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FORMED IN THE CRUCIBLE OF MESSIANIC ANGST: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SHAPE OF THE HEBREW PSALTER'S FINAL FORM

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Christians have been reading the Psalms as a book throughout their history. Sixteen hundred years ago, Augustine (354-430 CE) wrote, 'The arrangement of the Psalms, which seems to me to contain a secret of great mystery, has not yet been revealed to me.'¹ And so in Augustine's view, the arrangement of the individual psalms in the Psalter has significance, even if God had not yet revealed to him the logic behind it. Perhaps this interpretive instinct issued from the way the church through the ages had read the book of Psalms as a single meditation text, already at the time of Jesus, and on through church history well beyond Augustine's lifetime.² Closer to our own day, Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890) was unique for his era, as his commentary paid special attention to key word links between adjoining psalms. For example, he pointed out that although Psalms 1 and 2 have very different themes, they are bound into a 'whole' by the repeated beatitude *šry* ('blessed', Pss 1:1; 2:12), and lexically linked together by the verb *hgh* ('to meditate, moan', Pss 1:2; 2:1).³ Or on a more popular level, in an entry entitled 'Blessedness and Praise', Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910) chose to open his exposition of the book of Psalms with an entry on *both*

¹ As cited in, Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (SBL Academia Biblia, 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p. 1. This quote is also cited in David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSS, 252; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 14.

² See Norbert Lohfink and Linda M. Maloney, *In the Shadow of Your Wings: New Readings of Great Texts from the Bible* (Collegeville: Order of Saint Benedict, 2003), p. 79.

³ See Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: Volume 5, Psalms* (trans. James Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 82-3. This commentary was first published in 1859-60, with a second edition appearing in 1867. Francis Bolton translated it from German into English in 1871.

Psalms 1:1 and 150:6, the first and last verses of the book. He wrote: ‘It is not by accident that they stand where they do, the first and last verses of the whole collection, enclosing all, as it were, within a golden ring, and bending round to meet each other.’⁴ Evidently this 19th century Baptist also read the Psalms as a book, with the twin themes of blessedness and praise purposefully enclosing the entire collection.

With the rise of the rise of historical criticism in the 19th century, and form criticism in the 20th century, two centuries of Psalms scholarship largely moved away from this approach of reading the Psalms as a book. Prior to Gunkel (1862-1932), historical critics set about the task of ‘determining’ the historical settings of the various psalms, often with a focus on the Maccabean period. As Childs humorously adduced, ‘this move was basically unsuccessful. As if one could write the history of England on the basis of the Methodist hymn book!’⁵ The form-critical method offered a refreshing twist, as Gunkel—who did not believe it possible to uncover anything about the original composers of the psalms—asserted that the main task of Psalms study should be to categorize the individual psalms according to genre, and to identify the *Sitz im Leben* from the cultic life of Israel that gave rise to each psalm. Although Gunkel’s methodology had strengths—such as his development of genre study in the Psalter, and his reminder that much of Hebrew Psalmody did originate in a cult setting—he did not approach the book of Psalms as a well-ordered compilation. In fact, Gunkel bluntly wrote that,

No internal ordering principle for the individual psalms has been transmitted for the whole. To be sure, sometimes related psalms stand together in the collection of the psalter... More commonly, however, no internal relationship can be discovered between neighboring psalms... What Goethe says ... about the inscription goes for the individual psalm as well: It ‘has nothing behind it. It stands alone, and must tell you everything.’⁶

He has made his position clear!

⁴ Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (Accordance electronic ed. Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006), n.p.

⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 509.

⁶ Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), p. 2. Although Gunkel was unable to finish this work before he died, he entrusted it Begrich who completed it in 1933; Nogalski translated it into English in 1998.

With the emergence of the canonical approach to biblical interpretation in the latter half of the 20th century, there has been a recovery of reading the Psalter as a single text, and this has tacitly shared Augustine's recognition that the book of Psalms *must* have an intentional arrangement, even if it is difficult to determine. No one in recent times provided a greater catalyst in the quest to uncover the purposeful arrangement of the Psalter than Gerald H. Wilson. The 1985 publication of his dissertation on *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* served to re-awaken scholarly interest in the Psalms as a book, and to spur on this new movement of Psalms study.⁷ Wilson focused on the macrostructure of the Psalter as a whole, and many have followed in his wake who have built on his work, as well as applying his canonical method in the study of more microscopic clusters and key themes that bind the book of Psalms together. Zenger characterizes this approach as appreciating the study of the Psalms as individual texts for life-help in the various situations believers encounter, but also viewing the book of Psalms as 'a programmatic composition which is to be read, learned by heart, recited and contemplated as a coherent text.'⁸ And so canonical interpreters study *both* the individual compositions in the Psalter, *as well as* the arrangement of the work as a whole.

