *Psalms*, 336.

[207] Tate, *Psalms*, 334.

[208] Tate, *Psalms*, 339.

The body of the psalm consists of verses 2–7, which depict the actual meeting over which God presides. God opens the discussion with a question to those present. "How long?" This question is the same question the people ask of God so often. Tate points out that verse two is the indictment against the gods and is in question form in order to allow those accused to explain their actions.[209] The indictment against the other gods is that they are acting unjustly by being partial to the wicked.[210] "How long?" is the question put before the gods because theirs is a chronic misjudgment in favor of the wicked, not a temporary mistake.[211] The *selah* at the end of the verse indicates a pause, but the gods give no explanation.

Verses 3–4 announce what proper judgment looks like. If the gods were judging correctly they would be watching out for the widowed, orphaned, and poor. They would be rescuing the needy from the wicked. God's expectation was for the gods to protect the marginalized of society, but they failed to live up to that expectation.[212] The unjust judgments of the gods have violated God's will for the world.[213] The juxtaposition of righteous and wicked reminds the reader of Psalm 73, which presents what the world is like when the gods are partial to the wicked. Psalm 82 explains how such a world could exist.

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[209] Tate, *Psalms*, 335.

[210] Artur Weiser ties this psalm to the problem of theodicy; the explanation for theodicy is that injustice is caused by the lesser deities (*The Psalms: A Commentary* [OTL; trans. Herbert Hartwell; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962], 557).

[211] Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, Part 2, 114.

[212] Tate, *Psalms*, 336.

[213] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1006.

Verse 5 shifts from second person pronouns to third person pronouns in reference to the gods. It is unclear if this shift represents a shift in speaker or a shift in addressee or both. If it is a shift in speaker, it could be attributed to the liturgist who speaks in verses 1 and 8, in which case the worshippers would be the addressees. If the addressee(s) of God's speech has changed from the gods to someone else, it is unclear who else would be present. Tate concludes that the speaker has shifted and belongs to the same person who speaks verses 1 and 8.[214] McCann approaches the verse as God's summary of the situation.[215] Gerstenberger suggests that the speaker is uttering the verdict not to the culprits, but the "imaginary court."[216] In any case, the statement uttered is in reference to the actions of the gods. These unjust gods do not have knowledge or understanding; they do not recognize right from wrong.[217] These gods are incapable of grasping the issue of walking in the light and as long as they have some power there is not hope for the world.[218] Perhaps the enemies of Israel who have mocked her and the unrighteous within her who have uttered statements about God's lack of knowledge were mistaking God with the gods who do lack knowledge.

Miller points out that justice is a concern of all Near Easter religions, but the intense focus on righteousness and justice is particularly important to Israel. Whereas other religions focused on justice in the human realm; Israel expands the implications to

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[214] Tate, *Psalms*, 337.

[215] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1006.

[216] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 114.

[217] Kraus, *Psalms*, 156.

[218] Tsevat, "God and Gods," 128.

the cosmic realm.[219] In the absence of just judgments, the very foundations of the world

are undermined. The statement about the shaking of the world's foundation is found

elsewhere in the psalms (11:3; 46:3, 7; 60:4; 93:1) and always suggests universal

chaos.[220] In order to maintain order in creation, there must be justice; in its absence

creation is subject to a return to chaos. Injustice destroys the whole world.[221]

The scene in the assembly ends with judgment upon the gods.[222] Despite their

position in the assembly as children of the "Most High," they will be judged for their

inability to maintain justice.   The punishment is for the gods to meet the same fate as all

humans. They will in fact die, just as human princes die. They will be stripped of their

divine status leaving only one who is able to judge, the God of Israel. God is alone in

the distribution of justice; God is sovereign over all the earth. [223] Judgment upon the

gods is also found in Isaiah 46 and Jeremiah 10:6–16, but these do not emphasize lack of

social justice in the accusations against the gods.[224] The sentence of death for the gods in

verse 7 paves the way for the petition in verse 8.

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[219] Patrick D. Miller Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 123–24.

[220] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 114.

[221] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1007.

[222] Though the divine council idea was common in the ANE and is understandable in this context, others have suggested that God is addressing human political powers (Smick, "Mythopoetic Language," 94–97). H. Niehr points out that wherever justice was at stake in the ANE, deities played an important role as did the humans in charge, thus suggesting that God is addressing humans is a "false alternative," ("Götter oder Menschen – eine falsche Alternative: Bemerkungen zu Ps 82," *ZAW* 99 [1987]: 94–98). There is also midrashic tradition that makes Israel herself the addressee of vv 6–7 (Jerome Neyrey, "I Said: 'You are Gods'-Ps 82:6 and John 10:34," *JBL* 108 [1989]: 647–63).

[223] Tate summarizes the translation debate regarding verse 8 pointing out the three possible translations: 1) "for you granted inheritances among all the nations," 2) "for you will possess (as inheritance) all the nations," and 3) "for you have possession of all the nations" or "you have patrimony in every nation." Tate opts for the third possibility stating that it makes more sense in light of the petition at the beginning of the verse (*Psalms*, 340).

[224] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 114.

Verse 8 places the psalm securely in community worship.[225] God is implored to do what the gods could not; God is implored to judge the earth and realize God's jurisdictional power over the earth.[226] There is no confusion among the worshippers about who reigns because it is God who reigns over all of the nations. God is called upon to make that reign a reality.

On its own Psalm 82 is difficult to understand. If taken in its canonical context, on the other hand, it makes more sense to the reader. McCann points out the connection between the commands in 81:9 to put no other gods before you and not to bow to a foreign god and the death of those gods in 82:7.[227] The judgment of the gods in Psalm 82 makes it clear that the other gods are incompetent and unable to judge rightly. Worshipping them is pointless.

In a different explanation of Psalms 81 and 82, Gerstenberger points out that it is not uncommon in prophetic literature for foreign powers to be denounced as a sequel to the indictments or admonishments against God's own people.[228] For example, Zephaniah 1 declares God's universal destruction (vv 2–3; 17–18) and the upcoming destruction of Judah and Jerusalem because of idolatrous actions of the people (vv 4–16). Chapter two then shifts the indictment to the other nations including the Philistines (vv 4–9), the Moabites and Ammonites (vv 8–11), Ethiopians (v 12), and Assyrians (vv 13–15). Gerstenberger believes the same idea can be applied to Psalm 81 and 82 if they are linked liturgically. Psalm 81 is God's admonishment against the people and Psalm

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[225] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 114.

[226] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 114.

[227] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1006.

[228] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 113.

82 functions as the indictment against the nations by way of an indictment of their gods.[229] Whether the two were used together liturgically or not, for the reader who reads these two psalms together the indictment of the people followed by the indictment of other gods may fit into this pattern. This idea is even more fruitful in light of Psalm 83 in which the people cry out for God to punish the nations.

Psalm 83

Psalm 82 establishes that God is without a doubt the one true God who is able to judge the earth rightly. Psalm 83 is a plea for that judgment to begin in the form of God's judgment upon Israel's neighbors who mean to destroy her. Classified consistently as a communal lament,[230] this psalm articulates the distress felt by God's people in light of the actions of the "heathen nations"[231] which surround them. Psalm 83 is often criticized for its vengeful attitude toward the nations.[232] It is important to note first that the point of view of the psalmist is that Israel is not just any nation, but the place where the reign of God is made known to the world.[233] Thus, God is called upon to protect both the divine interest and reputation. Second, the ultimate purpose of God's judgment upon the nations is so that all the earth may know that God rules the world.

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[229] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 113.

[230] Broyles, *Psalms*, 339; Kraus, *Psalms*, 160; Mays, *Psalms*, 271; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1009; Tate, *Psalms*, 345, "a national lament."

[231] Tate, *Psalms*, 345.

[232] Kraus, *Psalms*, 164.

[233] Kraus, *Psalms*, 164.

The result will be "a reign of justice and righteousness that characterizes God's rule as opposed to the rule of autonomous nations or the rule of the gods."[234]

The psalm opens with a plea to God, which is arranged in chiastic structure with God (אלוהים and אל) as the first and last word of the verse (v 2).[235] Gerstenberger points out that typically the pleas of a communal lament are positive requests to be heard and heeded. The requests of Psalm 83:2, however, are negative.[236] God is first called upon not to keep quiet. The word used (דמי) suggests stillness in action not necessarily lack of speech or noise. Additionally, God is urged not to be speechless (חרש)[237] and not to be undisturbed (שקט). What is happening to Israel warrants God's action and should be so disturbing to God that God cannot keep silent. The prayer seems to desire that God avert imminent danger; it is not looking back at previous defeat or disgrace.[238]

Verses 3–9 describe the imminent distress and the enemies who are plotting it. The psalm is not primarily focused on the conflict between the enemies and the people of Israel, but on the conflict between the enemies and God.[239] In fact, a first person pronoun is used only once (v 14a), while second and third persons pronoun in reference to God and the enemies abound.[240] The enemies are described as hating God (v 3).

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[234] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1010.

[235] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1009.

[236] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 117.

[237] The Hebrew word has to do with being deaf and/or dumb.

[238] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 117–118.

[239] Broyles, *Psalms*, 340.

[240] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 117–118.

While the enemies actions are directed toward the people of God (v 4), their conspiracy is against God (v 6). The goal of the enemies is to wipe out the nation of Israel so that its name will no longer be remembered (v 5). This conspiracy to eliminate Israel nationally and in the minds of all people is an assault on God's way and work in the world. God's name/reputation and God's claims upon history are at stake as a result of these plots against God's chosen people.[241]

The list of enemies (vv 7–9) involved in this plot is interesting. Broyles points out that providing a "roll call" of enemies is not the usual practice in psalmic prayer.[242] The closest to this type of list is Psalm 120:5, which mentions hostile neighbors more generically.[243] The peoples listed are those groups who surround Israel geographically,[244] and the list is more likely for liturgical and symbolic purposes than historical data.[245] The list in verse 7 is a mix of tribal/state designations (Edom and Moab) and appellations in the plural form (Ishmaelites and Hagrites).[246] The list continues in verse 8 with peoples attested to be fierce enemies of Israel at various times.[247] Such a coalition aligning themselves together against Israel at one time is

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[241] Mays, *Psalms*, 272–73.

[242] Broyles, *Psalms*, 340.

[243] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 118.

[244] Tate, *Psalms*, 347.

[245] Broyles, *Psalms*, 340. Gerstenberger points to the possibility that the list was part of a cultic ritual in which enemies were executed in effigy (the practice is known from Egyptian examples). If this ritual is meant, Gerstenberger suggests we label the list a "Cultic List" and distinguish it from an historical situation (*Psalms, Part 2*, 119).

[246] These appellations are relatively infrequent in the HB; Ishmaelites - nine times and Hagrites – six times (Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 119).

[247] Gebal is the exception; little is known about it (Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 119).

unknown[248] and its presence here is more likely a poetic way of indicating that Israel is in need of major assistance.[249]

The psalmist then turns to petition God to take action (vv 10–16). The action requested falls into two categories. First, God is urged to act in a way similar to the way God has acted against enemies in the past. Do to the current enemy as you did to Midian, Sisera, Jabin, Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna. The references to past enemies are all taken from accounts during the period of the Judges,[250] a time when Israel was frequently handed over to enemies because of sin and then, after crying out to God, was delivered from the enemy. These enemies are mentioned because they had a similar goal, to take God's land (v 13). Numerous enemies could have been mentioned as examples of times when God delivered the people, why mention these? Why not the enemies of Saul or David? I suspect, given a probable post-exilic date of writing,[251] that the time of the judges would resonate well with the people in post-exilic times. They, too, were struggling to (re-)establish their place in the land and were doing so without a king.

The second category is found in the suggestion that God treat the enemy as elements that are destroyed by natural powers.[252] Make them like dust in the wind (v 14), like forests and mountains in the path of a fire (v 15), and show them the terror of

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[248] Tate, *Psalms*, 345.

[249] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 1010.

[250] Midian, Judg 6–8; Sisera and Jabin, Judg 4–5; Oreb and Zeeb, Judg 7:25; Zebah and Zalmunna, Judg 8:21. With the exception of Sisera (also mentioned in 1 Sam 12:9), these leaders' names are only mentioned in the Judges accounts and this psalm (Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 120).

[251] Tate, *Psalms*, 349.

[252] Broyles, *Psalms*, 340.

the hurricane (v 16). This suggestion that God use nature to subdue the enemy is another acknowledgement that God is the creator of the cosmos and is thus sovereign.

The desired result of God acting against the enemy is that the enemy will be put to shame and within that shame realize that it is YHWH's name that they should be seeking (vv 17, 19). Though the requests for vengeance are harsh, the purpose (as stated in v 17 and 19) is for the enemies to be reconciled and understand that YHWH is the most high over the earth. Verse 18, however, seems to allow the harsh petitions another hearing as the psalmist hopes that the enemies' shame will last forever and that they would perish in disgrace. These last three verses are difficult to reconcile. Is the psalmist suggesting that the heathen nations may be converted or are these verses accentuating their shameful demise?[253] I suspect the worshippers, whose lives were still in upheaval because of the exile and destruction of Jerusalem, would have had much difficulty deciding between the options as well.

At the end of the collection, it seems that the situation has not changed. The enemies are still present and threatening and the people still cry out for God's intervention. What is striking about the collection, though, is that in the midst of a harsh and unchanging reality some still remain faithful (apparently not all, Ps 73). Though the cries for God's action do not produce the desired result, the people are still choosing to see God as the ultimate answer in their desperate times.

Summary

This chapter has moved through a reading of each of the Psalms of Asaph, paying attention not only to the message of the individual psalms themselves, but also to

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[253] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 121.

the way the psalms of the collection influence each other. Though perhaps dominated by communal laments, the collection represents a wide range of psalm genres; from the autobiographical reflections of Psalm 73 to the unusual court scene of Psalm 82 the collection moves the reader through vast changes in emotions and circumstances. God's voice rings in the collection as God pronounces judgment on the wicked in Psalms 75 and 81 and on the other deities in Psalm 82. The voice of the people is loud, expressing both frustration and great confidence as they struggle to reconcile what they know about God's character with their current reality. The crisis of the exile has shaken their faith to the point that they question whether or not to remain faithful (Psalms 73 and 77).

While this chapter focuses on the message of the individual psalms, chapter five will assess the thematic and linguistic connections that are found throughout the collection, including themes such as God's judgment and anger, in a more direct way in an effort to uncover the message of the collection as a whole.

CHAPTER FOUR

Psalm 50: A Reading and Discussion of Placement

Psalm 50 is the only Psalm of Asaph located outside of the collection in Book III.

This psalm is located in Book II after the first Korahite collection (Pss 42–49) and before

the second Davidic collection (Pss 51–72). Its location leads to many questions: What

is its relationship with the rest of the Asaphite collection?[1] Why is it separate? Why

might it be located between two larger collections in Book II? These questions will be

dealt with by first examining the psalm itself, then discussing recent scholarship

concerning the Elohistic Psalter of which it is a part, and lastly by discussing theories

regarding its placement.

A Reading of Psalm 50

Psalm 50 is difficult to categorize in typical genre terms.[2] It is most likely a

prophetic psalm that does include an oracle from God to the people.[3] Gerstenberger

disagrees and classifies Psalm 50 as a sermon complete with instruction and

admonition.[4] Mays points out the similarities between Psalm 50 and trial proceedings.

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[1] This question will be answered more thoroughly in Ch. 5, "Assessing the Collection."

[2] Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (CC; trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 488.

[3] Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIB; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 223; J. Clinton McCann, "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 4; Leander Keck, et al., ed.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 880.

[4] Erhard Gerstenberger also disagrees with the suggestion that Ps 50 is a festival song preferring to link the psalm to a postexilic congregation whose concern was with Torah lessons and Levitical instruction (*Psalms, Part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* [FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 210).

God proclaims God's place as judge with the earth and the heavens functioning as witnesses to the actions of God's people.[5] The setting is very likely connected with a cultic festival. Craigie and McCann suggest the possibility of a covenant renewal festival, though McCann notes that the concerns presented within the psalm are appropriate for any worship service.[6]

Verses 1–6 introduce God as judge and recount the summons for both creation and the faithful to hear God's judgment.[7] Following the title, verse one presents a "piling up"[8] of the divine names אל, אלהים, and יהוה. This trio of names is rare and seems to crescendo toward the name Yahweh.[9] McCann suggests that naming God three times emphasizes God's authority to speak in the manner that is to come.[10] In God's coming God will not be silent (חרשׁ); God's arrival will be accompanied by fire and storm.[11] The reason for God's dramatic arrival is not laid out until verses 4 and 5 where God declares the intention to judge the people and in direct address, calls for the faithful ones, that is those who made a covenant with God, to be gathered before God.

