

Marquette University
e-Publications@Marquette

Dissertations (2009 -)

Dissertations, Theses, and Professional Projects

Wisdom Editing in the Book of Psalms: Vocabulary, Themes, and Structures

Steven Dunn
Marquette University

Recommended Citation

Dunn, Steven, "Wisdom Editing in the Book of Psalms: Vocabulary, Themes, and Structures" (2009). *Dissertations (2009 -)*. Paper 13.
http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/13

Wisdom Editing in the Book of Psalms: Vocabulary, Themes, and Structures

By

Steven Dunn, B.A., M.Div.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette
University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

December 2009

ABSTRACT

Wisdom Editing in the Book of Psalms: Vocabulary, Themes, and Structures

Steven Dunn, B.A., M.Div.

Marquette University, 2009

This study examines the pervasive influence of post-exilic wisdom editors and writers in the shaping of the Psalter by analyzing the use of wisdom elements—vocabulary, themes, rhetorical devices, and parallels with other Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions. I begin with an analysis and critique of the most prominent authors on the subject of wisdom in the Psalter, and expand upon previous research as I propose that evidence of wisdom influence is found in psalm titles, the structure of the Psalter, and among the various genres of psalms. I find further evidence of wisdom influence in creation theology, as seen in Psalms 19, 33, 104, and 148, for which parallels are found in other A.N.E. wisdom texts. In essence, in its final form, the entire Psalter reveals the work of scribes and teachers associated with post-exilic wisdom traditions or schools associated with the temple. This expansive influence of wisdom sources results in part as a response to the failure of the Monarchy and subsequent reshaping of Israel's theology and self-understanding. In this context of foreign domination and failure of the Monarchy, the primacy of Torah and the kingship of YHWH are reasserted and emphasized. Wisdom circles preserve and disseminate Torah as a guide for successful living in accord with God (Pss 1; 19A; 119); wisdom teaching pervades all aspects of life, as seen in the presence of wisdom elements in psalms of lament, thanksgiving, and praise. Creation is a source of revelation and wisdom. Among the most significant uses of wisdom teaching is the Psalter's response to the suffering of the righteous, as seen especially in Psalms 37, 49, and 73. I conclude by proposing that "wisdom traditions" encompass a variety of viewpoints and emphases, which reveals that these proposed wisdom editors and writers reflect diverse schools of thought. This diverse group of wisdom editors and writers finalized the shape and understanding of the Psalter in the post-exilic period.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	1
	Survey of Contemporary Scholars.....	2
	Methodology.....	43
	Historical-Critical Concerns.....	47
	Conclusion:A.N.E. Languages and Israelite Scribes.....	47
II.	AN EXAMINATION OF THE TERM <i>Mas'kil</i> IN THE CANONICAL PSALTER AND THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AS EVIDENCE FOR WISDOM EDITING OF THE PSALTER.....	50
	Relation to Other Psalm Titles.....	52
	Meaning of the Term.....	53
	Recent Interpretations.....	54
	Etymology.....	56
	Maškil at Qumran.....	57
	Analysis of Maškil in the Canonical Psalter.....	66
	Psalm 14.....	66
	Psalm 32.....	70
	Notes on the Septuagint and מַשְׁכִּיל.....	74
	Psalm 41.....	75
	Psalm 42.....	76
	Psalm 44.....	76
	Psalm 45.....	77
	Psalm 47.....	78
	Psalm 52.....	79

Psalm 53.....	81
Psalm 54.....	83
Psalm 55.....	84
Psalm 74.....	85
Psalm 78.....	86
Psalm 88.....	89
Psalm 89.....	91
Psalm 142.....	93
Conclusion.....	95
III. PSALMS 1 (2), 19, 111–112, 119, AND 145: TORAH, WISDOM, AND ACROSTIC BOUNDARIES OF AN EARLY FORM OF THE PSALTER.....	96
Introduction/overview.....	96
Psalm 1 (and Psalm 2): A Wisdom Introduction to the Psalter.....	100
Psalm 19: Wisdom in Torah and Creation.....	110
Psalms 111—112: Acrostics in Praise of the Lord and Wisdom.....	115
Psalm 119: An All-Inclusive Celebration of Torah in Life.....	120
Psalm 145: An Acrostic Hymn Extolling God’s יְהוָה for All Creation ..	141
Conclusion.....	147
IV. WISDOM IN BOOK ONE.....	148
Introduction.....	148
Psalm 25: A Prayer for God’s Covenant Love and Instruction.....	149
Wisdom Elements in Psalm 26.....	159
Psalm 33 and the Revelation of God’s Wisdom in Creation.....	161
Psalm 34 and the Relationship of Thanksgiving and Wisdom.....	171
Psalm 36: God’s Covenant Love Framed by Wisdom Teaching.....	177

	Psalm 37: An Acrostic Poem of Traditional Retribution Theology...	184
	Psalm 39: A Wisdom-Influenced Reflection on the Transitory Nature of Life.....	192
	Wisdom Elements in Psalm 40.....	197
	Conclusion.....	199
V.	WISDOM IN BOOK TWO.....	201
	Introduction.....	201
	Psalm 49: Wealth, Arrogance, and the Ultimate Meaning in Life...202	
	Some Wisdom Elements in Psalms 50 and 51.....	215
	Wisdom Elements in Psalm 62.....	219
	A Wisdom Interpolation in Psalm 64.....	222
	Conclusion.....	214
VI.	WISDOM IN BOOK THREE.....	225
	Introduction.....	225
	The Relationship between Royal Psalms, Lament and Wisdom: The Context for Psalm 73.....	226
	Psalm 73 As the Wisdom Center Point of the Psalter.....	229
	Analysis of Psalm 73: From Orientation, to Disorientation, to New Orientation.....	231
	Conclusion: Psalm 73 as a Microcosm of the Psalter.....	237
VII.	WISDOM IN BOOK FOUR.....	239
	Psalm 90: A Wisdom Reflection on the Finitude of Life and God's Eternity.....	239
	Psalm 92: A Song for the Sabbath with Wisdom Reflections.....	245
	Psalm 94: A Wisdom-Oriented Instruction for Confidence in Divine Judgment.....	253
	Psalm 101: A Guide for Wise Living.....	260

PART TWO: PSALMS 104—106.....	265
Wisdom and Creation in Psalm 104.....	265
Wisdom Elements in Psalm 105.....	280
Wisdom Elements in Psalm 106.....	281
Conclusion.....	285
VIII. WISDOM IN BOOK FIVE.....	287
Psalm 107:33–40.....	287
Psalm 127: Happy (אַשׁוּרָא) is the one Blessed by God.....	290
Psalm 128: the Blessings of the One Who Fears the LORD.....	293
Psalm 133: the Blessings of Harmonious Living.....	298
Royalty and Wisdom in Psalm 144.....	302
Praise and Wisdom in Psalm 146.....	306
Wisdom Elements in Psalm 147: Creation and Commandments...	310
Divine Wisdom Revealed in Creation: Psalm 148.....	314
Conclusion.....	322
IX. CONCLUSION: WISDOM IN THE CANONICAL PSALTER AND ITS IMPLICATIONS.....	324
X. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	334

Chapter One

A Review and Critique of Key Scholars on the Topic of Wisdom Psalms, and an Outline of the Methodology Used in this Study

Introduction: An examination of the Psalter reveals the presence of elements of Israelite wisdom literature that reflect the importance of sages or “wisdom editors”—learned scribes connected with wisdom schools associated with the royal court and temple. I propose that these wisdom editors are responsible for the post-exilic editing and finalization of the canonical Psalter. By examining vocabulary, thematic elements, structural and rhetorical elements, and theological emphases, I shall show that the canonical Psalter in its final form is the product of a variety of scribes connected with post-exilic wisdom circles. These scribes, however, present a diversity of wisdom emphases. Wisdom elements in the Psalms include the traditional retribution theology found in Proverbs (e.g., Ps 1), the issue of *theodicy*—why a just God allows the innocent to suffer—as addressed in Job (e.g., Pss 49; 73), and reflections on the ephemeral nature of human existence as in Ecclesiastes (e.g., Psalm 39; 90); wisdom elements also occur in contexts of lament, the use of acrostic structures, numerical sayings, and wisdom-oriented vocabulary. In addition, I view creation theology as an important and often overlooked aspect of Israelite wisdom literature—consider Proverbs 8; Job 38–41; and parallels in Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions—that plays an important role in the Psalter (e.g., Psalms 19A; 33; 104; 148). In addition to specific “wisdom psalms,” various genres of psalms exhibit wisdom elements and interpolations that reveal the editorial work of these post-exilic sages.

I begin by analyzing the work of key writers on the topic of wisdom psalms, from the earlier form-critical and cultic emphases of Gunkel and Mowinckel to the more recent thematic, literary, canonical and theological emphasis in the works of scholars like Murphy, Brueggemann, Purdue, Wilson, Kuntz and others. This survey and analysis is not meant to be exhaustive of every possible writer on the topic but focuses instead on the most influential, relevant, and important. The following scholars have been both influential in my understanding of the category “wisdom psalms”

and have also produced the most extensive and relevant work on the topic. My summary of their work naturally leads me to outline what emphases I look for in examining the category of wisdom psalms, wisdom elements within the Psalter, and the pertinent terminology in the Hebrew Psalter. In addition to examining the work of other key scholars, I will offer my own interpretation and critique of their work, and conclude with an explanation of my methodology.

Hermann Gunkel: views wisdom psalms as arising from a later period which emphasized perception and reflection over the earlier lament and solemn poetry. As Israelite wisdom was associated with sages who proclaimed wisdom teaching at the city gates, in wisdom schools, the home and marketplace, the original setting of the wisdom psalms was located outside that of most psalms. Eventually, these poems entered the Psalter as unique individual compositions (e.g., Pss 37, 49), or entered through the various genres which eventually were dominated by the wisdom theme.¹ By placing the development of wisdom psalms at a late period in the formation of the Psalter—he admits the issue of dating is of secondary importance to him²—argues well, in my view, for the concept of wisdom editors as highly influential in the final editing and formation of the canonical Psalter.

For Gunkel, in the final stage of the development of psalmody, various collections were merged to form the Psalter after which (or I would argue, “during which”) the songs again were focused on public worship (cult).³ Unlike Mowinckel, who tends to view wisdom psalms as non-cultic, Gunkel believes, correctly in my view, that these wisdom-oriented psalms were eventually used in the cult. He includes Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, and 133 in this category.

Gunkel’s views can be affirmed by examining the structure of the Psalter. For example, Wisdom Psalm 1, with its emphasis on the prosperity of the righteous who live by Torah, over the

¹ Gunkel uses the phrase “old men in the gate or in the market” to describe the sages, which in my view is an inadequate understanding of their prominence or of wisdom schools and even wisdom traditions within the home. Gunkel uses the phrase, “disintegrated them” to describe the effect of wisdom elements entering a genre and dominating it. *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (completed by Joachim Begrich; trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ *Ibid.*

wicked, who fail to live by Torah, begins the Psalter with a “two ways” of theology life that parallels major themes of Deuteronomy 11–30.⁴ I refer to this as “retribution theology.” Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical and add wisdom theology, respectively, to Books 1 and 2, while Psalm 19B contains several Torah keywords—following the creation meditation of 19A—that also appear in the longest Torah-wisdom Psalm 119. Between these Torah-wisdom psalms we find the meditation on the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous in Psalms 37, 49, and 73, along with what I call mixed genre wisdom psalms throughout the Psalter; these psalms combine strong wisdom elements (linguistic and thematic) along with aspects of lament, thanksgiving, or praise. Among these I include Psalms 25, 32, 33, 36:2–5, and Psalm 39, which parallels Ecclesiastes in both vocabulary and themes; I will also analyze Psalms 50, 51, 62, 64, 90, 92, 94, 101, 111, 112, 127, 128, 131, 133, 145, 146, and 148 for their specific wisdom content. Among aspects of wisdom psalms I include an emphasis on creation theology, which explains my treatment of Psalms 19A, 33, and 148 (along with elements of Psalm 104).

Important wisdom terminology to be discussed includes these terms: שָׁכַל, “to be wise”; מִשְׁכִּיל, “understanding” and also a Psalm title; חִכְמָה, “wisdom”; בִּינָה, “understanding”; לָמַד, “to teach”; עֲצָה, “to give counsel”; אֲשֶׁר־י, “happy is the one”; סוֹד, “counsel”; סוֹר מֵרַע, “turn from evil.” In addition, the use of an acrostic structure in Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145 reflects the work of scribes associated with wisdom schools. This variety of wisdom vocabulary, themes, and structure throughout the Psalter reveals, in my view, this later editing work to which Gunkel refers.

Sigmund Mowinckel on Psalms and Wisdom: Mowinckel emphasizes the cultic origin and use of the psalms, in which even the first-person singular “I Psalms” voice the concerns of the community or a segment of it within a national political context. In response to Gunkel’s theory of

⁴ The basic “two ways” theology of Deuteronomy 11–30 consists of (1) those who obey and live by Torah receive the promise of long life, blessings, and inheritance of the land; (2) those who disobey Torah and rather turn to other gods (Canaanite worship) will perish and not enter the land (see, for example, Deut 30:15–20).

individualism in the Psalms, Mowinckel responds by saying that even though traditional sacred poetry can “carry a richly personal content,” the texts bear symbols or words pregnant with meaning that inspire and express personal experience for those who use the psalms in worship.⁵ Mowinckel posits the development of a “private psalmography” in “the wisdom schools which were closely connected with the Temple.”⁶ This “learned psalmography” was recited within the wisdom schools. Psalm writing and editing was taken over by “wise men” that he compares to Ben Sira, the author of Sirach. Out of this comes the use of the term *Maskil*, which he claims, “testifies to the connection between the psalmists and ‘wisdom.’”

The collecting and forming of the Psalter “is the work of ‘the wise,’” who themselves composed some specifically wisdom poems (e.g., 45; 49).⁷ These “learned writers” or scribes are responsible (e.g., Ps 45:2) for handing on and editing the Psalter and adding to it literary forms such as the proverb (משל), reflective of this later “private, learned psalmography” which contains a specifically didactic purpose.⁸ These wisdom writers eventually become the Jewish Scribes of the New Testament, and more importantly, he attributes to them the Psalm headings or superscriptions which provide “learned interpretations” and “supposed historical circumstances.”⁹ He defines a *Maskil* as a cultic poem of “supra-normal wisdom” and relates it to earlier Indian *Vedas* as representing a poem which contains “active power” and effectiveness; he translates it as “efficacious song.”¹⁰ Mowinckel cites Psalms 1, 19B, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112, and 127 as representing non-cultic poems within the canonical Psalter.¹¹ My analysis of Mowinckel’s work will be extensive,

⁵ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (2 vols; trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; New York: Abingdon, 1962), I:14–15.

⁶ Ibid., II: 87.

⁷ Ibid., 94.

⁸ Ibid., 106–108.

⁹ Ibid., II: 105.

¹⁰ Ibid., 209.

¹¹ Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 111; in an earlier article, largely reproduced in *Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, Mowinckel listed the same psalms minus 19B. See Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (VTSup 3; eds. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 205–24.

as many of his ideas provide a foundation for the theory of wisdom editing and writing in producing the final canonical form of the Psalter.

School and Temple: Mowinckel views psalms primarily within cultic contexts and in my view overstates his theories of their cultic origin and usage, often going into rather interesting but speculative detail about their composition and use that cannot be verified with the certainty he implies. On the other hand, his observations concerning scribal schools, temple singers, and Levites as sources of psalm writing and editing provide plausible insights into the development of the Psalter. According to Mowinckel, the wisdom psalms originated within circles of scribes (ספרים), the wise men who were leaders within the wisdom schools. Mowinckel sees fluidity among the various classes—priestly prophets, cult prophets, temple singers who composed psalms, Levites who interpreted Torah, and wise men (חכמים) who were scribes. Some of these scribes were among the temple personnel. The traditional attribution of wisdom literature to Solomon derives from Solomon’s establishment of scribal schools that introduced wisdom poetry from other ancient Near Eastern cultures (e.g., Egypt, Mesopotamia; Canaan). These scribal schools also taught foreign languages as part of their curriculum.¹² According to Mowinckel, the scribal schools represented a source of art and culture, as found in other societies (e.g., Canaanite Court; Mesopotamian Court). Using Psalm 45:2 as an example—“my tongue is like that of a ready scribe”—he posits that within the closely connected guilds of scribes and temple singers were writers who also copied earlier psalms. These so-called “learned writers” or scribes copied psalms, wrote psalms, and also interpreted earlier ones—as based on their added, later Superscriptions. Their work reflects international sharing and influences (Egypt; Mesopotamian; Canaan).¹³

Proverbs, exhortations, didactic moralizing, reflection on life and practical ways of living, compromise the essence of this wisdom writing, which as noted maintains an international flavor. The essence of their teaching is often summed up in emphasizing “the fear of the Lord” (e.g., Prov

¹² Ibid., 206–07.

¹³ Ibid., 207.

1:8; 2:5; 9:10; Pss 34:10, 12; 111:10) as the most important of human virtues.¹⁴ Building on Mowinckel's thesis about these groups of wisdom schools and writers, I propose that in the process of copying and interpreting "older psalms" these writers, teachers, and editors added various levels of their own "wisdom shaping" in the form of additional words, phrases, and Superscriptions. Here the term *Mas̄kîl*, with its clearly didactic root (שכל) and usage, reflects this process as it becomes an important term in many superscripts and perhaps served to provide a wisdom context of interpretation; it also appears in wisdom sections of varied psalms in the Psalter of mixed genres.¹⁵

Mowinckel sees the influence of wisdom writers in thanksgiving psalms that have a didactic flavor; this includes at times proverbs or riddles within exhortations to the congregation. In so-called "problem psalms" which deal with issues of *theodicy*—why do the innocent and righteous suffer while the wicked prosper, and why does a just God allow this?—the psalmists speak of God's greatness, justice, and wisdom in hymn form, with Psalm 73 being a representative example. Though didactic in character, he emphasizes that nonetheless "learned psalmography" must be considered prayers which speak to God and often to other humans. He also emphasizes the development of independent, inspired prayers of individuals which occurred outside the context of the Temple and formal cult.¹⁶ He sees this particularly in the inspired prayers and petitions of the prophets that arose from their personal experiences—often, as in Jeremiah, reflecting struggles related to their calling—and later through the development of Synagogue piety, in what he calls the "lecture room" or schools of the learned, rabbinic traditions, and Jewish piety within the home.

The concept of "fixed hours" of prayer (Ps 119:164, "seven times a day I pray"; Dan 6:11, 14) provides further evidence of this non-cultic development of prayer and psalms. However, the "fixed traditional style of the regular service," including the Psalms, helped influence the style and

¹⁴ Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship II*, 105.

¹⁵ Examples of the term as both the hiphil participle, *Mas̄kîl*, and other uses of the verb occur in these psalms: 2:10; 14:2; 32:1, 8; 36:4; 42:1; 44:1; 45:1; 47:8; 52:1; 53:1, 3; 54:1; 55:1; 64:10; 74:1; 78:1; 88:1; 89:1; 94:8; 101:2; 119:99; 142:1.

¹⁶ Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," 208–09.

form of these private prayers.¹⁷ Mowinckel also sees the influence of “psalm style” in the prayers of existing and even pre-exilic prophets like Amos, Isaiah, and especially Jeremiah. Interspersed within their writings are hymns expressing “emotions of the heart” arising from their prophetic experience and provide early examples of “cult-free psalmography.”¹⁸ These prophets pour forth their experiences of trouble and deliverance in pious reflection upon past events, often placing the words of a hymn in the mouth of some past figure, e.g., the Prayer of Hezekiah (Isa 38:9–20); other examples are found in Hannah’s Prayer (1 Sam 2:1-10), and the books of Jonah, Esther, Ezra, Daniel, Tobit, and Judith.¹⁹

Mowinckel refers to this “cultus-free psalmography” as “private, learned psalmography” developed among educated and “inspired” collectors which included the “latest, anonymous prophets,” who continued and further developed psalm composition as a pious work and an acceptable means of offering sacrifice. This type of psalm-writing develops independently of the Temple singers but may have had Levites among their authors; these Levites, he believes, belonged to the same families as the Temple singers. Spirit-guided pneumatics, such as Sirach, collected and expanded psalm materials in the later, post-exilic period, which saw the movement from a cultic context—of which, Mowinckel claims, they “no longer have an understanding”—to a period in which the focused usage of such materials was didactic. Thus, they composed psalms to reflect life experiences, such as deliverance from danger, which now served pious, reflective and didactic-wisdom purposes within the community.²⁰ He connects these learned psalms with thanksgiving offered to God for deliverance, benevolence, and God’s works, and also as a vehicle to call upon God in times of need (Ps 50:15). Mowinckel views Psalm 34 as a “thanksgiving psalm on deliverance from some distress” and ascribes a similar meaning to Psalms 37, 49 and 73.²¹ In this context he

¹⁷ Ibid., 208-09.

¹⁸ Ibid., 210.

¹⁹ Ibid., 211.

²⁰ Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom,” 210 –11.

²¹ Ibid., 215. These psalms speak to the fear that God might fail to uphold the covenant promise of retributive justice (see Exod 34:6-7) for the just, who suffer while the wicked continue to prosper. The answer comes in the speaker’s awareness and proclamation that the ultimate dissolution of riches and power will occur

identifies Psalm 73 as primarily a Thanksgiving psalm. These psalms would then be recited among students in wisdom schools as “inspired teaching.”²² While Mowinckel is on target with his understanding of the didactic use of these psalms, I classify them first as Wisdom Psalms and secondarily as having elements of thanksgiving.

In examining non-cultic poems of what he calls the “latest psalmography” (Pss 1, 19B, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112, and 127) Mowinckel views these psalms as marked by what he calls “dissolution of style”: in his view they did not arise from a specific cultic context or purpose and thus contain mixed styles and motives. A clear example of this is the alphabetic acrostic, in which succeeding lines begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet—considered an example of skilled writing in Israelite tradition—but often end up containing a variety of genres within a single psalm, as the organizational structure takes precedence over thematic unity.²³ I think he exaggerates this claim. While the acrostic does control the structure of the psalm somewhat artificially, most of these acrostics fit within an identifiable genre and structure. Psalm 119, for example, the longest psalm and an acrostic, focuses on Torah “key words” but in its 176 verses does contain a variety of moods, from confidence to cries for help, but on the whole focuses on Torah—represented by several key words, most of which are found in Psalm 19—as the source of meaning, truth, and guidance in life. Further, I will argue that the wisdom psalms most certainly were used in cultic contexts in addition to instruction and private usage.²⁴

The question of theodicy is answered in the assertion of God’s ultimate justice, wherein the just will be rewarded and the prosperous wicked will lose their temporal wealth and status when they

in the inevitable event of death; thus, the promise that the pious, just, lowly ones will be embraced by God and vindicated.

²² Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 109-11; “Psalms and Wisdom,” 210-211.

²³ Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom,” 213; later, in *Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, M adds Ps 19B to his list of non-cultic poems (111).

²⁴ For a detailed explanation of how Psalms 1, 19B, and 119 were produced in connection with the Chronicler’s History in the Persian period, and for an analysis of the work of post-exilic scribes in composing Psalm 119, see Leo J. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2007), 138, 156–57.

suffer God’s judgment (Pss 37, 49, 73).²⁵ Mowinckel discusses Psalms 78 and 105 as types of a “didactic hymn,” which develop into “hymnal legends” utilizing the history of Israel for teaching. They also serve confession of sins based on past infidelity, as recounted in a “historical penitential psalm” like 106.²⁶ He offers a valuable and often overlooked insight into these “historical psalms” which I will briefly expand upon. These “historical psalms” (Pss 78, 105, 106) contain didactic elements in their use of history to teach.