Although other interpretive methodologies are of great value for the study of the Psalter, in what follows I will employ the canonical method to analyze the arrangement of the book of Psalms as a whole, finally arguing that it has a broadly eschatological shape. If the final shape of the Hebrew Psalter was formed in the crucible of Messianic angst, at a time when Israel had been repeatedly disappointed in its wait for a king like David, and so began to look ahead for *the king* to come and fulfil the eschatological hopes of God's people, this ethos was infused into the arrangement of the book itself. I will build this argument in three parts. The brief but foundational Part I, the obvious is stated: that the Psalter was formed in process and over time. Part II sets out the mains lines of evidence which suggest an intentional shape for the book, where I notice with Wilson and others that the Psalter was not haphazardly put together, but was compiled with care and purpose. This all sets the stage for Part III, in which our general observations will be interpreted, and the conclusion reached that eschatological messianic angst best explains the final shape of the Hebrew Psalter. Finally, I offer some words of application to the Christian life. It is my hope that the reader is led to a greater understanding of the

⁷ One thinks of the Society of Biblical Literature Psalms Project, with the meetings and publications which have sprung from it.

⁸ Erich Zenger, 'New Approaches to the Study of the Psalms', *PIBA*, 17 (1994), 54.

Psalms, and a deeper worship of the one who ultimately shaped their final form.

I. TOWARD A FINAL FORM: THE HEBREW PSALTER IN CANONICAL PROCESS

As we begin our study it is important to state what should be obvious, that the book of Psalms was not originally written as a single composition. In fact, the Psalter makes this claim for itself, with the superscription of Psalm 90 suggesting Mosaic authorship, and the content of Psalm 137 clearly pointing to a setting from the Babylonian exile, 850 years after Moses and the exodus. Thus, as the rest of the Hebrew Bible was undergoing its composition, compiling, and editing in stages,⁹ so was the book of Psalms. In light of this, Waltke observes that while each psalm does have an original compositional setting, its later use was adapted for a new setting, and its final redaction into the Hebrew Psalter as it now stands also bears editorial fingerprints, before its use in the New Testament offers a fourth interpretive horizon.¹⁰ For Waltke, the intention of the developing text of the Psalter 'became deeper and clearer as the parameters of the canon were expanded. Just as redemption itself has a progressive history, so also older texts in the canon underwent a correlative progressive perception of meaning as they became part of a growing canonical literature.'¹¹ In short, God was the author of the book of Psalms through each stage of its development.¹² If times changed as the psalms continued to be gathered, the Psalter reflected these changes through its various stages and toward its final form; the individual psalms would have been

⁹ Waltke and O'Connor distinguish four distinct stages in the editing of the Hebrew Bible: 'from the time of composition to 400 B.C.E., from 400 B.C.E. to c. 100 C.E., from 100 C.E. to 1000, and from 1000 to the present' Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 15. According to these authors, the text was standardized during the third period.

¹⁰ See Bruce K. Waltke, 'A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms', in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. by John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹² Seybold uses the helpful language of 'growth rings' to describe this process. See Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (trans. R. Graeme Dunphy; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), p. 14. In fact, his whole discussion of the developing shape of the Psalter is worth reading. See *ibid.*, pp. 14-28.

reappropriated for a new context and the message of the new ‘whole’ was now greater than the sum of its parts.¹³

II. SHAPING THE FINAL FORM: EVIDENCE OF INTENTIONALITY IN THE EDITING OF THE HEBREW PSALTER

A popular analogy for the book of Psalms is that of a hymn book. Craigie adopts this analogy and then argues that although word linkages are clearly present between psalms in the Psalter, it is also possible that there is no overall structure to the book of Psalms.¹⁴ In other words, just as hymn books are not meant to be read consecutively, neither is the book of Psalms. However, if we can discover evidence of intentionality in the editing of the Hebrew Psalter, the hymn book analogy falls short, and it is legitimate to look for an editorial theme behind the Psalms as a book.¹⁵ As this section unfolds we will begin by looking at evidence from Israel’s neighbours, before we move to consider the superscriptions, postscripts, and doxologies in the Hebrew Psalter itself. We will then look for evidence of earlier and later collections within the Hebrew Psalter, before observing key themes which occur at the ‘seams’ between the books.

1. Evidence from Israel’s neighbours

At the outset we can summarize Wilson’s findings, that the Sumerian Temple Hymns (2334-2270 BCE) and the twenty-two tablets containing ‘catalogues of hymnic incipits’, which range in date from Ur III to the neo-Babylonian period (2112-639 BCE), both display evidence of intentionality in shaping their hymnic collections. Further, these hymns maintained their superscriptions, even when they were incorporated into later contexts in which those superscriptions were no longer relevant.¹⁶ Since Israel’s neighbours adapted older poems into intentionally shaped new contexts, the possibility is left open that this literary practice could have been adopted by Israel as well.

¹³ See Waltke, ‘A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms’, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ See Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 30.

¹⁵ Wilson notes that apart from seven Qumran Psalms manuscripts (of 39 found at Qumran), the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic versions of the Psalter follow the Masoretic Text’s structure. See Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS, 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 64-5; ‘The Shape of the Book of Psalms’, *Interpretation* 46.2 (1992), 129. However, a critic could reply that this is simply due to a common *Vorlage*.

¹⁶ For a full discussion of these two bodies of literature, see Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, pp. 13-61.