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[5] James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 194.

[6] Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco: Word, 1983), 363; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 880.

[7] A similar scene is found in Micah 6:1–8 where God proclaims controversy with the people to the mountains, hills, and foundations of the earth. In both scenes there is a common concern with the sacrifices and actions of the people.

[8] Craigie, *Psalms*, 364.

[9] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, "The So-Called Elohistic Psalter: A New Solution for an Old Problem" in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen, eds; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2003) 35–51.

[10] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 881.

[11] The language is similar to theophany reports

The summons to the earth and heavens is in three parts. First, in verse 1 God summons only the earth. In this verse the phrase, "from the rising of the sun to its going down" suggests that every part of the earth is being summoned, however, verse 2 points out that it is out of the specialness of Zion that God shines forth. Second, in verse 4, God calls to both the heavens and the earth asking them to gather the people. Third, in verse 6 the heavens alone are mentioned as declaring God's righteousness. Mays points out that in other ancient Near Eastern agreements the gods are called upon as witness, but here the heavens and earth replace the gods as witnesses.[12]

After the witnesses and God's people are called, God begins to present the testimony against Israel (v 7). Verses 7–15 communicate the direct speech of God, which was likely voiced to the congregation through a cult prophet or priest. The heart of this first accusation is the people's understanding of sacrifices (v 8); the people have misunderstood and misused the sacrificial system. They have apparently mistaken the sacrificial system as a means of providing God with the necessary food, a common belief in the ancient Near East.[13] God does not need their sacrifices because the beasts and fowl of the earth belong to God (vv 10–11). The sacrifices of the people do not provide food for God (v 12) because offering is not a transfer of a human's possession to God for it is already God's possession.[14]

Verses 14–15 present God's view about sacrifices. Sacrifice is about thanksgiving (v 14); it should not be used as a means to assert one's self or to attempt to

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[12] Mays, *Psalms*, 194.

[13] Kraus, *Psalms*, 494; Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms, Volume 1* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 762.

[14] Mays, *Psalms*, 196.

influence or appease God.[15] God is more interested in seeing personal vows fulfilled (v 14) rather than heaping up bulls and goats as burnt offerings. God also desires to see the people depend upon God (v 15) rather than incorrectly think that God depends upon them. In response to the cries of the people, God will deliver them and in that process God will be glorified, not the people. It is important to note that this psalm is not rejecting the sacrificial system; rather God is clarifying its purpose and distinguishing Israel's system from others.[16]

The second accusation against God's people begins in verse 16 with God's address to the "wicked." This group should be thought of as part of God's covenant people, not a separate group.[17] These people know the statutes and covenant of God and have recited them (v 16), a fact that God uses against them. They are labeled wicked because of their actions, which are in contrast with God's statutes. The psalm continues by listing the abhorrent actions of a people who should know better. The wicked hate discipline and disregard God's words (v 17), they have relationships with thieves and adulterers (v 18), and they speak evil, even against their own families (v 19–20). The wicked have gone about acting in ways contrary to God's commands and because God was silent they thought God was ignorant of their actions (v 19). God's silence has ended with indictment against the people (v 21).

Psalm 50 points out two areas in which the people of God were going astray, their understanding of sacrifices and their hypocritical actions. Their judgment is

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[15] Kraus, *Psalms*, 491; McCann, "Book of Psalms," 882.

[16] Kraus, *Psalms*, 494.

[17] McCann, "Book of Psalms," 882; Wilson, *Psalms*, 763.

pronounced in verse 22; forgetting God will result in their destruction and then there will be no one around who can save them. The judgment is dire, but verse 23 makes it clear that the people are not beyond redemption.[18] If they will bring the proper sacrifice and they will act in accordance with God's way, then God will bring salvation rather than judgment. Rather than ending in judgment, this psalm ends with a warning to those who choose not to change and instructions for those who do.[19]

<center>*The Elohistic Psalter*</center>

The issue of the placement of Psalm 50, if discussed at all, is often tied to the issue of the development of the Elohistic Psalter. For this reason it is important to outline the recent scholarship regarding the Elohistic Psalter. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger provide a succinct discussion of the history of the scholarship regarding the Elohistic Psalter in their article, "The So-Called Elohistic Psalter: A New Solution for an Old Problem."[20] Scholars in the early to mid-nineteenth century called attention to the increased use of the divine name ʾlhym in Psalms 42–83[21] and there has been debate on how to understand this phenomenon since. Of the early views, Ewald's view that the concentrated use of Elohim in Psalms 42–83 can be explained as redactional work in which the original divine name Yahweh is replaced by the divine name Elohim is

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[18] Wilson, *Psalms*, 765.

[19] Mays, *Psalms*, 197.

[20] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, "The So-Called Elohistic Psalter: A New Solution for an Old Problem," in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 35–51.

[21] Among these is Delitzsch who considers the use of the divine name to be one of the key characteristics that point to the unity of the Asaphite collection (*Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* [3 vols; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908], 2:140.

prevalent still.[22] What then can be said about the occasional presence of the divine name Yahweh within the collection? These occurrences necessitate an explanation, which has typically consisted of the idea that either the editors overlooked some occurrences or later editors have reintroduced the name. These theories are challenged in places where both divine names exist side by side (ex. Ps 42:2a, 9a) demonstrating an inconsistent redaction.[23] Yet another suggestion is that the Elohistic psalms preserve the original divine name while the rest of the psalms have undergone a Yahwistic redaction, a suggestion that essentially flips the subject of the redaction.[24]

More recently scholars have revisited the issue of the Elohistic Psalter in a way that examines the use of the divine name throughout that group in an effort to understand its importance in the Psalter. Many of these studies begin by comparing divine name usage within the Elohistic Psalter with usage in the rest of the Psalter.[25] Matthias Millard does so and points out that, while the preference of divine name in the Elohistic Psalter is Elohim, the name YHWH has not been avoided; rather it receives less

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[22] Heinrich Ewald, *Allgemeines über die Hebräische Poesie und über das Psalmenbuch* (Die Dichter des Alten Bundes 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1835).

[23] Hossfeld and Zenger, "The So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 37.

[24] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 37. See also, Gerald H. Wilson, *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 196–97.

[25] Matthias Millard, "Zum Problem des elohistischen Psalters: Überlegungen zum Gebrauch von יהוה und אלהים im Psalter," in *Der Psalter in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. E. Zenger; Herders Biblische Studien 18; Freiburg: Herder, 1998) 75–110; Christoph Rösel, *Die messianische Redaktion des Psalters: Studien zu Entstehung und Theologie der Sammlung 2–89** (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1999); Laura Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter: What, How and Why?" *SJOT* 15 (2001): 142–69.

importance.[26] Millard suggests that the Elohistic Psalter is a literary composition, and there are no grounds to assume an Elohistic redaction.[27]

Christoph Rösel also notes decreased instances of YHWH in Psalms 42–83 and considers the existence of an Elohistic Psalter obvious. This group of psalms should be understood as a structural element when studying the Psalter.[28] Rösel, unlike Millard, attributes the existence of the Elohistic Psalter to redactional activity in which redactors substituted אלהים for יהוה, a redaction that was later distorted by a reinsertion of יהוה.[29]

Ziony Zevit also offers a new explanation in which he suggests that the Elohistic Psalter, a collection created after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom sometime during or shortly after the reign of Hezekiah, was created for use in a pluralistic worship setting.[30] Zevit points out the importance of expressing the name of the deity. He states that "without a name, or if uttered in a context where the addressee was not clear, the utterance was simply noise and not a communication."[31] By substituting the generic Elohim, the redactor has elevated the generic to an honorific, thus allowing originally Yahwistic poems to be addressed to other deities worshipped in the temple. This suggestion, however, still suffers the same difficulties as earlier theories, namely that the

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[26] Millard, "Zum Problem," 86.

[27] Millard, "Zum Problem," 97.

[28] Rösel, *Die messianische Redaktion*, 25.

[29] Rösel, *Die messianische Redaktion*, 35.

[30] Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 677.

[31] Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 677.

redactor must have been sloppy, or later redactors must have reintroduced the name Yahweh. In light of such difficulties, Zevit further sharpens his theory by suggesting that "Where 'Elohim' functions as a divine name in the psalms it replaced a divine name other than YHWH."[32] Thus psalms that do not mention Yahweh were originally addressed to other deities, illustrating Zevit's belief that the psalmodic traditions of Iron Age Israel were "heterogeneous, fluid, and complicated."[33] The redactor, then, was trying to produce a collection that privileged Yahweh's name while not slighting other deities in the process. One advantage to the redactor's work is that the collection could easily be used by later worshippers during a time when polytheistic worship was not recognized.[34]

Zevit's conclusions rest upon a pre-exilic date for the redaction of the Elohistic Psalter, which would have been necessary to maintain a polytheistic setting.[35] He suggests that the smaller collections (Korahite, Davidic, and Asaphite) pre-date the creation of the Elohistic Psalter, thus the collections would have to have been solidified years before the exile. Zevit does not, however, account for the exilic and post-exilic elements of the collection and psalms that are generally dated later, especially psalms referring to the destruction of the temple or Jerusalem (i.e., Psalm 79). In reference to the Asaphite collection, Zevit does mention that when the collection was redacted in the south, reference to northern sites and shrines were changed but he dates those changes

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[32] Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 678.

[33] Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 678.

[34] Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 678.

[35] Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 678.

before the exile.[36]   While Zevit's conclusions are compelling, his dating of the collection is not.

A more appropriate date for the compilation of the Elohistic Psalter is found in the work of Hossfeld and Zenger. While Hossfeld and Zenger find the work of Millard and Rösel helpful for providing focused attention on individual cases, they carry the work further by "utilizing [their] redaction- and composition critical concepts"[37] as they examine the use of YHWH (and YH) in the various collections within the Elohistic Psalter. They define the collections in what they consider their chronological order as follows: Second Davidic Psalter (Pss 51–72), Asaph Psalms (Pss 50, 73–83), and First Collection of Korahite Psalms (Pss 42–29).[38] After examining the occurrences of YHWH/YH in each collection, Hossfeld and Zenger reach the following conclusions:[39] 1) the occurrences of YHWH/YH (49) are distributed in all three groups, thus undermining a simplistic explanation for the Elohistic Psalter. The collections show a frequent use of the generic Elohim with YHWH, a phenomenon that is better understood as an expression of theological thinking that reveals itself "only as a theological tendency in these texts."[40] 2) The beginning of this theological tendency is pre-exilic and its ending is postexilic. Changes in its implementation can be seen as the collection progresses from its older psalms in the second Davidic Psalter through the first Korahite

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[36] Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 684.

[37] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 41.

[38] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 42–50.

[39] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 50.

[40] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 50.

collection and then in the Asaph collection.[41]   3) It is possible that the Elohistic tendency is related to the "so-called" Elohistic texts of the Pentateuch and is in no way related to the later fear of misusing or pronouncing the tetragrammaton.[42] 4) "Motivations for the Elohistic tendency arise from classical connotations of speech about 'Elohim' in connection with Old Testament beliefs about Yahweh."[43] The use of Elohim emphasizes God's distance and transcendence; when God's universality is celebrated, Elohim is preferred.[44]

While Hossfeld and Zenger state that they are using redactional- and composition critical concepts, their final conclusions about the Elohistic Psalter move us away from redactional explanations. Their conclusion that the presence of the Elohistic Psalter can be tied to a theological tendency rather than redaction is helpful, but their suggestion that Elohim is preferred because it emphasizes God's distance, transcendence, or universality is less convincing. There are other places in the Psalter where the same is communicated using YHWH rather than Elohim, for instance Psalm 8:2 refers to YHWH's name being majestic in all the earth and YHWH's glory being above the heavens. In Psalm 10:1 the psalmist asks YHWH why YHWH is standing far away. There are also occurrences in the Elohistic Psalter where God seems near as in Psalm 57:2 when the psalmist takes refuge in the shadow of God's wing or Psalm 78:14–17 when God leads the people with cloud and fire and God splits the rock so they might drink.

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[41] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 50–51.

[42] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 51.

[43] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 51.

[44] Hossfeld and Zenger, "So-Called Elohistic Psalter," 51.

Laura Joffe, in her effort to understand the Elohistic Psalter, undertakes an extensive study of the use of divine names in the entire Psalter in which she first compares the use of Yahweh and Elohim in the psalms and then examines other divine appellations used in the Elohistic Psalter as compared to their use outside of that group.[45] Her study shows that it is true that the use of Elohim is increased in Psalms 42–83, but it is also true that the Elohistic Psalter uses Yahweh more frequently than Yahweh sections use Elohim.[46] She also points out that while the beginning of the Elohistic Psalter is abrupt the ending is difficult to pinpoint because, though not typically included in the Elohistic Psalter, Psalms 84–89 also have a high proportion of 'Elohim.' Joffe considers these psalms to be the "tail" of the Elohistic Psalter.[47] In regards to the use of divine appellations she finds that the Elohistic Psalter contains a wide variety of names for God, and thus the term "Elohistic Psalter" is a misnomer.

Joffe goes on to examine the use of Elohim in the Yahwistic Psalter and the use of Yahweh in the Elohistic Psalter. Elohim, which is used primarily as a common noun in the Yahwistic Psalter,[48] expresses the thoughts of the wicked, describes the wicked, appears as judge, and is used in close proximity with humans.[49] In the Elohistic Psalter, Yahweh is often the B-word in parallelism or used in combination with other divine

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[45] Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter," 147–152.

[46] Joffe points out the implications that her findings have upon the suggestion that the Elohistic Psalter is the result of redaction with the purpose of removing the divine name Yahweh; if there was a redaction the redactor missed a large number of Yahwehs. ("The Elohistic Psalter," 149).

[47] Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter," 149.

[48] Joffe distinguishes between the proper name Elohim and the common noun which often appears with suffixes or in construct ("The Elohistic Psalter," 151).

[49] Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter," 155–57.

names and sometimes appears as the last divine name in a psalm.[50] Based on the use of

divine names, Joffe concludes that the use of Elohim in Psalms 1–41 appears to be an

indication of theology or semantics while the use of Yahweh in the Elohistic Psalter is a

literary choice made in light of poetic structure.[51] Joffe concludes that the Elohistic

Psalter was the result of redaction, but not a redaction motivated by an aversion to

pronouncing the divine name Yahweh; rather the redaction was a deliberate, literary

innovation.[52] She suggests that this redaction occurs around the time of collecting

Psalms 1–89 into one work, thus the Elohistic Psalter represents the second half of the

Psalter.[53]

In a subsequent article, Joffe suggests that the reason for the editing is a magical

or theurgic desire to link the number of the names of God to the number forty-two.[54]

She suggests that any attempt to understand the overall structure of the Psalter should

look toward numerical or some other technical structure rather than plot or message in

part because of the diligent and skillful work of the redactor.[55] Joffe admits to the

speculative nature of her argument but maintains is plausibility. The basis of her

argument is centered on the fact that certain aspects of psalms organization are governed

by significant numbers and that the number forty-two is linked to an ancient tradition

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[50] Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter," 157–58.

[51] Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter," 158; Joffe suggests that the number of occurrences of the divine name 'Yahweh' was altered to 42, which differs from the number of times Yahweh is attested in BHS, but is possible because of the fluidity between the use of Yahweh and Adonai (Joffe, "The Answer to the Meaning of Life, the Universe and the Elohistic Psalter," JSOT 27 [2002]: 223–35).

[52] Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter," 165.

[53] Joffe, "The Elohistic Psalter," 168.

[54] Joffe, "The Answer," 224.