Wisdom-Historical Psalms: In light of Mowinckel’s analysis of these historical psalms I will expand upon why I think they fall under the classification of wisdom psalms. Reflection upon Israel’s history emphasizes and teaches how YHWH remains faithful throughout history—for example, Psalm 105 begins with praise of God’s works and then recounts the covenant with the Patriarchs, the Exodus, and entrance into the Promised Land—while showing how violations of the covenant by Israel result in disaster (emphasized more in Pss 78 and 106). Psalm 78 contains the title *Mas’kil*, which I interpret as reflecting a didactic intention (this I will argue in more detail in chapter 2, which is specifically on the *Mas’kil* psalms). Its introductory section, especially vv. 1–5, contains specific wisdom vocabulary: תורתִי, “my teaching”; משל, parable, and חידות, riddle; עדות, testimony; and תורה in reference to God’s teaching in vv. 5, and 10; the verbs “he commanded” (צוה) and “to make known” (להודיעם), both in v.5, reflect wisdom interests. It begins with a didactic imperative tone exhorting the people to “listen” to the teaching, which must be passed on to successive generations (v.4). Following this introduction, the psalm recounts Israel’s historical experiences of God’s covenant love and faithfulness in leading Israel from Egypt into the promised

²⁵ Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom,” 213–14. Public testimony by worshippers who recount their experience of forgiveness and or deliverance and exhort others to trust in YHWH—by admonition, blessing, recollection of their deliverance as a reason to teach others (e.g., Ps 32:5-9)—that they may similarly experience YHWH’s blessings thus reflects the character of wisdom teaching (31:24; 34:4-6, 11-14; 124:8). Examples include what he terms “thanksgiving” psalms which recount the experience in a sentence (37:35-40), or invites others to share from his or her experience (37:11-14; I add, 32; 62:8, 10; 94:12-15). While he identifies Psalms 32, 34, 37, and 73 as “thanksgiving,” I view them as primarily wisdom with mixed elements, e.g., thanksgiving, praise, prayers of confidence; he rightly emphasizes their didactic nature. He discusses this didactic tendency in “later psalmography” in Pss 1, 112, which contain didactic proverbs which contrast the fates of the wicked, who will suffer punishment, and the righteous who follow Torah and will be “happy” (אשר).

²⁶ Ibid., 214.

land, their infidelity and sin which aroused God's anger, and finally God's mercy and rejection of "Joseph" (Northern Kingdom) in favor of David, Judah, and the Jerusalem Temple.²⁷

Psalm 105 concludes by recalling how God fulfilled the covenant promise (v. 42, "For he remembered his holy word to Abraham his servant"), which in the end enables the Israelites to "keep His statutes, and observe his teaching" (בעבור שמרו חקיו ותורתיו ינצרו). This recalls the language of Deuteronomy and Torah-wisdom psalms 19B and 119 (חק; תורה) and provides a specifically didactic conclusion to the poem, which begins as a thanksgiving hymn. An important aspect of education in any culture is learning the story of our ancestors to discover one's roots, great figures of the past, and events. In this case, the retelling of Israel's story confirms God's fidelity in history and the need for succeeding generations of Israelites to remain faithful to Torah; I therefore classify these psalms as "wisdom-historical psalms."²⁸

Psalm 106 begins with formulaic praise of God's covenant love (חסד compare Ps 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; and 136:1) and a wisdom-oriented blessing (אשר) on those who "keep justice and act righteously" (שמרי משפט עשה צדקה). The so-called 'asrē (אשר) formula, translated "Happy is the one," occurs frequently in the wisdom literature, occurring 26 times in the Psalms and frequently in Proverbs (e.g. 3:13; 8:32, 34; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14; 29:18).²⁹ "Justice" (משפט) and "righteousness" (צדקה) are also wisdom-oriented terms, frequently used in contrasting those who live according to Torah with the wicked (e.g., Pss 1; 119; Prov 10—15). Following this introduction is an historical survey, similar to Psalm 105, which recounts God's actions in the Exodus. In tone,

²⁷ R. N. Whybray offers a comprehensive analysis of what he calls "interpolations of Torah theology" in Psalm 78, which he calls a wisdom psalm, noting several parallels in its vocabulary to the Book of Proverbs. He observes that the word תורה, as used in v.1, represents the teaching of a wisdom teacher, whereas its other uses, in verses 5, 10, refer specifically to God's teaching. *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 48–49.

²⁸ Whybray suggests that the "unexpected" references to Torah keywords in v. 45 may be evidence of a later interpolation (*Reading the Psalms as a Book*, 56).

²⁹ The formula occurs also in Job 5:17, 29:11, and as a verbal form in Prov 31:28 it occurs frequently among the wisdom-oriented psalms, to be discussed in the analyses of individual psalms below. For its use as a wisdom term and parallels in Egyptian literature, see אשרי, *TDOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 1:445–48.

Psalm 106 differs from Psalm 105 in its penitential nature as it focuses on Israel's sin and violations of the covenant—the rebellion in the desert, the Golden Calf, Baal of Peor, idol worship. It recounts how these actions aroused God's anger; ultimately, however, God “remembered his covenant” and “steadfast love” (vv. 44-46). This leads to a final prayer for salvation and being gathered to the Lord (v. 47). In summary, I view the wisdom aspect of these historical psalms as focusing on learning to be faithful to YHWH and the covenant based on the faithfulness of YHWH tempered by a cognizance of the consequences of sin and infidelity. These psalms in their final form reflect post-exilic writing and editing by wisdom teachers as a means to emphasize fidelity to YHWH in light of past history.

Torah psalms: Psalms 19 and 119 uphold God's creation as revealing Torah (19), which is righteous and life-giving, a constant source for prayer and guidance in life (119). Outside of Torah psalms, Mowinckel views the influence of Torah on the psalms as “not very discernable”; eventually, the educated scribes became overseers of the “spiritual and literary traditions of the temple” and, most importantly for our purposes, the final collectors and redactors of the canonical Psalter.³⁰ His theory holds that learned scribes redacted the final collection of the canonical Psalter. I subscribe to this view. Mowinckel asserts that these learned scribes composed some “non-cultic” psalms—he includes Psalms 1, and 127—both of which I consider among the “wisdom psalms.” I propose that these scribes are also responsible for wisdom additions to specific psalms, the wisdom title *Maskil*, which places various psalm types in a sapiential context, and even whole wisdom psalms beyond the two he lists, as the finalized the canonical Psalter.

Summary Critique: In critiquing Mowinckel's substantial contributions to the area of “wisdom psalms,” I view his inherent form-critical bias and zeal for interpreting psalms as primarily cultic as leading to a de-emphasis or undervaluing of the role and importance of wisdom psalms and editorial additions in the Psalter.³¹ We see this in his overstated claim that such poetry is specifically “non-

³⁰ Ibid., 216.

³¹ Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship I*, chapter I, 1-22, “The Psalms and Cult,” focuses on the evidence within the Psalter itself, based on internal evidence, terminology, rabbinic traditions, and their relationship to other ancient oriental religions, to support his thesis that “the biblical psalms are to be interpreted as cultic texts” (22). Chapter II, 23-41, “The Method of Cultic Interpretation,” describes in detail

cultic” and reflects a confused “dissolution of style” as the wisdom writers were supposedly somewhat removed from participation in the cult and thus “without any real comprehension” of the rules of psalm composition, which they tried to follow.³² An example is seen in his view that “personal thanksgiving psalms” Psalms 34, 37, 49 and 73 and “mixed” psalms of supplication and laud, like Psalm 119, originated as personal votive offerings and memorials to YHWH. They also provided testimony to future generations, and were later added to the “treasury of psalms” and used in worship.³³ In my analysis, these five psalms are all wisdom psalms.

In the case of Psalms 34, 49, and 73, however, we find no “dissolution of style,” “confusion” or lack of comprehension—in fact, the psalms contain evidence of cultic use: blessings, calls to the community, refrains, mention of the Temple (Pss 34:2, 4; 49:2, 13/21; 73:17). Further, I suggest that the historical and modern use of wisdom-oriented psalms in Jewish and Christian worship, in the Jewish Prayer Book, the Christian Lectionaries and Liturgy of the Hours, for example, show the natural adaptation of these psalms for congregational worship and prayer. Thus, in contrast to Mowinckel’s limitations upon this “learned psalmography,” I will argue for a “both-and” solution: while wisdom psalms and elements of wisdom within the Psalter reflect the work of post-exilic wisdom writers, who are responsible for the final form of the Psalter and focused on a didactic use of the psalms, this also included their continued use in communal worship. Cultic worship often includes a didactic purpose, and even after the destruction of the Temple the Synagogues carried on the public use of the psalms in worship and study.

A note on non-canonical wisdom texts: Mowinckel focuses on *Sirach* and the *Psalms of Solomon*, along with some NT psalm-type hymns—the Canticles of Mary and Zechariah—as further evidence

his form-critical, cultic interpretation of the Psalms in which he posits “four main types of psalms in the Psalter,” congregational praise and thanksgiving, private thanksgivings, congregational and individual lamentation, and “prayer psalms” (39). He also mentions that writers may use “wisdom poetry” for purely personal expression of praise or thanksgiving outside of being a formal wisdom psalm (31).

³² Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 109-12. For a similar critique, which however fails to recognize Mowinckel’s acknowledgment that these psalms may have had a cultic origin or were later adapted to the cult (see Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 110, 114), see Katharine J. Dell, “‘I Will Solve My Riddle to the Music of the Lyre’” (Psalm XLIX 4 [5]): A Cultic Setting for Wisdom Psalms?” *VT* 54 (2004), 445-58.

³³ *Ibid.*, 114; he posits that these thanksgiving poems may have been written on a stela or leather and deposited by the individual worshipper in the Temple.

of the development of psalms with elements of wisdom.³⁴ I would add to this list the reference by the Risen Jesus in Luke 24:44 to “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” (RSV), which implies that the TANAK was codified by the time Luke was composed in the late first century C.E. The numerous references to psalms in direct quotes or allusions by the NT writers reveal the ongoing significance of psalms in the nascent Jewish-Christian communities of the first century C.E. (e.g., Mark 15:24 [Ps 22:18], 31 [Ps 22:8–9], 33 [Ps 22:2], 36 [Ps 69:22]; Acts 2:25–28 [Ps 16], 34–36 [Ps 110]).

Mowinckel interprets Sirach 51:1–12 as a thanksgiving psalm composed by Ben Sira in gratitude after he experienced deliverance from threatening enemies. Stylistically, the psalm utilizes imagery and phraseology typical of canonical thanksgiving psalms—e.g., Psalms 16, 30, 116—and its doxology forms an inclusion with its introduction (vv. 1, 12). Mowinckel posits that the psalm was probably recited before disciples in a wisdom school. Ben Sira uses poetic verse to teach the virtues associated with traditional Israelite wisdom in a style reminiscent of Proverbs throughout the book.³⁵ In addition, I would add that he provides an expansive development of creation theology (39:12–35; 42:15–43:35), directly associates wisdom with Torah (24), provides an historical summary (44–50), and even alludes directly to his wisdom school (51:23).³⁶ Mowinckel notes how the circles of wisdom teachers like Ben Sira had a “lively” sense of hope which was reflected in their poetry.³⁷ In the *Psalms*

³⁴ Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom,” 218–24.

³⁵ Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom,” 218. Mowinckel also emphasizes the importance of the Book of Sirach in trying to determine the formation of the canonical Psalter, citing the evidence from the Prologue which alludes to a three part “canon” of accepted writings ca. 190 B.C.E.—although he acknowledges at this point the *Ketubim* were incomplete as Daniel was yet to be composed in the context of the coming Maccabean Revolt. He views the Superscript to Psalm 30, which connects it to the celebration of Hanukah, as further evidence of this late dating because that celebration arose from the Maccabean era; likewise a quote of Psalm 79 in 1 Maccabees seems to imply a canon of psalms by the first century B.C.E. He further emphasizes the evidence from the Books of Chronicles (1 Chron 16 quotes parts of 3 canonical psalms, 97, 105, 106), which he dates to the fourth century B.C.E., as the most likely period for the canonization of the Psalter. See *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 198–201.

³⁶ Christine Schams proposes that in Ben Sira’s time, the positions of scribes and wisdom teachers often overlapped, particularly due to the identification with Torah and Wisdom in that period (e.g., Sirach 24:22); scribes would copy various texts, including sacred literature, which was studied (39:1–11) as a source of wisdom (*Jewish Scribes in the Second Temple Period* [JSOTSup 291; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 102).

³⁷ Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom,” 218. Sirach composed traditional style psalms which included many elements, ideas, and forms of Jewish wisdom literature. This appears in the numerous reflections, “I-form” hymns meditating on the greatness of YHWH and creation, and God’s just rule of the world. These

of Solomon he cites *Ps Sol 10* as an example of praise and wisdom. In addition, he cites the *masbal* style in *Ps Sol 3* and 14; these contrast just and sinful behavior, and include didactic admonitions. *Ps Sol 15* in his view is “inspired by” canonical Ps 32, which I count as a wisdom psalm; he sees a relationship between *Ps Sol 13*, a “thanksgiving” for deliverance which also emphasizes the fall of sinners, and the didactic style of canonical (wisdom) Psalm 73. Many of these psalms address in lament form the difficulties experienced as a result of Israel’s infidelity to YHWH. They also contain elements of thanksgiving, wisdom and didactic emphases, and an eschatological hope reflecting the theological emphases of scribes in the Persian to Hellenistic periods (ca. 500–200 B.C.E.).³⁸ Many of Mowinckel’s observations on scribal activity in the post-exilic period are in line with Karel van der Toorn’s recent study of scribal culture and the development of the Hebrew Bible. Van der Toorn claims the collections of writings that will later constitute the *biblia* are the product of priestly scribes associated with the temple in the period ca. 500–200 B.C.E.³⁹

His observations of these non-canonical texts provide further evidence of the important influence of sages in the post-exilic era, who utilized existing psalms and literary forms but adapted them for didactic-wisdom purposes in light of historical circumstances and developments to address past and present experience (failed leadership, defeat, and suffering), while looking to the future with eschatological hope. This covers the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods.

André Lemaire and Philip R. Davies: *the influence of schools and scribes in post-exilic canonizing.* Lemaire argues strongly for the existence of wisdom schools as the source of biblical wisdom literature, including the wisdom psalms. From examination of surrounding cultures, particularly wisdom traditions associated with Egypt, some paleo-Hebrew inscriptions, and from the

didactic poems included “hymnal motifs” focusing on God’s judgment of the proud, revelation in nature and creation, steadfast love, mercy and forgiveness (he cites, Sir 10:14-18; 16:18ff.; 16:26-17:24; 27:29f.; 33:19f.; 39:12-35; 42:15-43:23 as examples).

³⁸ Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 118–20. Mowinckel sees examples of all the major psalm types—prayers, lamentations, confession of sin, reflections, and expressions of hope, in the context of the Maccabean’s fall from power and Pompey’s conquests—with an important new emphasis on “reflection” and “elements of wisdom.” These psalms show more mixture of genres than the canonical psalms and “do not keep to the rules”; they contain both “I” and “We” psalms to reflect and express the difficult situations faced by the Israelites.

³⁹ Van der Toorn also argues that literacy was mostly limited to this elite educated class; see his *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1–8.

biblical texts themselves, Lemaire argues that these schools began operating during the first temple period.⁴⁰ In contrast to Davies below, Lemaire sees clear evidence for the development of literacy ca. 600 B.C.E., based on ostraca, seals, and bullas. International influence upon Israelite wisdom traditions is found particularly in Proverbs: Egyptian (e.g., “Instruction of Amenemope” in 22:17 – 23:12), and Transjordanian (“Sayings of Agur,” 30:1–14; “Sayings of Lemuel,” 31:1–9). Royal schools of the first temple period provided a well-rounded instruction (language; literature; history; geography; law) that included wisdom instruction; he finds evidence of this in Proverbs and Deuteronomy.⁴¹ Lemaire discusses “wisdom psalms” as the product of “skilled scribes concerned with teaching,” possibly in a royal or wisdom school; he lists Psalms 1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, and 127, along with acrostics (adding Pss 9—10, 25, 111, and 145).⁴²

In a more recent study, Davies examines what he calls the “canons of David and Solomon” (as attributive authors) and concludes that these “canons” were finalized in the third century B.C.E., parallel to the Chronicler’s History. Based on the evidence in Chronicles, Davies concludes that among the numerous priests and Levites functioning in this period, the Levites served as a “scribal class” (e.g., 2 Chron 24:11; 34; 35:3; Ezra 8:30–33; Neh 8:7–8). They also served as musicians and gatekeepers (1 Chron 26; 2 Chron 34:12–13), and as “heirs to the prophets” (1 Chron 25:1–3; 2 Chron 20:13). These Levites probably finalized the canon—the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. In the case of the psalms, Davies posits that they collected religious poetry for both cultic use and private edification.⁴³ In this respect, he seems to parallel the general thought of Gunkel and Mowinckel in viewing wisdom poetry as primarily non-cultic. Davies describes an unspecified “large number of Psalms” used for non-cultic, individual usage; these constitute wisdom psalms, used

⁴⁰ André Lemaire, “The Sage in School and Temple,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 165–81; for details of his evidence for wisdom schools in the first temple period, including Egyptian sources, inscriptions, and “hints” in the biblical text, see pp. 168–71.

⁴¹ He cites in particular the reference to the Egyptian “Instruction of Amenemope” in Prov 22:17–23:12, and several other passages; though acknowledging the final date of Proverbs is “a matter of dispute,” he views the book as wisdom teaching given in a royal school during the first temple period (172–73). For the evidence from Deuteronomy, see 176–78.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 179–80.

⁴³ Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (London: SPCK, 1998), 131–34.

primarily for private edification.⁴⁴ Though Davies’s main concern is the role of scribes and schools in the shaping of the canon, his observations lend support to the hypothesis that the Hebrew Bible took its later canonical shape in the Persian and Hellenistic periods by groups associated with scribal schools and the temple cult.⁴⁵ Both Lemaire and Davies provide strong evidence for the existence and importance of schools and scribes in the transmission of wisdom psalms.

Hans Joachim Kraus: calls for a reconsideration of the influence of wisdom teaching on the development of the Psalms, seeing in particular the influence of wisdom literature upon the reflective and didactic aspects of especially prayers of individuals and hymns of thanksgiving. Like Mowinckel, Kraus sees a close relationship between priestly and wisdom schools within Jerusalem of the Second Temple period, as they lived in close proximity and the wisdom teaching of the scribes was adapted by priests and temple singers in prayer and song. He also sees a relationship between wisdom and the expression in the psalms of thanksgiving for rescue from danger, which in turn is expressed in knowledge gained and teaching (Psalm 32, I note, is a perfect example of this). Secondly, reflection, experiential knowledge, and wisdom teaching “show unmistakable signs of the beginnings of formation of theology in the Psalms.” The didactic elements in the Psalter are, in his view, an important aspect in constructing a “theology of the Psalms.”⁴⁶ Kraus rightly recognizes the didactic elements in a variety of psalm types, which may reflect the editing work of the wisdom teachers who construct and edit the Psalter in such a way that it serves didactic purposes for the ongoing life of Israel.

In discussing the importance of תורה in the Psalter, Kraus views it as a source of life and joy for the pious Israelite, as seen in Psalms 1, 19, 25:4, 37:23, 119, and 40:8–9. Challenging previous, largely Christian interpretations of Torah as representing “legalistic Judaism”—in particular he mentions B. Duhm’s view that references to Torah in the psalms derive from Pharisees and scribes—Kraus rightly emphasizes its meaning as “instruction.” Torah provides guidance,

⁴⁴ Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, 133–34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

⁴⁶ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans. Keith Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 15.

edification, and an encounter with the living and active word of God. Torah revives life and provides reason to rejoice; “light” that illuminates God’s presence and will shines forth from Torah (Psalm 19:7–8; 119:105, 130). In Psalm 40, the speaker discusses a “written scroll”—presumably portions of the Torah—and how he or she delights to do God’s will, because “your Torah is in my inner-most parts” (וּתְוִרָךְ בְּתוֹךְ מִעֵי 40:9). Kraus proposes that whenever psalm texts speak of the relationship of an individual to Torah, “we are dealing with texts that belong to a relatively late period (post-Deuteronomic),” and that Psalms 37:30–31, 40:8–9 relate Torah to the effects of the “New Covenant” prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–34 (Deut 30:11–14).⁴⁷

Wisdom poetry influences the Psalter, as seen in passages emphasizing listening to, and abiding by, wisdom and Torah with obedience; for example he cites Psalms 111:10, which defines wisdom as “fear/reverence of the Lord” (Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28), 34, and 119, all of which focus on wisdom as the way to understanding and a good life. Above all, God’s steadfast love (חַסֵּד) stands as the most important value—even above mortal life itself (Psalm 63:4)—and one which the wisdom tradition and Torah ultimate point towards.⁴⁸ I agree with all of these assessments, and particularly Kraus’s strong challenge to longstanding (Christian) attitudes equating Torah with legalism. In my analysis of Psalm 119 below (chapter 3) I will further discuss Torah as a source of joy and its relation to God’s covenant love.

Among the “didactic poetry of the wisdom tradition” Kraus includes Psalms 39 and 90, sober reflections on the transitory and ephemeral nature of human life that serve to lead people to accept the reality of human finitude before the eternity of God, the source of truth and hope. He surmises these psalms borrow from the literature of surrounding cultures as a response to the reality of *death* and *Sheol*, over which only YHWH has sovereign power.⁴⁹ Again, I agree with the reference to these two psalms in particular being reflective of wisdom interests and would add their affinity to themes in both Ecclesiastes and Job. Finally, Kraus analyzes at length Psalm 73, which he views as

⁴⁷ Ibid., 161–62, quote 162.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 167–68.

“didactic wisdom poetry” that incorporates the song of petition and individual thanksgiving. Under the rubric of “the great problems of life” he lists both Job and Psalm 73, which deal realistically with the question of theodicy: why do God’s loyal servants suffer while at the same time the wicked prosper? His cogent analysis views the psalm as framed in its beginning and conclusion by hope in the goodness of God, the only source of refuge in the midst of suffering, injustice and even doubt: “Fellowship with God based on his covenant is what is permanent; it alone is real.”⁵⁰ Highlights of his analysis include the psalmist’s transformation upon entering the sanctuary (מִקְדָּשֵׁי־אֵל v.17), where he or she receives instruction that provides an answer regarding the outcome (אֶחָרִיתָ).

Though they seemed so powerful and overconfident, the wicked vanish like a dream while God eventually guides the psalmist with counsel, holds his or her hand, and “takes/receives” (לָקַח v.24) the psalmist with honor. Though the psalmist realizes the inevitability of physical deterioration, he or she confidently finds strength and “my portion” (חֵלְקִי v.26) in God, his or her refuge and source of goodness (v.28).⁵¹ Kraus correctly views Psalm 73 as from the didactic wisdom tradition and in relationship to Job; further, he challenges the anachronistic Christian interpretation of the psalm as referring to the resurrection—a concept foreign to the world of the psalmist.

Roland E. Murphy: He regarded the setting of the so-called wisdom psalms “elusive,” but nonetheless attempted to classify wisdom psalms based on their use of wisdom “criteria” or features, i.e., terminology, wisdom themes and concerns, and arrived at Psalm 1 as the best example, and also includes Psalms 32, 34, 37, 49, 112, and 128.⁵² Biblical wisdom literature seeks to discover and define the ways to achieve order in daily life. Psalm 1 sets out the “two ways” of life, contrasting the actions and fates of the “just/righteous” (צַדִּיקִים) and the “wicked” (רָשָׁעִים); the idealized portrait of Psalm 1 assures that the righteous will prosper while the wicked will perish. However, the question of theodicy raised in Psalms 37, 49, and 73 (Murphy does not include Ps 73 as a wisdom psalm),

⁵⁰ Ibid., 168–75; quote p. 175.

⁵¹ Ibid., 173–75.

⁵² Roland E. Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms’” *VTSup* 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 157–67.

provides a more realistic expression of “real life” wisdom, in which too often the just suffer while the wicked prosper, with the “answer” being that ultimately, God’s justice will prevail and the wicked will be unable to carry their wealth and status to Sheol (Ps 49:11). Creation theology is part of wisdom teaching: Psalm 19:2–7 speaks of how the heavens, firmament, and cycles of night and day are silently “telling the glory of God”;⁵³ vv. 8–15 use key wisdom terms to discuss how the teaching (תורה) of the Lord gives wisdom (חכמה) to the simple.⁵⁴ A case for the unity of both portions of Psalm 19 can be made through the relationship between *light radiating* from the sun (vv. 2–7) and the *enlightenment* received through the study of תורה; this theme reflects Prov 6:23, “For the commandment is a lamp, the teaching (תורה) is a light” (NJPS).⁵⁵ Ps 19:10 extols the virtue of “fear of the Lord,” which further connects the poem to wisdom literature.