2. Evidence from superscriptions, postscripts, and doxologies

Moving back to the Hebrew Psalter, the superscriptions are an important item to consider.¹⁷ Wilson helpfully summarizes that these record author, genre, manner of performance, and instrumentation (p. 139). Whereas the Psalter's lone postscript of Psalm 72:20 offers a statement of organizational intent, the superscriptions refer only to the individual psalms they introduce, and by the time of the Psalter's editorial arrangement the superscriptions had become fixed parts of their compositions (pp. 139-45). Wilson notes that in books 1-3 of the Psalter (Pss 1-89), authorship is of primary importance, with David dominating book 1 (Pss 3-41, with Pss 1-2 remaining untitled). In books 2 and 3, David is still cited as an author, and other authors are noted as well (pp. 155-6). This changes entirely after the end of book 3: whereas the first 89 Psalms contain 83 attributions of authorship, the final 61 exhibit only 19! This does not mean authorship is unimportant in the final two books of the psalms, though, as Davidic psalms are often grouped together, and only Moses (Ps. 90) and Solomon (Ps. 72) are claimed as additional authors in this group (pp. 155-6). Finally, one notices that these authorship divisions occur at the 'seams' between the books. In other words, changes in author are seen at the transition point between books (pp. 157-8).

With regard to the genre classifications in the psalm headings, Wilson notes that they never occur together in the same superscription, that genre is not a primary editorial principle for the Psalter, and that outside of the 'Ascent Psalms', a given genre is never clustered completely together (pp. 158-62). Wilson observes further that, this is in stark contrast to the Babylonian catalogues of hymnic incipits, which are organized primarily around genre (p. 143). Further to this, the Psalter also contains four clear doxologies which serve to conclude the first four books, and then five entire psalms of doxology as the climax to book 5 (p. 183).¹⁸ These features are again clear signs that an editorial hand worked to shape at least the general contours of the Psalter.

3. Evidence of Earlier and Later Collections

Wilson continues by observing that earlier and later collections within the Psalter seem to be exposed with careful observation. Specifically, books 1-3 seem to be early and books 4-5 seem to have been compiled and

¹⁷ This section is drawn largely from *ibid.*, pp. 139-87. Page numbers are given in parentheses.

¹⁸ See Pss 41:14; 72:19; 89:53; 106:48; 146-150. Note that since the superscriptions are identified as verse 1 of the psalms in the Hebrew Psalter, these verse references may differ slightly from those found in English Bibles.

added later.¹⁹ For example, the presence of a Davidic postscript attached to a psalm that claims Solomonic authorship (cf. Ps. 72:1, 20), shows on the one hand that it was meant to end a block of material, namely, books 1 and 2. The fact that other Davidic psalms, even another prayer of David (cf. Pss 72:20; 86:1), occur after this postscript, point on the other hand in the direction of books 1 and 2 as an early collection to which the latter books were added.²⁰ Wilson notes further that collections such as the psalms of ascents, the psalms of the Sons of Korah, the 'YHWH reigns' psalms, and the hallelujah psalms, all point to the existence of smaller collections of psalms that were in turn gathered to form the larger collection.²¹ Therefore, the final form of the Hebrew Psalter is not a completely new arrangement by a single editor, but at least partly a compiling of earlier collections that were shaped by previous editors.²² In order to uncover the editorial intentionality of the final editors, then, a look at the so-called 'seams' between the books will be a key interpretive factor, as this is where editorial activity should be most evident.²³ Waltke agrees, but notes that the presence of the so-called 'Elohistic Psalter,' stretching across one of these seams, is also significant.²⁴ It is well-known that in Psalms 1-41 and Psalms 84-150, YHWH occurs 584 times and *Elohim* 94 times, while in Psalms 42-83, YHWH occurs 45 times and *Elohim*, 210.²⁵ No consensus has been reached to explain the pattern of this portion of the Psalms, but we do notice the presence of the phenomenon.²⁶ With regard to earlier

¹⁹ See 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 (JSOTSS, 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 42.

²⁰ See Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms, Volume I* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. 21. See also Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 18. Seybold notes that the 'duplication of material' in the second collection of Davidic psalms (Pss 51-72) is evidence that it grew up separately, e.g. 'Ps 14=53; 40:13-17=70'. Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, p. 19.

²¹ See Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 5.

²² See *ibid.*

²³ See *ibid.*; Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), pp. 883-4.

²⁴ See *ibid.*

²⁵ See *ibid.*

²⁶ Mitchell's hypothesis in this regard is that, 'Israel in the initial period up until the eschatological conflict are estranged from God and under his judgment and wrath. Similarly, the predominance of *Yhwh* after the Elohistic Psalter might suggest that he is favourable to them in the period after the death of the king' Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, pp. 299-300. However, since the

collections of psalms, Waltke explains further that the ‘notice in 2 Chronicles 29:30 suggests that two collections, “the words of David” (cf. Pss 3-41 except 33) and “the words of Asaph” (Pss 50, 73-83), existed in Hezekiah’s time. Psalms by the sons of Korah (Pss 42-49, 84-88 but not 86) probably constituted another collection.’²⁷ Again, these are clear signs of editorial arrangement, even before the Psalter took its final shape.