[55] Joffe, "The Answer," 226.

pertaining to name(s) of god(s) and a curse.[56] Joffe points to other biblical stories in

which the number forty-two, a multiple of the significant number seven, is used in

relation to disastrous events such as Jehu's slaughter of forty-two of Ahaziah's relatives

(1 Kings 10:14).[57] The use of forty-two is not limited to the Old Testament; it is found

in the New Testament in the book of Revelation and in other sources of Jewish

tradition.[58] Thus, the fact that the Elohistic Psalter begins with Psalm 42 and contains

forty-two psalms is significant for Joffe who suggests that the redaction was meant "to

ward off the curse of 42, to turn it into blessing."[59]

Joel Burnett draws upon Joffe's significance of the number 42 in his article,

"Forty-Two Songs for Elohim: An Ancient Organizing Principle in the Shaping of the

Elohistic Psalter."[60] Burnett begins by pointing out various approaches in scholarship

surrounding the issue of the Elohistic Psalter and points to agreement emerging from

issues of shape and shaping of both the Elohistic Psalter and the Psalter as a whole as a

place to begin the discussion regarding the origin and framework of the Elohistic

Psalter.[61] Agreement has been reached on several basic points: 1) the content and

arrangement of Books I–III had been established before the first century BCE as

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[56] Joffe, "The Answer," 224.

[57] Other examples include Judg 12:6; 2 Kgs 2:24; and perhaps 2 Chron 22:2 (Joffe, "The Answer," 228).

[58] Joffe points out Rev 11:2; 13:5–6. Along with the number forty-two is the number seventy-two, which is present in the Talmud, Jewish magic, and Kabbalah (Joffe, "The Answer," 229–31).

[59] Joffe, "The Answer," 231.

[60] Joel Burnett, "Forty-two Songs for Elohim: An Ancient Organizing Principle in the Shaping of the Elohistic Psalter," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 81–101.

[61] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 82–84.

evidenced by their appearance in the Dead Sea Scrolls;[62] 2) this part of the Psalter

developed gradually with the second Davidic Collection (Pss 51–72) as the core around

which the growth took place;[63] 3) the growth resulted in Psalms 42–83 existing as an

independent psalm collection prior to its development in the Psalter;[64] 4) the collection

and assembling of these psalms (Pss 42–83) began and was perhaps concluded during

the time of the exile.[65] Burnett points out that significant to this shaping framework is

the recognition that the psalms of the Elohistic Psalter developed as a distinct collection

that is combined later with a "Yahwistic" collection to form a two part collection (Books

I–III).[66]

In light of these agreements and in reaction to Joffe's work that places

significance on the number 42,[67] Burnett concludes that the two defining organizational

features of the Elohistic Psalter are the number 42 and the grouping of compositions by

the dominant divine title. The number 42 is also important in works outside of the

Hebrew writings including the Book of the Dead[68] and Mesopotamian hymn collections

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[62] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 84.

[63] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 85.

[64] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 85.

[65] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 86–87.

[66] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 87.

[67] Burnett points out problematic issues relating to Joffe's thesis: 1) as Joffe herself admits, the number of uses of Yahweh in the EP is difficult to verify; 2) the fact that the EP begins with Psalm 42 depends on a numbering of psalms that was carried out subsequent to the initial ordering of psalms and does not account for the addition of Psalm 1. Though there are some problematic aspects of her thesis, Burnett does support the significance of her claim that the number 42 is an organizational principle for the EP ("Forty-Two Songs," 90–91).

[68] Burnett points to Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead that depicts a scene of judgment in which 42 deities preside and where the deceased has to discount a list of 42 offenses to avert divine judgment ("Forty-Two Songs," 96–97).

and catalogues.[69] The use of 42 in the Mesopotamian works may have more

implications for the idea that the Elohistic Psalter is not the product of editorial

substitution but of cultic traditions regarding divine name usage.[70] In the Mesopotamian

works 42 serves as an organizational device, and the use of divine name is influential in

the labeling and grouping of hymns within the catalogues.[71] In light of the fact that "the

two defining organizational features of the Elohistic Psalter are the number 42 and the

grouping of compositions by the dominant divine title,"[72] Burnett suggests that its

development reflects the influence of the ancient Mesopotamian traditions.[73] He

concludes that the Elohistic Psalter, a collection of 42 psalms favoring the divine name

Elohim, was created during the exile and possibly draws on the number 42's association

with divine judgment. The collection was subsequently combined with another psalm

collection favoring the divine name YHWH.[74]

In a subsequent essay, "A Plea for David and Zion: The Elohistic Psalter as

Psalm Collection for the Temple's Restoration," Burnett gives attention to the Dead Sea

Scrolls and the insight gained from studying them in relation to the Elohistic Psalter.[75]

Burnett pays particular attention to the work of Peter Flint who points out the stability of

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[69] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 97–99.

[70] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 99.

[71] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 98.

[72] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 99.

[73] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 99.

[74] Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs," 100.

[75] Joel S. Burnett, "A Plea for David and Zion: The Elohistic Psalter as Psalm Collection for the Temple's Restoration," in *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms* (eds. Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger, Jr. and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr.; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 95–113.

the psalms from Books I–III and the lack of stability in Books IV–V and suggests that such stability would have occurred prior to the second century BCE.[76] In light of Flint's assertion, and in light of the fact that the Dead Sea Psalms manuscripts preserve the use of Elohim in the Elohistic Psalter, it seems that the Elohistic Psalter was part of the early Psalter prior to the time of the Qumran community.[77] This point lends support to Burnett's earlier comments regarding the exilic date of the Elohistic collection.

In this essay, Burnett also returns to his study of the Mesopotamian hymn texts, this time pointing out not only their use of the number 42 as an organizational principle, but also their connection with temples, namely the restoration of temples.[78] In the Mesopotamian texts it seems that the focus was the avoidance of divine wrath that was associated with the destruction of the temples.[79] Given the association of the number 42 with cursing and blessing in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Israelite texts, it is possible that the Elohistic Psalter was produced as a means of "seeking the reversal of divine wrath."[80] Burnett points out the presence of references to the destroyed temple in Psalms 74:1–8 and 79:1 and suggests that they can be compared to Mesopotamian texts that suggest the anticipation of the rebuilding of temples rather than the dedication of

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[76] Peter Flint, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Psalms (STDJ 17; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 148–49, see also "Psalms, Book of," *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2:702–10 and "11QPs[b] and the 11QPs[a]-Psalter," in *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms* (eds. Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger, Jr. and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr.; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 157–66.

[77] Burnett, "A Plea for David and Zion," 98.

[78] Burnett, "A Plea for David and Zion," 108–111.

[79] Burnett, "A Plea for David and Zion," 110.

[80] Burnett, "A Plea for David and Zion," 112.

those which have been restored.[81] Though temple restoration is likely a main concern of the Elohistic Psalter, the shape of the collection, that is, the bracketing of a Davidic collection by the more cultically concerned Korahite and Asaphite collection, also lends itself to a royal emphasis. Thus, Burnett considers the Elohistic Psalter "a plea to the divine for the reestablishment of David and Zion."[82]

There are many ideas about the composition of the Elohistic Psalter ranging from multiple redactions to a complex literary unity. Upon close investigation of Psalms 42–83, the redactional theories seem to break down as they fail to account for the places where a redactor missed words. The Elohistic Psalter is better understood as a literary composition that was compiled in light of a preference for the divine name Elohim that already existed in certain psalm collections. This Elohistic collection was likely used in a specific worship setting and complements the Yahwistic collection of Psalms 3–41. Since the larger Elohistic collection consists of the smaller Korahite, Davidic, and Asaphite collections, then understanding this larger collection is helpful for understanding the placement of Psalm 50.

The Placement of Psalm 50

Psalms studies rarely refer to the issue of the placement of Psalm 50. This psalm is tied to the Asaphite collection both by title and common thematic and linguistic occurrences, yet is separated from the rest of the collection by over twenty psalms. Delitzsch suggests that Psalm 50 is placed as such because of its shared connection with

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[81] More specifically he points out the *balag* and *ershemma* laments, which make reference to destroyed temples suggesting that they have not been rebuilt yet (Burnett, "A Plea for David and Zion," 112).

[82] Burnett, "A Plea for David and Zion," 113.

the animal sacrifice of Psalm 51.[83] Briggs understands it to be placed as the conclusion to the first 50 psalms.[84] Clifford mentions the shared connections between Psalms 49, 50 and 51 and considers it a bridge between the first Korah collection and the second Davidic collection.[85] While these suggestions attempt to deal with the placement of Psalm 50, they do not offer insight into why a psalm that seems to have been part of a collection would be separated from that collection.

Wilson mentions the placement of Psalm 50 as a break between the Korahite Psalms of 42/3–49 and the "Davidic" psalms that follow. He also points out the thematic links that Psalm 50 shares with Psalms 46–49, especially their concern for Zion and their focus on God as the source of hope.[86] Wilson's comments are helpful in some ways, but still do not address the issue of the separation of Psalm 50 from the rest of the collection.

Hossfeld and Zenger, on the other hand, have a detailed explanation for the placement of Psalm 50 that is tied to the arrangement of the Elohistic Psalter. According to Hossfeld and Zenger, it is the Asaphite theologian who expands an exilic collection (Pss 52–68) into the Davidic Psalter (Pss 51–72). They suggest the Asaphite theologians because of their interest in historical theology and the history of Israel from exodus

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[83] Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms, Part 1*, 26–27.

[84] Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (ICC; 2 vol.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1907).

[85] Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.

[86] Wilson, *Psalms*, 758–59.

through exile. [87] Hossfeld and Zenger posit the following progression for the Asaphite literary creation:

a. Explicit Davidizing of the exilic collection, Psalms 52–68*, by addition of the superscription "Of David" or "Of David, when he . . ."

b. Implicit Davidizing through the prior placement of Psalm 51 (reference to 2 Samuel 11–12), insertion of Psalm 53 (strengthening the military perspective and anticipation of victory), creation of the final composition, Psalms 69–72 (Psalms 69–70: summary of the life of David under the double aspect of persecution and zeal for God's dwelling; Psalm 71: prayer of David in old age; Psalm 72: royal testament).

c. Creation of the Asaph composition in Psalm 50, 73–83, with its own theological program; it also serves to surround the David Psalms 51–72.

d. Fastening together the Asaph psalm composition with the David collection framed by the Asaph psalms through the insertion of two new psalms into the David collection (Psalm 58: YWHH as "judge," a typical Asaph theme; Psalm 60: community lament psalm as prolepsis [anticipation/advance proclamation] of the Asaph Psalms 74, 79, 80.[88]

Thus, Psalm 50 is used by the Asaphites as a type of introduction to their work and their theological program and as a way of enclosing their expanded collection (David psalms

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[87] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 4. See also, Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I* (Die Neue Echter Bibel: Komentar zum Alten Testament mit dem Einheitsübersetzung; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993), 15–16.

[88] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 4.

and Asaph psalms) with their own psalm. Later this David-Asaph collection is further augmented with the addition of the Korah group of Psalms 42–49.[89]

In relation to Psalm 50, David Mitchell asks the question, "Why are they (the Asaph Psalms) arranged with Psalm 50 standing alone and the others in sequence?"[90] He approaches the issue by paying attention to the placement of Psalm 50 in relation not only to the psalms immediately surrounding it but also in relation to the larger literary structure of Books II and III.[91] Mitchell disagrees with scholars who suggest that the Elohistic Psalter is a distinct literary unit and instead treats Psalms 42–89 (the Elohistic Psalter with the addition of the Korah Psalms) as the "real" literary unit.[92] Mitchell points out the chiastic inclusion of Korah and Asaph Psalms around the central David collection:

> A: Korah Pss 42–49
>
> B: Asaph Ps 50
>
> C: David Pss 51–65, 68–70
>
> B′:   Asaph 73–83
>
> A′:   Korah 84–85, 87, 88, (89).

Mitchell also relies upon the book divisions as evidence that whoever added them thought that Psalms 42–89 should be regarded together, if not, they would have divided

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[89] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 4.

[90] David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 71.

[91] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 71–73.

[92] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 71.

the books at Psalm 83 (the end of the Elohistic Psalter).[93] In Mitchell's scheme the placement of Psalm 50 helps define the literary structure of the unit. Mitchell also believes it is placed before the Davidic Psalm 51 because of their shared thematic and lexical content and because the redactor "thought Psalm 50 suited that particular place better for literary or theological reasons"[94]

The placement of Psalm 50 is a puzzle. On the one hand, the psalm shares many themes and characteristics in common with the remaining Asaph psalms leaving one to surmise that at some point it was transmitted with the rest of the collection. On the other hand, its location after Psalm 49, marking an end to the Korahite collection, and before Psalm 51, the beginning of a group of Davidic psalms, seems to be explained best as deliberate literary placement. Hossfeld and Zenger and Mitchell explain its placement in these terms, but their explanations regarding who placed it differ, Hossfeld and Zenger suggesting the Asaphites themselves[95] and Mitchell suggesting either the redactor of the Elohistic Psalter or the redactor of the entire Psalter.[96] It seems that any number of suggestions could be made regarding this issue, but none are certain.

Perhaps focusing on the impact that the placement of Psalm 50 has upon the reader can be helpful. In the scope of Book II, Psalm 50, as already noted, marks a transition between the Korahite collection of Psalms 42–49 and the Davidic collection of Psalms 51–65, 68–70. The Korahite collection begins in distress with the psalmist crying out to God for help (Pss 42–44), then turns to celebration, first in a love song and

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[93] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 71.

[94] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 72.

[95] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 4.

[96] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 72.

then in songs celebrating God's presence in Zion. The collection ends with a psalm that points out the reality that all will die, both wise and fool, like the animals. The superscription of Psalm 50 signals a shift to the reader, but there are some themes carried over from the previous group of psalms. For example, Psalm 50 (v 1, 4, 7) begins with a summons as does Psalm 49 (v 1). Also, God calls to the people out of Zion, which is mentioned in Psalms 46 and 48.   Thus some continuity is maintained.

One major shift that does occur between the Korahite collection and Psalm 50 is the role of God. In the Korahite Psalms, God is often referred to as king, especially in terms of victory over enemies.[97] In Psalm 50, however, God's role is to testify against the people and to judge. God is the main character in the psalm; it communicates the words of God rather than a psalmist. In this psalm God speaks to the faithful and wicked among God's people and lays out the consequences for their respective behavior. The tone has shifted.

Psalm 50 has similarities with what comes after it in the Davidic Collection as it did with the psalms before it. Psalm 51 carries the emphasis upon Zion (v 20) from the Korahite collection, through Psalm 50, and into the Davidic collection. It is also linked to Psalm 50 because of their shared interest in acceptable sacrifices being tied to attitude rather than burnt offerings (50:13–15 and 51:17–18). Psalm 51 also seems to enact God's command in Psalm 50 for the people to call upon God in times of trouble (50:15). Psalm 51 is just that, David's call to God for the forgiveness of sins. David realizes his need for forgiveness lest he be cast away from God.

In fact, the concept of calling on God in times of trouble is put into practice in many of the Psalms in the second Davidic collection. At times the call is made for God

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[97] See Ps 44:5–6; Ps 47:3–4, 7–8; Ps 48: 2.

to forgive, as in Psalm 51, but the most frequent call is for God to deliver the psalmist from the enemy. Psalms 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 64, 69, and 70 are all cries for deliverance from the enemy. Various situations necessitate the call, such as the enemy seeking the life of the psalmist (Pss 54:4, 56:7, 59:4), the presence of violence, oppression and fraud (Ps 55:10–12), the enemy laying traps for the psalmist (Ps 57: 7, 64:6), the bitter speech of the enemies (Ps 64:4), or the false accusations of the enemies (69:5). Other psalms of the collection, like Psalm 65, celebrate God for answering that call to deliver.

Psalm 50 presents the concept of calling on God while the Davidic collection acts out the concept. The confidence and trust found in this Davidic collection seldom waiver for long before the psalmist returns to praise that God has/will deliver(ed) again. This trust and confidence seem shaken as one reads the Asaphite Psalms 73–83. To the careful reader, this contrast is stark and leaves one to wonder if, when, and how it can be recovered.

In addition to calls for God to deliver, other psalms communicate strong confidence in the fact that the wicked will be judged, another concept introduced in Psalm 50. In Psalms 52 and 53, the psalmist paints a picture of the wicked as those who do no good and, in fact, love evil (52:4; 53:2). In contrast, the righteous trust in God (52:10) and know that God will reject the wicked (52:7; 53:6) and deliver the righteous (53:7). The difference between the wicked and the righteous is clear, a point that seems to strengthen their confidence that God would act. This clear distinction is seen especially in Psalm 58, which begins by asking if the gods judge fairly (v 2) and ends by affirming that it is God who judges the earth (v 12). In between is a striking picture of the complete wickedness of the unrighteous. They are wicked even before birth; their

lies are like the venom of a snake that does not hear the snake charmer's voice. In

response to their utter wickedness, the psalmist asks God to make them vanish, wither,

and dissolve (vv 8–9) for God is the judge of earth who will reward the righteous (v 12)

but punish the wicked. In a much different type of psalm, God's role as judge is

celebrated in Psalm 67. In this psalm all the nations recognize God's power and

blessing. In response they praise God for God's saving power (v 3), God's ability to

judge with equity (v 5), God's guidance (v 5) and God's blessing (v 7). God's equitable

justice is sure.