Sources of wisdom derive from life of common people, in which parents pass on instruction to their children, and in the royal court, where professional scribes and sages provide formal education. From these two sources, the home and court school, wisdom psalms and the use of wisdom elements within other psalm-types originated. The introduction to the Psalter with wisdom Psalm 1 and its emphasis on the Two Ways and Torah sets a precedent for wisdom in the Psalter. Murphy sets forth wisdom criteria to define wisdom psalms; these include the following elements, to which I have added representative examples from select wisdom psalms: the אֱשֶׁר formula (Pss 1:1; 32:1; 34:9; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1; 128:1), numerical sayings (Ps 62:12–13), “better than” sayings (Ps 37:16), proverbs (Ps 133), admonitions (Ps 34:14–15), acrostic (Pss 34; 37; 112; 119), and the address of a teacher to students (Ps 34:12); wisdom themes include the two ways (Ps 1), the contrast between

⁵³ Though Psalm 19:2–7 normally are not classified as a “wisdom” section, I see a connection with Sirach 42:15–25, which also extols God’s presence revealed in creation.

⁵⁴ I will examine Psalm 19 in detail below in chapter 3; the wisdom words in vv. 8–15 include, “teaching,” “testimony,” “to make wise,” “precepts,” “commandment,” “fear of the Lord,” and “judgments.”

⁵⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 70–96. Sarna sees thematic connections between Pss 1, 8, and 19, and the influence of Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature.

the wicked and righteous (Pss 37; 49; 73), theodicy (Ps 73), advice on proper conduct (Pss 32:8–9; 34:12–15), and the “fear of the Lord (Pss 34:10; 111:10; 112:1).”⁵⁶

Most wisdom psalm scholars hold to a similar set of criteria when defining wisdom psalms and elements within the Psalter. Note, however, that Murphy excludes Psalm 73, which is posited as a “wisdom psalm” by the majority of scholars who use the category. In a later article, he posits that an “instructional element” may be implicit in psalms of thanksgiving, citing for example Ps 30:6, wherein the psalmist teaches—based on experience of deliverance—that God’s anger is limited but favor last forever, and in 37:6–7, that those who look to God and the “lowly” will be heard by the Lord. Thus, he sees a natural relationship between performance of the psalms in worship and their didactic use.⁵⁷ This coheres well with Kraus’s view of the didactic use of the Psalter and, in contrast to Mowinckel, recognizes that wisdom poetry can be both cultic and didactic. Murphy’s article on wisdom psalms is referenced in almost all contemporary wisdom psalm research and, therefore, must be considered as a good standard of measuring the category. Likewise, his identification of wisdom elements within existing psalms of other genres provides a wider understanding of wisdom in the Psalter than limiting it to specific “wisdom psalms.”

Leo G. Purdue: views wisdom psalms originating in a “wisdom context,” which may include wisdom schools used for the instruction of the young, and/or the work of sages with the specific intention of adding to the cultic literature to show forth prayer by the wise and their participation in the cult (Pss 19; 119). Some he calls “Proverb poems”; מִשְׁרָיִם poems; “Riddle poems,” and sees parallels in Job 28 and Sir 39:12–35, for example. Other wisdom psalms he considers “reflective poems” which embrace the movement of lament to thanksgiving as a wisdom response to suffering. Examples include Pss 32 and 34; this also reflects the presence of laments and thanksgiving in wisdom literature (Sir 33:1–3; 35:16–22; 51:1–12). He notes the similarity of Psalm

⁵⁶ Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom—Theses and Hypotheses,” in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien* (ed. John G. Gammie, Walter A. Brueggemann, W. Lee Humphreys, and James M. Ward; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978), 35–42; for a concise outline of Murphy’s criteria, see R. E. Murphy, *Psalms, Job* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 21.

⁵⁷ Murphy, “Reflections on Contextual Interpretation of the Psalms,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed., J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 21–28; here 24, 25.

73 to Sumerian wisdom literature and the Book of Job. His list of wisdom psalms includes 1, 19A, 19B, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127; of these, he concludes that 1, 37, 49, 112, and 127 originated in non-cultic contexts and were included in the Psalter by post-exilic scribes.⁵⁸ As with Mowinckel, I question this assertion that wisdom psalms necessarily originated in “non-cultic” contexts as their age-old adaptability to worship in both Jewish and Christian tradition attests to possible cultic origins.

Purdue’s methodology for identifying didactic poems and wisdom psalms examines the use of sapiential forms, themes and language in the Psalter.⁵⁹ Though the actual evidence for specific wisdom schools in ancient Israel is limited, Purdue agrees with most scholars that abundant evidence of such schools in the Ancient Near East in Egypt and Mesopotamia—whose wisdom literature seems to have been appropriated by Israel’s sages—argues for their existence and that they served as the locus for the writing and editing of wisdom psalms and didactic poems.⁶⁰ He takes a “both-and” approach in regard to the intention behind wisdom/didactic psalms: for use in the instruction of students in literary techniques and wisdom doctrine which emphasizes God as the creator and redeemer and ultimate judge of the righteous and the wicked (Pss 1, 37, 49, 112, 127) and as literature produced by the wise for use in the cult (Pss 19A; 19B; 119) or reflecting cultic interests (Pss 32, 34, 73).⁶¹ Among the so-called “Proverb poems” which utilize a proverb, riddle, or **אָשְׁרֵי** saying, he places Psalms 1, 34, 37, 73 (he refers to it as a “Joban psalm”), 112, 19B, and 127. In the category “Ashrei poems” he includes Psalms 32 and 119; note that in the **אָשְׁרֵי** occurs also in “proverb poems” 1:1, 34:9; 112:1, and 127:5. Under “riddle poems” he includes Psalm 49 and creation hymn

⁵⁸ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult* (SBLDS 30; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 261–343. Among scholars treated in his review of wisdom psalms research, Purdue includes Herman Jansen, *Die spätjüdische Psalmendichtung. Ihr Entstehungskreis und ihr ‘Sitz im Leben’* (Oslo: I Komisjon Hos Jacob Dybwab, 1937), who focused on apocryphal Jewish wisdom literature but also emphasized that the canonical wisdom psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 112, 127, 128 and 133 were produced by post-exilic sages in a wisdom school adjacent to the temple for the dual purposes of instruction and devotion. I agree with the assessment that such poems retained their devotional and liturgical purpose and character in addition to sapiential concerns.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁶⁰ Purdue speaks of “long didactic poems” like Ps 119 and wisdom psalms, which were composed in both the post-exilic and pre-exilic era, in contrast to earlier writers like Mowinckel, von Rad, and Jansen, who limit their production to the post-exilic era. Purdue rightly argues that since similar wisdom/didactic writings existed in other Ancient Near Eastern traditions which preceded Israel, we can safely conclude that pre-exilic religious sages existed in Israel and produced wisdom/didactic poetry (267).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

19A.⁶² For each Psalm Purdue provides a translation and comprehensive analysis of its structure and content in relation to the respective category.

In his most recent book, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History*, a comprehensive survey of the context and theological content of all the major biblical wisdom books, Purdue discusses wisdom and Torah psalms in chapter 5, “Scribalism and the Torah in the Wisdom Tradition.”⁶³ He locates the composition and editing of these psalms in the Persian period by sages “who were composers and interpreters of texts,” at a time when Torah became identified with creation (e.g., Psalm 19; Sirach 24).⁶⁴ These sages composed wisdom psalms for both worship and instruction. His list of wisdom psalms is slightly expanded from his earlier work with the inclusion of Psalms 111 “and perhaps 104.” Post-exilic scribes of the Persian period used these psalms to praise YHWH for creation (Pss 19; 104), provide instruction in morals to students in wisdom schools, reflect on suffering and the issue of theodicy (Pss 49; 73), and praise YHWH for the gift of Torah as a guide for proper living (Pss 1; 19; 119). In particular, Purdue connects Psalm 19 with Ezra’s Prayer (Neh 9:6–37), as both texts combine creation and Torah—the two major sources of divine revelation in Second Temple Judaism.⁶⁵ Thus, the wisdom psalms become part of a reformation and renewal of Judaism in the post-exilic period during which “Judaism” develops, and reveal the dominant role of scribes at this time, with “the legendary priest-sage” Ezra upheld as the model scribe (סֹפֵר).⁶⁶

While I agree fully with Purdue’s view in his earlier work that wisdom psalms were used in the cult and for instructional purposes, and that such poems were likely produced both before and after the exilic period, the categories of “proverb,” “Ashrei,” or “riddle” poems seems narrow as each of the psalms treated contains a variety of wisdom elements. Rather, each psalm is better examined in terms of its overall content to see if it fits in the broader category or “wisdom psalm.” Overall, Purdue provides a very useful critique of the work by the earlier German and Scandinavian scholars,

⁶² Ibid., 269–323.

⁶³ Leo G. Purdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2007), 137–60.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 15–58.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 149–50.

an expansion of previous work by Murphy, and offers a broader list of wisdom psalms. In his latest work, Purdue expands his classification of wisdom psalms (111; 104) and more strongly emphasizes the relationship between Torah and creation in the post-exilic period when the composition and editing of the Psalter was completed. Again, I fully agree with Purdue's views here, but in addition to mention of Psalm 104 within the wisdom matrix, I add Psalms 146 and 148—all of which contain wisdom and creation themes. His observations of the relationship between traditions surrounding Ezra and scribal activity in the Persian period support the emphasis on Torah and creation as key sources of divine revelation during the time in which the Psalter was finalized by wisdom editors and composers.

James L. Mays: considers the classification of wisdom psalms “in itself ambiguous” and instead focuses on what he calls the “Torah Psalms,” especially 1, 19, and 119, as among the latest written and serving to bring together the main genres and themes of the Psalter in an eschatological context.⁶⁷ Similarly, Claus Westermann proposed an early form of the Psalter bounded by Torah Psalms 1 and 119. It is important to note here that Mays's “Torah Psalms” are considered by most other authors on this topic as falling under the category of wisdom psalms.

He emphasizes the clear parallels between these Torah Psalms and the language and themes of Proverbs (and Joshua, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah). For example, he sees similarities in “form, vocabulary, and topic” in Psalm 1 which show a relationship to “literary conventions found in Proverbs.” Psalm 1 emphasizes how the one who “delights in the Torah of the LORD” will prosper; likewise, Deut 17:18–20 teaches that the king who guides his life and rule by Torah will with his descendents have a long reign, in Jos 1:8 the LORD commands him to recite Torah “day and night” to insure success, and Jer 17:5–8 uses the simile of a tree prospering by flowing waters to describe those who trust in the LORD.⁶⁸ He also posits the connection between Torah and creation by viewing Psalm 19A and B as a unity whose purpose is to reveal God in both Torah and creation. Several psalms are deliberately paired to serve a theological purpose. Psalms 1 and 2 combine Torah

⁶⁷ James L. Mays, “The Place of the Torah Psalms in the Psalter,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 3–12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

and prophecy as a synthesis which looks forward with hope to the coming of God's anointed one. Psalms 111 and 112 both share an acrostic structure, with Psalm 111 extolling God's deeds and concludes with the statement that "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD" (v.10)—an important theme found elsewhere in the wisdom literature (Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Sir 1:12). This conclusion leads into Psalm 112, which upholds traditional wisdom theology by extolling those who fear the Lord and delight in the commandments in contrast to the wicked. Psalm 19B teaches that the תּוֹרַת of the LORD is perfect and his commandments are pure.⁶⁹

In addition, he points out the importance of an acrostic structure in the Torah psalms and cites the important keywords relating to the broader context of "Torah" or instruction: Psalm 19: "testimony, precepts, commandments, fear, and ordinance" (respectively: עֲדוּת, פְּקוּדֵי, מִצְוֹת, רָאָה, מִשְׁפָּטִי, רָאָה), and in Psalm 119 one adds to these "statutes" (חֻקִּים), "promise" (אִמְרָה), "way" (דֶּרֶךְ), and "path" (אֶרֶץ).⁷⁰ Mays offers one of the most thorough examinations of the Torah-focused psalms; my research here includes Torah-focused psalms within the wisdom psalm category.

Avi Hurvitz: In a short but important article, Hurvitz focuses his analysis on vocabulary, positing that, "if there is in fact such a thing as 'Wisdom Psalms', i.e. Psalms which were created in a Wisdom milieu, we may assume these texts have absorbed words and expressions which were current specifically in Wisdom literature."⁷¹ Hurvitz's methodology is by his own admission "minimalist" as he, like Whybray, views "maximal" interpretations of wisdom in the Psalter as obscuring "its distinctive qualities." Thus, he limits his definitions of wisdom elements to what one finds in Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.⁷² His "three-fold model" for examining wisdom in the Psalter includes (1) the "distinctive Wisdom corpus" of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, (2) "distinctive wisdom phraseology" which includes linguistic elements from the above "distinctive wisdom

⁶⁹ Ibid., 10–11.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁷¹ Avi Hurvitz, "Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of 'Wisdom Psalms'" *V/T* 38 (1988): 41–51, quote 41.

⁷² Ibid., 43.

corpus,” and (3) “distinctive Wisdom Psalms” which he defines as those psalms which contain a “significant accumulation” of wisdom characteristics which would therefore provide evidence that such a psalm arose from a distinctive wisdom milieu.

While I differ with his narrow guidelines for examining wisdom in the Psalter, he provides an important observation, often overlooked by other wisdom psalm scholars, that the terms **הוֹן** and **סוֹר מַרַע** serve as an important word combination in examining wisdom in the Psalter.⁷³ The word **הוֹן** in wisdom psalms refers to the wealth of the rich. Among other synonymous terms used for wealth, of the 26 uses of **הוֹן** in the Bible, 18 are in Proverbs; it qualifies as an authentic wisdom term. The occurrences of the term in Psalms 112:3 and 119:14, along with their other linguistic elements of wisdom literature (acrostic; righteous vs. the wicked; **אֲשֶׁר־י** formula), led Hurvitz to classify both as “Wisdom Psalms.”⁷⁴ The limitation to these two sets of terms, however, oddly ignores the wider vocabulary of wisdom used by other writers on this topic and narrows the possibilities.

Hurvitz proposes that the word pair **סוֹר־מַרַע**, translated “turn from evil,” provides evidence of wisdom editing and writing. While individually both words are common in the Hebrew Bible, the combination occurs almost exclusively in wisdom literature: 10 out of 13 occurrences are found in Proverbs and Job. This qualifies the word pair as “a distinctive Wisdom element.”⁷⁵ By surveying the usage of the word pair, he concludes that its specific use in Psalms 34 and 37 reflects their wisdom milieu, which qualifies them as wisdom psalms.⁷⁶ He admits that his system does not

⁷³ Ibid., 43–45.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 45–47; Hurvitz does not specify the “linguistic wisdom elements” of Pss 112 and 119 which I therefore provide in parentheses above. He notes the use of **הוֹן** in Ps 44:13, which otherwise fails to qualify linguistically or thematically as wisdom psalm but he claims the “case of Ps. xliv must be left open” (47, n. 18). I also note that Ps 44, a Korahite Psalm, has the **מַשְׁכִּיל** in its title, which I uphold as a “wisdom marker” (to be discussed in a later chapter).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 50.

cover all aspects of wisdom psalms, but in my view his contribution remains unique and extremely valuable in examining specific vocabulary as a marker for Wisdom material.

R. N. Whybray: recognizes that an easily agreeable definition of what constitutes wisdom psalms has been elusive, but begins his argument by challenging the traditional notion (Gunkel, Mowinckel) that wisdom psalms are non-cultic; Whybray sees a link between didactic poetry and worship, noting that wisdom schools and teachers were very likely connected to the Temple.⁷⁷ He draws on the Passover instructions in Exodus 12 as evidence of a longstanding tradition of combining instruction and worship in Israel and thus views an absolute distinction between wisdom psalms and other types as “mistaken,” noting, correctly, that even Mowinckel’s “wisdom schools” were connected with the Temple. In addition, Whybray discusses the practice of private daily prayer and worship at a later stage in the development of the Psalter (noting Ps 119:164 in which the speaker prays seven times per day, and Dan 6:10-11), while rightly maintaining that private prayers of petition (e.g., as seen in the Prophets Jer 12:1-6; 17:14-18) were a longstanding part of Israel’s history.⁷⁸ I agree with Whybray’s view that wisdom psalms likely had a cultic function, and while I do hold that some psalms stand apart as wisdom psalms, many of them are of “mixed genre.” I will argue, as he noted, that the later development of daily prayer utilizing the psalms—including wisdom psalms—in the Breviary and the Lectionary reveals their easy adaptation to cultic use.

In a later monograph, Whybray expands significantly his discussion of wisdom influences in the Psalter, more clearly defining the classification of wisdom psalms as those which employ “modes of thought” characteristic of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes; psalms that employ language and terminology characteristic of these books are most probably wisdom psalms. Secondly, he views wisdom psalms as having a disposition for reflection, “especially on personal experiences and on the

⁷⁷ R. N. Whybray, “The Wisdom Psalms,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton* (eds. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 152–60, see 154 for his view that cult and wisdom are related and, even if separated, “came together here [in worship].”

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

problems and implications of religious faith and of the human condition in general.”⁷⁹ He begins with an analysis of Psalm 1, focusing on v. 2, where the *בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה*, is described as the “delight” of the righteous person and also a source of meditation (*יָדָה*) “day and night,” i.e., at all times. Noting the linguistic similarities of Psalm 1:2 with Joshua 1:7–8, he concludes that “Torah” in Psalm 1 (and Pss 19, 119 and other “interpolations” of Torah material—see below) most probably refers to a specific, written law, “the Law of Moses,” rather than as a general term for the Psalter. He challenges the idea that Psalm 1 is placed as a deliberate introduction to the Psalter as “no more than an inference” and “not based on anything in the text.”⁸⁰ While not rejecting the idea that Torah Psalms may have been a later editorial addition to the Psalter intended to “point to a new mode of interpretation,” he claims this requires interpolations of Torah material into existing psalms, in addition to so-called complete Torah Psalms. He classifies Psalms 19, 37, 40, and 78 as containing interpolations of Torah material.⁸¹

While his analysis is useful and cogent, and challenges the overly systematic vision of the Psalter proposed by other scholars, below I define Psalms 19, 37, and 78 as falling within the general category of wisdom psalms as they, respectively, contain other wisdom features (creation; retribution theology; wisdom themes and vocabulary; *Maškil*; historical recital) in addition to interpolations of Torah material; I agree, though, that Psalm 40 constitutes an example of interpolation of Torah material by later editors. Next, he classifies Psalms 18, 27, 32, 86, 92, 94, 105, 107, 111, 144, and 146 as containing “interpolations of wisdom material.”⁸² Again, while I agree with his observations of wisdom material in these psalms—and notice the uniqueness of his observation of Psalms 18 and 86 as containing wisdom elements—I classify Psalm 32 as a “wisdom psalm” based on linguistic and thematic content (see below, chapter 2), and the acrostic 111 as a wisdom psalm deliberately paired with 112 (note the “wisdom thesis” in 111:10, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD”).

⁷⁹ R. N. Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield U. K.: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 36–87; quote p. 37.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 42–49.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 50–60.

I also question why Psalm 106 is not included with 105, as both contain wisdom elements within the wider genre of a didactic historical recital.

Whybray classifies Psalms 8, 14/53, 25, 34, 39, 49, 73, 90, 127, 131, and 139 as “pure wisdom and torah psalms.”⁸³ As will be seen below in subsequent chapters, I agree with *most* of his selections, but question his omission of Psalms 128 and 133, and do not include Psalm 131 as a “pure wisdom psalm” as it primarily is a song of trust. Psalm 139 is hard to classify but certainly qualifies as having wisdom elements but, again, in my analysis is not primarily a wisdom psalm. Because creation material is an important element of wisdom literature—witness, for example, Job 38–41; Proverbs 8; and Sir 16:22–28; 24; 39:12–35; and 42:15–43:35—I understand his inclusion of Psalm 8, but question the omission of Psalms 33, 104, and 148, all of which focus on creation and contain wisdom elements. I classify Psalms 104, and 148 as Creation hymns with a strong wisdom background, and Psalm 33 as primarily a wisdom psalm (see below; chapter 4). I consider Psalm 8 a midrashic hymn based on Genesis 1 rather than a more specifically wisdom-oriented creation psalm.

In his earlier article, Psalm 1 presents *Torah* as guide and way (תורה) to a holy and prosperous life, which is the end and goal of the meditation on Torah as presented in Psalm 1. These themes of meditation on Torah from Psalm 1 appear strategically throughout the Psalter in both specific wisdom psalms and intentionally located as elements within other psalms. The goal of Torah meditation described in Psalm 1 finds its fulfillment in the doxological praise of Psalm 150 at the conclusion of the Psalter. The seemingly “scattered” wisdom elements along the way from Psalm 1 to 150 may reflect the wider goal of wisdom editors to keep those who read and pray the Psalter focused on a wisdom-oriented interpretation. Whybray examines intentional groupings of various psalms (e.g., 90–92; 105–106) which contain wisdom themes—human finitude, rewards and punishment in Israel’s past history as result of fidelity or lack thereof—as serving the wider wisdom purpose of “meditation” to heighten awareness of God’s saving actions and the consequences for

⁸³ Ibid., 60–73.

various behaviors.⁸⁴ In this earlier article, Whybray takes a rather narrow view in his approach to wisdom vocabulary and criteria for a wisdom psalm, and concludes that only Psalms 34, 37, and 78 qualify as true wisdom psalms. He draws upon parallels between psalms and the canonical wisdom books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, but also emphasizes the importance of studying “late psalmography” (a term used by Mowinckel) in which psalms were composed, and earlier ones adapted, to serve a didactic purpose within existing psalm collections; the final form of the Psalter remained fluid until this later period, and various existing collections were combined and adapted in forming the Psalter. This research takes into account psalms embedded in canonical books (e.g., Deut 32), apocryphal psalms (e.g., *Psalms of Solomon*, *Prayer of Manasseh*, *Sirach*, *Tobit*), Qumran literature, the Greek additions to Daniel and Esther, and even N.T. Psalms (Pauline hymns; hymns in Revelation).⁸⁵ Whybray offers some very unique, detailed and useful analysis of the placement and importance of wisdom material in the Psalter, and shows a rather dramatic development and expansion of his thought between the earlier article and his monograph.

J. Kenneth Kuntz: In a key 1974 article, the principles of which were updated in a 2000, J. Kenneth Kuntz provides a brief overview of wisdom psalms research and then proceeds with his own analysis of what constitutes a “wisdom psalm” and elements within the Psalter which reflect the influence of wisdom writers by examining rhetorical, thematic and “formal” elements, leading to his classification of nine “wisdom psalms”: Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 112, 127, 128, and 133.⁸⁶ Later, he adds Psalm 73 to his list and updates his analysis with a more canonical approach by focusing on wisdom psalms separately in Book I, Books II-III, and V. The later article evidences the influence of Brueggemann’s work (see below). While concluding no specific wisdom psalms occur in Book IV,

⁸⁴ Whybray, “The Wisdom Psalms,” 155–57.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 157–60.