4. Evidence between the Books: Kingship and Wisdom at the Seams

When the so-called ‘seams’ of the Psalter, the points at which the books meet, are analyzed, patterns emerge which also indicate editorial intentionality. Specifically, Wilson has noted that the theme of kingship occurs at the beginning of the Psalms proper, and the end of books 2 and 3 (Pss 2, 72, and 89), with the absence of a royal psalm in Psalm 41 best explained by book 1’s early combination with book 2.²⁸ Childs agrees and adds that since no ancient groupings of royal psalms have been preserved, but rather, they are scattered throughout the Psalter, this hints that they have been re-appropriated, with a new understanding for a new situation.²⁹ But it is also significant to note that sapiential psalms occur at the seams of books 4 and 5, and at other key junctures in the Psalter, as Psalms 1, 73, 90, 107, and 144-146 are all wisdom-tinged psalms.³⁰ Kingship and wisdom, then, are scattered throughout the book of Psalms, and also found at prominent places within it.

III. THE MESSAGE OF THE FINAL FORM: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SHAPE OF THE HEBREW PSALTER

At this point we are able take our study to the next step: if the Hebrew Psalter *does* bear evidence of editorial intentionality, is there an agenda behind its final shape? Most concede a general shape to the Psalter, with the dual themes of the Torah of *YHWH* and the Anointed One of *YHWH*

Elohistic redaction ceases *prior* to the darkest portions of book 3 of the Psalter, I remain intrigued but not totally convinced by Mitchell’s suggestions.

²⁷ Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 883.

²⁸ See Gerald H. Wilson, ‘The Structure of the Psalter’, in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. by David Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), pp. 233-4; Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 884; Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, p. 208.

²⁹ See Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, pp. 515-16.

³⁰ See Wilson, ‘The Structure of the Psalter’, p. 234.

in Psalms 1-2 forming a 'gateway' into the work as a whole.³¹ Further, the doxological climax of Psalms 146-150 is often seen as the Psalter's triumphant conclusion, with the five-book structure in between as a possible reflection of the shape of the Torah.³² But beyond the generally accepted broad structure of the Psalms, should we be saying anything more specific?³³ In what follows I will critically interact with various answers set forth within this field of study, and argue that an eschatological agenda best explains the final shape of the book of Psalms.

³¹ An example of 'gateway' language to describe Psalms 1 and 2 can be found, for example, in J. Glen Taylor, 'Psalms 1 and 2: A Gateway into the Psalter and Messianic Images for the Restoration of David's Dynasty', in *Interpreting the Psalms for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. by Herbert W. Bateman and D. Brent Sandy (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2010), pp. 47-62. For other arguments in favour of Psalms 1-2 as an introduction to the work as a whole, see also Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 884; P. D. Miller, 'The Beginning of the Psalter', in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. by J. Clinton McCann (JSOTSS, 159; Sheffield Academic, 1993), p. 88. Alternatively, Wilson views Psalm 1 as the lone introduction to the Psalter, with Psalm 2 as the first in Book 2. See Wilson, 'The Shape of the Book of Psalms', p. 133.

³² In fact, Seybold notes that the length of the Hebrew Psalter even roughly equals that of Genesis. See Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, pp. 16-17. This is not to argue for one-to-one correspondence between the Psalm books and their corresponding book in the Torah, but simply to note the existence of a five-book structure.

³³ In addition to the more detailed work I will outline in what follows, Brueggemann argues more broadly that the Psalter is intentionally 'bounded by obedience and praise', with a Psalm that summons Israel to Torah-obedience at its head, and a self-forgetful, Godward note of praise to conclude it. He also sees Psalm 73 as a key 'canonical marker' at the mid-way point between the Psalms, with its emphasis on the believer's struggle and new-found hope in eternal realities, as well as the reiteration of the importance of Torah piety from Psalm 1. See Walter Brueggemann, 'Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon', *JSOT* 50 (1991), 63-92; 'Psalm 73 as a Canonical Marker', *JSOT* 72 (1996), 45-56. Another author of note is Balentine, who sees Pss 3-89 as displaying a crisis of the Torah-piety that was set forth in Ps. 1, and book 5 picking up on that theme again, with Psalm 119 as central, with the Davidic monarchy imaging God's reign from shore to shore (Pss 108-110; 138-144), and with praise to God throughout the cosmos sounding forever (Ps 145-150). See S.E. Balentine, 'The Politics of Religion in the Persian Period', in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason*, ed. by J. Barton and D.J. Reimer (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), pp. 134-5.