God's role as judge of the wicked and righteous is first introduced in the

Elohistic Psalter in Psalm 50.[98] The theme is mentioned a few times in the Davidic

collection, but is expanded even further in the Asaphite collection that follows it in

Psalms 73–83. The theme of God as just judge is an important one in the Asaphite

collection. For the reader Psalm 50 introduces a theme that is then gradually built upon

in the Davidic collection until it becomes a major theme in the Asaph collection.

In addition to the themes of calling upon God in times of trouble, and God's

acting as just judge of the wicked and righteous, the concept of sacrifice or offerings is

returned to at various times in the Davidic collection. Psalm 50 corrects the peoples'

misconception that God needs their animal sacrifices and suggests that instead God is

looking for offerings of thanksgiving and the payment of vows. Mention of sacrifice

occurs in Psalms 51, 54, 56, 66 and is alluded to in Psalm 69, while mention of giving of

vows occurs in Psalms 56, 61, 65, and 66. Psalm 51 emphasizes the proper attitude, a

broken spirit, and right sacrifices (vv 19, 21). The offering in Psalm 54 is a freewill

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[98] Psalm 43 does use judicial language (v 1) in the psalmist's request for God to vindicate and defend his cause against the unjust, but it is not explicit about God's role as judge as is Psalm 50.

offering given with thanksgiving to God's name (v 8) made in response to God's action of deliverance. Psalm 56 similarly pictures the psalmist giving thank offerings and vows to God in response to deliverance (v 13). In Psalm 66, a psalm celebrating the amazing deeds of God, the psalmist describes the burnt offerings he will bring in fulfillment of the vows he made while in trouble (v 14–16). He will bring the fatling, rams, bulls, and goats to offer. In addition to the animal offerings he will tell those who will hear the great things God has done in answer to his prayers (vv 17–19).

Psalms 61 and 65 do not mention sacrifices but do mention the performance of vows before God. In Psalm 61 the vows of the psalmist seem to serve a dual purpose. First, the vows, which God has already heard, serve as proof of the psalmist's attitude toward God (v 6). Second, the vows are made daily in combination with songs of praise as a response to God's love and faithfulness (v 9). It is the second purpose that is intended in Psalm 65 when the psalmist urges that vows be preformed for God who answers prayer (vv 2–3).

In addition to the psalms that mention offerings, sacrifices, or vows in specific terms, Psalm 69 implies the same sentiment as Psalm 50. After a large number of verses in which the psalmist laments his difficult situation in the midst of enemies, false accusations, and shame, the psalmist finds confidence enough to praise God in verses 31–37. The psalmist states that he will praise God with thanksgiving and is sure that his thanksgiving will be more pleasing than ox or bull, which would have represented the offering. The psalmist's thanksgiving would provide an example for the oppressed and needy who seek God.

While offering/sacrifice and vows are a recurring theme in the Davidic collection, after its mention in Psalm 50, vows are only mentioned once in the Asaphite collection. In Psalm 76, the psalmist urges the people to make vows to God and bring gifts to God in response to God's power over the enemy. Psalm 75 begins by giving thanks to God but does not specifically link this thanks with an offering or vow. Thanksgiving and praise are both rare in the laments of the Asaphite collection. Perhaps offerings and sacrifices are not mentioned because much of the lament in the collection has to do with the destruction of the temple (i.e., Pss 74 and 79), the place for making sacrifices.

In light of these connections between the psalm collection preceding Psalm 50 and the collection following it, the placement of Psalm 50 does seem to play a literary role in bridging the Korahite collection, the Davidic collection, and the Asaphite collection. Of the Asaphite psalms, it is the most capable of providing such a link. We do not know who placed it there and when, but its placement is a skillful literary move that provides some continuity within the Elohistic Psalter by carrying themes from one collection to the next and by introducing to the reader new themes that are important in subsequent psalms.

Summary

In light of its seemingly unusual placement, Psalm 50 has been treated on its own before assessing how it fits into the larger Asaph collection. This chapter began by simply reading the psalm in an effort to understand more about its message. The psalm portrays God as judge, convening heaven and earth as God judges the people. Their faults were two-fold. First, they misunderstood the sacrificial system and thus God by

thinking their sacrifices were necessary to God. God corrects them by stating that

sacrifices of thanksgiving, the keeping of vows, and dependence on God in time of

trouble were preferred. Second, the wicked among them know and recite God's statutes

but do not keep them. God's response to these is to tear them apart and withhold

deliverance, which is in contrast to God's response to the righteous who will see God's

salvation.

We then turned to the issue of placement by first attempting to understand

various approaches to the presence and compilation of the Elohistic Psalter.

Understanding possible ways in which the Elohistic Psalter was compiled aids in

understanding why an Asaph psalm might be used to bridge the Korah collection and

Davidic collection. Literary techniques were likely at play as compilers attempted to

bring the various collections together to form the larger collection. In an effort to

answer the question, "Why this Psalm?" we approached the various collections from a

reader's point of view looking for thematic and verbal links that tie them together.

Many are present and establish Psalm 50 as the most appropriate of the Asaphite psalms

to play the literary role it does in the Elohistic Psalter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Assessing the Collection

Previous scholars have pointed out linguistic and thematic links occurring in the

Asaphite collection.[1]   Their purposes have been in one of two directions: 1) to argue for

the unity of the collection (Delitzsch); or 2) to discover more about the tradition in which

the collection was created (Nasuti, Goulder). Both purposes have yielded interesting and

helpful results, but fail to ask the questions "Why these Psalms?" and "Together, what

do they mean?" This chapter will begin to address these questions by taking another

look at linguistic and thematic links and by asking what help these links provide in

discerning a purpose for the collection as a whole. Because this study is not a search for

the traditions behind these psalms, the thematic and linguistic connections need not be

limited to those found only in this collection.[2]

Nasuti's Analysis

Nasuti has undertaken an extensive linguistic analysis of the Asaphite psalms in his

monograph.[3] In his analysis, Nasuti treats each of the Asaphite psalms individually and

points out the linguistic connections as they occur in the text. The purpose of his

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[1] See Chapter 2, "History of Scholarship."

[2] In studies such as Illman, Nasuti, and Goulder, which are concerned with discerning the tradition that produced these texts, much attention must be paid to find clues that are specific to that tradition. Thematic and linguistic links that are found in other traditions are not helpful in locating the Asaph tradition group. This study is in search of clues that indicate arrangement and purpose, thus connection (and disconnection) with themes within the collection and themes in the psalms that come before or after this collection are valuable tools for the reader, even if they occur elsewhere in the Psalms.

[3] Harry P. Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph* (SBLDiss 88; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1988), see chapter 3 "A Linguistic Analysis of the Psalms of Asaph."

anaylsis is to "corroborate by means of an internal control the existence of the *traditio*

suggested . . . by their common superscription,"[4] and to provide "additional information

concerning the nature of any *traditio* to which the psalm belongs."[5] In light of his

tradition-historical focus, Nasuti limits the linguistic connection only to those whose

elements are distinctive rather than those which bear an "all-Israel" relevance.[6] He

focuses his analysis on both the inner Asaphite connections and the connections between

the Asaphite occurrences and the Ephraimite (Deuteronomic) tradition stream known

outside of the Psalter.[7] Table 1 summarizes Nasuti's findings regarding only the

Asaphite connections.[8] This linguistic study shows that only Psalms 82 and 83 lack

connections with the remaining Asaphite psalms, while Psalm 75 has only minor

connections. When one includes the Ephraimite connections as Nasuti does, only Psalm

82 is lacking and Psalm 75 remains on the fringe with a number of possible, but not

conclusive Ephraimite links.[9]

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[4] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 59.

[5] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 59.

[6] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 59.

[7] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 60.

[8] In the chart only the first mention of a linguistic connection will be noted. For instance, Ps 50:2 and Ps 80:2 will only be listed with Psalm 50.

[9] Nasuti, *Tradition History*, 115–116.

Psalm	Specific Language	Other Asaphite Occurrences
	Table 1. Inner Asaphite Connections	
50	v 2 *hôpîaʿ*	Ps 80:2
	v 7 *šimʿâ ʿammî*	Ps 81:9 (*šemaʿ*)
	v 7 *weʾāʿîdâ bākkĕ*	Ps 81:9
	v 9 *miklĕʾōt*;	Ps 78:70
	v 11 *zîz śāday*	Ps 80:14
73	v 3 qal of *hll* paralleled by *rĕšāʿîm*	Ps 75:5
	v 17 *miqdāš*	Ps 74:7 and 78:69
	v 18 *maššûʾôt*	Ps 74:3 (only two plural occurrences)
	v 26 *šĕʾērî*	Ps 78:20; 27 (not the same usage)
74	v 1 God as subject of *ʿšn*	Ps 80:5
	v 1 *ṣōʾn marʿîtekā* as object of God's anger	Ps 79:13
	v 2 *šēbeṭ* used figuratively to designate a "tribe"	Ps 78:55, 67, 68
	v 11 Israel as God's *ṣōʾn*	Ps 77:21; 78:52; 79:13; 80:2

Table 1—*Continued*

Psalm	Specific Language	Other Asaphite Occurrences
75	v 10 divine title God of Jacob	Ps 76:7; 81:2, 5
76	v 1 *pros ton Assyrion* (in Greek text)	Ps 80:1 (in slightly different form)
77	v 12 *maʿălāl* to designate the deeds of God	Ps 78:7
	v 13 *ʿălîlôt*	Ps 78:11
	v 15 *ʿōśēh peleʾ*	Ps 78:12
	v 16 *yôsēp*	Ps 78:67; 80:2
	v 21 simile *kaṣṣōʾn* used with verb of guidance	Ps 78:52; 80:2
78	vv 3, 4, 6 verb *spr* in reference to God's actions	Ps 75:2
	v 5 idiom *śîm b* in a legislative context	Ps 81:6
	v 5 *ʿēdût*	
		Ps 81:6
	v 38 *kpr* with a divine subject	
		Ps 79:9
	v 52 hiphil of *nsʿ* used with the exodus	
		Ps 80:9
	v 55 *grš*	
		Ps 80:9

Source: Harry P. Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985), 60–91.

Nasuti has provided extensive information, but in light of his purpose, he has left out other connections. The purpose of the present study, however, does not negate the use of other non-distinctive links. In fact, paying attention to other "all-Israelite" links within the collection may prove vitally helpful in understanding the message a post-exilic reader would gleam from the Asaphite collection. The remainder of the chapter will focus on both linguistic and thematic links that occur within the collection.

God in the Asaph Psalms

Let us begin with linguistic and thematic links concerning God. The most

obvious in this category is the frequent use of the divine name Elohim, which is to be

expected in the collection given its place in the Elohistic Psalter. Though El/Elohim is

the preferred divine name, YHWH is used several times within the collection. In fact,

with the exception of Psalm 82, YHWH is used in every psalm in the collection at least

once (in Ps 77 as יה).[10] The use of the divine name does help establish the unity of the

collection, especially when one looks at the use of compound divine names;[11] however,

the use of divine name alone does little in helping one understand the message of this

collection.[12] More helpful are connections that communicate who and what this deity is

all about.

The reader's first encounter with the collection in Psalm 50 sets up the concept of

God as judge, which recurs in several psalms to follow (Ps 75, 76, 82).[13] Several

Hebrew words communicate the theme of judgment in the collection with three being

used in Psalm 50. The first judgment word of Psalm 50 is דין,[14] which is found in verse

four, a verse recounting God's call to the heavens and earth in preparation for God to act

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[10] Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III* (JSOTSup 233; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 17.

[11] For example, אל אלהים יהוה in Ps 50:1, the only occurrence in the Psalter and צבאות אלהים in Ps 80:15, the only occurrence in the HB.

[12] For a discussion on the place of the Asaph collection within the Elohistic Psalter, see chapter 4 of this work.

[13] Many scholars have pointed out the judicial character and tone of the collection as a means of establishing unity within the collection. See especially Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms I–III* (ET; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888), 2:142; Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch*, 19–20.

[14] In this occurrence as a Qal infinitive construct.

as a judge over God's people. Second is the very common שׁפט in verse six. In this

verse God is declared the judge, a judge who is righteous. The third word, יכח, is used

as a hifil verb in verse eight and verse twenty-one. This word is more descriptive of the

decision related to judgment, usually translated as rebuke, reprove, or convict. These

three Hebrew words work together to establish God's purpose in the psalm—to judge,

establish God's role—righteous judge, and communicate the outcome—rebuke.

These judgment words are referred to at other times in the collection. In Psalm

73:14, the psalmist, who is setting up a contrast between himself and the wicked,

laments that he is plagued and rebuked (יכח, feminine noun) every morning. His

situation confuses him primarily because his expectation of God (as communicated in

Psalm 50 among other places) is that God is a righteous judge and as such should be

rebuking the wicked rather than him.   Taken by itself, the occurrence of יכח in Psalm

73 works to enhance further the contrast in that psalm between the psalmist and the

wicked. When reading the collection with Psalm 73 following psalm 50, יכח serves to

enhance the inner struggle of the psalmist experiencing what appears to be a rebuke, a

rebuke that should be directed at the wicked. Surely part of the psalmist's struggle was

trying to rectify an understanding of God as the righteous judge in a situation in which

unrighteousness seemed to be the basis of order.

The next cluster of judgment themes occurs in the prophetic oracles of Psalm 75

as God proclaims to the people a coming time of judgment. In this psalm the verbal root

שׁפט is used twice, in verse 3 as a first person imperfect and in verse 8 as a participle. In

both cases God is clearly the subject. God's judgment is described as coming in God's

time (מועד) and being equitable. Again in Psalm 75 it is the wicked who are cut down while the righteous are uplifted. Two images are used to illustrate God's judgment; the first is a tottering earth. Presumably the earth totters because of the actions of the wicked, but God restores balance with fair judgment. The second image of judgment is the foaming cup of wine given to the wicked by the LORD.[15]

Psalm 76 lauds God for God's judgment that when it comes causes fear and stillness in the earth (v 9) and brings salvation to the oppressed (v 10). The placement of this psalm after the oracle of Psalm 75 seems to suggest that either the appointed time of 75:3 has already passed or that the psalmist is so sure of God's coming fair judgment that he can speak as if it has already happened. If the reader only takes Psalm 76 (and perhaps Psalm 75) the former seems to be the case. The psalmist describes a battle that God has definitively won (vv 3–7). If the reader, however, continues to read into Psalm 77 she gets the sense that injustice is still a reality, which would favor reading the judgment of Psalm 76 as a future event. A third and better option would be to view God's judgment as a fluid concept that is sometimes obvious and sometimes seemingly absent. Thus one can praise God for judgments of the past while still calling out for God to judge the present situation. The psalmist and the people did not think of God's judgment as a "once and for all" event.

The use of specific judgment terms is absent from Psalms 77–80, though God's anger against the people is portrayed repeatedly. The term משפט is used in Psalm 81:5 apparently in reference to the covenant. The judgment language is picked up again in

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[15] Nasuti traces the development of the term cup from a general image regarding one's fate, to a specific reference to bad fate or punishment, then to being identified with a nation who serves as punishment for another nation. Nasuti suggests that the occurrence of the cup in Psalm 75 fits the middle level of bad fate or punishment (*Tradition History*, 73.)

Psalm 82, but this time in a very different setting, the divine council of the gods. Judgment in this psalm is not pronounced on the people, but on the gods. Verse one sets the context; God has taken God's place in the assembly; this time God's action within the assembly would be that of judge (שָׁפַט). The indictment against the gods is their lack of just judging (שָׁפַט), which is evident in their preference for the wicked (v 2). In contrast to their present way of judging, the psalm continues by stating the correct way to judge (שָׁפְטוּ in the imperative), justly with primary consideration given to the poor, weak, and needy. The psalm ends in the realization that the gods are not capable of such just judgment and their faulty actions are shaking the very foundations of the earth (v 5).[16] Only God has the ability to judge justly, and the final cry of the psalm is for God to judge (שָׁפְטָה in the imperative) the whole earth (v 8). Psalm 83 does not use judicial language, but, following the cry of 82:8, this psalm seems to portray to the reader what the just judgment upon other nations has looked like in the past and may look like in the future.