⁸⁶ J. Kenneth Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel—Their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimensions,” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler; Pittsburg, PA: The Pickwick Press, 1974), 186–222; “Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter,” in *For A Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (ed. Randal A. Argall, et al.; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 144–60.

he does acknowledge the clear wisdom elements in Psalms 92:7-8, 13-15, and 94:8-11, 12-15.⁸⁷ As with my analysis of Mowinckel's contributions to the topic, I also will devote more extensive space to Kuntz's work as he provides perhaps the most extensive research on the topic in recent decades. In a later essay he challenges the skepticism of James Crenshaw regarding the category of wisdom psalms.⁸⁸

In addition to Gunkel and Mowinckel, Kuntz examines the work of several scholars, including P. A. Munch. Munch held that "school psalms" (19B, 25, 119) were used for devotional purposes, while "Instructional Psalms" (32, 34) were used specifically for instructional purposes. In my view, while his hypothesis may well reflect the origins of these two groups of psalms, his strict limitations on their usage seems untenable.⁸⁹ M. Ludin Jansen is, in Kuntz's view, less precise in seeking to determine how wisdom psalms were used but examines the wider category of psalms literature and, with Munch, compares Sirach and the Psalms of Solomon (as did Mowinckel) with the canonical psalms. Aage Bentzen's *Introduction to the Old Testament* determines that only psalms 1, 112, and 127 qualify as "wisdom" psalms; with Kuntz I agree that his limited selection lacks depth in excluding Pss 32, 34, 37, and 49 (I add 73) which arises from his tendency to favor "thanksgiving" classifications at the expense of wisdom (as with Mowinckel).⁹⁰

Perhaps the most important contemporary analysis of wisdom psalms at the time Kuntz wrote this article was Roland E. Murphy's important 1963 article, "A Consideration of the Classification, 'Wisdom Psalms'" (noted above) which examined wisdom psalms and how the psalm writers incorporated wisdom elements into psalms of other genres.⁹¹ Rather than seeking a precise *Sitz im Leben* for these wisdom psalms and elements of wisdom in the Psalter, Murphy instead

⁸⁷ Kuntz, "Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter," 149.

⁸⁸ J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Reclaiming Biblical Wisdom: A Response to Crenshaw," *CBR* 1.2 (2003): 145–54, see 151.

⁸⁹ Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms," 189, citing P. A. Munch, "Die Judischen 'Weisheitspsalmen' und ihr Platz im Leben," *AcOr* 15 (1937), 112–40.

⁹⁰ Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms," 189–90.

⁹¹ Roland E. Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification, 'Wisdom Psalms'" (*VTSup* 9; Leiden: Brill, 1963), 156–67. My listing of wisdom psalms exceeds Kuntz's but admittedly includes some psalms (e.g., 45, 90) which are a "minority" among wisdom psalms classifications and, thus, I tend to follow Kuntz's analysis in critiquing others.

emphasized a “wisdom milieu” reflective of the post-exilic cult in which thanksgiving and wisdom elements often merged. He also focuses on stylistic and linguistic markers in determining wisdom in the psalms and views the post-exilic context in which didactic elements and, hence wisdom, received greater emphasis. Kuntz rightly challenges Murphy’s omission of Psalms 127 and 133 from his list (Pss 1, 32, 37, 49, 112, 128), to which Kuntz will later add Psalm 73.

Next, Kuntz describes what he calls “rhetorical elements in Psalmic Wisdom.” These include seven items: (1) the “better” (טוֹב) saying; (2) the numerical saying; (3) the admonition, which may or may not include a motive clause; (4) the admonitory address to sons (child/children); (5) the אֲשֶׁר־י formula; (6) the rhetorical question, and (7) the simile.⁹² Examples of the “Better saying”—which occur twenty-two times in Proverbs and eighteen in Ecclesiastes—include Psalms 37:16; 63:4; 84:11; 118:8, 9; and 119:72. The saying is used against some perceived wealth, which in effect becomes useless in light of the certainty of death. Among psalms with the “better” sayings, however, only Psalms 37 and 119 are wisdom psalms. An example of the “numerical saying” occurs in Pss 1:6; 27:4; 62:12-13; of these, Psalms 1 and 62 provide clear wisdom contexts. Psalm 1 is “numerical” in its reflection of a “two ways” theology; more specific, however, is Psalm 62, in which the numerical saying occurs directly after an earlier wisdom element in vv. 9-11, which reflects Ecclesiastes in its use of “vanity” (הַבֵּל) in describing human pursuits. The combination of proverbial sayings and the “once”/“twice” saying provides a clear wisdom element in what otherwise is classified by Kuntz as a Song of Trust.⁹³ The admonition occurs in both Deuteronomic and wisdom contexts but stands out in Job and Ecclesiastes 4:17–5:6 and in various places in Proverbs—where it often includes a motive clause—and often is preceded with the emphatic כִּי. Examples of the admonition include Pss 32:9, 34:4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 37:1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 27 (סוֹר־מַרְעֵ) 34, and 37;

⁹² Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms,” 191.

⁹³ Ibid., 192–93.

49:17. Psalms 34:15 and 37:27 include the **סוֹר־מַרְע** formula identified by Avi Hurvitz as an important wisdom vocabulary.

These admonitory elements are considered by Kuntz as “crucial” rhetorical elements in wisdom psalm classification.⁹⁴ Among the most common rhetorical elements in Proverbs emphasized by Kuntz is the address to “my son,” which occurs twenty-three times, with the expression **בְּנִי**, “my son” (e.g., 1:8, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10), and sometimes plural, **שִׁמְעוּ בָנִים**, “hear my sons” (4:1), and often is immediately followed by an admonition.⁹⁵ In Proverbs, this and other wisdom expressions apply both to a family and court settings, in which the father and mother (see Prov 1:8), or court scribes, taught proper social behavior and training in virtue. Choosing the way of wisdom—“fear of the Lord” and “knowledge of God” (1:2-7; 2:5)—brings prosperity (3:2). Those who pursue evil are doomed (1:10–18). Proverbs provides instruction for students to live in harmony with nature and learn from its processes (e.g., 3:13-20). Turning to the Psalms, Kuntz finds ten instances where the singular “son” occurs and concludes that none of these are within wisdom contexts. The plural “sons” occurs over thirty times and can refer to all of humanity (“sons of men” Ps 12:2), the Israelite community (“sons of Jacob” Ps 77:16), men (Ps 147:13), or children in a family (Ps 127:3). The best example occurs in Ps 34:12, in which the speaker admonishes, “Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (my translation).⁹⁶ In this verse the speaker clearly presents him or herself as a wisdom teacher who seeks to inculcate the essential wisdom trait of “fear of the Lord” (Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Pss 111:10; 128:1). Kuntz points out a related phrase found in wisdom psalms (49:2) and psalms with wisdom elements (78:1), the admonition to “people” (**הָעַמִּים**; **עַמִּי**, respectively) which functions in the same way as “my son” or “sons.” I include the admonitions in Ps 50:5, 7, addressed by YHWH to Israel in a covenant lawsuit, with YHWH acting as

⁹⁴ Ibid., 193–94. I included the actual admonitory verses from these psalms, which Kuntz omitted; he views motive clauses in 34:10, and 37:2, 9, 17, and 22, which all are preceded by the **כִּי** emphatic particle.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 194–95. Here I expand upon Kuntz’s limited examples of the address to “sons” and the implications of wisdom teaching within the home and in the court.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 195.

the wisdom teacher: “Gather to me my faithful ones” (חֲסִידַי v.7), utilizes “faithful ones” as equivalent to “my people” or “sons,” while verse 7, “hear, my people” (שְׁמַעְהָ עַמִּי) follows the typical wisdom format. Though Psalm 50 itself is not a wisdom psalm, I will argue below that in these respects it contains wisdom elements.

Next, the אֲשֶׁרִי (*’ašrē*) formula is, in Kuntz’s view, “an undeniably crucial wisdom psalms element,” seen as related to the cultic blessing formula *baruk* (“blessed”; בָּרוּךְ) and arising from wisdom traditions (Job 5:17, “happy the man whom God reproves”) as it expresses a major focus of wisdom literature, i.e., who is “happy” or “fortunate” in living the good life. Though lacking in wisdom psalms 19, 37, 49, 73, and 133, it occurs once in psalms 1, 34, 112, 127, and 128, and Murphy further cites its uses in the wisdom sections of Psalm 40:5-6 and 94:8-15, and also occurring twice at the beginning of the long wisdom-Torah psalm 119 (vv. 1-2).⁹⁷ Kuntz regards the use of the formula in Psalms 2:12, 33:12, 41:2, and 84:5 as non-sapiential; I will argue that its use in Pss 2, 33, and 41 is, in fact, sapiential while only 84:5 qualifies as “non-sapiential.” In 2:12, the אֲשֶׁרִי occurs in the context of what appears in my view to be wisdom editing which relates Psalms 1 and 2 as an “introduction” to the Psalter. Though largely a “Royal psalm,” 2:10 begins with a wisdom admonition, “now, kings, *be wise* (הַשְׂכִּיל), accept discipline judges of the earth”—the hiphil imperative of the verb שָׁכַל, “to have wisdom, insight,” a key wisdom term and the root of *Maskeil* in psalm headings (discussed below in ch. 2), places this admonition in a wisdom framework. In 2:11 another admonition calls upon the kings and judges to serve the Lord with “fear” (בִּירְאָה), which relates to the wisdom element to “fear the LORD”; this prepares for the אֲשֶׁרִי in v. 12, “Happy are

⁹⁷ Ibid., 196–97. Kuntz also references Augustine George, “La ‘Forme’ des Beatitudes jusqu’ a Jesus,” *Melanges Bibliques Andre Robert* (Paris: Blond et Gay, 1957), 398, who views it as a beatitude, and Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 314, who connects it with the blessing, “bārūk,” and views its use in psalms 1, 127, and 128 as directly related to wisdom traditions. Similarly, Walther Zimmerli (“Zur Struktur der alttestamentlichen Weisheit,” *ZAW* 51 (1933), 185 notes how the formula emphasizes the wisdom concern of “who is fortunate.” Kuntz points out that the *’ašrē* formula occurs most frequently in the Psalms (24 times), five times in Proverbs, twice each in Isaiah and 2 Chronicles, and once in 1 Kings, Job and Daniel (196, n. 30).

those who take refuge in him” [YHWH]. The *’asrē* at the conclusion of psalm 2 forms an inclusion with Psalm 1:1, which describes the blessed/happy state of the person who avoids the way of evil but instead delights in Torah.

Likewise in Psalm 33:12, which I classify below as a creation-wisdom psalm, the formula occurs in a section with wisdom elements: the admonition to “fear the LORD” (v. 8), a contrast between God’s thoughts and counsel and the futility of human thoughts and counsel (vv. 9-11), leading the **אשרי** in v. 12, which calls happy the nation “whose God is the LORD,” i.e., who trust in YHWH rather than false sources of power (vv. 16-17), and therefore “fear” (**ירא**, v. 18). In Ps 41:2 the pairing of the formula with the participle of **שכל**, “happy those who *consider* the needs of the poor” (**אשרי משכיל אל-דל**) reflects, in my view, deliberate wisdom editing. Scribes inserted this saying so that the final psalm of Book 1 begins, like Psalm 1, with a description of the happiness of one who lives by the principles of Torah; Psalm 41 goes on to describe how the wicked mistreat the righteous person. I agree with Kuntz on the importance of the *’asrē* formula as a marker for wisdom in the Psalter as it contrasts the fate of those who live by Torah/wisdom in life with those who fail to do so, assuring that ultimately the righteous will be rewarded.

The sixth rhetorical element is the “rhetorical question,” which occurs in the wisdom context of Ps 94:9-11 in v.9: “Can he who planted the ear not hear? Does the one who formed the eye not behold?” It also appears in Psalm 25:12, “Who is the man who fears the LORD? I will teach him the way he should choose.” In Psalm 34, the admonition in v. 12, “come, children [**בנים**] and listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD,” is followed by the rhetorical question in v. 13: “Who is the one who desires life, who loves length of day to see good?” A “crisp imperative admonition” follows in v. 14. In Psalm 49, the summons in vv. 2–5 prepares for the rhetorical question in 6: “Why [**למה**] should I fear days of evil”; the answer in vv. 7–10 focuses on the futility of those who trust in wealth in the face of God’s power and their destiny in Sheol. Kuntz recognizes

that the use of rhetorical questions occurs outside of wisdom contexts, too, as in Micah 6:6-7 and Psalm 24.⁹⁸

The final rhetorical element Kuntz identifies is the simile. A simile utilizes simple comparisons or word pictures drawn from everyday experience to highlight a teaching: for example, Ps 1:3 compares the one who delights in and meditates upon Torah as a fruitful streamside tree (Job 8:16; Jer 17:8), while in 1:4 the wicked are compared to chaff blown away by the wind. In other wisdom psalms the wicked are likened to withered grass, vanishing smoke (37:2, 20) or the “beasts” that perish (49:13, 21), for whom “death will be their shepherd” (49:15). The pious Israelite receives instruction to be not like a horses or mules that “lack understanding” (אִי־בִינָה לָהֶם); the sons of a father are “like arrows in the hand of a warrior” (Ps 127:4) who can protect him in old age; the righteous man’s wife is like a “fruitful vine” and his children like “olive shoots” around the family table (Ps 128:3), and the unity among siblings is “like precious oil upon the head,” and the rich “dew of Hermon” (Ps 133:2, 3). All these wisdom similes draw from daily life and experience to emphasize points of instruction.⁹⁹ The common workhorse or mule needed to be harnessed and directed, and having children and a “fruitful wife” who bears them was a sign of God’s blessing and prosperity; these “sons” become a source of protection, labor, and continuance of the family line. Harmony among siblings and countrymen provided calm and happiness in life symbolized by anointing with fresh olive oil, a mark of hospitality, a sign of divine blessing, and healing, and the fructifying dew of Mt. Hermon.¹⁰⁰ While recognizing the importance of the simile in wisdom literature and the wisdom psalms or elements of psalms, Kuntz also concedes that Psalms employ the simile in non-wisdom contexts.

⁹⁸ Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms,” 198.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰⁰ A. Cohen (*The Psalms*; [Soncino Books of the Bible; Rev. ed; London/Jerusalem/New York: 1945, 1992], 439) provides a Jewish interpretation of Ps 133 emphasizing the oil in relation to the consecration of the High Priest in Exodus 29:7, in which it flowed down upon his beard (Aaron=Aaronic priesthood), as symbolic of the effect of harmony spreading among Israel; he notes further that Mount Hermon was noted for the abundant dew which forms on its slopes and provides fertility to the soil, just as a single king will bring fruitful unity to the nation. The image of Hermon, far to the north of Jerusalem, then, serves as a poetic device to emphasize divine blessing.

Following R. B. Y Scott, Kuntz lists 64 “wisdom words” from Scott’s list of 77, which appear in the Psalter and, recognizing the importance of distinct vocabulary as a marker of wisdom, analyzes the usage of these particular words.¹⁰¹ For this study, what matters most is his analysis of the use of these words in wisdom psalms or elements within psalms. While noting the non-cultic character of Ps 119, its repeated use of wisdom key-words, and its artificial acrostic structure, Kuntz withholds it from the classification of a wisdom psalm. He notes, however, that it provides an example of later composition in which wisdom and legal interests converge.¹⁰² In his “rankings” Psalm 94 follows with 15 wisdom words, Psalm 32 is third with 13, Pss 25 and 55 each have 12, Pss 19, 37, and 49 have 11, Pss 10 and 107 each with 10 of Scott’s wisdom words, and finally Pss 1, 5, 73, 92, and 139 each have 9 words.¹⁰³

Kuntz’s list of wisdom words (revised from Scott to isolate those words found in the Psalter) lacks several key words which I consider crucial to evaluating wisdom in the Psalms: שָׁכַל, “to be wise,” מִשְׁכִּיל, “understanding/being wise/intelligent,” סוֹפֵר, “to write/scribe.” Scott’s list is too broad to be of much help in narrowing the definition of wisdom psalms and elements in the Psalter as so many of these words have extensive use in non-wisdom contexts. In his final analysis based on this word list, Kuntz identifies Pss 1, 32, 37, and 49 as having both words from the list and wisdom psalm designation; Pss 25, 92, 94, and 107 as having “clearly identifiable wisdom elements,” and Pss 19B, 73, 119, and 139 as reflecting “the concerns and interests of Israelite wisdom.” Four wisdom psalms from his classification contain key words: Pss 34 (6 words), 112 (6), 128 (2), and 127 (1).¹⁰⁴ While I find myself in agreement with much of his analysis, I disagree on several points and take a broader view of wisdom in the Psalter.

I will argue that Psalm 19 with its emphasis on both creation and Torah in two parts, which I view as an original unity, and utilization of key words and themes found in the wisdom literature

¹⁰¹ R. B. Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 121; Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms,” 201.

¹⁰² Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms,” 202.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 202–08.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

(Proverbs; Job; Sirach), certainly qualifies as a wisdom psalm. The wisdom conclusion in Psalm 107:43 in my view reflects the deliberate work of later wisdom editors. Psalm 90, with its Ecclesiastes-like wisdom-based meditation on the transitory nature of human life and focus on God's omniscience and enduring **תָּוֶן**, argue for its inclusion as a wisdom psalm. In his 1974 article Kuntz seems to contradict himself when he classifies Psalm 34 as "wisdom" by citing Murphy's view of wisdom as the prevailing element when a psalm contains both wisdom and thanksgiving, but then rejects wisdom classification for Psalm 73 in favor of it being a "thanksgiving," though it contains clear wisdom elements (retribution motif; vocabulary), based largely on its "strikingly personal utterances" and "sustained second-person address to the deity."¹⁰⁵ In his 2000 article, however, he adds Ps 73 to his list of wisdom psalms.¹⁰⁶ Kuntz acknowledges the limitations of vocabulary alone as a factor in determining wisdom psalms; he notes its importance as one factor among other rhetorical and thematic elements in determining which psalms should be classified as wisdom psalms.¹⁰⁷

Thematic Elements: Kuntz identifies the "fear of the LORD" as an important theme in wisdom psalms, which is borne out by the importance of the expression in the Book of Proverbs (1:7, 29; 9:10; 14:27). He views the construct chain **יִרְאֵת ה' הוֹדָה**, "The fear of the LORD," as a technical term used by Israel's wisdom teachers; the three occurrences of the phrase in the Psalter are all didactic in context (Pss 19:10; 34:12; 111:10). The wisdom term **יִרְאֵ** ("to fear"), occurs in the wisdom psalms (34:8, 10 [x2]; 112:1; 128:1), in combination with **יִשְׁרָאֵל** in 112:1 and 128:1, and in the wisdom section of Psalm 25:12-14, which emphasizes fear of YHWH and knowledge.¹⁰⁸ In Psalm 25 "fear of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 207, 208.

¹⁰⁶ Kuntz, "Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter," 149.

¹⁰⁷ Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms," 211.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 211–12.

the LORD” is connected with instruction (יורנו v.12), inheritance of the land (ירש ארץ v.13; see 37:11, 22, 29, 34), and counsel (סוד).¹⁰⁹

The contrasting lives of the righteous and the wicked constitute the second thematic element. Here Kuntz recognizes Psalm 37 as the primary example in the Psalter, with key words ציִק vs. רשע, and also the terms חטאה כסיל for the wicked, in contrast to תמים ישר for the righteous. He further notes the use of these contrasts in Pss 1, 34, 92, and 112, but oddly neglects the importance of this theme in wisdom psalms 49 and 73, which share strong thematic connections with 37 on the question of theodicy. The “reality and inevitability of retribution” is the third thematic element, in which the ultimate justice of God occurs in the “Two Ways” theology of Pss 1, 112, and in poems of confidence (Pss 34:16-22); I note this also occurs in the context of theodicy (Pss 37, 49, 73).

Other themes include advice on one’s company (Ps 1:1), speech (Ps 34:14), avoidance of anger (Ps 37:8), the desire for peace (Pss 34:15; 37:37), harmony with one’s siblings (Ps 133), perseverance and trust (Pss 32:10, 37:3, 5, 7, 34; 62:9), humility and generosity (Pss 37:11; 49:13, 21; 112:5, 9; 62:11 [integrity]). A very important emphasis of Hurvitz which Kuntz only briefly mentions as a wisdom marker is the imperative to turn from evil and do good (34:15; 37:3, 27—the *sur-mera* formula); one who embraces wisdom through devotion and fidelity to YHWH will have a prosperous family life with many children (Ps 128) and harmony among kindred (Ps 133).¹¹⁰

Walter Brueggemann: In his *The Message of the Psalms* (1984) and *Psalms and the Life of Faith* (1995), Brueggemann recognizes Psalms 1 and 119 as “Didactic” psalms of “orientation,” i.e., psalms which speak to a well-ordered life, and Psalms 37 and 14 (orientation), along with 49, and with reservation 73 as wisdom psalms of “disorientation,” i.e., psalms which speak to life’s crises, challenges, fears and laments.¹¹¹ Though his focus pertains more to theology and canonical

¹⁰⁹ I view Psalm 25 as a genuine wisdom psalm based on its vocabulary, thematic content, and acrostic structure.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 213–215.

¹¹¹ See *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 42-44, 106, 115; *Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 189–213, 235–257.

structuring, his emphasis in these books and several articles in which he deals with Psalms 73 and 37 are especially pertinent to my argument as I identify these as wisdom psalms and also embrace aspects of his theology of the canon. Brueggemann offers two applications of Psalm 37: his “first reading” views the psalm from the perspective of “orientation” and support for “an economic, social status quo,” while the second interpretation embraces liberation theology as “a ground for hope for the landless.”¹¹² He focuses on the numerous references within the Psalm to “the land” (אֶרֶץ) as reflective of the covenant promises for God’s faithful, the “righteous” (צַדִּיק), noting the use of Ps 37:11 in the Sermon on the Mount and in his second reading views the psalm as a “passionate embrace of a revolutionary future” related to the concept of Jubilee, when those whose land was lost will receive it anew. In this second reading, he views the psalm as a response to the futility of Qoheleth with anticipatory hope.¹¹³ In either reading of Psalm 37, however, Brueggemann sees numerous affinities with Proverbs and Job, and describes it as the most clearly identifiable wisdom psalm.

Brueggemann notes that while Psalm 1 begins the Psalter with a call to “obedience”—to Torah, and as a wisdom poem—and Psalm 150 concludes with a universal doxology of praise, which provides evidence that the Psalter reflects a “drama,” from a beginning call to obedience, through the experience of “laments of candor” (e.g., Ps 25), to “re-perception through communion” (Ps 73), gratitude (Ps 103—note the “covenant formula” in v. 8 which harkens back to Exod 34:6), ending with doxological joy of Psalm 150. Thus, the Psalter in its final canonical shaping is “bounded” by the themes of obedience and praise (Pss 1, 150), but in order to “appropriate the faith of Israel” one must enter into the Psalms between the boundaries, which reflect the movement from the ideals of wisdom/Torah and Kingship at the beginning (Pss 1, 2), the experiences of loss, injustice, doubt, anger and alienation seen in the laments (Pss 25, 37)—in which the speakers candidly seek to remind YHWH of the covenant promise of אֶרֶץ [Ps 25:10–15]—and the post-Davidic transformation from

¹¹² Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 235–257.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 249–57.

doubt to trust in Psalm 73, which itself begins by restating the theological position of Psalm 1.¹¹⁴

This movement from lament over the seeming absence of God's **יְהוָה** in the laments to a renewed trust in God's **יְהוָה** is represented by Pss 25:6-7, 10 and 103.

The Psalter begins with emphasis on obedience to Torah, which leads to divine blessing and sustenance (Ps 1:1–3; Jer 17:7–8; Ps 112); however, “real life” intrudes with sin, guilt, suffering and unexplainable hurt, doubt and pain (e.g., Pss 13; 22; 25; 51). At some point we experience a transformative movement that embraces the ideal of Psalm 1 but also candidly confronts injustice, suffering, and through prayer in the sanctuary leads to a new orientation of renewed faith and hope; this transformative movement occurs in Ps 73:17, when the perplexed psalmist enters the sanctuary, and experiences transformation and renewed hope. Standing at the theological center of the Psalter, Psalm 73 embraces the movement from orientation (v. 1) to disorientation, to a new orientation in its 28 verses.¹¹⁵ Interestingly, Brueggemann’s approach juxtaposes two wisdom Psalms in opposition to each other: Psalm 25, while beginning with hope reminiscent of Psalm 1 and including repetitive use of the word “way” (**דֶּרֶךְ**) which recalls its use in Psalm 1, challenges the naïve premises of Psalm 1, as it deals with the reality of the seeming failure in real life of the moral coherence promised in the first psalm.¹¹⁶ My own examination of Psalm 25 will conclude that it contains strong wisdom

¹¹⁴ Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon” *JOT* 50 (1991): 68–88; of course numerous other laments in addition to Psalm 25 appear in the first half of the Psalter, though Psalm 25 also contains wisdom elements, just as several other examples of gratitude appear in books 4 and 5; though note that both 103 and 145, which contains wisdom elements, also utilize the “covenant formula” of YHWH’s self-identification from Exodus 34:6–7, emphasizing God’s **יְהוָה**. I think it important to add the thematic connections between Pss 1–2, particularly how 1 begins and 2 closes with the important term, **יְהוָה**, and the emphasis on Wisdom, Torah, and the kingship of YHWH. This article is reprinted in his *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 189–213.