1. In Dialogue with Wilson: Is the Psalter Sapiential or Eschatological?

As the most significant recent catalyst for the study of the Psalms as a book, Wilson deserves the first word in our interaction with the dominant views from the field. For Wilson, Psalm 1 stands alone as a sapiential introduction to the Psalter, and is followed by book 1 proper. This first book begins with an echo of the Davidic covenant (Ps. 2:7-9; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14), and is followed by, 'a very Davidic group of psalms in which the proclamation of *YHWH*'s special covenant with his king in Psalm 2 is matched by David's assurance of God's continued preservation in the presence of *YHWH*'.³⁴ The Solomonic Psalm 72 concludes the predominantly Davidic book 2 with a celebration of the king, and offers petitions for *YHWH* to bless him on the basis of the covenant. However, for Wilson the addition of book 3 adds a new, exilic perspective, as the Davidic covenant is viewed as being in the dim past and the covenant now broken, failed. After the bleak Psalm 88, the hope of the concluding Psalm 89 is that *YHWH* will remember his covenant and uphold the descendants of David. For Wilson book 4 of the Psalter answers the problem of the apparent failure of the Davidic covenant, as it begins with a psalm of Moses, showing that the covenant stretches back before the monarchy, and in fact to the first 'wandering' of God's people, which itself would end with the fulfilment of *YHWH*'s promises. Wilson refers to book 4 as the editorial heart of the Psalter, with its '*YHWH* reigns psalms' communicating the message that *YHWH* reigns even if David does not. Finally, book 5 is said to stand as an answer to the pleas of the exiles in Psalm 106, with a message of trusting in *YHWH* alone, and with David as a model of petition and praise. This attitude of trust in *YHWH* will result in obedience to the Torah. The Psalter is then climaxed with a doxological refrain that acts as its conclusion (Pss 146-50). For Wilson, then, books 1-3 are primarily concerned with the Davidic King, and books 4-5 have a much greater emphasis on wisdom and personal approach to *YHWH*, as even the Davidic Psalms in these later books set him forth as an example for the individual to follow. Although Wilson recognizes that royal psalms are found at the seams of the early books of the Psalter, and his later work left more room for an eschatological rereading of them, he viewed the wisdom psalms at the beginning of the Psalter and at the seams of the later books as evidence of a primarily sapiential agenda for those who gave the Psalter its final shape.³⁵

³⁴ Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, p. 210. Much of what follows summarizes *ibid.*, pp. 209-28.

³⁵ See Wilson, 'The Structure of the Psalter', pp. 233-4; David M. Howard Jr., 'The Psalms and Current Study', in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and*

Wilson's groundbreaking work on the narrative structure of the Psalter certainly has a lot to commend to it; I largely agree with him and will not restate my own competing narrative reading. Instead, in what follows I will critically interact with some points in Wilson's treatment that warrant reconsideration. Most significantly, while Wilson's broad-strokes explanation of the Psalter has great value, I disagree with his language of a failed Davidic covenant, which prompted a sapiential 'final edit' to the book of Psalms. Whereas Wilson thought of the Davidic covenant as failed in book 3 and therefore fading into the background in books 4 and 5, the structure of the Psalter speaks to a *temporary* cessation of the house of David in the vein of Deuteronomy 30:1-10, along with that same passage's hope of a future restoration. In other words, the shape of the Hebrew Psalter is forward-looking, and not defeatist. The editors experienced an angst for *YHWH* to work, but they were not worried about whether he would be faithful, and faithful through the very chanel he had promised to use, namely, the Davidic king. In other words, the presence of royal psalms throughout the Psalter and the Davidic clusters in the latter books, have not been adequately explained by Wilson. I will speak to this further in what follows, but for now we can note with Howard that since the royal, Davidic Psalm 144 is linked to Psalm 145 which emphasizes *YHWH's* kingship, interpreters must take this as a sign that the earthly expression of *YHWH's* reign was clearly meant to be the Davidic king. Therefore, both earthly *and* heavenly expressions of *YHWH's* kingdom stand together as messages of hope at the end *and* the beginning (Ps. 2) of the book of Psalms.³⁶ To be fair, Wilson himself argues that since the lament psalms are clustered more densely at the beginning of the Psalter, and those of praise and thanksgiving toward the end, this indicates that we live in a world of suffering and pain, but suffering and pain are not God's final word.³⁷ But instead of moving to a focus on wisdom for the individual, the Psalter's final editors leaned heavily on the promises of *YHWH*, including the Davidic covenant, and shaped the collection of psalms to anticipate a faithful outcome!

Next, in contrast to Wilson's sapiential interpretation of book 5, the eschatological note must be seen as primary, even if the wisdom-theme is also present and important. Psalm 107 begins this final book with thanksgiving. In answer to the plea at the end of Psalm 106, *YHWH's* mercy does last forever, as this psalm celebrates a dispersed people's return from

Approaches, ed. by David G. Firth and Philip Johnston (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), pp. 25-7.

³⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

³⁷ See Wilson, 'The Structure of the Psalter', p. 246.

exile.³⁸ Significant still, this grouping contains two clusters of Davidic Psalms (108-10; 138-45), a likely allusion to an ideal David to come, rather than a primarily sapiential example for the individual to follow.³⁹ Dempster adds that Psalms 135-7 end with the lament of the exiles who wish for the destruction of their enemies.⁴⁰ However, exile is not the final word of the Psalter, because the Davidic Psalms 138-44 provide an answer to this lament, namely, David.⁴¹ Finally, the Psalter ends on a note of praise, as in the words of Bruggemann, Psalm 150 is 'a determined, enthusiastic, uninterrupted, relentless, unrelieved summons which will not be content until all creatures, all of life, are 'ready and willing' to participate in an unending song of praise that is sung without reserve or qualification.'⁴² The eschatological narrative reading of the psalter certainly makes sense in light of the data.