One of God's prominent roles in the Psalms of Asaph is to act as judge. In William Brown's list of roles God assumes in the Psalter: creator, provider, redeemer/savior, healer, king, warrior, parent, and teacher; it interesting that judge is not listed. [17] Judge is certainly a prominent role of God in the Asaphite collection as it both begins and ends with God in that role. In Psalm 50 God judges the people. In Psalm 75 God acts as judge against the wicked; in this case the wicked are not named, are they the

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[16] In contrast to Ps 75:4 where God, who judges with equity, keeps its pillars steady.

[17] William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 187–95.

wicked of God's people or are they outside of that special relationship? In Psalm 76 it is clear that God is judging the enemies of Salem/Zion who had come to do battle but have been overcome by God. Lastly, in Psalm 82, God even judges the other deities. The reader of the Asaph collection gains the understanding that God alone is the righteous judge of all, a message communicated not only through the words of the psalms, i.e. Psalm 50:6, "The heavens declare God's righteousness, for God is the one who judges," but also through the overall message communicated.

Another prevalent theme of the Asaphite collection is that God's dissatisfaction with the behavior of the people has resulted in anger with them or at least the people assume such. God's anger is not a private inward emotion, but a disposition that effects the judicial and historical outcomes in the life of God's chosen people.[18] Most frequently this theme is communicated directly as the psalmist describes God's anger (אף). In Psalm 74:1 God's anger is directed toward the people, "the sheep of your pasture." This communal lament describes the enemy's destruction of the sanctuary, an action that the people attribute at least in part to God's anger; otherwise God would have acted to stop the destruction (v 11). Psalm 77, another communal lament also speaks directly of God's anger (אף), attributing God's lack of compassion to anger (v 9). Psalm 79 laments over the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and again attributes such destruction and continued lack of intervention to divine anger (אנף) and wrath (v 5, קנאה). In fact, in Psalm 79 God is asked to turn divine anger (אף) toward the nations and those who do not know God (v 6) instead of God's own people.

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[18] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 182.

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The psalms mentioned thus far deal with God's anger toward the current generation (within the scope of the psalm). Psalm 78, on the other hand, seems to deal with God's anger toward previous generations and more specifically the Ephraimites/Israelites. In the case of Psalm 78, the psalmist records the actions of the people, which justify the anger of God. The results of God's anger are not lamented, but almost celebrated (vv 67–72). Verse 21 recalls God's anger (אַף) against Israel and the people's lack of trust and faith (v 22) that God would/could provide for them in the desert. God's anger (אַף) is referred to again in verse 31 in response to the same situation. In Psalm 78:49–50 God's anger (אַף) is directed toward the Egyptians. God's anger is not a problem for the people when it is turned upon those who seem deserving.

God's anger is also not a problem when it is turned upon the enemy. In Psalm 76, God's anger (אַף) is applauded (vv 7–9), for it is with anger that God judged the enemies of Judah. In this psalm the reader gets the sense that God did not respond immediately, but once God's anger was roused no one could stand before it. The result of God's anger was judgment and fear upon the earth and the salvation of the oppressed. Thus, God's anger can be a positive reaction if one is not counted within the opposition toward God.

A discussion of God's anger cannot be limited to the Hebrew word אַף as there are various words that communicate the same reality. In Psalm 78:58 the people provoke God to anger (hifil of כעס) with their high places. The result of their idolatrous ways is recounted in verse 62 as God becomes furious (hithpael of עבר) with them. In Psalm 80:5, yet another word is used to describe God's angry state. In this

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verse God fumes (עֹשֵׁן) over the prayers of the people, the smoke of God's anger is perhaps obscuring God's view for God has allowed the people to become the scorn of their neighbors and enemies (v 6).

The collection also communicates God's anger in tacit ways, especially as God deals with the wicked. In Psalm 50 God testifies against the people who have been practicing insincere worship and hypocrisy. The final judgment upon them is dire—the ones who forget God will be torn apart with no hope of deliverance (v 22). The word טֶרֶף is used literally of wild animals who tear prey and metaphorically of humans and God as they tear apart the wicked and enemies.[19] As a lion or wolf would seize and tear apart prey, so God will tear apart the wicked in Psalm 50. In other occurrences of God's tearing, God's action is directly related to God's anger or wrath. In Job 16:9, Job attributes his situation to God tearing him in wrath. Hosea urges the people to return to the LORD who has torn them for it is the same LORD that will heal them (6:1). Hosea's plea follows a chapter that depicts harsh judgment upon Israel, Ephraim and Judah, judgment that is carried out in God's wrath or fury (עברה). In Amos 1:11 the LORD declares punishment upon Edom because Edom has torn his brother in anger (אף) and wrath (עברה). Though Psalm 50:22 does not mention God's wrath or anger, the metaphorical use of tearing can imply anger.

Thus far the description of God has covered God as judge and as angry with the people and thus not acting on their behalf. Taking these two traits into consideration as one approaches the collection, it is interesting that judgment and anger are only referred

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[19] *BDB*, 382–83.

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to in the same psalm once, Psalm 76.[20] God and judgment are found in Psalms 50, 75, 76, and 82[21] while God's anger is prominent in Psalms 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, and 80. Though in other places in the Psalter God's anger is associated with righteous judgment (i.e., Psalm 7), there seems to be a distinction made between them in this collection. The psalms referring to God's anger are surrounded by those referring to God as judge. What impact, then, does this have upon the reader of these psalms? First, it distinguishes between God's judgment and the actions of God (or lack thereof) that the people perceived to be because of God's anger. The anger portrayed is not that of righteous indignation as one might expect from a just judge (with the exception of Psalm 78). It is as if God has exceeded the bounds of aggression that are associated with righteous indignation.[22] Second, it communicates the tension that the exilic and post-exilic people must have been feeling between their understanding of God as just judge and the reality of their situation of continued national turmoil. God may have been just in some judgments, but is God just in allowing the punishment to continue into subsequent generations? Third, God's anger toward the people is not the last image provided for the reader. The collection closes with the establishment of God as the one and only judge of the earth (Ps 82) and the call for God to take vengeance upon the nations who conspire against God's people (Ps 83). God's anger against the people is not permanent; it will be turned upon the enemy in due time.

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[20] Not including the tacit expression of anger in Psalm 50, which focuses on God as judge.

[21] Psalm 73:14 does contain the word יכח, a word linked with judgment as noted above but has been left off this list because God is not clearly noted as the one doing the reproving. Psalm 83, though not containing any words of judgment, seems to be an explanation of what the people expect of God after calling on God to judge the earth in Ps 82:8.

[22] Brown points to Psalm 38 as another example of anger going beyond righteous indignation (*Seeing the Psalms*, 183).

God's judgment and anger are not the only aspects of God's character described in this collection. God's role as savior, redeemer, or deliverer is referenced more often than either judgment or anger. As with judgment and anger, the theme of God's salvific action on behalf of the people is not limited to the Asaph collection, but when read as a collection, the prominence of this theme communicates a powerful message to the reader. Before discussing the message, we must first look at the various words used to communicate this theme and their occurrences.

The most prominent Hebrew root used to describe God's salvific action is simply ישע, which occurrs in both noun and verb forms in this collection. In noun form the word is always used in this collection in connection with God (as opposed to other gods, more below). The first occurrence is found in Psalm 50:23, which describes the response of God toward those who bring honorable sacrifices; to those faithful ones, God will show the salvation (masc.) of God. The next occurrence, Psalm 74:12, also refers to God's salvation, but this occurrence is unique in that the salvation (fem.) is of the earth in the form of God's defeat of chaos described in verse 13–17. As noted in chapter 3, these verses have been interpreted in two ways, either the creation of the earth or of God's creation of Israel. In the Asaph collection, God's actions related to the Exodus are connected to the word גאל (Pss 74:2, 77:16, and less directly 78:35) rather than ישע, which may support reading the passage in reference to God's initial creative act.

The occurrence of ישע in Psalm 78:22 falls within a description of the people's rebellion against God. In Psalm 78 the basic fault of the people is their lack of trust, which verse 22 narrows further to their lack of trust in God's salvation (fem.). This lack

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of trust is present despite the repeated actions of God that suggest God's full capability in providing for the people. The lack of trust also leads the people to commit various sins that are recounted throughout Psalm 78. Psalm 79, when read as a sequel to Psalm 78,[23] attests to the continued sin of the people and subsequent punishment, this time in Judah. In Psalm 79:9 the psalmist cries out to God in full awareness that help can be found in the "God of our salvation (masc.)." The psalmist also links the salvation of the people to the reputation of God.

The root יֹשַׁע is used as a verb in Psalm 76:10, in this case a Hifil, Infinitive Construct. God is being praised as a just judge whose establishment of justice upon the earth is paralleled with the salvation of the oppressed of the earth. The link between God's justice and God's salvation is interesting. God's concern for just judgment motivates God's salvific activity, and it is the remembrance of these actions that motivate the people of God to call upon God to act again. They call upon God even when they do not see God's justice in their present situation. This link can be seen further in Psalm 80. The root יֹשַׁע is found in both verb and noun form in Psalm 80 with four occurrences of the root, due in part to its repetition in the refrain (vv 4, 8, 20). The first occurrence is the noun form (fem.) in verse 3. After affirming God's sovereignty in verse 2, the people call upon God in verse 3 to awaken (עוּר, poel, impv) God's might in order that God would come for their salvation. The people know that God is capable of bringing salvation but feel that they must cry out in a way that causes God to awaken to their situation.

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[23] See the account of Psalms 78 and 79 in chapter 3, where a pattern is established in Psalm 78 and is carried into Psalm 79.

Their understanding of the situation is explained in the remainder of the psalm. God is angry with the people and has allowed them to become the laughing stock of the nations. This reality puzzles the people because God took great care in transplanting the people from Egypt and establishing them in the land God had chosen. Why let it be destroyed? Why not wake up and punish those who have destroyed them? This account is punctuated by the refrain that occurs three times with slight variation. "O (LORD, v 20) God (of hosts, vv 8, 20), restore us and let your face shine; then we will be saved" (ישע, Nifal, 1cp). Despite their bewilderment, they know their only hope for restoration and salvation is God. They do not, however, call for salvation for their own sakes; rather they tie salvation to a long standing relationship (vv 15–19) with God and to God's reputation.

The next set of words used in relation to God's salvific activity is the Hebrew roots נצל and חלץ. In the hifil verb form in all of its occurrences in the Asaphite collection, נצל can be translated as deliver or rescue. It occurs first as a participle in Psalm 50:22, a warning to those who forget God. The judgment for their forgetfulness is that God will tear them apart and there will be no one to deliver them from the situation. The occurrence in 50:22 is the only time in this collection that נצל is used as part of a judgment from God rather than a plea from the people for deliverance.

The two other occurrences are hifil imperatives in form and constitute the calls of the people for deliverance from specific situations. In Psalm 79 the people are crying out to God in response to the destruction they have witnessed, destruction they attribute to God's anger with them. In verse 9 they cry out for God to deliver them. This cry for help ties deliverance to forgiveness of sins and points to God's reputation (the glory of

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God's name, for God's name's sake) as the basis for God's salvific action. In Psalm 82: 3–4, the traits of a just judge in relation to the treatment of the weak and needy are extolled (in contrast to the unjust judgment of the gods). Not only should a just judge maintain the right of the weak, but also rescue (פלט) the weak and deliver (נצל) them from the wicked. The psalm makes it clear that there is only one judge capable of such justice and that one is God. Deliverance belongs to those who remember God and to the weak and needy, a reassuring thought to the faithful after the exile.

The verbal root חלץ is found twice in the Asaph collection, both times in the piel 1cs form. The first occurrence is Psalm 50:15, in which God is urging the people to call upon God during times of trouble. Verse 15 is a continuation of the commands regarding proper sacrifice given in verse 14—offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and pay vows to the Most High and call upon God (v 15). God's response to the people's cry is to deliver them from their trouble. The overall outcome of the people's actions is the glorification of God. The second occurrence of חלץ is Psalm 81:8, which seems to be an occasion when the people did obey the command of 50:15. During a time of distress they did call out to God and God did, in fact, deliver them. The distress being referred to in Psalm 81 is the bondage of God's people in Egypt and the rescue would have been the exodus from Egypt (vv 7, 11). Their obedience, however, was short lived and they quickly turned to other gods an act that led to more distress. The only way out of this cycle of distress is listening to God and following God's ways (v 14).

The last of the terms used to describe God's salvific activity is גאל, redeemer. In the Asaph collection, גאל refers to God's activity in bringing the people out of Egypt.

In Psalm 74:2 God is urged to remember the people as the congregation God acquired long ago when God redeemed them. Though the exodus from Egypt is not mentioned explicitly, this action of "long ago" is surely a reference to the exodus. God's actions in the past are in striking contrast with the destruction of the present, which the people are lamenting in Psalm 74. The people know that God is capable of miraculous rescue; perhaps God needs to be reminded of such for God's present lack of action does not give evidence to such ability. In Psalm 77 God's deeds are recalled in an effort to reassure the psalmist that God is great and mighty rather than to remind God of divine capability. Those deeds are summed up in verse 16 when the psalmist recalls that with God's strong arm God redeemed the people; the remainder of the psalm elaborates on verse 16 by describing the crossing of the Sea.

Words related to God's salvific activity are found in all but three of the Asaphite psalms.[24] These words refer to God's past deeds, especially in the remembrance of the exodus. They are applied to the present situation both in cries of the people to God for deliverance and in God's calls for the people to seek only God for such deliverance. They are applied to the hope that God will act again and will restore the people for God's name's sake. The hope of salvation is offered to the people and to the earth, but is withdrawn from the wicked and the enemies. In a collection where judgment is the first and last word (Pss 50, 82–83) and anger is prominent in the middle (Pss 74, 77–80), it is

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[24] Pss 73, 75, 83. In Psalm 73 God's salvific activity is not referred to directly, but God's role as guide (v 24) and refuge (v 28) are often tied with salvific activity, especially in relation to the exodus (Brown, *Seeing the Psalms,* 48). Psalm 75 is a psalm of judgment upon the wicked and no salvation is offered. Likewise, Psalm 83 is a call for God's vengeance upon God's enemies and the people wish no salvation for them as the destruction of the enemy will likely result in the deliverance of the people.

the remembrance of and hope for salvation that is carried throughout the collection assuring the reader that God is capable and willing to deliver once again.

The last theme to be addressed in its relation to God is the role of creation and created elements within the Asaph Psalms. Illman considers creation one of the five themes of the collection and distinguishes the motifs of the chaos battle and God's establishment of the cosmos.[25] God's creative activity is highlighted in Psalm 74:12–17 as God brings salvation to the earth by first battling dragons and Leviathan in the sea (13–14) and then by creating springs, establishing the moon, stars, and sun (16), fixing the boundaries of the earth, and making seasons (17).[26] God does not leave the earth on in its own; when it totters, God steadies it (75:4).[27] In this collection, however, God not only creates and maintains the cosmos; God is sovereign over the created order. As sovereign, God commands the cosmos and when God acts, God often acts through creation. God's sovereignty over creation is clearly communicated in Psalm 50. God summons the entire earth—from the rising of the sun to its setting (v 1), God calls to the heavens and the earth commanding that they gather the faithful so that God may judge them (v 5), and the heavens declare God's righteousness (v 6). God declares God's sovereignty over the earth to the people irrevocably by claiming ownership of the beasts of the field (v 10) and the birds in the air (v 11), and in fact, all that is in the world (v 12). In turn the earth respects and fears God as seen in Psalm 76:9, after God

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[25] Karl-Johan Illman, *Thema und Tradition in den Asaf-Psalmen* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1976), 17–19.

[26] Ps 74:13–14 falls under Illman's chaos battle motif (*Chaoskampf*) while vv 15–17 fall under his second creation motif, "bringing forth of the earth" (*Hervorbringung des Kosmos*), (*Thema und Tradition*, 17–18).