¹¹⁵ See Walter Brueggemann and Patrick D. Miller, “Psalm 73 as a Canonical Marker” *JOT* 72 (1996): 45–56, in which they explore Psalm 73 as both sapiential and royal, serving as a marker to rethink the monarchy in a Deuteronomistic way: following the “Solomon” psalm 72, psalm 73 applies to Solomon in setting forth choices to idolatry (vv. 2-16), or embrace rather of Torah piety (vv. 18-28), with Torah piety promising the rewards established in Psalm 1 and idolatry leading to destruction. If so, the order of Psalm 73 reverses the movement in 1 Kings, where Solomon begins in wisdom (chapter 3) and ends in idolatry (chapter 11), or it serves as “choices” which lie before him early in his reign. Either way, the Psalm probably serves as reflection upon the failed monarchy “late in the canonizing process” (56).

¹¹⁶ Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise,” 71–75.

elements, both in its acrostic structure and vocabulary, and provides an example of how psalms of various genres can also contain strong wisdom elements.

Psalm 73 begins with a reiteration of the premise of Psalm 1, that the “pure of heart”—equivalent to those who delight in Torah of Ps 1:2—then immediately moves into a “passionate protest against the claims of Psalm 1” in vv. 2–13 in contrasting the prosperity of the wicked versus the suffering of the righteous. In addition, I note that verses 14–16 provide a personal reflection on the speaker’s disappointment that keeping his “heart pure” and hands clean in “innocence”—Pss 24:4 and 26:6 also utilize this imagery—has failed to result in the promised prosperity or well-being (Ps 1), which leads to cynicism and near hopelessness (v. 16). However, once the speaker enters the Temple to pray (v. 17, **עַד-אֲבוֹא אֶל-מִקְדָּשׁ-יְיָ** “when I entered the sanctuary of God”), he or she experiences a transformation which moves beyond protest back to trust (vv. 17-28), leading to the realization that God is “my portion forever” despite physical or emotional failure (vv. 26–27). This leads Brueggemann to emphasize the crucial and “daring” role of Psalm 73 in moving the Psalter’s theology from the idealized but often unrealistic premise of Psalm 1, through the reality of lament and suffering, to a renewal and new focus on communion with God as the greatest good, despite the possible incoherence of life, enabling finally the doxology of Psalm 150.¹¹⁷ Brueggemann’s analysis of Psalm 73 utilizes his interpretive method of classifying psalms by orientation, disorientation, new orientation.¹¹⁸

I find this interpretive method to be very useful for understanding psalms in their original contexts and for ongoing application of their content in daily life. For Brueggemann, the placement of Psalms in the canonization process reflects an intentional theological movement based on Israel’s history and experience. Viewed in light of the ultimate failure of the monarchy and the subsequent need to rethink not only the monarchy but the idealized promises of Psalm 1, Brueggemann’s proposal provides an excellent argument for the work of post-exilic wisdom editors.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 84–91.

¹¹⁸ For an overview of this method, see Brueggemann’s *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 1–21.

Gerald Wilson: A recent pioneer in understanding the canonical shape of the Psalter, Wilson emphasized the placement of Royal Psalms at the “seams” of the Books of the Psalter, the intentional placement of Superscriptions to thematically bind sections, the use of הלל יהוה and הודו יהוה (“Praise the LORD!” and “Give thanks!”), and doxologies to mark the intentional shape of the Psalter.¹¹⁹ From this, he divides the Psalter into two halves: 1—89 use Superscriptions to designate author and genre, while 90—150 are marked by “hallelujah” and “Give thanks” designations. In general this observation is correct; however, he should more readily have taken into account that the second half of the Psalter still contains several genre/author superscriptions (Pss 90; 100; 102; 108–110; 120–134; 138–139; 142–145). Based on linguistic studies and comparisons with the Qumran Psalms Scrolls, he concludes—correctly, in my view—that the second half of the Psalter contains the latest psalms. With wisdom Psalm 1 serving as an introduction, and Hallelujah Psalms 146–150 as a concluding doxology, he then focuses on thematic links or “competing editorial frames” in the remaining psalms. He concludes that the first half of the Psalter, which contains older psalms, emphasizes the Davidic Covenant (2), its continuation (“Solomon”; 72), and failure (89); this royal frame extends, albeit with a new interpretation of kingship, into the second half with Psalm 144.¹²⁰

Like Brueggemann, Wilson sees in the structure of the Psalter an emphasis in the first half on the ideals expressed in Psalm 1, the realities of the monarchy with its successes and failures throughout Books 1—2, and a transition in Book 3 which deals with the failure of the monarchy. While seeing the value of Brueggemann’s emphasis on Psalm 73 as the central “pivot” in the canonical shape of the Psalter, Wilson rather emphasizes Psalm 89, which closes out Book 3 with a stark, almost Job-like, expression of the failure of the monarchy (89:39–53), as “clearest articulation” of the theological shift between the two halves of the Psalter.¹²¹

In this later article, however, Wilson emphasizes the role of Wisdom Psalms and wisdom elements in shaping the final form of the Psalter: in contrast to the “royal covenantal frame,” he

¹¹⁹ See his *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) for a detailed understanding of his original arguments, which do not emphasize wisdom psalms.

¹²⁰ Gerald H. Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Int* 46 (April 1992): 129–142.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 134–38.

views the “strategic placement of ‘wisdom psalms’” as providing a structure for the last two books. This structuring occurs with the placement of Psalms 90 and 91—which I agree fit the classification of having “wisdom elements”—at the beginning of Book 4, Psalm 106 (which contains didactic elements) at the close of Book 4, and Psalm 145 (also wisdom-oriented) at the conclusion of the second half of the Psalter before his proposed “doxology” of Pss 146–150.¹²² Thus, wisdom elements play a key role in the Psalter’s final form.

Wilson finds Brueggemann’s emphasis on the movement from obedience to praise in the journey from Psalm 1 to 150 as “appealing.” Brueggemann’s emphasis on the concluding doxology or “postscript” of Psalm 72 is a key indicator of this movement; Psalm 73 provides the “paradigm” of this movement that requires “protest, candor, and communion”—all reflective of the movement from orientation, disorientation, and new orientation.¹²³ Wilson concludes that with wisdom elements dominating the final shaping of the Psalter we have clear evidence of the important role of sages in reshaping Israel’s understanding and use of the Psalms. Rather than being limited to the cult, the Psalter serves an ongoing didactic and religious purpose in application to the varied experiences of life. This shaping reveals movements from *lament to praise* and *individual to community*: lament and individual concerns dominate the first half, while praise and communal interests dominate the second.¹²⁴ Wilson sees a theological shift and movement revealed in the final shaping of the Psalter of which wisdom psalms and interests play a crucial role.

Methodology

Building upon the groundwork of Mowinckel, who posited a later “psalmography” with a wisdom orientation produced by sages working within the wisdom schools who became the final editors and redactors of the Psalter, and embracing the “wisdom criteria” explicated by Murphy, Kuntz, and Purdue, along with the importance of wisdom elements in the canonical shape of the

¹²² Ibid., 134.

¹²³ Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” 134–35; Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise,” 81 (and see above section on Brueggemann).

¹²⁴ Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” 138–39.

Psalter emphasized by Brueggemann and Wilson, I propose that the Psalter in its canonical form represents a deliberate and resourceful editing and redacting by wisdom writers or sages who in the post-exilic period sought to add a didactic emphases to the liturgical use of the Psalter. Though the category of “wisdom psalms” itself is disputed and varies among scholars, the wisdom elements within other psalm types and superscriptions—particularly the term *Mas̄kil* in superscriptions and the presence of key wisdom vocabulary and themes—evince a “wisdom pattern” in the Psalter.

Following Brueggemann’s Hegelian-like observation on “orientation, disorientation, and new orientation” in interpreting Psalms, I see a pattern in which the editors place the idealized wisdom Psalm 1 at the head of the Psalter, connected to an idealized royal Psalm 2 by the wisdom section in vv. 2:10–11—with the key terms, **שכל** and **אשרי** used as imperatives for proper behavior—as an introduction setting forth a ideal way of living and view of kingship. Using Brueggemann’s terminology, the Psalter begins in a situation of “orientation.” The First Davidic Psalter (Pss 3–41), however, with its many laments, reflects the disorientation found in “real life.” Following the introductory wisdom Psalm 1, I propose Psalm 14 as the first specific wisdom psalm. Psalm 32, the first with the term *Mas̄kil* in its superscription, contains blessing, recollection of past sorrows due to sin, confession, conversion, and wisdom teaching, concluding with praise. Psalm 32 provides a realistic picture of the movement from disorientation to new orientation through the application of wisdom teaching. Wisdom psalms 37 and 49 deal specifically with the questions of theodicy, with strong wisdom vocabulary and themes, to deal with the disorientation which occurs through the seeming injustice of the prosperity of the wicked and suffering of the righteous. Wisdom elements appear in creation Psalm 33, and Pss 39, 45, 51, 52, 62, and 64. The center-point of the Psalter, according to Brueggemann, is Psalm 73, a wisdom psalm, which also shows the movement from “orientation” in v.1 with its restatement of the ideal of Psalm 1, through the disorientation of lamenting the prosperity and oppression of the wicked over the righteous, and concludes with a reorientation of trust, knowing, wisely, that “nearness to God is good” (v. 28).

This movement also coincides with the transition from David, to Solomon (Ps 71, David's old age; Ps 72, attributed to Solomon, the father of wisdom tradition), to a realistic, post-exilic understanding of the Monarchy's failure (Pss 73; 89), and a renewed emphasis in Books 4 and 5 on YHWH as king. Wisdom teaching not only prepares for and marks this transition (Ps 73) but also adds reflection in Psalm 90, attributed "back" to Moses, Israel's divine prophet and law-giver who lead them to freedom and liberty in the Promised Land, and the didactic "historical-wisdom" teaching of Psalms 78, 105, and 106, which serve to provide a didactic reflection on past events, sin and its consequences, for ongoing generations of Israelites. Acrostic Psalm 119, dominated by keywords for Torah and wisdom, is an important part of an early framework for the Psalter (Pss 1–2; 19; 111; 112; 119; 145) consisting of torah and acrostic psalms. It anchors the last part of the Psalter with an emphasis on walking in the ways of Torah as the guideline for proper and prosperous living; Psalm 119 lacks any emphasis on the cult or covenant, and reinterprets the monarchy in terms of the renewed emphasis on YHWH as King (Pss 93, 96-100).

Wisdom psalms and elements, then, are found strategically placed in Book 3 with Psalms 73 and 78; in Book 4 with Psalms 90, 92 and 94, a lament with wisdom teaching (vv. 8–15), and creation Psalm 104. In Book 5 wisdom elements occur in the above-mentioned "didactic-historical" Psalms 105/106 and the conclusion of Psalm 107:42-43, and the acrostic wisdom Psalms 111, 112, and 119; Ascent Psalms 127, 128, 133; in parts of Psalm 144, and in Psalm 145, an acrostic hymn with wisdom features. At the conclusion of the Psalter, I find strong wisdom elements—thematic, vocabulary, and creation theology—in Psalms 146, 147, and 148. Throughout the Psalter a connection exists between wisdom and creation—a pattern found in Job (38–40), Proverbs (8) and Sirach—in Psalms 19A, 33, 104, 146:5–6, 147, and 148. Furthermore, the use of the term *Mas̄kîl* in superscriptions provides evidence of deliberate use by wisdom editors of various psalms of mixed genres to serve specific wisdom-teaching, "didactic" purposes; this wisdom term, I will argue, based on its root and use in the Dead Sea Scrolls, serves as more than a musical direction or type of song, but more importantly reflects later specific wisdom-oriented application of these psalms in teaching.

I conclude with the following lists of key wisdom themes, vocabulary, and literary characteristics for the examination of wisdom psalms:

- 1) The *'ashrei*, “happy is the one” saying (e.g., Pss 1:1; 32:1; 33:12; 34:9; 112:1; 119:1; 127:5; 128:1).
- 2) Emphasis on the proper way to live life (e.g., the “Two Ways” of Psalm 1; the imperatives to repent, turn from evil and do good in Psalms 32, 34; the question of Theodicy and call to trust in the LORD in Psalms 37, 49, 73; the emphasis on Torah as a guide for living in Psalms 1, 19B, 112, and 119).
- 3) The contrast between the righteous and the wicked (Pss 1, 37, 49, 73, 112).
- 4) Theodicy (37, 49, 73; 94).
- 5) Meditation on the brevity of life (39; 90).
- 6) Torah (1, 19B, 112, and 119).
- 7) Numerical sayings (e.g., 62:10-14).
- 8) Wisdom key-words: *Instruct, teach, Wisdom* (Hebrew: חכמה), *Maskil* (משכיל); *sakal* (“be wise”; *'ashrei* (“happy is the man/one”); *teaching, Law, precepts, decrees, commandments*; “turn from evil and do good” 34:14-15; 37:27; “better than” sayings, e.g., 37:16. *Sur-mera*‘ in Pss 34 and 37 as a wisdom word pair.
- 9) “Fear of the Lord” (e.g., 33:18; 34:10; 111:10; 112:1; 128:1).
- 10) The Acrostic—a scribal technique by which successive lines begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet; this technique brings a certain order to psalms, served for memorization, and emphasized “completeness” (best examples: Psalms 25, 34, 37; 111; 112; 119; 145).
- 11) Creation theology as attested in Proverbs 8; Job 28; 38–41; and Sirach 16:24–30; 24; 39:12–35; and 42:15–43:35, occurs prominently in Psalms 8, 19A, 33, 104, and 148.
- 12) Wisdom psalms: 1, 14/53, 25, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 49, 62, 73, 78, 90, 92, 94, 101, 111, 112, 119, 127; 128; 131; and 133. Also, Pss 26, 40, 45, 50, 51, 64, 104, 105, 106, 107, 145, 146 and 148 will be examined for the wisdom elements within their structures, although I would classify them as “mixed types” and not formally wisdom psalms.

Psalms Titles: in addition to *Maskil* (משכיל), which will be the subject of chapter 2, several psalm titles reveal evidence of the influence of wisdom editing in their references to figures associated with Temple singers and wisdom traditions. Among psalms I associate with wisdom traditions, the Psalms 39 and 62 (also 77) refer to “Jeduthun,” who appears in the Chronicler’s History as a temple musician and singer (1 Chron 9:16; 16:38, 41; 25:1, 3, 6; 2 Chron 5:12; 29:14; 35:15; Neh 11:17). In addition to being *Maskil* psalms, Psalm 88 is ascribed to “Heman the Ezrahite,” and Psalm 89 to “Ethan the Ezrahite.” Both of these figures appear in 1 Kings 5:11 (Hebrew) as wise men in Solomon’s court; Heman and Ethan are also mentioned as temple singers in 1 Chronicles 15:17, 19, and in 2 Chron 2:6 as “sons of Zerah.” With the majority of modern scholars, I assume most superscriptions are later additions to the various psalms; the appearance of

these names in association with Solomon's wisdom and in the Chronicler's History (Persian Period) may provide clues to the influence of wisdom editors and to the editing of these poems in the Persian Period. Further, Psalms 72 and 127 are attributed to "Solomon"; Ps 127 in particular is a wisdom psalm from the post-exilic period (discussed below), and Ps 72 is a royal psalm, most probably pre-exilic but later than Solomon. By placing the name of Solomon in the superscriptions of these psalms, later editors ascribe these psalms to the patron of Israelite wisdom. The collections of Korah and Asaph psalms will be discussed below in relation to wisdom-oriented psalms from those collections. Like Heman, Ethan, and Jeduthan, these figures also appear in the Chronicler's History and provide further evidence of the relationship of the Psalter and the Temple and court, where wisdom instruction was centered.

Historical-Critical concerns

I fully embrace the insights of modern critical scholarship, which has implications, for example, in references to "Solomon" as a patron of wisdom. While I take a moderate view that posits the existence of the historical Solomon, I view the description of his vast knowledge and composition of proverbs and songs in 1 Kings 3:12, 5:9–14, as exaggerated and reflective of the theologizing of the Deuteronomic Historians. However, the attribution of wisdom literature to Solomon, and his probable connections to foreign wisdom sources through his wives (e.g., 1 Kings 11), provide evidence of the milieu in which Israelite wisdom developed and its connections to the royal court. Therefore, when I invoke Solomon in the context of examining wisdom literature, I am referring to the international context of wisdom in the Ancient Near East that influenced the scribes who produced the wisdom literature and edited the Psalter.

ANE Languages and Israelite Scribes

Throughout this study I will make note of parallels and similarities between various Ancient Near Eastern texts, particularly from Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the psalms to show the *probable influence* of other ANE wisdom traditions on Israelite wisdom and particularly the Psalms. This raises

the question, when I note that something in the Psalms “reflects,” “parallels,” or “recalls” something from these ANE traditions, “did the Israelite sages know the languages of Egypt and Mesopotamia?” Short of any direct proof that Israelite scribes knew these languages, any affirmative answer must be considered hypothetical. I simply do not know. I do think it is possible that in the more international context of the post-exilic period, when Palestine was dominated by successive foreign governments, learned scribes could well have been trained in other languages. In pre-exilic contexts, however, it seems less likely, but when we consider the Hyksos—Semitic tribes that prevailed in Egypt from ca. 1750–1550 B.C.E.—it seems plausible that some educated scribes from an earlier period may have known some Egyptian.

Among contemporary scholars, Leo G. Perdue holds that within the royal courts, “At least a few Israelite scribes would have been able to read other West Semitic languages, Akkadian, hieroglyphics, and the hieratic script.”¹²⁵ André Lemaire strongly promotes the existence of wisdom schools in both pre- and post-exilic Israel.¹²⁶ In the First Temple period he posits their connection to the royal court and the existence of a “library”; these schools gain influence and importance in the post-exilic period when “there was no king and no royal school” and the sages merged with priestly traditions to emphasize the importance of Torah, exemplified in Ezra, the priest-scribe.¹²⁷ Perdue raises the possibility that the Egyptian court model influenced the development of the Israelite court, with the Babylonian period bringing forth the influence of Mesopotamian texts (particularly Job), and in the Persian period the use of both Hebrew and Aramaic by the sages, who “had to be at the very least bilingual.”¹²⁸ He cites Proverbs as being influenced directly by Egyptian wisdom traditions; in addition to the well-known citation of *Amenemopet* in Prov 22:19, knowledge of Egyptian wisdom would be mediated through the royal court and schools, and some of these sages may have known

¹²⁵ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 328.

¹²⁶ André Lemaire, “The Sage in School and Temple,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 165–81.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹²⁸ Perdue, *Wisdom Literature.*, 330.

Egyptian.¹²⁹ Lemaire also emphasizes Egyptian influence in Israelite wisdom: “Egypt exerted a strong cultural influence on Israel, demonstrated in part by the use of hieratic numerals in paleo-Hebrew writing.”¹³⁰ These observations provide strong support to the theory that wisdom schools existed in ancient Israel, and that these schools evolved in response to changing circumstances in Israel’s historical experience, from their beginnings in the monarchic period to their dominant role in the post-exilic period, when I propose the Psalter reached its final form under their influence. My analysis, however, leads me to conclude that the idea of “wisdom schools” includes a diversity of types, rather than a unified monolithic concept that embraced a common perspective.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 43, 46; Perdue cites a study by Nili Shupak (“The ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Book of Proverbs in the Light of a Comparison of Biblical and Egyptian Wisdom Literature” *RB* 94 [1989]: 98–119), who finds similarities in the vocabulary of Egyptian and Israelite wisdom texts, leading her to conclude that the Israelite sages either knew Egyptian or had it mediated to them via Phoenician or Canaanite sources (102).

¹³⁰ “The Sage in School and Temple,” 169–70.

Chapter Two

An Examination of the Term *Maskil* in the Canonical Psalter and the Dead Sea Scrolls as Evidence for Wisdom Editing of the Psalter

The term *Maskil* (משכיל), the Hiphil participle of the verb *sakal* (שכל), occurs frequently in the Wisdom literature, the book of Psalms, and the Dead Sea Scrolls; in the Dead Sea Scrolls it represents a particular leader or sage in the community who in addition to being wise serves as an “instructor” or “master” who imparts wisdom to others. In Psalm superscriptions and as a title in the Dead Sea Scrolls, it takes the form לִמְשָׁכִיל with the preposition ל (“to, of, for”).¹ (The preposition is similarly applied to David (דָּוִד) in canonical psalms attributed to him.) In the book of Psalms *Maskil* occurs in the superscriptions of 13 Psalms and in Ps 47:8, where it usually is interpreted as a musical term (e.g., RSV, “Psalm”). The exact meaning of the term is debated or uncertain for many commentators (e.g., NJPS notation on Psalm 32, “Meaning of Hebrew uncertain”). Based on its verbal root שכל, “to have insight,” I shall show that the occurrence of the term *Maskil* and most other uses of the verb שכל in the Psalms serve as a marker of wisdom editing and influence. Whether used in a superscription or within a psalm text, the term reflects the intents and purposes of the sages who served as the final editors of the canonical Psalter. Its use in the Qumran texts as a technical title for a wisdom teacher or “master” supports this thesis since the Qumran documents date to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, which coincides with the period in which the Psalter began to take on its final form. In this period sages may well have had a more prominent role in the editing and composition of the Psalms and wisdom literature.² By examining

¹ TDOT 14: 112–128; Carol A. Newsom, “The Sage in the Literature of Qumran: The Functions of the MASKIL,” *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 373–82; “Sectually Explicit Literature from Qumran,” in *The Hebrew Bible and its Interpreters* (ed. William H. Propp, Baruch Halpern, and David N. Freedman; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 167–87. “Maskil” is found in the superscriptions of Psalms 32, 42, 44, 45, 52, 53, 54, 55, 74, 78, 88, 89, and 142. Of these, I classify Pss 32 and 78 as wisdom psalms, and find wisdom elements in 52, 53.

² See Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (2 Vols in one; trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 94–95, 104–122, who posits such a role for these so-called “wise men” in assuming the handing on and production of psalms in the post-exilic era.

the term in both the canonical Psalter and the Dead Sea Scrolls, I shall attempt to show how this often-overlooked term provides clues to the editing and composition of the Psalter.

Among the Qumran texts, in the *Songs of the Maskil* and *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* the term refers to a specific person in a leadership position; this may provide a clue to the meaning of **משכיל** in the canonical psalms as a “wisdom marker” representing the intentions and instructions of a sage or group of sages who provide an authoritative application and reading of particular psalms. Though most of the canonical Psalms with *Maskil* in their superscription fall outside the specific wisdom psalm category (except Psalms 32 and 78), I propose that psalms of various genres which contain the term in their titles are specifically destined for pedagogical use relating to the intentions of the wisdom teachers. For example, the lament over Jerusalem in the context of Israel’s exile experience recounted in Psalm 74, while not a wisdom poem, is intended for special instructional use, perhaps to teach ongoing generations the importance of Torah obedience in light of the destruction resulting from Israel’s past sins, and to make successive generations knowledgeable about this definitive aspect of their history and identity. Other examples include: the lament in Psalm 42 of a distressed Israelite stranded in the north (“Hermon,” v. 7) and longing for the Temple in Zion; Psalm 52’s wisdom-influenced confident proclamation of **חסד** for those who trust in the Lord as opposed to the wicked who trust in their temporal wealth; the lament over betrayal in Psalm 55; the deeply distressed lament of Psalm 88 followed by the reflection on the monarchy and its failure in Psalm 89; the wisdom-oriented reflection from “Moses” on the temporality of human life in relation to God’s eternity in Psalm 90; and the prayer in Psalm 142 attributed to David hiding “in the cave.” A wisdom “master” or “insightful instructor” (*Maskil*) may have used these psalms for didactic purposes, even though they are not specifically wisdom psalms.