2. In Dialogue with Whybray: Is the Psalter Shapeless or Eschatological?

We have already noted that many contemporary scholars do not believe the book of Psalms has a discernible shape, but the only book-length critique of the canonical approach to the Hebrew Psalter has come from Whybray.⁴³ His ultimate conclusion that 'any editorial activity in the Psalter was sporadic', has certainly provided a helpful challenge to the field. However, his work has failed at several points. Most foundationally, and with Grant, I suggest that Whybray has failed to explain adequately the clear introduction (Pss 1-2), conclusion (Pss 146-50), and five book structure of the Psalms.⁴⁴ In addition to Grant's analysis, I add that Whybray has also failed to explain adequately the clearly exilic nature of book 3, along with the presence of royal psalms in prominent places and scattered

³⁸ See Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 200.

³⁹ In saying this, I do not deny that there is an element of double duty that these psalms play, with David as *both* an example to follow, *and* a signpost that points to the one who will come in his lineage. But whereas Wilson would have seen the former as primary, I see the latter as most significant in the minds of the second temple reader and editor. See Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, pp. 220-1.

⁴⁰ See Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, pp. 201-2.

⁴¹ See *ibid.*

⁴² Bruggemann, 'Bounded by Obedience and Praise', p. 67.

⁴³ See R. N. Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSS, 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ See Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, p. 18.

throughout, especially in light of the fact that the book of Psalms received its final redaction when Israel had no king.⁴⁵ If there is some truth to Whybray's challenge to canonical interpreters, a more balanced approach has come from a canonical interpreter, as Mays reminds us that it may not be possible to catalogue *every* psalm in terms of an intentional scheme, but rather, we must look for overarching organizing patterns.⁴⁶ This point is especially important in light of our observation that the final form of the Hebrew Psalter was at least partly made up of pre-existing collections.

3. In Dialogue with Mitchell: Is the Eschatological Shape of the Psalter Seen in the Minute Details or Mostly in the Broad Strokes?

Many other than myself have seen an eschatological, rather than a sapiential agenda in the editing of the Hebrew Psalter—Howard, Childs, and Brennan to name a few—but no one has developed the idea more thoroughly than Mitchell.⁴⁷ As he charts his course, he notes that the Psalter was shaped within an eschatologically conscious milieu when the house of David was in decline, and therefore a time of growing eschatological hope; that the figures to whom the psalms are attributed were regarded as future-predictive prophets in Biblical times; that certain psalms (e.g. 2; 72; 110) seem to be of an intrinsically 'ultimate' character in that they describe people or events in such glowing terms that they far exceed the reality of any historical king or battle; that the second-temple period's inclusion of royal psalms in the Psalter is evidence that the editor *intended* them to refer to a future messiah-king; and that the messianic psalms were placed in prominent positions in the Psalter as a deliberate means of having them 'infect' the interpretation of the whole.⁴⁸ He notes further that his hypothesis is in line with the eschatological interpretation of the Psalms found in Qumranic, New Testament, rabbinic, and patristic literature.⁴⁹ Although these are extremely insightful contributions to the field, I am not persuaded by the next step of his argument, that a specific eschatological programme from Zechariah 9-14 set the agenda for the Psalms of Asaph, the Psalms of Ascent, the Royal Psalms, and book 4 of

⁴⁵ To be fair, Whybray does see *some* eschatological elements in the royal psalms, but not in all of them, and he certainly speaks against any systematic redaction. See Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, pp. 98-9.

⁴⁶ See James Luther Mays, 'The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation', in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. by J. Clinton McCann (JSOTSS, 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 16.

⁴⁷ See Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, p. 88; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, p. 518.

⁴⁸ See Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, pp. 82-8.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 298.

the Psalter. His mapping out of the specific stages of the eschaton according to the prophetic book, along with their supposed parallels in the shape of the Psalter, seem too forced to be persuasive. However, although he has not heeded the cautions of Whybray and Mays, and although his overall argument has not won widespread support, his groundwork on the eschatological shape of the Psalms is compelling and important. I will appreciatively interact with some of his ideas as I set forth two final clues in favour of an eschatological agenda behind the final shape of the book of Psalms: the milieu of its editors, and the presence of royal psalms.

4. 'Despite Our Distress, YHWH Will Intervene': The Eschatological Milieu of the Psalter's Final Editors

We have already noted with Mitchell that the period in which the Psalter received its final shape was characterized by eschatological hope. He specifies that at the end of the Babylonian exile, when Israel and the house of David were in decline, Biblical literature of this period tends to look for a sudden, dramatic divine intervention in history that will restore Israel's exalted position (cf. Ezek., Zech.; see also the deuterocanonical 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-82).⁵⁰ With Mitchell we can point out that it seems extremely logical that the final redactors of the Psalms would have shared this same concern.⁵¹ In fact, this eschatological concern is also (arguably) reflected in the translation of the Psalter into Greek,⁵² with the LXX's multiplication of Psalms attributed to David,⁵³ its consistent translation of *lamnaššēah* ('for the choir director') as *eis to telos* ('for the end'),⁵⁴ and its addition of references to various Old Testament prophets.⁵⁵ Further still, Wacholder

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*

⁵² With Seybold I suggest that this translation took place some time in the 2nd or 3rd centuries BCE. See Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, p. 14.