[27] Ps 75:4 falls within Illman's "bringing forth of the cosmos" category, (*Thema und Tradition*, 18–19).

pronounces judgment from the heavens, "the earth feared and was still." Also in Psalm

77:16, the waters, upon seeing God, were afraid and trembled.

In addition to God's ownership of the earth, God also manipulates elements of

the cosmos in the announcement of God's coming. This appears first in Psalm 50:3 in

the language of theophany where God is preceded by fire and surrounded by the

tempest.[28] A more extensive description is found in Psalm 77:17–21. In this account of

God's presence before Israel as they crossed the sea, the elements of a thunderstorm

announce the power and presence of God. Rain, thunder, lightning, and wind were so

great the earth shook in response (19). The thunderstorm imagery is utilized once again

in Psalm 83:16, this time in the form of a request by God's people for God to pursue the

enemy with God's tempest and hurricane. This request is for God to come in judgment

to establish God's sovereignty over the enemies and the whole earth (19).

God's power over the created world is evident in special ways in stories of the

exodus and wandering. Gillingham suggests that the presence of the exodus story in the

post-exilic period functioned "to encourage the despondent community that the God of

the Exodus still offers a future and a hope."[29] Psalm 78, with its unique recitation of

Israel's past,[30] highlights these marvelous deeds of God. The most fundamental of these

deeds is God's parting of the sea during which God made the waters stand like a heap

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[28] Gerald Wilson, *Psalms* (vol 1; NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 761.

[29] Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody," *SJT* 52 (1999): 19–46, quoted from page 25.

[30] Unique in the sense that the accounts are not in chronological order, some plagues are omitted, and the psalm includes the otherwise untold account of battle at the fields of Zoan (Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* [CC; trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 127, 129).

(נד)[31] in order for the people to pass through (v 13). God also split rocks and made streams of water flow from them (vv 15–16) and miraculously provided bread and meat until the people were filled (vv 23–29). In these instances the actions of God are often accentuated with hifil (causative) or piel (intensive) verbs. God's actions are also highlighted by the interesting absence of Moses' participation in these events.

Even before the parting of the sea, God displays power through the many manipulations of nature that occur in the plagues. The first plague mentioned is the turning of rivers to blood (v 44), which would have certainly been difficult to understand as a natural occurrence. On the contrary, the presence of pests such as flies (v 45), frogs (v 45), caterpillars (v 46), and locusts (v 46) would not have been unusual in Egypt; their intensity and destructive power in this instance, however, is attributed to God as a means for punishing Egypt. God is also given responsibility for sending hail (v 47, 48), frost (v 47), and thunderbolts (v 48). God's command of insects and weather is further evidence of God's great power.

The way in which God's sovereignty over creation is recounted in the Psalms of Asaph communicates several things to the reader. First, it helps to establish that God is the sovereign God over all creation, not only the sovereign of God's chosen people. Second, God's great power is highlighted in several ways: 1) God defeated the sea monsters in battle (74:13–14); 2) God is responsible for establishing and maintaining the foundations of the earth (75:44–48); 3) God is able to command created elements in a way that suits God's purposes; and 4) the earth and all that is in it belongs to God (Ps 50:12). In the situation of the exilic and post-exilic community, God's sovereignty

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[31] נד in connection with water is used twice of the Sea (Exod 15:8; Ps 78:13) and three times of the Jordan River (Josh 3:13, 16; Ps 33:7), *BDB*, 622.

surely would have been in question. Was God unable to save the people? Are the gods of the conquering nations more powerful than the God of Israel/Judah? By highlighting God's role in the creation not only of Israel, God's chosen people, but also in the creation of the entire cosmos, the Asaphite collection reminds the reader that God is sovereign over the whole cosmos[32] and God remains powerful despite the defeat of the nation.

What then does the collection in its entirety communicate about God? God is the only just judge of the entire world, judging the wicked and the righteous at the appointed time. Despite the fact that God's anger seems to have resulted in excessive punishment, God is still recognized as the source of salvation and redemption in the present situation. Underlying these assessments of God is the fact that God is sovereign over the world and as such has the power to carry out just judgment and miraculous salvific actions. Though the nation has faltered, the people can still trust in their God.

The Antagonist in the Asaph Psalms

Standing opposite God in this collection is the enemy. Without the presence of an enemy, the psalmist's situation would have been much different. The enemy is a common character within the Psalter and is definitely present in the Asaphite collection. The enemy in this collection however, is difficult to define. In some cases the opposition is not referred to directly as enemy; for that reason, I will refer to an antagonist(s). The antagonist then is one opposed to God, the psalmist, or the faithful people. In some cases the antagonists are seen from God's point of view as those whose actions are discussed as being in direct opposition to the statutes of God (Ps 50:16–17).

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[32] Elmer Smick, "Mythopoetic Language in the Psalms," *WTJ* 44 (1982): 88–98.

In other cases the antagonists are seen from the point of view of the psalmist as those whose actions are in contrast to the actions of the righteous. For example, in Psalm 73 the wicked (רשע) are prideful (vv 3, 6) and boastful (v 11), oppressing the weak (v 8). There are still instances when the antagonist is referred to specifically as the enemy, for example in Psalm 74 the psalmist refers to the destroyers of the sanctuary as enemy (אויב, vv 3, 10, 18), foe (צרר, participle, vv 4, 23), impious (נבל, v 18), and adversary (קום, participle, v 23). In Psalm 78 the enemies of Israel are referred as foe (צר, vv 61, 66), first being used by God and then destroyed by God. Again in Psalm 80 the people plea for God to restore them so they are no longer a source of laughter for the enemy (אויב, v 7). God answers in Psalm 81 by reminding the people that if they walk in God's ways God would subdue their enemies and foes (vv 14–15, אויב and צר). In this Psalm God refers to the enemies of the people as "those who hate the LORD" (יהוה משנאי, v 16). Similarly in Psalm 83:3 the ones plotting against God's people are called God's enemies (אויב) and haters of God (משנאיך).

In addition to the variety of ways the psalmist refers to the antagonist, there are various options for defining or identifying the antagonist. Are the wicked and unrighteous living within the psalmist's community and thus also people of God, or are they outside of it? Which neighbors and nations are included within the status of enemy or foe? While one can make reasonable speculations in answer to these questions, many times the answer is ambiguous. I would suggest that in times of ambiguity the antagonist should not be limited only to those outside of the psalmist's community.

The most disturbing attributes of the antagonist, as communicated in the Asaphite collection, can be grouped into two categories; actions toward God and/or the faithful and misconceptions about God. One would expect that the most disturbing action toward the faithful would be physical destruction. While destruction of God's sanctuary is lamented in both Psalms 74 and 79, the more disturbing action is mockery by the antagonist. Several words and phrases are used to communicate their attitude of contempt. The most frequent Hebrew root used to communicate such is חרף (scoff, taunt, reproach), which is used in both verb and noun forms in Psalms 74 and 79. In Psalm 74 the scoffing of the enemy is directed toward God (vv 10, 18, 22). In verses 10 and 18 the scoffing of the foe/enemy is parallel to the spurning (נאץ) of God's name by the enemy/impious. In verse 22 the call for God to rise up and act is based upon the remembrance of the enemies' scoffs.

In Psalm 79 the scoffing is directed toward both the people and God. In verse 4 the people recount for God the fact that, as a result of the destruction that the nations poured upon Jerusalem, *they* have become the object of taunting (חרף), mocking (לעג), and derision (קסל) for their neighbors. In verse 12, however, the taunting (חרף) is directed toward God. While it is true that as the people of God any taunt directed at the people would also be directed at God and vice versa, the cries of the people for God to act on their behalf are heavily tied to their concern for God's reputation. Interestingly in Psalm 80:7 the psalmist blames God for putting the people in a situation to be mocked. God *made* (שׂים) them an object of contention amongst their neighbors; as a result their enemies mock (לעג) them.

Psalm 73 also refers to the scoffs of the antagonist as a trait of the wicked, paying attention to the source of the words, the mouth (פֶּה) and tongue (לָשׁוֹן). These arrogant ones scoff (מוּק) and speak with unkindness (דבר ברע, v 8). The source of such speech is their mouths, which are set against the heavens and their tongues, which range over the earth (v 9). God also assesses the mouths and tongues of the wicked in Psalm 50:19–20. The wicked give their mouths free rein to speak evil and their tongues are deceitful; they go so far as to slander their own relatives. There is one other reference to deceptive and lying with mouth and tongue in Psalm 78:36. In this case the people of Israel try to flatter God and lie to God rather than follow God's covenant (vv 35–37). The mouth and tongue are connected to the negative speech and actions of the antagonist in this collection.

Not only do the antagonists in the collection share scoffs and evil words, but they also share fundamental misconceptions about God, which they use to justify their actions. The first misconception is found in Psalm 50:21. The wicked think that because God has been silent about their wickedness, God must be like them (literally, "you imagined [דמה] surely I was like you).[33] God wastes no time in dispelling that misconception by pronouncing judgment upon them (vv 21–22). The second misconception appears in Psalm 73:11 where the antagonists doubt that God has knowledge (דעה, יָדַע) of their actions, thus allowing them the freedom to do as they please. Again, the wicked are corrected when God reveals to the psalmist the future of

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[33] In this case the infinitive construct of היה is immediately connected with the finite verb of היה (qal, impf, 1cs) acting in the same way as an infinitive absolute connected with its cognate (GK 113x), thus adding emphasis to their incorrect assumption.

the wicked. Ruin, destruction, and terror await them; they will perish. The wicked, presumably from within the people of God, hold these first two misconceptions.

The nations are responsible for the final misconception, which embodies the taunts of the enemies. "Where is their God?" (Psalm 79:10) The nations, too, understand God's lack of intercession on behalf of God's people as a sign that God has abandoned the people. In this case the misconception is not immediately corrected by the psalmist or by God. In fact, if an answer to this dilemma does come, it is found in the oracle of God in Psalm 81. God is not absent nor has God abandoned the people; God is waiting for the people to listen and walk in God's ways (v 13).

Brown points out that denying a deity's visual or auditory senses denies that deity's abilities and power.[34] The Asaphite collection makes it clear that God is still capable. Through the dispelling of misconceptions about God, the Asaphite collection communicates to its exilic/post-exilic reader three insights: 1) God is not like the wicked but is righteous; 2) God knows about the wicked who surround them; 3) God has not abandoned them, nor is God weak.

The Faithful in the Asaph Psalms

In contrast to the negative speech of the antagonist, the faithful let the deeds of God roll off their tongues. As a response to the nearness of God, the psalmist and people recount (ספר) God's works (מלאכותיך, Ps 73:28) and wonderful acts (פלא, nifal, ptc, Ps 75:2). They also commit to telling (ספר) the coming generations about those wonderful acts of God (פלא, nifal, ptc, Ps 78:4). The psalmist not only speaks of these

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[34] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 171.

deeds (מעלל in v 12, פלא in vv 12, 15, and פעל in v 13), but also meditates on them, presumably for reassurance in trying times (Ps 77:12–16). The recounting of God's deeds serves several functions: 1) to praise the God who did such things; 2) to prompt listeners to obey; 3) to establish hope for the future.

Though accounts of God's miraculous deeds are often expressed by the faithful, there is one question from the lips of the faithful that resounds in this collection, "How long?" (עד מתי in Pss 74:10; 80:5 and עד מה in Ps 79:5). How long will the enemy scoff (74:10)? How long will God's jealous wrath burn (79:5)? How long will God be angry with the people's prayers (80:5)? The question is in expanded form in Psalm 77:8–10 when the psalmist wonders if God will ever be favorable again or if God's promises ended. In the midst of a tremendously frustrating situation the psalmist utters this powerful sentiment. It is difficult to assess such a question. Is the psalmist upset by the duration of the punishment[35] or with the fact that God is not living up to divine promises by allowing such destruction in God's dwelling in the first place? Is the voicing of the question a sign of frustration *and* hope?[36] Is the question ever answered? A response to the question "How long?" may be communicated through the Asaphite collection, not in an answer about duration as the collection never communicates that the situation has changed or is about to change, but with assurances that in the mean time the God who did such amazing works in their past is the God who is still sovereign.

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[35] In this case, the people understand why there was punishment, but are confused that it has lasted so long (Tate, *Psalms*, 314).

[36] Walter Brueggemann points out that even when the accusatory tone of "how long?" is used, the lament is clearly an act of faith for only God can right the wrong, even if God caused the wrong (*The Psalms and the Life of Faith* [ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], 76).

The deeds of God are recounted before and after the psalms that bear this difficult question. Psalm 74 is surrounded by Psalms 73:28 and 75:2, which contain words of the psalmist who is assured of God's nearness. Psalm 79 is preceded by several stories of God's miraculous provision, which are retold in Psalm 78 and, though the tension created by Psalm 79 is not relieved in Psalm 80, Psalm 81 provides reassurance as God recounts previous instances when the people cried out and God answered, and it provides hope as God states that if the people will listen, God will again respond. The doubts of Psalm 77:2–11 regarding God's promises are resolved within the psalm itself as the psalmist shifts to recalling God's wonders by which God redeemed the people. It seems that the question "How long?" is a fundamental question to be asked and the collection does not downplay it or easily brush it aside, but the response that the collections provide is not so much an answer to the question itself as much as it is instruction for enduring the wait. In the meantime, trust in your God who so ably and mercifully provided in the past.

Remembrance in the Asaph Psalms

The importance of knowing what has happened in the past is further highlighted in this collection by an emphasis on remembering and not forgetting. Mitchell points out that the root זכר occurs thirteen times in this collection and three times in the deutero-Asaph psalms[37] compared to 38 times in the rest of the Psalter.[38] Thus this collection and its related psalms account for 10 percent of the occurrences of the root in the Psalter.

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[37] Psalms 96, 105 and 106; see Nasuti (*Tradition History*, 190).

[38] David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 98-99.

"This disproportionate emphasis suggests that it was an important idea to the Asaphite community."[39] Remembering and not forgetting are certainly messages repeatedly communicated through the collection. Every major character of the collection— God, the people, and the antagonist—is connected at some time to this theme. Mitchell suggests that the purpose of recalling history "is apparently to put God in remembrance of his former acts on Israel's behalf, and on that basis to request future deliverance."[40] While God's remembrance is certainly desired, the collection is not only concerned about God remembering, it also makes it clear that the people must remember and that their future depends on it (Psalm 50:22). Remembering is essential to avoiding punishment.

God's connection with this theme is tied more to God's remembrance affecting God's present action than it is about reminding the people about God's action in the past. God is asked to remember, not forget, and not remember; additionally God is accused of forgetting.   The psalmist pleads with God in Psalm 74:2 to remember (זכר) both the congregation, which God acquired long ago by redeeming them, and Mt. Zion, the place of God's dwelling. This concept is communicated further when the psalmist asks God not to forget (אל שכח) God's poor (v 19). In the same psalms the psalmist again urges remembrance (זכר), this time of the enemies scoffing in both verses 18 and 22 and the psalm ends with the call for God not to forget (אל שכח) the noise of the foe. In the

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[39] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 99.

[40] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 98.

case of Psalm 74, the purpose of God's remembering/not forgetting is to cause God to respond to the current situation.

The psalmist in Psalm 77 finds himself in a situation that leads him to wonder if God has forgotten (שׁכח) to be gracious (v 10). The opposite is found in Psalm 78 as God's remembrance stirs compassion in Psalm 78:39 when God remembers (זכר) that the people are flesh and temporary beings and restrains from punishing them. It is this type of compassion that makes possible the people's request in Psalm 79:8 for God not to remember (אל זכר) against them the sins of their ancestors. Again in these psalms, God's action or lack of action is tied to whether God is remembering or forgetting. Perhaps the frequent recollections of God's deeds in this collection also serve to remind God about the past so that forgetting is not an option.

The people also remember, forget, are urged not to forget, and are accused of not remembering. The didactic Psalm 78 contains examples of each of these. The psalm begins by extolling the importance of telling the next generation about the glorious deeds of God for the purpose of helping the next generation place their hope in God, rather than repeating the mistakes of the past. In verse 7 the teacher impresses upon the people that they should not forget (לא שׁכח) the works of God. Of great importance in verses 5–8 is the decree and law that God established and the people were supposed to pass along to subsequent generations. In verse 7 the phrase "do not forget the works of God" is parallel with the phrase "but keep his commandments," thus linking memory with action. Verse 8 describes the result of not forgetting God's works and keeping God's commandments—they will not end up like their stubborn, rebellious ancestors, unfaithful to God.