I will support my thesis that the term **משכיל** in psalm headings and **למשכיל** in the Dead Sea Scrolls provides evidence of the editing and compilation of the final form of the Psalter by wisdom instructors/sages in the later post-exilic period by first examining etymological aspects of the

root and its participle, the application of the term in the Dead Sea Scrolls and its relation to wisdom, and finally an examination of its use in canonical psalms. With regard to the Dead Sea Scrolls, I prefer the translation of לְמַשְׁכִּיל as “of the insightful/wisdom teacher” which differs somewhat from the usual “For the Master” in the critical editions and most analyses.³ Had the intention been to address a “Master” one might expect the use of בַּעַל or אֲדוֹן; using the wisdom root in narrows the application of the term to a specific wisdom teacher of high status, perhaps the elder or headmaster within a wisdom school. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Relation to other Psalm Titles: In several instances the title appears in a superscript along with mention of David (Psalms 32, 52, 53, 54, 55, 142), Asaph (74, 78), Heman (88), Ethan (89), Korah (42, 44, 45, 88), and to the Leader (לְמַנְצֵחַ, from the participle of נָצַח, “to lead, be chief”; 42, 44, 45, 52, 53, 54, 55, 88). We must consider the relation of in these instances to the other technical terms and proper names in psalm titles, attributed to Solomon (Psalms 72, 127), Moses (Ps 90; which contains wisdom elements), and the term הַמַּעֲלֵה וְתָה in the Songs of Ascent. With regard to Asaph, Korah, Ethan, Heman, “The Leader,” and “for the Ascent,” these other terms are specifically referent to guilds of singer and musicians (Asaph; Korah; Heman; Ethan; “The Leader”) or the liturgical context (“for the ascent”).⁴ In 1 Kings 5:11 (Hebrew; 4:31 RSV), in the description of

³ The critical editions which I consulted both translated לְמַשְׁכִּיל as “for the Master,” see James H. Charlesworth and Henry W. L. Rietz, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*. Volume 4AL: Pseudepigraphic and Non-Masoretic Psalms and Prayers (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997); and James H. Charlesworth and Carol A. Newsom, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translation*. Volume 4B: Angelic Liturgy: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

⁴ The *Korabbite* collection of Psalms includes 42 (43); 44–49; 84–85, and 87–88; 2 Chr 29:19 states: “Levites of the sons of Kohath and of the sons of Korah got up to extol the Lord God of Israel at the top of their voices,” which provides evidence of their role in temple singing. The Asaphite collection of psalms occurs in 50, and 73–83; Nehemiah 7:44 states: “The singers, the sons of Asaph” in the context of describing the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its wall in the Second Temple period. 1 Chr 16:7 places Asaph in Davidic times, while 2 Chr 29:30 calls him “the seer” (אַסַּף הַחֹזֵן), which suggests the poetry of the Asaphites occurred under divine inspiration. In 1 Chronicles Asaph repeatedly appears as among the Levites who serve an important role in Temple music and chanting (1 Chr 6:24; 15:17, 19; 16:5, 7, 37). Presumably, the Asaphites were present among the Levites who carried the Ark and meeting tent at the dedication of the Temple (2 Chr 5:1–5), and were still active when Josiah celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem (2 Chr 35:15), and continued their role in Temple liturgy in the fifth century, as attested in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 2:41; 3:10; Neh 7:44; 11:22; 12:35).

Solomon's exceeding wisdom, Heman and Ethan the Ezrahite are listed among a group of wise men whom Solomon surpasses.

Attribution to Solomon in the superscription of Psalm 127, a wisdom psalm, seems appropriate in light of his traditional association with the wisdom traditions. The ideal of kingship presented in Psalm 72, attributed to Solomon, along with the conclusion stating, "the prayers of David, son of Jesse, have ended" (72:20), marks the end of an earlier collection of David psalms and reveals the transition from David to Solomon. Most probably, later editors added the doxology in vv. 18–19, and the conclusion in v. 20, using the psalm to close book 2 in a way that reflects the failure of the monarchy. This leads to a renewed emphasis of YHWH as king, which occurs in wisdom Psalm 73 and throughout the latter part of the Psalter (e.g., Pss 93; 96:10; 97; 99). Likewise, the meditation ascribed to Moses in Psalm 90, following the lament over the fall of the monarchy in 89:39-52, provides a humble, wisdom-oriented reflection on the brevity of life and surpassing greatness of YHWH, while also praying for God's help to "prosper the work of our hands" (v. 17) in rebuilding the fallen nation after the failure of the monarchy.

Meaning of the Term: Among the possibilities proposed for this term three stand out: "a skillfully composed song," a song which provides insight or wisdom, and a "successful song," i.e., a popular song.⁵ Of these the first two seem plausible as they are based on the root meaning of the verb, "to have insight" or the causative "make insightful/wise"; the third option seems dubious as any poem which found its way into the canonical Psalter must be considered "successful." The second proposal, that it refers specifically to a wisdom or didactic psalm, must be challenged on the grounds that some of the psalms bearing the term in their superscription are laments and lack wisdom elements. However, if we accept—as I propose—that the final editing of the Psalter reflects the work of wisdom editors and/or teachers, we can argue that inclusion of the term in the superscription of an otherwise non-wisdom psalm type may reflect the intention of using or reading that particular psalm as "instruction," e.g., reading Psalm 74 as historical instruction of Israel's exile

⁵ *TDOT* 14:126–27.

experience or 89 as reflecting the Davidic covenant and ultimate failure of the monarchy and the resulting emphasis on YHWH as king.

Recent Interpretations: Among commentators on wisdom psalms, Mowinckel stands out in his description of a *Mas̄kîl* as “a song sprung out of and containing supra-normal insight and effect . . . and testifies to the connection between the psalmists and ‘wisdom.’”⁶ In Psalm 32, the first appearance of the term in a superscript in the canonical Psalter, Dahood interprets it as “A sense-giving harmony” that is both intellectual and “artistic-musical.”⁷ Terrien interprets the term as a musical notation for individual meditations used in private reflection, “perhaps a cantilena that has to be softly trilled in solitude,” when used in concert with the אֲשֶׁרׁ as in Ps 32:1; however, its use in Ps 47:8 (praise) and lament superscriptions (e.g., Pss 55, 74, 88, 142) leads to the alternative interpretation that *Mas̄kîl* designates a “plaintive reflection.”⁸ To suggest that the term as applied in varied psalms from wisdom (Pss 14/53, 32, 78), praise (Ps 47:8), and laments restricts its meaning to a musical notation indicating private reflection and soft humming seems contradictory and unconvincing. Observation of the variety of psalms in which the term appears argues for a broad application of the term; to suggest that these psalms are somehow limited to private reflection and soft humming ignores the probable cultic use and origin of such poems. Psalm 47, for example, exudes praise and a communal context as it exhorts “all peoples” (כָּל־הָעַמִּים) to clap their hands and shout for joy (v. 2), while the wisdom teacher of Psalm 32 “instructs” אֲשַׁכִּילֶךָ v. 8; same root שָׁכַל) and teaches (אֹרֶךְ) the student (s) the way of proper living.

Craigie offers a more useful interpretation, recognizing that its root (שָׁכַל) implies teaching and instruction and may mean “didactic psalm,” which accounts for its use in the superscriptions of

⁶ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship II* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; New York: Abingdon, 1962), 94; he further elaborates that the hiphil participle specifically refers to a “wise man” who has the knowledge and skill to achieve his aims, a “supra-normal power,” which indicates the cultic use of psalms containing this term as reflecting this supra-normal wisdom as pointing to the proper way to worship.

⁷ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1—50* (AB 16; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 194.

⁸ Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 29.

Psalms 32 and 78. In light of the non-didactic character of the other eleven psalms with *Maskil* in the superscription, it may mean “a meditation,” “a psalm of understanding,” or “a skillful psalm.” The key interpretive issue, in his view, is whether the word refers to the psalm text or its musical accompaniment. It may hold a dual meaning of “insight and analytical understanding” and “harmony and synthesis,” which could then apply the term to an interpretation and “exegesis of the text” which arises from its musical setting.⁹ This view better reflects the varied contexts in which *Maskil* appears and allows for both an individual and communal-liturgical setting for the psalms; such individual and communal usage more realistically represents how the psalms were used in later Second-Temple Judaism.

Kraus draws on its use in 2 Chr 30:22 (הַמְשַׁכִּילִים שְׂכֵל-טוֹב), which speaks of the Levites “showing skill in service of the Lord,” to suggest the term refers to songs composed according to “wisdom” (חִכְמָה) principles. Using the term “art song,” Kraus favors the idea that a *Maskil* refers to an artistic song which inspires praise and he discounts the didactic meaning. He emphasizes its use in Ps 47:8, a hymn of praise, while making note of Ps 49:3, “My mouth will speak wisdom,” as evidence of these principles of composition.¹⁰ He cites Ps 96:1 as an example of its meaning.¹¹ Use of the term in 2 Chronicles, a late writing (ca. 300 B.C.E.) aligns well with my view that later wisdom writers applied the term to various psalms and hymns in the post-exilic period to reflect the didactic use of such texts. Kraus’s view that *Maskil* does not reflect didactic interests seems unnecessary, as the liturgical and didactic purposes are not mutually exclusive; his emphasis on praise fails to account for the placement of *Maskil* in the superscriptions of laments.

In his recent translation of the Psalms, Robert Alter discusses *Maskil* as it appears in the superscriptions of Psalms 32 and 42 as “clearly a category of song,” the nature of which remains uncertain. Citing its use in Amos 5:13 (“Therefore, *the one being wise* will be silent in that time, for it is

⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1—50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 264.

¹⁰ Interestingly, while Kraus cites Psalm 49, which I count as a wisdom psalm, as evidence of these principles of composition, the psalm itself lacks the title *Maskil*.

¹¹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1—59: A Commentary* (Trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 25–26.

a time of evil”), Alter claims that the word refers to a “joyous song.”¹² Considering that Amos 5:15 describes the sin and punishment of Israel, his assertion that the use of **משכיל** provides evidence to interpret the term as referring to a joyful song seems odd. Alter acknowledges its use in other psalms (e.g., laments) which fail to support the definition of “joyful song,” and notes that its use in Psalm 32 may serve as a homonym for a “discerning person” or “giver of instruction,” while also pointing out the use of the verbal root in v. 8 and the wisdom aspects of the psalm.¹³

Etymology: In both biblical Hebrew and Aramaic the root **שכל** means to “have insight” or to make insightful; in the Hebrew Bible the verb occurs only in the hiphil, from which the term *Maskil* is derived. In Aramaic, the aphel of the root means “to make insightful, have insight,” while the ithpaal means “to acquire insight, comprehend, pay attention”; the noun forms meaning “insight,” and “understanding.”¹⁴ In Syriac, the pael of *skl* likewise means “to have insight” and “to proclaim.” In *Abiqar 147* the term appears with the meaning to be “clever” or “consider.”¹⁵ In the Hebrew Bible root **שכל** occurs 91 times, of which 16 use the hiphil, and 14 *Maskil* as a technical term in superscriptions of psalms. It appears as a singular participle eight times in Proverbs, a plural participle five times in Daniel, and fourteen times as the infinitive; the participle describes how a successful person behaves—a clue to its meaning in psalm titles. In the Psalms the occurrences of the root (11 times as verbal; 1 as a noun)—this excludes the use in superscriptions—occurs in wisdom contexts focusing on knowledge of God or God’s works, similar to its usage in Job (verb 3; noun 1).¹⁶

In Daniel 12:10 the term **המשכילים** (“the knowledgeable” NJPS) is paired with **יבינו** (“they will understand”) and applies in an eschatological context to those who remain faithful to YHWH. In the Chronicler and Daniel the root first begins to be applied as referring to the wisdom of elite

¹² Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 110.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *TDOT*, 14:112–13.

¹⁵ *TDOT*, 14:113–14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

intellectuals, gaining knowledge (Pss 94:8; 119:99), and reasonableness (Ps 36:4); the behavior of those to whom the term applies leads to success in life.¹⁷ Overall, the evidence suggests that clearly the use and derivation of this root שכל reflects wisdom concerns. For example, in wisdom Psalms 14 and its duplicate Psalm 53—which also contains *Maskil* in the superscription—and Psalm 32, which contains the term in its superscription and the body of the psalm, it refers to being wise and having clarity of knowledge. In Ps 41:2 it refers to those who “are wise to the poor”; they will be “happy.” The speaker of Ps 64:10 gains understanding of God’s deeds in rescuing while in Ps 101:2 the ideal king commits himself to “study the way of the blameless” (NJPS), and in the royal context of Ps 2:10 it serves as an imperative for kings to “be prudent.”

This provides a proper context for interpreting *Maskil* as a psalm title (and its occurrence in Pss 14:2= 53:3; 47:8) as a wisdom marker which provides a clue to the possible intended use of these particular psalms by wisdom teachers/scribes in the post-exilic period—the likely editors and compilers of the Psalter in its final form.

Maskil at Qumran: As with the canonical psalms, I view the use of *Maskil* as a title in the Qumran texts as a derivative of the verbal root שכל. The verb appears frequently in the manuscripts, reflecting the importance of instruction within the community; the verb is translated “take note of” or “heed” in several places (4Q185 1-2, I, 13; 4Q381 76-77, 8), to have “insight” (1QH 10:6) and “comprehend” (1QS 11:18; 4Q381 69:7)—all examples of the causative meaning of instruct.¹⁸

4Q381 69 is a non-canonical psalm that provides an example of the use of שכל in an instructional context. In describing the ministry of prophets as teachers of Torah, it states, “And through his spirit (ברוחו) prophets were given to you to give you insight (להשכיל) and teach you (ללמד).” The text goes on to mention “the statutes (חקים), teachings (תורות), and

¹⁷ Ibid., 117.

¹⁸ Ibid., 127.

commandments (מצוות) through the covenant he established through the hand of [Moses].”¹⁹ At Qumran, the prophets take on the role of Torah instructors; Moses revealed the Torah at Sinai, but ongoing generations of prophets (and priests) who understand Torah are inspired guardians who teach and apply Torah in the ongoing experience of Israel.²⁰ The list of men who prophesied with musical instruments as part of the temple service in 1 Chronicles 25 and Levites serving as gatekeepers in 1 Chron 26:17–20 provide evidence of prophetic and priestly roles being assimilated into the temple service in the Persian period.²¹ Alex Jassen views Nehemiah 9 as the most likely “base text” for 4Q381, noting the similarity between Neh 9:20 where God “gave your good spirit to instruct them (ורוחך הטובה נתת להשכל ים) and 4Q381 69.4 above.²² In both texts the spirit (רוח) illumines Torah instruction. In Nehemiah 8:13 the chiefs of clans, priests and Levites gather around Ezra the priest scribe “and study (להשכיל) the words of Torah.” The post-exilic context of the Chronicler’s History in the Persian period and its influence upon the Qumran texts indicate a common understanding and use of שכל (and, hence, משכיל).

Most commonly, however, the term שכל appears as the hiphil participle משכיל in reference to an instructor, or leader in the *Rule of the Community*, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, and *Songs of the Maskil*; the *Songs of the Maskil* show clear dependence upon the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and

¹⁹ My translation of the Hebrew text from Florentino García Martínez & Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 2:762.

²⁰ Alex Jassen, “Ancient Prophets as Lawgivers at Qumran” *JBL* 127 (2008): 322–25. For priests as teachers of Torah see Richard J. Sklba, “Sitting Down, He Taught Them: Teaching as Priestly Ministry in the Sacred Scriptures” *Emanuel* 115 (2009): 110–11; Sklba cites Deut 33:10, which in regard to the tribe of Levi states, “They shall teach your judgments (יורו משפטיך) to Jacob, and your Torah (תורה) to Israel,” along with incense and “whole offerings upon your altar.” In addition, Ezra the priest-scribe (Neh 8:1–18) provides an example of the role of priests as Torah instructors in post-exilic Israel.

²¹ See also 1 Chr 22:12, where the noun שכל in David’s prayer that the Lord grant Solomon “insight and understanding” (שכל ובינה) in observing Torah; 2 Chr 30:22 refers to the Levites “who taught good knowledge for the Lord” (המשכיל ים שכל-טוב ליהוה; my translation) in addition to making offerings and playing instruments during the feast of Unleavened Bread.

²² *Ibid.*, 323.

the *Hodayot* (thanksgiving hymns).²³ Use of the title לַמְשָׁכִיל in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and *Songs of the Maskil* relate to liturgical texts which in my view also served didactic purposes, much like the wisdom-oriented psalms of the canonical Psalter. These psalms reflect the concerns of post-exilic Israel in which the movement of Jews into the Diaspora, the temporary loss of the Temple, and subsequent need to preserve and maintain religious identity and the teaching of Torah, resulted in a more didactic emphasis in the composition of some psalms and editing and use of older ones.²⁴

Newsom notes that the term *Maskil* as applied to a person refers to a “sage” figure in both the Qumran community and in local villages of the “New Covenant Community” outside the more monastic type establishment postulated at Qumran. The use of the term, however, transcends simply a wise person or sage, but apparently describes an “Instructor” or “Master” whose role includes instruction and teaching others to become wise themselves. In the Community Rule, an important sectarian document of which thirteen copies have been discovered at Qumran, each chapter begins with reference to the מְשָׁכִיל, who leads community deliberations over rules, funds, and the interpretation of Scripture; in 1QS 1:1-12 it states that the text actually belongs to the מְשָׁכִיל. Commissioned to instruct the members, or “Holy Ones,” proper living “according to the book of the *Yabad’s Rule*,” the “Instructor/Master” (the usual translations of מְשָׁכִיל) must guide the faithful to “to seek God with all their heart and with all their soul,” to do good, according to God’s commands “through Moses and all His servants the prophets.”²⁵ The teaching of the *Maskil* continues to advance the Torah of YHWH given through Moses and the prophets and, in effect, he serves as a Mosaic-prophetic figure of great authority. He teaches the elect to act according to

²³ Carol A. Newsom, “The Sage in the Literature of Qumran: The Function of the *Maskil*” in John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 373–82, see 381 on the influence of *Sabbath* and *Hodayot* songs on the *Songs of the Maskil*.

²⁴ In asserting this, I disagree with the view of some authors, for example, Mowinckel, that wisdom psalms were non-cultic. See the views of Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988).

²⁵ Quoted from Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., & Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 126–27.

righteousness (צדקה), to “love all the Children of Light” and “hate all the Children of Darkness” while overseeing the initiation of new members into the community.

In 1QS 3:13 the *Maskeil* is charged with instructing and teaching the “sons of light” or members of the elect. It begins, “A text belonging to the instructor (משכיל), who is to enlighten and teach all the Sons of Light about the character and fate of humankind.”²⁶ Based on the content of this text, this instruction would presumably include the various dualistic beliefs, predestination and anthropological beliefs held by the sectarians; the *Maskeil* must be faithful to “Precepts” which may pertain to his specific function. Apparently in addition to didactic roles, the *Maskeil* held liturgical leadership responsibilities, such as blessing God (1QS 9:26–10:5), blessing members of the community (1QSb), and overseeing the admission of new members to candidacy (1QS 9:14, 16).²⁷

In 1QS 9:12–26, the *Maskeil* receives instruction to carry out God’s will according to “what has been revealed for each period of history,” suggesting a fluidity of revealed “statutes” through ongoing history; he must discern who authentically qualifies to be among the “Sons of Righteousness” and oversee membership in the *Yabad* (community). In this context, he also must conceal the *Torah* from “Men of the Pit,” and utilize his “true knowledge and right judgment” to reprove elect members, in leading them to perfection and understanding of “the mysteries” (רז), so that they may “walk blamelessly” (a wisdom expression, e.g., Pss 1:1; 119:1).²⁸ In 1QS 10:1-5, the times in which the *Maskeil* must lead prayer are outlined according to “times ordained of God,” i.e., night and day, and the “times appointed for new moons.” A lengthy prayer follows, in which the *Maskeil* speaks, noting that “With knowledge I shall sing out my music” (10:9), meditating on God’s miraculous deeds and חסד (10:16).²⁹ Several wisdom terms occur in 1QS 10:22-26, a section meditating on the power of the tongue and hence the need to speak wisely: he rejects “foolishness” and embraces “holiness,” speaks the “righteousness of God” as he is “counseled by wisdom,” and

²⁶ Ibid., 129.

²⁷ Ibid., 373–74, 377.

²⁸ Ibid., 139–40.

²⁹ Ibid., 140.

thus recounts “knowledge” with prudence and “shall mete out the statute” properly.³⁰ Typical of wisdom literature, we see here the contrast between “foolish” and “righteous” behavior, an emphasis on knowledge, wisdom, and prudence in action.

These texts clearly reveal the importance and high level of authority and knowledge accorded to the **משכיל**; he appears to continue the roles previously fulfilled by Moses and the prophets. Though the Community Rule focuses on the Qumran community, the document also refers to other possibly related groups throughout Palestine. It serves as a type of “charter” or constitution for the *Yahad*, which appears to be an association of priests, Levites, “Israel” and proselytes. They apparently viewed ritual sacrifice as less important and effective when compared to making atonement for sin, prayer, and righteous behavior.³¹ I see a parallel between the canonical prophets (e.g., Isaiah 1; Amos 5:21–27) and Qumran texts as both emphasize that worthy sacrifice must be accompanied by commensurate attitudes and actions. This de-emphasis on the cultic functions and heightened emphasis on proper instruction and behavior reflects the milieu of later Judaism, following the failure of the Monarchy, Exile, and foreign domination, in which *Torah* instruction becomes central to Israel’s worship and identity.³² Ezra the priest-scribe becomes the paradigm for Torah instruction and religious leadership in the Chronicler’s History, when the canon began to emerge in its final form.³³

What, then, is **משכיל** referring to in the Qumran documents? As noted above, it often appears with the preposition **ל** in reference to an important figure in the community. An analysis of its use in 4Q298 1, a wisdom text, provides in my view further clear examples of a primarily didactic function. It begins, “A word of a **משכיל** that he spoke to all the sons of dawn: [List[en to me, all]

³⁰ Ibid., 141.

³¹ The view held by Wise, Abegg, and Cook, in which they challenge the conventional view of the document as largely limited to Qumran; *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, 123–26.

³² Leo G. Perdue describes the emergence of scribes as interpreters of Torah and the dominant religious leaders in the Persian period, noting: “The frequent presence of sapiential literary forms, expressions, and themes in much of the Hebrew Bible is strong evidence that the scribes and sages were those who shaped the canon in its final form” (*Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2007), 148.

³³ Ibid., 150–51.

you men of heart. 2) And you who [pur]sue righteousness, understand my words . . .”³⁴ The imperative form of these statements to listen and understand the words of the **משכיל** reflect the style and vocabulary of a wisdom teacher addressing students (e.g., Prov 1:8; 4:1, 10; Pss 34:12; 49:2; 78:1). The text continues with imperatives to listen to those who “know” and “understand” (vv. 3-4), to increase in “learning” while upholding modesty, justice, courage, truth, pursuit of righteousness, and steadfast love; this advice to learned hearers to continue in pursuit of the virtues that lead to a good life reflects themes found in Proverbs and in wisdom psalms (e.g., Psalms. 1, 34, 49, 112). Harrington remarks, “It is remarkable for its use of wisdom terms,” and he interprets the **משכיל** as “the spiritual guide of the community (as in the Community Rule) and *not an ordinary sage*.” He posits the “sons of dawn,” are candidates for the community—regular members being called “sons of light”—who the **משכיל** meets outside the camp. The esoteric nature of this document may derive from a desire to limit access to the special wisdom teaching of the community to members and candidates.³⁵

Though many of the other uses of **משכיל** with **ל** occur in headings in documents that have a more liturgical and not specifically wisdom orientation, its usage here provides further evidence of the person and role of the *Mas̄kīl* as a specialized and important purveyor of practical and esoteric knowledge within the community—a “special sage,” so to speak.