⁵³ For a helpful discussion of this phenomenon, see Albert Pietersma, 'David in the Greek Psalms', *VT* 30.2 (1980), 213-26. He notes that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the individual psalms 'became Davidic' before or after they were translated into Greek. See *ibid.*, 224.

⁵⁴ This phenomenon occurs in all 55 superscriptions in which the word is found, from Pss 4 to 139. For example, see Taylor, 'Psalms 1 and 2', 58. Examples of converse opinions to mine on philological grounds are as follows: P.R. Ackroyd, 'נצח — εις τέλος', *ExpT* 80 (1969), 126; D. Winton Thomas, 'The Use of נצח As a Superlative in Hebrew', *JSS* 1.2 (1956), 106-9. In response, I would point out that although *eis to telos* may have been a valid translation choice for *lamnaššēah*, does it not say something that this nuance was chosen?

⁵⁵ See references to Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Ps. 64 LXX [= Ps. 65 MT]) along with Haggai and Zechariah (Pss 145-148 LXX [=Ps. 146-ff MT]), which Wilson

believes that the reference to David in 11QPsalms^a from Qumran is, 'an allusion to the eschatological descendant of Jesse expected at the End of Days',⁵⁶ which makes sense in light of the eschatological thought of the Qumran community. Since the LXX was most likely translated after the Hebrew Psalter received its final shape,⁵⁷ and since 11QPsalms^a was likely assembled a century or two later, the eschatological traces in these works do tell us something of the cultural milieu around the time the Psalter received its final shape.

5. Celebrating which King?

The Eschatological, Messianic Reappropriation of the Royal and Davidic Psalms

Further still, in light of the absence of the monarchy at the time when the Hebrew Psalter received its final edit, one might question why Psalms that celebrate the king are present at all. One helpful answer has come from Grant, who views the placement of kingship psalms alongside of torah psalms as deliberate by the editors of the Hebrew Bible; since they intentionally reflected the image of a the Torah-observing king of Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the final editor's presentation of kingship was intentionally speaking to the people's eschatological image of a restored Davidic king.⁵⁸ Contrary to the very imperfect presentation of the king in the Deuteronomistic history, then, the psalmists paint a picture of an ideal

believes 'creates a prophetic dimension to the LXX Psalter that encourages even more an eschatological and messianic reading of David and the royal psalms.' Wilson, 'The Structure of the Psalter', p. 244. Admittedly, the question of eschatology in the LXX Psalter is a live one. Although it does not interact with the points I outline here, an argument in favour of an eschatological reading of the Hebrew Psalter but against a further eschatological/messianic agenda embedded into the Old Greek Psalter, see Claude E. Cox, 'Schaper's Eschatology Meets Kraus's Theology of the Psalms', in *The Old Greek Psalter*, ed. by Robert J.V. Hiebert, Peter J. Gentry, and Claude E. Cox (LHB/OTS, 332; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 289-311.

⁵⁶ Ben Zion Wacholder, 'David's Eschatological Psalter 11QPsalms^a', *HUCA* 59 (1988), 23. For further discussion of the relationship between Qumran and the MT Psalter, see Wilson, 'The Structure of the Psalter', p. 244.

⁵⁷ This is in line with Mitchell's view, that the Masoretic Psalter received its final shape prior to the translation of the LXX, which exhibits too much dependence on the Masoretic Psalter to consider the latter anything but its *Vorlage*. See Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, pp. 16-17. For contrary assertions that the Masoretic Psalter received its final shape in the first century CE, see Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, p. 6; Gerald H. Wilson, 'A First Century C.E. Date for the Closing of the Book of Psalms?', *JBQ* 28 (2000), 102-110.

⁵⁸ See Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, pp. 2-3.

Deuteronomic king to come. Waltke agrees, and expands on the way the royal psalms were recast for the new context in which they were edited:

Israel draped the magnificent royal psalms as robes on each successive king, but generation after generation the shoulders of the reigning monarch proved too narrow and the robe slipped off to be draped on his successor. Finally, in the exile, Israel was left without a king and with a wardrobe of royal robes in their hymnody. On the basis of I AM's unconditional covenants to Abraham and David, the faithful know that Israel's history ends in triumph, not in tragedy. The prophets... envisioned a coming king who would fulfill the promise of these covenants... It was in that context, when Israel had no king, that the Psalter was edited with reference to the king. Accordingly, the editors of the Psalter must have resignified the Psalms from the historical king and draped them on the shoulders of the Messiah... In short, in light of the exile and the loss of kingship, the editors colored the entire Psalter with a messianic hue.⁵⁹