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The psalm continues by giving several examples of what happens when one

forgets God's deeds. The Ephraimites did not obey God's commands and forgot (שׁכח)

what God had done, as a result they had no confidence in battle and had to turn back (vv

9–11). Repeatedly they rebelled against God in the wilderness because they did not

remember (לא זכר) God's power or God's redemptive actions on their behalf (vv 40–

43). It was only when God punished them by making their days terror that they

repented and remembered (זכר) that God was their rock (vv 32–35). The ultimate

punishment for their forgetfulness and resulting disobedience was their utter rejection by

God (vv 56–64).

The punishment that Israel received, though harsh, is not a surprise to the readers

of the Asaphite collection as they have encountered such a threat in Psalm 50. The last

instance of forgetting addressed here is actually the first encountered in the collection

and the only time forgetfulness is tied to the antagonist (in this case the wicked). In

Psalm 50, an oracle of judgment, God addresses the wicked and their hatred of

discipline, unsavory company, and evil speech (vv 16–19). God ends the address by

officially charging them, rebuking them (v 21), and presenting their punishment (v 22).

The wicked who are addressed in verse 22 as "ones who forget (שׁכח) God," will be torn

apart and have no hope of deliverance. In regard to the people's remembering and

forgetting, the message of the collection is quite clear— be one who remembers.

The King in the Asaph Psalms

In addition to the linguistic and thematic concepts that are repeated throughout

the collection, it is also necessary to assess one notable concept that is particularly

lessened in this collection, kingship. In the first two books of the Psalter, kingship, especially the kingship of David, is a prominent theme. Whether by virtue of superscription or content of psalms, the earthly king is exalted beginning in Psalm 2 and continuing through Psalm 72. In light of the postscript of Psalm 72, that the prayers of David have ended, the less prominent place of the king in the Asaph collection is important. There are two instances in which מלך is used. The first occurs in Psalm 74:12 when the psalmist is celebrating God who has been king since creation. There is no mention of any earthly king in the psalm, in fact, the everlasting nature of God's reign would have created a contrast with earthly kings. Especially during and shortly after the exile when the demise of the Davidic monarchy was fresh in the minds of the people, the contrast between God's everlasting reign and the failed Davidic monarchy would have been sharp. The second use of מלך is found in Psalm 76:13 and is a reference in general to the kings of the earth who are afraid of God. The point of the psalm is to praise the God of Judah and Israel who is mighty in battle (vv 4–7) and just in judgment (vv 8–10). Though not a direct reference to "king," Psalm 80:2 refers to God as enthroned on the cherubim. The idea of God's sitting upon his cherubim throne is also found in Psalm 99:1.

It is also interesting to note that David is only mentioned by name one time in the Asaphite collection. The final verses of Psalm 78 laud God's choice in rejecting Ephraim and choosing to dwell in Judah (vv 67–68). The psalmist celebrates the temple, which he refers to as God's sanctuary, and celebrates David as the God–chosen leader (vv 69–72). The image the psalmist uses to describe David's leadership is not that of a king but a shepherd tending a flock. Throughout the collection God is often referred to

as the shepherd of the flock of God's people, and in this case David takes on those traits. The mention of David in Psalm 78 magnifies Judah's election in light of Israel's failures, but again the canonical placement of Psalm 78 before Psalm 79 communicates to the reader that Judah did not fare much better. The temple and the earthly leader were no assurance that calamity could be averted.

The dwindling presence of an earthly king and the limited emphasis on God as king is an interesting development in this collection, especially considering its placement after the second Davidic Collection and the benediction of Book II. Perhaps this lack of interest in the role of king, whether human or divine, reflects the absence of the Davidic monarchy or even a lack of confidence in that role.

Summary

The Asaph collection has much to say about God, the antagonists and the people. God is the one righteous judge of both the chosen people and the nations. God's anger with the people has resulted in God's lack of response to them, yet the overwhelming understanding of God in this collection is God as savior, redeemer, and deliverer. Deliverance, of course, would not be necessary if the enemies were not present. The scoffs and taunts of the enemy offend God's people and tarnish God's reputation, but their conception of God as one whose silence means acceptance and whose lack of action means lack of knowledge or absence is absolutely wrong.

The theme that transcends characters is the emphasis on remembering. Remembrance is the key to staying or becoming faithful and it is the means by which the people spur God to act. The collection does its part in helping the people remember as it

recounts the past, especially the ways in which God has delivered and cared for the people. This remembrance gives them the hope to endure until God delivers again.

The role of the king is notably lessened in this collection in comparison to what precedes it. When it is mentioned, it is in reference to God, but God's role as judge is much more prominent. This development may represent the beginning of a change in the understanding of the Davidic monarchy, or at least confusion over its demise.

CHAPTER SIX

The Message of the Asaphite Collection and its Role in the Psalter

The previous chapter identified a number of thematic and linguistic connections between the psalms of the Asaph collection. These connections in combination with the arrangement of the collection work together to communicate certain messages to the reader. The purpose of this chapter is to look closely at the arrangement of the collection and identify the message(s) being communicated. I will then take a step back from this single collection and look at its role in the Psalter as a whole.

The Arrangement of the Asaph Psalms

The Asaph Psalms are located in a pivotal place in the Psalter. Not only are they the first psalms of Book III, the middle book of the five-book Psalter, but they are also located in the numeric middle of the Psalter. They also seem to react to a very critical point in Israel's history, the exile.[1] Is there, though, any insight to be gained by understanding how these psalms of assorted genre are arranged? Following the example of Wilson who suggests there is purposeful arrangement in the final Psalter[2] and McCann who has begun to look at arrangement within the books themselves,[3] its seems

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[1] J. Clinton McCann suggests that all of Book III responds to the exile ("Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Psalter" in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, [ed. by J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 96).

[2] Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, Calif.: Scholar's Press, 1985).

[3] McCann, "Books I–III," 93.

a worthwhile endeavor to look for arrangement within smaller collections, especially a collection that exhibits such unity. The following discussion will suggest an answer to McCann's question "Is it possible that Psalms 73–83 in particular were not collected randomly but were selected and arranged to address a crisis in the national life?"[4]

We will begin with the role of Psalm 50. As discussed earlier, Psalm 50 functions as a bridge between the Korah collection of Psalms 42–49 and the second Davidic collection of Psalm 51–72. It functions as such because of the thematic and linguistic links that occur between what comes before it and what follows. Psalm 50 also introduces an important theme of the Asaphite collection, God as judge. The theme of God as judge is echoed in the intervening Davidic collection and reaches its crescendo in the Asaphite collection. Psalm 50 also establishes an idea that is challenged at the beginning of the Asaphite collection—the wicked will be punished and the righteous will be rewarded. Most of the psalms of the second Davidic collection deal in some way with the enemies' attacks upon the psalmist, but their overall outlook is one of trust in the idea that God's justice will prevail and the enemies will be punished. That outlook is not as optimistically shared in the Asaph collection.

Psalm 73 presents the underlying problem of the larger Asaphite collection: life is not as it should be. Psalm 73 is an abrupt shift for the reader on many levels: a new book is beginning, several superscription changes occur in the psalms leading up to Psalm 73, and the tone shifts. The reader is quickly ushered into the upside down world of the psalmist who sees the wicked thriving while the righteous languish. Despite the oracle of God in Psalm 50 and the confidence of the Davidic collection, the psalmist

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[4] McCann, "Books I–III," 93.

struggles with the fact that reality does not line up with what the tradition has taught. While this psalm does end with a positive outlook, reality has not changed.

The locus of change for the psalmist in Psalm 73 is the sanctuary of God, but what the exilic reader knows is confirmed in Psalm 74—the sanctuary has been destroyed. Psalm 74 elaborates on the confusion presented at the beginning of Psalm 73 by communicating the distress of the people in the face of the destruction of the sanctuary. The place where one went to be in the presence of God, the temple, has been destroyed, thus the psalmist must turn to another source to find comfort. In Psalm 74:13–18 that source is God's created order. This emphasis on God as creator serves many purposes. First, it establishes God's rule in a time of old. Second, it establishes God as ruler of the entire cosmos because God is its maker. God's rule was not destroyed when the temple was destroyed because God's rule is far older than the temple and God's rule stretches far beyond Jerusalem. Third, given the ambiguous nature of the creation imagery, these verses also remind the people of God's mighty deliverance when God controlled the waters so they could pass out of Egypt. Once the psalmist has (re)-established God's sovereignty, then the psalmist calls upon God to act according to God's promises.

Psalm 74, while ending with some confidence that God is capable of action, does not end with any assurance that God will act soon or praise because God has already acted as many of the psalms of the second Davidic collection do. If read by itself, there is no assurance that God will act but when read with Psalm 75 there is assurance. The transition from Psalm 74 to 75 is again abrupt as the reader encounters the final pleas of Psalm 74 and then the jubilant thanksgiving of Psalm 75. This shift is similar to the shift

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in many lament psalms where the psalmist quickly moves from lament to praise.[5] The assurance found in Psalm 75 is based once again on the fact that God is a just judge who will put down those who are proud and lift up the lowly.

The attitude of thanksgiving is further expanded with the praises of Psalm 76. While Psalm 76 does extend the more assured tone of Psalm 75, the motive for its praise seems out of place to the reader of the collection as it lauds God's definitive actions in establishing Zion as God's own dwelling. It seems out of place because of the utter destruction of the sanctuary recounted in Psalm 74. What is the reader to make of this praise of the God of Zion? God may have established the divine abode in Zion by breaking the arrows and swords of the enemy, but the balance of the scales has been tipped by the destruction of that abode by a more recent enemy. It is necessary that the contrast between God's actions in the past and the people's present reality be presented. It is in this contrast between past and present that the people find a way to move forward. Psalm 76, with its reminiscence of God's initial actions to secure Zion, functions again to reassure the people. Once God chose Zion and fought on her behalf, perhaps God will do so again when the divine wrath moves God to such a point. Again, the basis for such wrath is God's established judgment on behalf of the oppressed of all of the earth, a category into which the people once again fit.

The next three psalms, Psalms 77–79 are at the heart of the Asaphite collection and as such present the resounding question of the people, "How long will God's anger keep God from acting?" These psalms also present the people with a way to maintain faith in the meantime by remembering the past. Psalm 77 begins this series of psalms

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[5] Hermann Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (completed by Joachim Begrich; trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon: Mercer Univ., 1998), 93 and 180–81.

with words that express the constant struggle of the psalmist as he ponders the current situation and questions God's faithfulness to God's promises. The psalmist's initial conclusion is devastating: God must have changed. This psalmist is surely expressing the thoughts of many in this profound statement. The reader, however, is not allowed to linger in this assessment for long as the psalm sharply turns to recollecting God's mighty deeds of the past. It is as if the psalmist knows the people will hear such words and agree so the psalmist quickly inserts a counter argument that would make it impossible to maintain such a thought for long. The psalmist specifies one definitive action of God from the past to exemplify God's deeds, the parting of the sea. The vivid image portrayed is of God exhibiting complete control over the natural elements of water, clouds, lightning, thunder, and the earth. The created order reveals God's presence and God uses Moses and Aaron to lead the way.

Psalm 78 continues recalling the past. It emphasizes the past in such a way that those in the present will learn from past mistakes. What the people learn about their past must be applied to their current situation and be passed down to the next generation. The purpose of recalling the past is twofold: 1) to help the people place their hope in God, and 2) to learn from the mistakes of their ancestors. A pattern is established in Psalm 78: God acts graciously, the people forget and reject God, and then God punishes the people. Though the psalm repeatedly mentions God's anger at the people, it also repeatedly mentions God's compassion, graciousness and willingness to give the people another opportunity. The pattern can provide considerable encouragement to the reader. It is time for God to act graciously again. The pattern also places major responsibility upon the reader to remember the past and not repeat it. The cycle can be broken.

Psalm 78 ends at a point in the story when new opportunities are at hand with the appointment of David and the election of Zion, but the story does not end there. Psalm 79 carries the story further and lets the reader know that the people must have once again forgotten because they are again in a devastating situation. The reader's suspicions are confirmed later in the psalm (vv 6 and 9); God is angry and the people are pleading for God to show compassion again. While the psalmist pleads for compassion, the reader knows that compassion is possible and, according to the pattern of Psalm 78, compassion should be forthcoming. Psalm 79 continues and the people cry out for God to forget their ancestors' iniquities and act on their behalf. What God should be focusing on is the divine reputation. As long as the nations are taunting, God's reputation is in jeopardy. The psalm ends with a promise from the people to God. If God exacts revenge, then the people will give thanks and praise God forever.

Psalms 80 and 81 stand side by side as the people's plea for God to turn in Psalm 80 and as God's response and plea for the people to turn in Psalm 81. Psalm 80 again asks for God's swift action (v 3) and ponders the longevity of God's anger (v 5). The heart of the psalm returns the reader to the confusing reality of the psalmist (vv 9–14). God is the one who transplanted the people to a place where they could prosper, why then has God allowed such destruction? The psalm itself does not reveal an answer to the question, but the reader assumes one—disobedience. Whether because of disobedience or some other reason, God has turned against the people and the people can only plead for God to turn around and look down from heaven at their situation. The return of God's shining face, God's powerful presence, is enough to rebuke the nations

and save the people. In return for God's turning, the people promise never to turn their back to God.

Psalm 81 is God's response, not only to Psalm 80, but also to Psalms 77-79. In the midst of the sights and sounds of a festival day, God speaks and answers the questions of the people. God begins by recounting God's role in their rescue from Egypt, an action initiated by the distressed cries of the people. God then admonishes them because, unlike God who hears their cries, the people are not listening to God. The only offense God mentions specifically is their worship of other gods. In this divine oracle it is clear that action against their enemies would be swift if the people would listen and walk in the ways of God. God has again heard the distress cries of the people and responds to the question 'How long?' by placing the responsibility back on the people. 'How long?' depends on when the people will turn back and follow God's ways.

Following God's response, Psalm 82 returns again to the theme of God as judge. The collection has already established that God is a just judge who cares for the righteous. In this psalm, however, God is not judging humanity, God is judging other deities. Psalm 82 takes the offense of Psalm 81, the worship of other gods, and illustrates why it is misguided. God enters the divine council as judge to pronounce judgment on the other gods. Their task has been to provide justice and deliverance for the weak, but they have sided with the wicked instead and for that they will perish. Because of the actions of these unjust gods the foundations of the earth are shaken, but when the earth shakes, it is God who steadies it again (Ps 75:4). Reliance on those gods is useless, but reliance on God, who is just and righteous, is cause for confidence. It is with that confidence that the psalmist calls for God to judge the whole earth.

Psalm 83 points out where the psalmist thinks God's judgment of the earth should begin; it should begin with those who plan to wipe out God's people. The list of enemies is not related to the exilic or post-exilic struggles, but does include numerous enemies of Israel's past. Any group whose goal is to wipe out Israel should be subject to God's judgment, including the present enemy who is not mentioned by name. The purpose of the psalmist's call for vengeance is so that those who are shamed will know the name YHWH and will know that YHWH is sovereign. Psalm 83 ends the Asaph collection with a call for God to assert divine sovereignty definitively. Throughout the collection God's sovereignty is announced in various ways – God is sovereign as just judge, as master of creation, and as mighty deliverer of the people. The psalmist knows that God is sovereign, the reader should know, and when God acts so will the whole earth.

The psalms of the collection function as follows:[6]

Psalm 50: links the collections of the Elohistic Psalter and introduces the theme of God as judge.

Psalm 73: introduces the general problem, life is not as it should be because the wicked are prospering, but asserts that there is hope.

Psalm 74: introduces the specific problem, the temple has been destroyed – God's lack of action is a sign of anger.

Psalm 75: reasserts God's role as judge who will judge the wicked in time.

Psalm 76: celebrates God who judges.

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[6] The indented structure is not meant to connote chiastic structure, only to highlight the psalms with similar themes.

Psalm 77: returns to the issue of God's anger, but also presents

assurance.

Psalm 78: establishes a pattern of the people's sin, God's anger, and

God's grace and deliverance in Israel's past and urges the people to

learn from it.

Psalm 79: the people are currently experiencing God's anger, thus

they must have sinned, but there is hope because God does deliver.

Psalm 80: a cry for God to turn from anger and save the people.