At Qumran knowledge is considered a gift from God, both for general membership (1QH 4:25) and the *Mas̄kīl* (1QH 12:11–12). Newsom associates the special knowledge of the *Mas̄kīl* with the proper interpretation of Torah and understanding of God’s will. Reflecting of the polemics between those the Sons of light, who embrace the truth, and Sons of Darkness who embrace falsehood, the *Mas̄kīl* must be careful to prevent the non-sectarians from gaining access to true knowledge while reserving its teaching to members of the sect (see above, 1QS 9:17–18). This

³⁴ Translation from Daniel J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 65.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

special knowledge was revealed to the *Maškil* who interprets it in the form of *Halakah* for the children of the light, for example, in answering questions of theodicy for the dualistic sect: forces of evil cause the righteous to suffer. Even though the children of light can be influenced by the powers of evil, they will experience purification in the end times which will set them free.³⁶

Maškil in Liturgical documents: The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* is a cycle of 13 songs, one for each of the first thirteen Sabbaths of the year. They focus on the angelic priesthood, angelic praises, the Heavenly Temple, God's *Merkabah* or Chariot, and the sacrifices offered in the heavenly temple. They are non-polemical, presume the use of a solar calendar, and appear non-sectarian. Each song begins with the title, לַמַּשְׁכִּיל, in reference to a specific figure (see also 1QS 9:26–10:5; 1QSb).

Newsom interprets this title as a noun referring to a sectarian community leader who was an instructor, a sage (1QS 3 13), and liturgical leader (1QS 9:26—10:5; 1QSb); he holds both angelological and liturgical knowledge. Considering the rich number of extant copies of *The Songs of the Sabbath* at Qumran, it seems likely the *Maškil* held significant importance in the life and worship of the sectarians; it is possible, however, that these texts originated outside Qumran and were later adapted by the community for instruction and study.³⁷ An interesting suggestion holds that the *Maškil* at Qumran coincides with the *Mēbaqqēr* or “guardian” who, according to the *Damascus Document*, could be from non-priestly stock and whose authority derives from his knowledge rather than hereditary lineage.³⁸

An example from the *Songs of the Sabbath* provides some insight into the function of the *Maškil* in the *Songs*. 4Q403 fragment 1 2.18 begins with reference לַמַּשְׁכִּיל for the “eighth Sabbath” and goes on to describe “the seven priests in the wondrous sanctuary for the seven holy assemblies,”

³⁶ Newsom, “The Functions of the *Maskil*,” 378–79.

³⁷ Newsom, “Sectually Explicit Literature from Qumran,” 180–181. I also note that the Chariot and heavenly visions from the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* help us to understand the development of later Jewish Merkabah Mysticism as presented, for example, in the Books of Enoch (see 3 Enoch in particular). This connection between mysticism, liturgy and the role of the adepts in later Jewish mysticism seems to have early roots in the role of the לַמַּשְׁכִּיל in these liturgical hymns.

³⁸ Advanced by Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (2d ed.; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 22–25; see also Newsom, “The Sage in the Literature of Qumran: The Functions of the *Maskil*,” 375.

the “prince and angels of the king, “the knowledge of their discernment” (וְדַעַת בִּינְתָם), v. 23), and “seven mysteries of knowledge” (שִׁבְעַת רִזֵּי דַעַת), v. 27). The emphasis on knowledge and mysteries here and elsewhere represents the dual liturgical-didactic purpose of these hymns, for which the *משכיל* serves as teacher and interpreter, and the belief at Qumran that knowledge has an esoteric, divine source which one finds or receives.³⁹

The *Songs of the Maskeil* This collection was authored within the Qumran community and shows direct dependence on the *Hodayot* and *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.⁴⁰ The *Songs of the Maskeil* emphasize the important role of the *Maskeil* in the community as a teacher and liturgical leader. Significant numbers of extant manuscripts of the *Hodayot* and *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* reveal their importance among the Qumran sectarians. The *Maskeil* interprets time and, therefore, instructs the community to offer praise in accordance with the movements of the calendar: the divinely-inspired movement of day to night, weeks, months, seasons, years and epochs. This assures a proper coordination between the divinely-ordained movements of time and season and praise offered by the community. Because the *Maskeil* has knowledge which enables him to coordinate worship according to the movement of the heavenly bodies, he also holds esoteric knowledge of the heavenly realm as attested by his prominence in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. These texts concern themselves with the Sabbaths, Heavenly priesthood, and sanctuary, angels, and the divine Chariot or *Merkabah*. Proper coordination of worship through the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, lead by the *Maskeil*, enables the human community to offer praise and worship in concert with that offered by the heavenly angelic worshippers and enter into communion with them. This concern for the celestial sanctuary occurs throughout the *Hodayot* and *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and likely helped to strengthen the Qumran priests’ role and purpose, and served perhaps as a foretaste of their service with the angels,

³⁹ English translation and Hebrew text from James H. Charlesworth and Carol A. Newsom, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translation*. Volume 4B: Angelic Liturgy: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 93.

⁴⁰ Newsom, “Sectually Explicit Literature from Qumran,” 181–82.

as attested in the blessing of the priests by the *Maškeil* in 1QSb.⁴¹ These roles further affirm the importance and didactic role of the *Maškeil*, whose knowledge of earthly and heavenly matters serves to maintain the worship and self-understanding as it seeks to discern and fulfill God's will. This leads us back to the *Songs of the Maškeil*, which likewise focuses on celestial matters, praise, the angelic priesthood, and heavenly sanctuary.

The *Songs of the Maškeil* parallel the vocabulary of *The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* in their use of אלוהים for God and the term שיר (song) along with imperative calls to praise; they use nearly identical language in describing the heavens and cherubim (4Q511:44), and showing God appointing priests for service (4Q511:35). In addition, as noted above, the *Songs of the Maškeil* shows many parallels with the *Hodayot*, both verbally and thematically. The *Maškeil* likewise is depicted as holding special insight and understanding of human nature as he is in the *Community Rule* (compare 4Q511 63 3:2-3 and 1QS 3:13-15). In 4Q511 2:9-10, reference is made to the יוד which seems to clarify the origin of the *Songs of the Maškeil* within the Qumran community. While the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* may have originated outside the Qumran sect, clearly the *Songs of the Maškeil* depends upon them and originated uniquely with Qumran. In examining the role of the *Maškeil* in the Qumran texts one clearly sees the special status and power attributed to him; reference to “the splendor of his beauty” (4Q510 1:4) reveal the “quasi-magical purpose” of the *Songs of the Maškeil*.⁴²

I propose that *Songs of the Maškeil* exemplify the specific appropriation and adaptation of the term משכיל by the Qumran community. Presumably, they adapted the common understanding of the Hiphil participle of שכל as a didactic term denoting intelligence, wisdom, and as a psalm title, and applied it to a revered and important instructor within the community who oversaw worship and the dissemination of esoteric knowledge. I propose that the existing use of משכיל in psalm superscriptions and within psalms (and other didactic applications in the Hebrew Bible), of which the

⁴¹ Newsom, “The Sage in the Literature of Qumran: the Functions of the *Maškeil*,” 379–81.

⁴² Newsom, “Sectually Explicit from Qumran,” 185.

Qumran sectarians would be aware, provided the basis of their adaptation of the word to a specific teacher within the community. If correct, this provides an earlier understanding of the true meaning of **משכיל** in the Psalms as specific to wisdom instruction and instructors rather than simply a musical, and this in turn clues us into the intended use of Psalms with the title.

Analysis of “Maskil” in the Canonical Psalter

Psalm 14: I consider Psalm 14, and its parallel Psalm 53, as Wisdom Psalms, based on their shared theme of the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked, use of wisdom key-words, and use of retribution theology, similar to Psalm 1. Its view that the godless and corrupt behavior of the wicked will merit punishment from an omniscient and just God who will vindicate the righteous and restore Israel’s fortunes, places the psalm thematically within post-exilic wisdom traditions. Wisdom terminology includes: “fool” **נבל**, v. 1; “they have knowledge” **יערו**, v. 3; “ones acting wisely” **משכיל**, 14:2, 53:3; and “Counsel” **עצת**, v. 6).⁴³ Other wisdom terminology occurs in the phrase **אין עשה-טוב**, “none do good,” in v.1 (Ps 53:2), and **השחיתו**, “they act corruptly”; these uses contrast with wisdom teaching to “do good” and “turn from evil” (see Pss 34:15, 37:3, 27 and Eccl 3:12; 7:20). Whybray describes as a “rare usage”; he also classifies Psalms 14/53 as “Pure Wisdom” psalms.⁴⁴ The use of **משכיל** comes in the context of YHWH observing humanity from heaven, to see “if there is anyone *acting wisely*” (**לראות היש משכיל**); alternatively, if translated as a noun, this verse reads, “to see if there is a *wise person*.”⁴⁵ Both psalms conclude with a prayer for the rescue and

⁴³ My classification of “wisdom psalms—including psalms of mixed genres in which “wisdom elements” predominate—includes 1, 14/53, 19, 25, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 49, 73, 90, 92, 94, 104, 108, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133, and 148; psalms with strong wisdom elements include 2, 26, 40, 41, 45, 51, 64, 105, 106, 107, 145, 146, and 147. The prayer for the restoration of Zion combined with imprecations against the wicked fits well into the post-exilic context of foreign domination. One could argue the final plea for restoration places the psalm during the time of captivity; perhaps it originated in that context but was later expanded to be used for ongoing teaching about the omniscience of YHWH and the pitfalls of foolish behavior.

⁴⁴ R. N. Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 61.

⁴⁵ Whybray, *Ibid.*, also describes **משכיל** as evidence of the psalm’s wisdom origins and adds that the term “is almost exclusive to Proverbs and Job” (Prov 10:5; 14:34; 15:24; 16:20; 17:2; 19:14; 21:12; Job 22:2).

restoration of Israel/Jacob, which will result in exultation. On the other hand, the wicked will be shamed (Pss 14:6; 53:6).⁴⁶

Psalms 14/53 lament the lack of wisdom by evildoers or those unfaithful to the covenant while providing reassurance, by implication, for those who act as **משכיל**. Stuart Irving interprets the **משכיל** as qualified by the second half of the line, “one who seeks God,” and thus views it as referring to “someone who looks for and discerns Yahweh.”⁴⁷ This interpretation complements, rather than contrasts with, the usual understanding of the term as referring to one who acts according to wisdom: a person who acts wisely naturally focuses on YHWH for both worship and to gain direction and meaning in life. Though Psalm 14 contains elements of prophetic speech, lament and the hymn, these elements serve the theme of wisdom, which dominates.⁴⁸ Lament and prayer are here combined with the traditional wisdom theme of the prosperity of the righteous over the wicked (Ps 1.) The differences between Psalms 14 and 53 will be discussed below in the comment on Psalm 53.

Bennett divides the psalm into three parts: vv. 1–3 condemns the fool and corrupt behavior of the wicked using “the meditative tone and proverbial style of wisdom”; vv. 4–6 (53:4–5) uses prophetic speech to describe the oppression of the wicked and God’s response; and v. 7 is the hymn-like prayer for deliverance, restoration, and rejoicing.⁴⁹ Key to his analysis is the use of the wisdom terms **נבל** in strophe 1 to **עצת** in strophe 2; these terms reveal the moral deficiencies of the wicked

⁴⁶ Psalm 53:6 expands upon this by adding that, in addition to being shamed, the bones of the wicked will be scattered—a metaphor for defeat and destruction—and they will be “spurned” (**מאסו**).

⁴⁷ Stuart Irving, “A Note on Psalm 14:4” *JBL* (1995): 465; Irving describes the psalm as “a prophetic lament liturgy with elements from wisdom literature” (463).

⁴⁸ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 40, calls it a prophetic psalm; Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 146, emphasizes how the wisdom theme subsumes and dominates the other elements of lament, prophecy, and hymn; Dahood, *Psalms I*, 80, likewise emphasizes the predominance of wisdom themes. Robert A. Bennett, “Wisdom Motifs in Psalm 14=53—*nabal* and *‘esah*,” *BASOR* 220 (1975): 15–21, classifies both psalms as of mixed genre but united by “the strong wisdom orientation of the psalm” (20). Clifford downplays the wisdom identification by claiming that the words for fools and knowledge are “general” and classifies it as a “psalm of trust” as the singer rejoices in his status among the poor and confidently awaits God’s vindication (*Psalms 1—72*, 88–89).

⁴⁹ Bennett, “Wisdom Motifs,” 15.

who are unable to accept or grasp wisdom teaching.⁵⁰ The fool (נבל) says in his heart (בלב) “God is not” (אין אל־הים v. 1); in other words, the fool concludes that God is irrelevant to life and therefore lives outside the covenant obligations of a wise Israelite. Modern notions of atheism did not apply to this cultural context; the issue was not whether gods existed but whether they were relevant. Literally, the heart equals the mind or center of moral reasoning in Semitic thought, so the fool “acts on the basis of the wrong assumption” about God.⁵¹

From the heavens, the metaphorical place of God’s throne in Ancient Near Eastern cosmology, YHWH looks down (השקיף) upon humanity, looking for those who embrace wisdom (משכיל), and thus seek God (דרש v.3). Clifford compares this verse to Genesis 11:5, where YHWH looks down from heaven to observe the tower (of Babel), and Gen 18:21, where YHWH goes down to check on the people of Sodom.⁵² By depicting God observing humanity from the heavenly abode the psalm emphasizes divine transcendence and omniscience. Unlike other psalms (82:1; 89:8) which mention a divine council of “holy beings,” here only YHWH is depicted in heaven, which may be evidence of a later, post-exilic provenance in which monotheism was normative.⁵³ The negative result is that all “turn aside” (סר) and act impurely (v.3); the verb סור used here is also a wisdom term used as an imperative in other wisdom psalms to “Turn from evil” (e.g., Pss 34:15; 37:27; Prov 3:7; 4:27; Job 1:1, 8).⁵⁴ In contrast to the wisdom imperative of Ps 34:15 to “turn from evil and do good” (סור מרע ועשה־טוב), here the wicked turn (סר) from wisdom and seeking God and “no one does good” (עשה־טוב).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 16–19.

⁵¹ James L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994), 81.

⁵² Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 89–90.

⁵³ My view is that pre-exilic Israel was largely *henotheistic*, believing that YHWH, the God of Israel, was superior to all other gods—which existed; in post exilic Israel, as attested in Isaiah 44–45, strict monotheism appears to have become normative. For a concise and informative discussion of the concept of God’s heavenly dwelling and the divine council, see James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 467–68, 540–46.

⁵⁴ Avi Hurvitz, “Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A contribution to the Study of ‘Wisdom Psalms’” *V/T* 38 (1988): 41–51; on this term see 47–59.

Instead, the evildoers “do not know” wisdom and consume (אכלו) God’s people (the righteous) like “bread”—a metaphor depicting pervasive oppression (v. 4; see Mic 3:2–3). Because the fools say in their heart/mind that “there is no God” (v. 1), they do not call upon YHWH (v. 4).⁵⁵ Verses 5–6 emphasize that the wicked who reject God live under great fear (פחדו פחד)—despite their attempts to “shame the counsel of the poor,” (עצת עני)—because God remains with the righteous generation (ברור צדיק) as their refuge (מחסה). Psalm 36:2–5 has thematic and linguistic parallels to Psalm 14: the wicked hold transgression “deep in their heart” (בקרב לב, v. 2) have no fear (אין פחד) of God, reject wisdom and good behavior (להשכיל להיטיב, v. 4), plot evil and walk in a way that is “not good.”⁵⁶ In both psalms wisdom terms are used negatively to describe those who reject and fail to live by wisdom, with the consequence that the wicked ultimately suffer (Pss 14:5; 36:12–13) while the righteous prosper. I imagine wisdom teachers using Psalms 14/53 and 36 as ways of teaching wisdom through negative examples in which the consequences of rejecting God and wisdom are laid out and contrasted with the rewards of the righteous.

Coming full circle from the initial expressions of lament, the psalm concludes in verse 7 with an anticipatory hymn-like prayer for the salvation and restoration of Israel/Jacob, which will lead to celebration with gladness and rejoicing. The construction, “when YHWH restores the fortunes of his people” (בשוב יהוה שבות עמו) reflects exilic and post-exilic literature (Ps 126:1, 4; Jer 30:18; Ezek 29:14; Amos 9:14).⁵⁷ While the verse may be a later addition, I prefer to see the psalm as a unity and the product of the post-exilic period in which wisdom schools and the editing of the

⁵⁵ Irving (“A Note on Psalm 14:4,” 465) translates the verbs ידע, as “to reason,” and קרא as “meet, encounter,” leading to the translation, “Do they not *reason*, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, that they do not *encounter* YHWH?” (Emphasis added.) While this translation is plausible, I prefer the usual translation of the verbs as “know” and “call.”

⁵⁶ See chapter four of this dissertation for an expanded analysis of Psalm 36; normally “my heart” in 36:1 is emended to “his heart.”

⁵⁷ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 90–91. Mays (*Psalms*, 83) reads v. 7 as arising from present distress and looking towards a future when both oppressed and oppressor would rejoice in YHWH. I rather see the focus of the prayer on the righteous who will be vindicated from oppressors who shall have no share in their future happiness.

Psalter came to fore. In such a context, the godless fool represents the oppressors who led Israel into exile—an may refer also to the ongoing foreign domination—that ultimately will be overcome and will result in joy and exultation as God’s faithful are restored to security and prosperity. The emphasis on Zion as the place of this restoration seems to envision the restored temple and worship in Jerusalem, the place which most powerfully represents the divine presence on earth.

Psalm 32: This first instance of *Maskeil* in a superscription occurs in a wisdom Psalm.

Wisdom aspects include the **אשר** formula (twice, vv. 1-2), its contrast between sinful and righteous behavior (vv. 10-11), and emphasis on instruction (vv. 8-9). It provides a powerful metaphorical description of the mental and physical effects of sinfulness and guilt (vv. 3–4), the transformation that occurs through repentance and confession (v. 5), which leads to both wisdom instruction (vv. 8–10), thanksgiving (vv. 6–7), and concluding praise (v.11). With Murphy, Kuntz, and Purdue, I view the psalm as essentially a wisdom psalm in which the wisdom teacher recalls his own experience of transformation as a tool to teach others (vv. 8–9).⁵⁸ Perdue describes it as an “*Ashrê poem*” which builds its structure around the initial use of **אשר**, the didactic use of thanksgiving (as in Ps 34), instruction, and uses extensive wisdom vocabulary, the dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked, and just judgment (v. 10a). Purdue observes the use of three words for the “righteous” (**יֵשֶׁר חֲסִיד צַדִּיק**); three verbs for confession of sin (**אודה**; **לאִכַּסִּיתִי**; **אודיעך**, v. 5); three verbs for instruction (**אשכילך**; **אורך**; **איעצה**, v. 8); and three imperatives for the congregation to rejoice (**הרנינו**; **גילו**; **שמחו**, v. 11).⁵⁹ Four synonyms for sinfulness in the introductory verses:

⁵⁸ Roland E. Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms’” (*VTSup* 9; Leiden: Brill, 1963), 156–67; Kenneth Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel—their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Elements” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (Pittsburg Theological Monograph Series 1; Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1974), 186–222; Leo J. Purdue, *Wisdom & Cult* (SBLDS 30; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 261–343.

⁵⁹ *Wisdom & Cult*, 299–301. I agree with Perdue’s observations on the wisdom elements of the psalm but disagree with his classification of vv. 3–7 inclusive as “thanksgiving,” as the recollection of physical and emotional anguish by the psalmist in vv. 3–4 reflects upon past suffering and lament which, when transformation occurs, allows for thanksgiving and praise. Both Perdue (300) and Craigie (*Psalms 1—50*, 265) propose a chiasmic structure for the psalm. In my analysis, the chiasms seem forced; rather, I propose an inclusion with the initial *’asrê* in vv. 1–2 and the concluding praise in v. 11.

רמיה; עון; חתאה; פשע (vv. 1-2); the first three are repeated in the psalmist's recollection of his confession of sin in v. 5.

The combination of the אֲשֶׁר־י ("happy is") formula with words for sinful behavior to describe the state of the forgiven speaker recalls Psalm 1; here, however, the speaker has received forgiveness and has turned from sinful to righteous behavior. By utilizing multiple words for sinfulness balanced by words for forgiveness—נָשָׂא, "to lift up/forgive," and כָּסָה, "to cover"—together with the *'asrē*, the psalmist introduces the instruction with two beatitudes (vv. 1–2) that intensify the sense of pardon and conversion.

Vv. 3–5: Now the psalmist recollects the physical and emotional distress that resulted from unresolved guilt. His "silence" (הִחַרְשֵׁתִי, "when I kept silent") led to "my bones wasted away" and continuous groaning (בַּל־הִיָּוִם, v. 3); silence represents the psalmist's attempt to avoid taking responsibility for sin, which causes both emotional anguish and physical weakness. The connection between silence and suffering occurs also in Pss 38:14–15, 39:3, and is anticipated in Sheol in 88:11–13. Similar descriptions of physical distress caused by sin occur in Pss 6; 30:7–9; and 41:5. In addition, the psalmist experienced divine punishment, described as YHWH's hand being "heavy upon me"—the hand of God being symbolic of divine power, which here becomes a crushing burden for the unrepentant sinner (Ps 39:11). This emotional, physical and divine punishments leaves the psalmist feeling spent and weak, like a plant dried out in summer's heat (v.4), much like the wicked of Psalm 1 who become like wind-blown chaff. Transformation occurs through honest acknowledgment, repentance and confession of sin (Pss 38:19; 51:5), which evokes YHWH's forgiveness (נָשָׂא, v.5). A "gravitational contrast" occurs with the use of verbs for forgiveness, which means "to lift up," in vv. 1 and 5, and "your [YHWH] hand was heavy" (תִּכְבֵּד) in v.4.⁶⁰ Unresolved guilt weighs one down physically, spiritually, and emotionally, while repentance,

⁶⁰ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 80.

confession, and forgiveness both “cover over” the stain of sin and, literally “lifts up” the burden, providing physical, spiritual, and emotional relief.

Vv. 6—7: The speaker offers a brief thanksgiving urging that others pray to YHWH with similar honesty (“in a time when indeed [you] are found” *לעת מצא רק* v.6), so that they may avoid anguish and suffering. Suffering is likened here to floodwaters which consume the sinner (see also Psalms 18:5, 17; 69:1, 16; 88:18; 124:4–5; 144:7 for similar descriptions of floodwaters as a mortal threat).⁶¹ As the Israelites were not a sea-faring people, the image of floodwaters and implied drowning served as a powerful metaphor for danger. Through confession, however, the psalmist receives divine pardon and, in contrast to threatening floodwaters, now delights with God as a “hiding place” or shelter (*אתה סתר לי*) that provides protection from distress (*מצר*, “pains”). The image of God as a hiding place parallels Ps 27:5; here the metaphor expresses the value of repentance and prayer as a means of healing and communion with God. Now the psalmist is “surrounded” (*הסובבני*) by glad shouts of deliverance; similarly, in v. 10 in contrast to the punishment of the wicked, the righteous collectively will be surrounded (*יסובבנו*) by God’s steadfast, covenant love (*חסד*). The “shouts of deliverance” (*רני פלט*) may represent a victory cry after battle.⁶² Here the battle is the internal struggle with sin and guilt; the victory is the lifting of these burdens and subsequent transformation, which leads directly to instruction. Gerstenberger views the exhortation and confession in vv. 6–7 as liturgical, rather than “personal or autobiographical,” as the experience of forgiveness is directed to an entire congregation of worshippers; the expression of confidence in v.7, therefore, serves as a public confession in an assembly. He views this passage and the psalm in general, as post-exilic.⁶³

⁶¹ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 264, amends the MT *מצא* to *מצוק*—supposing the waw was confused for a resh by a scribe—giving the translation “let every godly one pray to you at a time of stress,” which, admittedly, more closely coincides with vv. 3–4 and “distress” in v. 7. I prefer to follow the MT, which then emphasizes the importance and immediacy of repentance and prayer before it is too late; thus, pray now, when God will hear and answer before it is too late.

⁶² Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 267.

⁶³ Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 140–42.