This is further bolstered when we remember that the royal psalms were not only scattered throughout the Psalter, but were also placed in prominent places (e.g. Pss 2; 72). In light of this Dempster notes that books 1 and 2 end on a note of hope, as Psalm 72 speaks of the day when the Davidic 'son' will rule the earth, bring an end to injustice, renew nature, reign from sea to sea, whose enemies will lick the dust, kings will worship him (cf. Isa. 60:1-22), and all nations will be blessed in him (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).⁶⁰

Finally, while I affirm with Grant that the royal psalms reflect the Deuteronomic ideal king, I add that the Davidic psalms reflect the David who is presented in the Deuteronomistic history: as a lamenter on the run from *YHWH's* enemies, as a repenter after the Bathsheba episode, as a flawed but forgiven and faithful king, but most of all, as the recipient of the covenant of 2 Samuel 7 with its promise that his seed will endure on the throne forever. And so Waltke's argument about the royal psalms applies to the 73 Davidic psalms as well, for they also colour the entire Psalter in a Messianic hue, serving as a constant reminder (from Pss 3-145!) of the promise that a king like David would come.

⁵⁹ Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 890. See also Richard P. Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ From All the Psalms* (Rearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2006), p. 123; Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, p. 87; Gerald H. Wilson, 'King, Messiah, and The Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter', in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. by Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (SVT, 99; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2005), pp 400-1; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture*, pp. 516-7.

⁶⁰ See Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, p. 196.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have seen that the Hebrew Psalter was put together in process and over time, and that it bears evidence of intentionality in its shaping. I have argued that an eschatological messianic angst best explains what lies behind that final shape, especially in light of the milieu in which the Psalter received its final edit, and the presence and prominence of royal and Davidic psalms within it. I now close with a few practical reflections in light of our findings.

First, I hope that this study has equipped Christians to use the Psalter in personal and corporate worship, not as a haphazardly arranged hymn book, but as a text for meditation that is a well-structured whole. This may mean paying attention to the narrative context of a given psalm, as the dark Psalm 88 is followed by the more hopeful lament of Psalm 89, which after its superscription proclaims, 'I will sing of the *hesed* of YHWH forever,' and as both of these psalms are found in the exilic book 3. That the phrase 'How long, O YHWH' occurs near the end of Psalm 89, also leads the reader into book 4 and the declaration from the lips of Moses that *Elohim Adonai* has been a dwelling place for his people in generation after generation, and that a thousand years (of exile?) is like a day in the eyes of their God.

Next, meditation, praying, and singing of the early laments in the Psalter may be done with the knowledge that praise will be the final word for the Christian, as it is in the book of Psalms. However, the trajectory toward this goal is not a consistently 'onward and upward' one, but rather, reflects the ups and downs of the real life of God's people as they live in a fallen world. As Calvin likened the Psalter to 'an anatomy of all the parts of the soul,'⁶¹ and as the Apostle Paul reminded Christians to remember thanksgiving along with supplication in the midst of worry-inducing events (cf. Phil. 4:6), the book of Psalms is a great aid to guide believers in this full-orbed prayer life, but only as they read it like a book and not a pick-and-choose hymnal!⁶² If the general movement in the Psalter is from lament to praise, the meandering course that leads to this goal also leads the reader to pray diverse prayers.

Most importantly, I hope this study has helped the reader to better understand the New Testament's use of the book of Psalms with reference

⁶¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)* (trans. John King; Accordance electronic ed. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), n.p.

⁶² To be fair, although Whybray argues against a purposeful redaction of the Psalter, he also argues in favour of private consecutive reading of the Psalms for pragmatic purposes, but not because they were necessarily *meant* to be read this way. See Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, p. 124.

to Jesus. It is well known that the Psalter is second only to Isaiah as the most quoted Old Testament book by the authors of the New Testament,⁶³ and sometimes these connections seem baffling to Christians. It is possible that attention to the context of a passage in the Psalter may shed light on its use in the New Testament. A reminder of the eschatological milieu in which the Psalter received its final edit is also a helpful point to remember—leading up to and in the first century, God's people were *looking* for a dramatic turn of events from the hand of their faithful God. Finally, a reading of the Davidic and royal psalms in light of the covenant of 2 Samuel 7, and in light of the failures and subsequent demise of David's successors, further explains the messianic reappropriation of these psalms in the New Testament, as Jesus was being identified as the hoped-for Davidic king. To cite a broad example, Waltke points out that although the royal dimension of the lament psalms had been lost in the intertestamental period, Jesus corrects this and uses them to affirm the Old Testament teaching of a suffering Messiah.⁶⁴ We could add that the structure of the Psalter itself would have hinted at this, for as there is movement in the psalms from lament to praise, and as Psalms 146-50 conclude on a note of celebrative worship, so would the life of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He was the ultimate lamenter, the one who deserved so much more, but who *chose* to take on a crucifixion-lament that would end in resurrection-exultation. Indeed, he did this in order to purchase a people out of lament and into praise. From a New Testament perspective, the book of David has become the book of David's greater son, and finally a book for all those who trust in this Messiah for salvation. Praise YHWH!

⁶³ Waltke notes that, 'Of the 283 direct quotes from the Old Testament in the New Testament, 116 (41 percent) are from the Psalter.' Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 892.

⁶⁴ See Waltke, 'A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms', pp. 15-16.