Psalm 81: God's response to the people: they have disobeyed

and must turn back to God.

Psalm 82: God judges the other gods and is established as the one and only

judge of the whole earth.

Psalm 83: The people cry out for God to act against their enemies.

The collection is an honest reflection of the confusion encountered after the

destruction of the temple and the exile. On the one hand, the people embrace God's role

as judge of the wicked and righteous. On the other hand, their present situation does not

reflect a reality in which God is acting as such. Are the wicked prospering because God

is not capable of judging or is God's lack of action against the wicked a reflection of

God's anger at the people? The psalms of the collection make it clear that God is

capable of judging. The psalms which dwell on God's anger (Pss 77–80) are flanked by

those that herald God as just judge (Pss 75–76 and 82) and God's response to the people

(Ps 81). In fact, God is the only just judge, the only deity capable of correct judgment

(Ps 82). As for the latter, the issue of God's anger occurs most frequently at the heart of

the collection (Pss 77–80), but even though the psalmist briefly toys with the idea that God has changed, the overwhelming message is that God is a God of salvation and deliverance. The primary message of the collection is that the people should remain faithful and obedient. The basis of such a message is twofold. First, God is the one just judge who will come to judge the wicked. Second, based on God's previous actions of salvation and deliverance, the people can be assured of God's faithfulness toward them. In Psalm 81, God makes it clear that obedience is necessary in order for God to act. Once the people turn to God's ways, action will be swift. God has not abandoned the people and the people should not abandon God for the ways of the wicked. God's deliverance is available to those who remain faithful and obedient.

The Psalms of Asaph and the Psalter

The Asaphite collection communicates an important message to the exilic reader about remaining faithful during traumatic times, but how does this collection fit into the rest of the Hebrew Psalter? Wilson has suggested that the Psalter has been shaped by concerns for covenant and kingdom in Books I–III and concerns of wisdom in Books IV–V, concerns that have been bound together in its final shape.[7] Wilson believes that the psalms of Books IV and V offer new theological perspective and resolution. McCann suggests that answers to the problem of exile and the continued oppression of Israel are present already in Books I–III as they move the reader beyond the Davidic/Zion covenant theology. As the reader moves beyond the traditional

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[7] Gerald H. Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms" in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, (ed. By J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 72–82.

Davidic/Zion theology, which was the previous grounds for hope, she finds new hope in God as judge.[8]

Walter Brueggemann suggests that the Psalter moves from a confident summons to obedience in Psalm 1 to enthusiastic, unselfish praise in Psalm 150.[9] As such the Psalter reflects the Israelite belief that both obedience and praise are essential and obedience always comes first followed by praise. The remaining psalms aid the faithful as they move from duty to praise by honestly addressing suffering and hope, because, though Psalm 1 presents a world in which the faithful prosper and the wicked are punished, the readers of the psalm know that that is not always the case. At the heart of suffering, threat, guilt, and death is the question of Yahweh's *ḥesed*, which is repeatedly affirmed.[10] Brueggemann suggests that Israel's move from questioning God's *ḥesed* to affirming it is encapsulated in Psalm 73.[11] The conclusion of Psalm 73 offers a new understanding of torah piety. Obedience is not kept in order to gain promises; it is kept in order to remain in the presence of God. "What finally matters for this advocate of radical faith is communion with God in which all other issues are derivative and subordinate."[12]

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[8] McCann, "Books I–III," 99–100.

[9] Walter Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon," *JSOT* 50 (1991): 63–92.

[10] Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience," 77–78.

[11] Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience," 81.

[12] Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience," 96.

James Mays suggests that the theology of the Psalter is tied to the LORD's reign.[13] God is frequently referred to as king in the psalms and is often portrayed with vocabulary which belongs to the earthly king.[14] Yahweh's reign includes all—other deities, created elements, nations and peoples, and Zion with its surroundings.[15] The rule of God is powerful, effective and active; it is not merely an issue of status.[16] As sovereign, Yahweh has a special people, Israel, and a special place in the world, Zion.[17] Mays grants that there is a plurality of thought about God in the psalms, but suggests that this root metaphor transcends the variety.[18]

Jerome Creach suggests a different way of understanding the primary message; namely, he suggests that the destiny of the righteous is the central subject.[19] Creach believes that understanding the destiny of the righteous as the central subject helps to overcome disagreements about the literary shape of the Psalter by focusing a dominant concern found in every segment of the Psalter.[20] The righteous are identified by their faithfulness and their dependence upon God for forgiveness and protection, which is

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[13] James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

[14] Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 13.

[15] Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 14.

[16] Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 15.

[17] Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 18–19.

[18] Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 22.

[19] Jerome Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 1.

[20] Creach, *Destiny of the Righteous*, 9–10.

often found in their prayers. By praying they are drawing nearer to God.[21] They can

also be identified by their primary activity, praising God.[22] They praise because they

recognize that God is sovereign and that they need God, as a result their subsequent

actions focus on helping to bring God's peace to the community around them.[23] David,

the righteous king and anointed one plays an important role as an example of a righteous

sufferer who depends on God for deliverance.[24]

It seems that these and other attempts to understand the Psalter as a whole are

challenged in the Psalms of Asaph. In these psalms the role of the Davidic king is

greatly diminished when compared to the psalms before and after it.[25] The one place

where David is mentioned (Ps 78:69–72) speaks of him as servant not specifically as

king and is tempered by the arrangement of Psalms 78 and 79. God is only referred to as

king once (Ps 74:12) and God's kingship is tied to God's creation of the earth rather than

God's reign in Zion. God's dominant role in the Psalms of Asaph is judge, an aspect of

divine kingship that is not often emphasized in the Psalms. It is as if the confusion over

the loss of their earthly king has caused them to rethink that role altogether, at least for a

time. Though God's role as judge is important in the Asaphite collection, especially in

moving the people beyond a focus on God's anger, it does not continue to be a dominant

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[21] Creach, *Destiny of the Righteous*, 18–19.

[22] Creach, *Destiny of the Righteous*, 31.

[23] Creach, *Destiny of the Righteous*, 41.

[24] Creach, *Destiny of the Righteous*, 11.

[25] Admittedly, the concept of king does include ideas about the king as warrior, judge, and shepherd. By king, I am referring primarily to the office of king, which is highlighted both by the Davidic superscriptions of the psalms before the Asaph collection and the content of the psalms following the collection in Book III (Korahite collection).

theme in Book III. Book III comes back to the concept of king and laments greatly over the loss of the earthly king in the Korahite collection.

The present reality also threatens the people's perception of God's sovereignty, an issue that is in some ways tied to the idea of kingship, but encompasses more than the idea of the office of king. God, whose nearness had been felt most fully in the temple, is now without a physical dwelling place as both the temple and Zion are destroyed. Perhaps it is for this reason that the psalmist continually points to God's cosmic sovereignty as creator and God's nearness as the shepherd of Israel. The psalmist also points to various events in which God's presence is made known outside of the temple building, for instance at the parting of the sea or in the form of pillars of fire (Psalm 78:13–14). The people must expand their understanding of God's sovereignty in order to maintain their belief that God is capable of making things right.

Also tempered in the Asaphite collection is the faith of the righteous. At least twice in the collection (Ps 73:13 and 77:11) the psalmist comes to the verge of abandoning faith in light of the conflict between present reality and the promises of God. God's *ḥesed* is even questioned in Psalm 77:9. The situation that the righteous are encountering is threatening every previously held assumption about God. Hope is offered to the readers, especially in the form of God's past actions, but the collection does not provide any indication that the people have taken up the hope. It is still in question.

The fact that the Asaphite collection seems to challenge attempts to define an overall concern or theology of the Psalter does not necessarily mean that those attempts are incorrect. In fact, it further illustrates the confusion that the people were feeling as a

result of the destruction of the temple and the exile. Beliefs about God, the earthly king, and Zion have been severely undermined. The Asaph collection represents one group's initial attempts to move forward, even though they do not seem altogether sure that God was moving with them. A failure to grapple with the confusion and to seek a way forward would have meant the end of their faithfulness and as the psalms of the collection reflect, that was not an option they were willing to take.

Their attempts to move forward pave the way for the people to evaluate previous assumptions and create new ways of understanding God and God's purposes. Brueggemann is correct in suggesting that it is through the struggling and suffering that a new understanding is found.[26] Though the struggle of the exile is still present in the remainder of Book III, especially the struggle over the loss of the Davidic monarchy, the testimony of Books IV–V make it clear that the people did maintain their faith and they did find hope in God's universal sovereignty.

Summary

This chapter seeks to outline the arrangement of the Asaphite collection and understand the message(s) the collection communicates to the reader and to the role of this collection in the Psalter. The main problem presented in the collection is that life is not as it should be: the wicked prosper and the temple has been destroyed. The remainder of the collection deals with that problem. The psalms at the heart of the collection ask the question "How long?" and suggest that God's anger is the reason for the lack of action. These psalms are surrounded by psalms that herald God the one and only just judge who will come and judge the wicked, the nations, and other deities.

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[26] Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience," 85–86.

Important to the collection is the idea that God has not abandoned the people. Despite the confusion that is expressed, the collection also maintains a hope in God's sovereignty that goes beyond the temple and Zion, a hope that can be found as the people remember God's past actions. The faithful can and should remain faithful.

As for the role of this collection in the Psalter, it is vitally important as it honestly addresses the crisis and provides a way for the faithful to move forward. Many issues are in question in the collection including the role of the earthly king, God's justice, sovereignty, and *ḥesed*, and the fate of the faithful. Though these issues are not all settled within the collection and the collection does not end with absolute assurance that anything would change, the witness of Books IV and V give testimony that the faithful received the message and remained faithful.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

In his 1993 work, "Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of the Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise," Gerald Wilson calls for continued study of the shape of the Psalter including studies of the smaller collections within the Psalter.[1] This dissertation answers that call by focusing on the arrangement and message of the Psalms of Asaph. The previous chapters have closely examined this single psalm collection in an effort to discern if there is purposeful arrangement within the collection and if so, what message might the collection be communicating.

After a brief introduction to the scope of the project and methodological considerations, I focused attention on the past scholarship pertaining to this psalm collection and on scholarship pertaining to the canonical shape of the Psalter. While the studies regarding the Asaph collection have been helpful in establishing the uniqueness of the Asaphite collection among psalm collections, with the exception of Mitchell, they have focused on the tradition behind the text rather than the purpose of the collection or its role within the Psalter. I, instead, have focused on the unified collection and then attempted to understand its place within the Psalter. In light of that pursuit, the history of scholarship then turns to the works of Wilson and McCann who have modeled the concern for understanding the canonical shape of the Psalter.

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[1] Gerald Wilson, "Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of the Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise" in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, (ed. by J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 42–51.

With the ideas of the uniqueness and unity of the collection supported in the

work of previous scholars, I then move to a close reading of Psalms 73–83 with an eye

toward the influence of the arrangement of the psalms and their impact upon the reader.

Each psalm is dealt with individually in an effort to familiarize the reader of the

dissertation with the content of the collection. The reading of the psalms highlighted the

ways that reading the psalms in their canonical order influences the interpretation of the

psalms. Examples of this include the juxtaposition of Psalm 73 where the sanctuary is

the place where the psalmist found grounds to remain faithful and assurance that God is

near followed by Psalm 74 which laments the destruction of the sanctuary, which would

have underscored the distress of the people who now have no sanctuary in which to seek

God. Also, the triumphant ending of Psalm 78, which celebrates the elevation of Judah,

is tempered by the distress of Psalm 79, which recalls the fall of the temple.

Chapter four takes a closer look at Psalm 50, which is treated separately because

of its placement outside of the main body of the collection. This chapter also contains a

close reading of the psalm and then moves to the question of its placement. The issue of

the placement of Psalm 50 is often tied to the issue of the Elohistic Psalter and its

development, and thus the chapter includes a short discussion of recent scholarship in

this area. Many have suggested that the Elohistic Psalter, named because of its

preference for the divine name Elohim, is the result of an editing process through which

the divine name YHWH was replaced with Elohim. In light of the numerous

occurrences of YHWH within the collection, as well as convincing evidence from

scholars who suggest a literary or liturgical basis for the use of the divine name, I

acknowledge the originality of the name Elohim. I also suggest that the placement of

Psalm 50 is an attempt by the compilers of the Elohistic Psalter to bridge the various smaller collections by connecting important themes in a way that moves the reader from one collection more easily into the next, and to introduce to the reader the theme of judgment, which is gradually built upon in the Davidic collection and becomes a major theme in the Asaphite collection.

After the close reading of the psalms, I address the various linguistic and thematic links that occur within the collection. Unlike Nasuti who only attends to those links that are unique to the Asaphite collection, I address links that are found elsewhere in the Psalter in an effort to understand their particular role in this collection. The collection has much to say about God who is praised for being a just judge, but also questioned regarding the length and severity of divine anger. Throughout the collection God's role as Israel's deliverer is communicated, even in the midst of a psalm on the brink of giving up faith (Psalm 77). Though God is only referred to as king once in the collection, God's sovereignty is celebrated in ways that point beyond the office of king. The emphasis upon God as creator of the cosmos expands the people's view of God's sovereignty to include the whole cosmos not only Israel.

The antagonists play a prominent role in the Asaph psalms with their taunting lips and destructive weapons. Whether unrighteous Israelites or enemy nations, the antagonist's presence is constant. The psalms of the collection, however, make it clear that their fate is destruction. In contrast to the antagonists are the faithful whose tongues recall both the great deeds of God in Israel's past and lament God's lack of action in the present.

Also important in the Asaphite collection is the theme of remembrance. God, the antagonists, and the faithful are at various times urged to remember or are scolded for forgetting. The future of the faithful depends on their remembering God's past faithfulness and the covenant. The fate of those who forget is dire; they will be rejected by God.

Following the assessment of the linguistic and thematic links within the collection is a discussion of the arrangement of the collection in chapter six. The arrangement of the psalms within the collection communicates much to the reader. The reader is first confronted by the problem in Psalm 73; reality is not as it should be because it is the wicked who prosper. The problem is further defined in Psalm 74 with the description of the destruction of the temple. Psalms 75 and 76 provide some hope as they celebrate God's role as judge, but the hope is tempered by the issue of God's anger in Psalms 77 and 79 and qualified by the call of Psalm 78 for the people to remember their past mistakes. Psalm 80 records the people's cry for God to turn and restore them while Psalm 81 records God's response urging the people to turn and once again obey God. The theme of judgment is once again addressed in Psalm 82, only this time God is judging other deities and is recognized as the judge of all nations. The collection ends with a cry for vengeance in which the people essentially call upon God to exercise judgment upon all those who threaten Israel.

The message communicated to the reader through linguistic and thematic links and the arrangement of the collection is that the people must remain faithful, even though their present reality has brought the faithfulness and sovereignty of God into question. They may do so by understanding God's role as just judge, remembering

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God's past action, and following God's ways. God is still sovereign. Though the message is communicated, one question remains. Do the people remain faithful?

Many have noted the pivotal placement of Psalm 73, this collection, and Book III within the Hebrew Psalter. At this pivotal place many of the theological or thematic concerns of the Psalter are challenged including the promise of the Davidic monarchy, God's sovereignty, God's *ḥesed*, and the fate of the righteous. In this place the Psalms of Asaph help to provide a way for the faithful to go forward. Although the psalms of the Korah collection that follows in Book III still presents evidence that the faithful are struggling with these issues, the presence of Books IV and V make it clear that the people did remain faithful and are able to overcome their doubts and frustrations.

This dissertation, with its focus on the Asaph collection, answers the call of Wilson to look for evidence of editorial arrangement within the smaller collections of the Psalter. After careful consideration of the collection and its impact on the careful reader, I have concluded that there is editorial arrangement and that the purpose of the collection is to communicate to the people that they can and should remain faithful and obedient.

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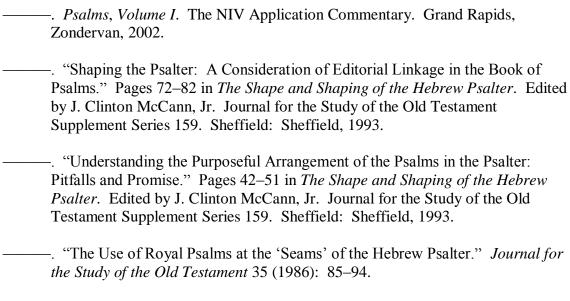
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