Vv. 8–9: The initial beatitudes, recollection of past suffering, confession, transformation and thanksgiving prepares for the key didactic section of the psalm, where the psalmist takes the role of a wisdom teacher (vv. 8-9). Having experienced conversion and forgiveness, the psalmist exclaims to others: “I will instruct you (אֲשַׁכִּילֶךָ) and teach you (וְאֹרְרֶךָ) the way in which you should walk” (בְּרֹדְדֵי-זוֹ תֵלֵךְ). The first word of instruction in v. 8 derives from the root שָׁכַל and is in the Hiphil form, just as the title *Maskil* derives from the hiphil participle of the same root. This combination of wisdom-oriented vocabulary continues as the psalmist-teacher “gives counsel” (עֲצָרָה) with “my eye upon you,” an image that conveys God’s protection and guidance for the converted sinners to help them follow the path of wisdom.

A proverb follows in v. 9 calling on the students to avoid being foolish or dumb “like a mule” or horse which “lacks understanding” (אִין הִבִּין) and needs to be controlled by bit and bridle. The verb “understanding/intelligence” (בִּין) is a key wisdom term. This admonition complements the wisdom statement in v. 8 by focusing on the need to overcome resistance to repentance and confession so that one may experience divine forgiveness; like an unruly animal, sinners often hold stubbornly to their self-destructive behaviors. A similar image occurs in Proverbs 26:3, comparing the horse and mule, which need to be bridled and whipped, to the fool, who receives the “rod” on his back.⁶⁴

By contrasting the punishment of the wicked with the promise of God’s steadfast love and rejoicing for the righteous, the concluding verses (vv. 10–11) recall the conclusion of Psalm 1. Psalm 32 teaches the importance of repentance, confession, and conversion that brings forth the renewal of God’s רִסּוֹן; this important lesson reflects the concerns of wisdom teaching. While identifying the psalm as an individual thanksgiving, Gerstenberger recognizes the wisdom elements in vv. 1–2, 8–11, and posits its use in congregational settings, “as lecture or prayer,” within an educational, wisdom

⁶⁴ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 208; Craigie connects this verse to vv. 3–4, which shows the results of stubborn resistance to confession.

context; theologically, the psalm reflects traditional wisdom interests as in the line of reasoning by Job's friends. Noting the importance of forgiveness in texts from the Persian period (Ezra 9; Nehemiah 9; also Daniel 9), and the lack of reference to sacrifice, he views the psalm as reflective of synagogue worship.⁶⁵ While I agree with a later context for the psalm and its origins, or at least final form, arising from wisdom interests, the evidence for specific liturgical or synagogue worship is at best hypothetical and not clearly adduced from the text itself. At best we can say it lacks historical or cultic reference, and though attributed to David, obviously derives from a much later period in Israel's history.

Notes on the Septuagint and מִשְׁכִּיל: At this point I shall examine the LXX translation of the term. Interestingly, in the LXX version of Psalm 14, the Hebrew term מִשְׁכִּיל is translated with εἰ ἔστι συνίω, “if there were any that understood”; all the uses of מִשְׁכִּיל in LXX superscriptions use a form of συνίειν—usually συνέσεω with the genitive (Psalms 32, 52, 53, 54, 55, 74, 78, 88, 89, 142) but sometimes σύνεσις (42, 44, 45), and always translated as “instruction.” The LXX of Ps 41:2 also uses the participle of συνίειν to translate מִשְׁכִּיל: μακαρίος ὁ συνίω ἐπὶ πτωχόν, “Happy the one who considers the poor.” In Pss 14:7, 41:2 and 53:3, the LXX translates the participle συνίω as the equivalent of the Hiphil participle of שָׁכַל.⁶⁶ In Psalm 47:7 (46:8), a hymn of praise for Zion, the LXX translates the Hebrew מִשְׁכִּיל זָמְרוּ, “sing wisely,” with ψάλατε συνετώ, “sing praises with understanding,” using the Greek συνετώ, a term that can also be translated as “wise.”⁶⁷

Considering that the LXX Psalter dates from the approximately the mid-third century B.C.E., its translation of מִשְׁכִּיל using closely-related Greek equivalents provides strong evidence

⁶⁵ Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 143.

⁶⁶ Here I use the English translation from Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1851; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001) and use the Hebrew enumeration; for the various Greek equivalents of the root שָׁכַל and מִשְׁכִּיל in the LXX, see Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament II* (3 Vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1897; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983), 1314–1316.

⁶⁷ See Hatch and Redpath, *A Greek Concordance to the Septuagint*, 1315.

that the final redaction of these psalms *in Hebrew* and the addition of superscriptions occurred before ca. 250 B.C.E. The relationship between the Hebrew texts behind the LXX and MT, respectively, remains uncertain, and the Dead Sea Scrolls *Psalms Scroll* also reveals variations in the order of Psalms.

Psalm 41: This psalm combines elements of wisdom (vv. 2–4) and thanksgiving (vv. 11–12) which form an envelope around a lament over the speaker’s sin (v. 5), an unspecified illness, malicious, duplicitous enemies (vv. 6–9), betrayal by a friend (v. 10) and plea for help (v. 11). I see indications of 41:2–4 being a possible interpolation by later wisdom editors who may have added wisdom elements to Psalm 41 as it closes Book 1. Verses 5–13 could easily stand alone as a thanksgiving which recalls God’s deliverance from past distress which may have been an illness (v. 7, “come to visit me”) and/or scorning and betrayal by false friends. Note also that Book 3 begins with *Maskil* in the superscription of Psalm 42, a lament. Craigie describes vv. 2–4 as “didactic poetry reminiscent of the wisdom tradition.”⁶⁸ He proposes that the opening words come from a priest at a liturgy of healing to teach that only those who show concern for the needs of the poor and weak may expect God’s blessing in their own time of illness or suffering.⁶⁹ Commenting on his translation of Psalm 41:2 (“Happy *who looks* to the poor”; term in italics), Alter states that the verbal form of **משכיל** may refer to seeing or looking, in addition to the more common reference to “understanding,” as the idiom “to see” in many languages also holds the meaning “to understand.”⁷⁰

Verse 2 begins with the **אשרי** formula (“Happy the one”) typical of wisdom literature, followed by a verbal use of **משכיל** in reference to “one who considers the poor” (RSV), and a prayer (v. 3) that the one who cares for the poor be protected by God and “be called happy in the land” (**אשר בארץ**)—from the same root as **אשרי**—and delivered from enemies. Alter’s translation, asserting that **משכיל** also holds the meaning “to see” or “to look,” could also be

⁶⁸ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 319.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

regarded as a metaphor for understanding.⁷¹ In addition, the contrast between the righteous and the wicked in the psalm also reflects wisdom interests. Perhaps the wisdom editors who finalized the Psalter added wisdom interpolations here in the final psalm of Book 1; even if the Psalm is a unity, it most likely received its final form by wisdom editing in a post-exilic context. While Book 1 concludes with the use of *משכיל*; Book 2 begins with the term in the superscription.

Psalm 42: This lament in which the psalmist appears to be in the North (Hermon, v.7) and yearns to return to Jerusalem and Temple worship (vv. 2–5), begins with superscription, “For the Leader, *Maskil* of the Sons of Korah” (v.1). While the Psalm itself lacks a wisdom orientation, it is the first of a series of psalms of mixed genre in Book 2 which include *משכיל* in the superscription (Pss 44; 45; 52; 53; 54; 55). These include attribution to the sons of Korah (42; 44), a royal love poem (Ps 45), and David (Pss 52–55). While dating of Psalm is notoriously difficult, in my view Psalm 42 may well reflect an earlier, pre-exilic date of composition; the comparison of a “deer” yearning for running waters with the psalmist yearning for God has affinities with Ugaritic literature.⁷² Along with closely related Psalm 43, which extends the refrain (Pss 42:6, 12; 43:5) and focus on the Temple (43:3–4), the two formed an originally unified composition that was divided at a later date. Perhaps when post-exilic wisdom editors adapted the Psalm for didactic purposes in addition to liturgical use they added *משכיל* to the superscription. The attribution to the temple guild singers “the Sons of Korah,” to which the wisdom editors added *משכיל* as a didactic marker, reflects the psalm’s cultic and didactic use.

Psalm 44: A communal lament that recalls God’s past favors in Israel’s history (vv. 2–9) in light of current defeat, where God seems absent. The psalmist holds God responsible for their plight (vv. 10–17, 20, 23—all of which use the personal pronoun “you”) while confessing the innocence of the community (vv. 18–19, 21–22). The poet references Deut 8:17–19, “You rooted out the nations but them you planted” (v. 3; cf. Pss 78:55; 80:9) in recalling God’s past favors in leading Israel

⁷¹ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 145.

⁷² Roland E. Murphy, “Psalms” (*JBC*; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), 583.

through the exodus from slavery and victory in the conquest and settlement of the land. This text now serves as a reminder for God to restore Israel in its current plight, described as being “scattered among the nations” (וּבְגוֹיִם זָרִיתָנוּ v.12). I place the psalm in an exilic context, when Judah and Jerusalem were overthrown and the wealthier classes were exiled to Babylon while the poor remained in the destroyed city.⁷³ The superscription is exactly the same as in Psalm 42: “For the Leader; A *Maskeil* of the Korahites” (v. 1). While the context and date of Psalm 44 probably differ from Psalm 42, the attribution to the Korahites and didactic reference (*Maskeil*) remain the same. I propose that in post-exilic worship these laments recalling past events continued to serve didactic purposes; Psalm 42 in its depiction of the centrality of Jerusalem worship, and Psalm 44 in its recollection of the experience of dislocation and exile. Unusual, however, is the Job-like lack of contrition by the speaker in Psalm 44 (similar to the attitude of the speaker in *Maskeil* Psalm 88).

Psalm 45: In this royal love poem, a “ready scribe” (סוֹפֵר מְהֵירָה v. 2) describes the handsome and noble nature of the king as chosen and anointed by God (vv. 3–10), executing divine rule with justice (v.8), and holding vast wealth (vv. 9, 10). The scribe describes plans for a royal wedding. The poet advises the bride (vv. 11–12), describes her finery and procession (vv. 13–16), and concludes with further reference to the king’s throne and sons who will succeed him (vv. 17–18). With mention of “ivory palaces,” numerous foreign wives (“daughters of kings”), and gold of Ophir, the description of this king recalls Solomon, noted for his wisdom, rich temple, wealth, and foreign wives (1 Kings 3—11). Like Song of Songs, medieval commentators gave an allegorical to the psalm as representing God’s relationship with Israel. The Psalm is best interpreted as presenting the picture of an ideal Israelite monarch, God’s anointed (מְשֻׁחָה v.8). Because of his close relationship to God

⁷³ I base this mainly on the imagery of “scattering” among the nations and the humiliation expressed by the psalmist; any proposed date for the psalm is, however, somewhat conjectural. Alter notes: “Ancient Israel in all periods had no lack of powerful adversaries, and there is nothing in the language of the poem to enable a confident dating” (*The Book of Psalms*, 155).

the kings is even called *Elohim* (כסאך אל הים עולם ועד); “Your throne, O God, forever and ever” (v. 7).⁷⁴

In this context the superscription states: “For the Leader, upon Shoshanim (על־ששנים),” an apparent reference to “lilies”; it may be the melody of a wedding/love song. It continues: “of the Sons of Korah: *Maskeil*, a love song” (משכיל שיר ידידות). Among psalms of the Korah guild, it stands out as a unique type, a “love song.” Wisdom elements in the psalm include reference to the king and, therefore, association with Solomon, the patron of Israelite wisdom traditions; the identification of the psalmist as a scribe in v. 2; and description of the king’s promotion of righteousness. This royal love song may have continued to serve didactic purposes in the post-monarchic era through adaptation to later Jewish messianic belief, where the “king” refers to the coming Messiah (e.g., Dan 7).⁷⁵ In the post-exilic period, the failure of the monarchy led Israel to reemphasize God as king, as seen, for example, in many post-exilic psalms (e.g., 93, 96, 99, 145); in addition, some psalms may describe a future messianic ruler (Pss 2; 110). Tate conjectures that the origins of Psalm 45 may be a royal wedding in the Northern Kingdom (Ahab) which received later adaptation for the Southern monarchy (Hezekiah), and later, in post-monarchic times was further interpreted as symbolizing the reunion of Zion and Israel as the “bride” of God in implicitly messianic terms.⁷⁶ Thus, משכיל in the title may reflect this editing and adaptations of an older poem by wisdom writers in a post-exilic context.

Psalm 47: Describing YHWH as “Most High” (על־יון) and “great king” (מלך גדול), this hymn offers praise with joyful shouts and clapping of hands, because YHWH subdues Israel’s enemies (vv. 1–3), and embraces Israel as his inheritance and the “pride of Jacob whom he loves” (v. 5). As a

⁷⁴ This parallels the use of the term for the king as a type of “superhuman being” as applied to David (2 Sam 14:17, David’s house/temple (Zech 12:8), or for members of the heavenly court (Pss 82:1, 6; 138:1); though human, the king stands in a special and unique relationship with YHWH and thus can be considered sanctified or “sacral.” Various translations of אל־הים in this verse have been proposed, e.g., “Your Divine throne.” See Murphy, “Psalms” 584.

⁷⁵ For messianic interpretations of the psalm in Jewish tradition, see Cohen, *The Psalms*, 140–45.

⁷⁶ Marvin Tate, “Psalms” in *(Wisdom) Writings* (ed. Watson E. Mills and Richard F. Wilson; vol. 3 of *Mercer Commentary on the Bible*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001), 41–191, here 97.

so-called “Enthronement Hymn” it contains linguistic and thematic similarities to Psalms 93, 95–100, and arises from a clearly liturgical context. The focus in these psalms (including both Pss 46 and 48) on Divine kingship, and lack of emphasis on the Davidic monarchy, most probably reflects their use as post-exilic liturgies that reemphasize YHWH as king—Psalm 47 uses יהוה and אל־הים for the deity—and Israel’s election as God’s chosen people. God’s glory, however, will yet be made fully manifest in the future, which eventually leads to an eschatological reading of these psalms.⁷⁷

In describing God’s ascent (עלה אל־הים, v. 6) to the heavenly throne, accompanied by the sound of the ram’s horn (שופר), the psalm recalls the theophany at Mt. Sinai in Exod 19:16). God rules over all creation, which includes “all nations” (על־גוים, v. 8); the editors may have taken an earlier liturgy in which the Ark of the Covenant was ritually carried in procession to the Temple, and adapted it for a universal, eschatological depiction of God ruling over all creation.⁷⁸ משכיל occurs at the end of verse 8: “For God [is] King over all the earth; sing praise wise ones!”; most versions, however, translate משכיל here as a noun, e.g., Alter: “hymn joyous song.”⁷⁹

If this psalm in its final form derives from a post-exilic context, which seems likely, then it can be reasonably adduced that wisdom editors were responsible for its final shaping and form and may have added the unusual use of משכיל in a hymn as an assertion to skilled singers connected with the temple cult and wisdom schools.

Psalm 52: This and the following three psalms all contain משכיל in the superscriptions.

Psalm 52 defies easy classification as it begins with a confident condemnation of an arrogant, evil,

⁷⁷ The concept of YHWH as “great king over all the earth” may be rooted in the victories achieved by David in his conquests, which remained fresh in Israel’s collective memory and in light of the monarchy’s failure and dislocation of the exile, receives a new, eschatological interpretation in the promise that YHWH will again restore and raise up Israel, ruling from his celestial throne (vv. 6, 9). For more on the development and use of the Psalm, see Marvin Tate, “Psalms,” 99–100.

⁷⁸ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 166–67, views verse 6 and the general theme of ascent in the poem as the psalmist’s attempt to depict God ascending to “His seat on the celestial throne”; rather than the conjectured New Year festival of Mowinckel, Alter proposes the psalm as a “symbolic” hymn emphasizing God’s universal reign and sovereignty, which accords well with its use in the Jewish New Year celebration.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 167, where he notes that “joyous song” derives from the use of the word in Amos 5:13, a position which, as noted above, I find puzzling, as Amos 5:13 is hardly a “joyous” context.

and deceptive strong man or warrior (גבור vv. 3–6), continues with a confident assertion that these evildoers will be “rooted out” of the land while the righteous observe with vindication (vv. 7–9), and concludes with a short thanksgiving hymn proclaiming that the righteous flourish in the temple where they give thanks for God’s covenant love (חסד) with confidence and hope. Clifford classifies it as a “song of trust.”⁸⁰ Structurally, the poem shows a movement from an initial identification of the evildoers, who are contrasted with the righteous; ultimately, the righteous prosper and the wicked are “rooted out” or destroyed, which reflects a basic wisdom orientation (e.g., Ps 1).

Following the initial superscript in verse 1, “For the Leader, A *Mas̄kîl* for David,” verse 2 continues by associating the content of the psalm with 1 Samuel 21 and 22.⁸¹ In that passage, Doeg the Edomite sees David taking refuge from Saul with the priest Ahimelech in Nob, and proceeds to inform Saul, who in turn orders the killing of Ahimelech and all the priests. When the king’s servants refuse to strike them down, Doeg is ordered to do the killing and a massacre ensues in which in addition to the priests of Nob, all the residents and even cattle are slain (1 Sam 22:9–23). Alter points out that while the editors may have associated the horrible effect of Doeg’s words with the evil speech and wicked intent of the antagonist in the Psalm, the connection between Doeg and the Psalm is somewhat forced as Doeg’s words in reality are not “deceit” but informative, and while he engages in great evil in 1 Sam he is not depicted as “boasting.”⁸² This stretch between the “historical” event from Scripture in the superscription and the actual content of a particular psalm provides further evidence that these titles derive from a later, post-exilic context (see, for example, Ps 30:1). A similar application of a *Mas̄kîl* for David with his flight from Saul occurs also in Psalm 54 (below).

⁸⁰ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 253–54.

⁸¹ Tate connects *Mas̄kîl* in the title to its use in 2 Chr 30:22 in reference to a group of Levites involved in liturgy; he thus sees the term as referring to a collection of psalms composed by priests skilled in music and worship and raises the possibility that this “collection” may date to the time of Hezekiah (*Psalms 51—100*, 33). I prefer a post-exilic context for the application of this term to psalms—some of which may well be pre-exilic—and hold that it more likely refers to wisdom teachers than liturgical functionaries.

⁸² Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 184.

Using powerful metaphors—“Your tongue devises mischief, a sharpened razor that works treacherously” (v. 4; NJPS)—the psalmist contrasts the haughty rich people (הַגְּבוֹרִים, v. 3) who delight in lies and speak falsely, with the righteous (צַדִּיקִים, v. 8) who ultimately prevail. This contrast, as noted above, is an important wisdom motif. A relationship to the wisdom teaching of Psalm 1 occurs in v. 10: the righteous speaker describes him/herself as a flourishing olive tree in the temple courts, who trusts in the steadfast love (חַסֵּד, vv. 3, 10) of God, and is thus loyal to the covenant. Psalm 1 similarly describes the righteous as fruitful tree planted beside flowing waters whose leaves never fade and always prospers (v. 3). The wicked are “rooted out of the land of the living” (v. 7; see 116:9)—a metaphor depicting how, like weeds pulled from the soil, the wicked will have no share in the prosperity and blessing in the covenant promise of land; rather, they are destined for Sheol while the righteous flourish in God’s house, i.e., the Temple. The Talmud describes “tent” and “house” as symbols for places of instruction (*Tal. San. 106b*); if we apply this principle to the superscription Doeg, because of his evil, cannot learn Torah while the righteous David studies and promulgates Torah’s values.⁸³ Unlike the idealized portrait of Psalm 1, in Psalm 52 the wicked previously had prevailed or held sway; now, however, the righteous celebrate their defeat. It may well reflect the perspective of post-exilic wisdom editors and court poets who uphold the promise of prosperity for those who remain obedient to Torah.⁸⁴ Similarly, the following three psalms, a wisdom psalm and two laments, also describe the contrast between the fate of the wicked with the righteous that trust in God and ultimately prevail.

Psalm 53: Psalm 53 duplicates wisdom Psalm 14, with some minor changes and additions. (See the previous comments on Psalm 14.) Whereas Psalm 14 begins, “For the Leader; A Psalm for David,” Psalm 53 expands the title: “For the Leader; upon Mahaloth, A Maškil for David.” Psalm 53 adds *Maškil* (מַשְׁכִּיל) to the Superscription—both poems have the verbal form in the text (14:2; 53:3)—and the term מַחֲלוֹת (*Eng. Mahaloth*), which is of uncertain origin and meaning but most

⁸³ Cohen, *Psalms* (1992), 167.

⁸⁴ Tate, “Psalms,” 106.

probably derives from a word for “sickness” (מחלה); in the psalms it may refer to a musical instrument or musical form used for plaintive songs. It seems to derive from the verbal root חלח (to make sick; be weak) in its Hiphil participle form and later, like משכיל, was viewed as a technical term and used as a noun in Psalm titles.⁸⁵ It appears once more in the Psalter in the Superscription to Psalm 88 (which also contains משכיל)—a psalm wholly directed to the issues of theodicy, suffering, oppression and illness; Psalms 14 and 53, however, while complaining about the “fools,” strike a much more confident tone.

In this case I propose that the addition of משכיל and מחלה reflect post-exilic, didactic use of Psalm 53 that intends to reflect on the experience of loss and suffering in the Exile. If Psalm 14 is earlier, then perhaps these additions to the superscription of Psalm 53 reflect further wisdom editing after the Exile. Clearly, the experiences of loss, suffering and oppression may have been in mind, with the imprecations against the corrupt and loathsome “fool” an application to their former captors. Adding to this exile-based interpretation is the slight editing of Ps 14:5 in Ps 53:6; in the former, evildoers will be “seized with fright, for God is present in the circle of the righteous” (NJPS), while in Ps 53:6 the text reads, “There they will greatly fear where there is no fear, for God scatters the bones of your oppressors.” The word “scatter” (פזר) often connotes the experience of Israel’s being “scattered” (Ps 44:12, זרה) during the Exile, but here it applies to the evildoers, and may intend a reversal of fortunes, i.e., the prayer for, or realization of, the hope that what their oppressors did to Israel will subsequently become their own fate when God rejects them (Ps 53:6), and delivers and restores Zion (Pss 14:7; 53:7).

One significant change between Psalms 14 and 53 occurs in the use of אלהים in place of יהוה (compare 14:2, 4, 6; 53:3, 5, 6); Psalm 53 occurs in the collection called the “Elohistic Psalter” (Pss 42–83) because the almost exclusive use of the word אלהים for God rather than יהוה. I

⁸⁵ BDB, 317–18.

speculate that at some point in the post-exilic period the wisdom editors connected with the Temple guilds who gathered, edited, and composed psalms formed this “Elohistic” collection. This raises the question: did a particular group of scribes edit existing psalms that almost exclusively use אלהים, or did they deliberately use or add אלהים and avoid or remove יהוה?⁸⁶ James L. Mays speculates that it may derive from an attempt to emphasize monotheism by proclaiming Israel’s God as the one God ruling over heaven and earth.⁸⁷ In either case, this arrangement provides further evidence of later editorial work; in addition, both psalms conclude with a plea for the restoration of Zion, which places their origin in a post-exilic context. Psalm 53, then, is a slightly later adaptation of Psalm 14 that adapts it for the “Elohistic” collection and emphasizes the exile experience by adding משכיל and מחרת to the superscription, along with a greater emphasis on God’s rejection and “scattering” of Israel’s enemies.

Psalm 54: This lament begins with a cry for help (vv. 3–4) against “strangers” (זרים) who in addition to being ungodly threaten the speaker’s life (v.5); typical of laments, it lacks specific information on the identity of the enemies or historical circumstances of the poem. Later editors who added the superscription connect the psalm to another episode in David’s flight from Saul’s persecution, when David was hiding in the Wilderness of Ziph and the Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah to inform him (1 Sam 23:15–29). Since David and Saul were closely associated, the use of “strangers” (זרים) to describe the speaker’s enemies reveals the artificiality of the superscript; the general nature of the psalmist’s plea, complaint about enemies, profession of confidence in God (vv. 6–7), commitment to offer a future thanksgiving sacrifice (v. 8), and final recollection of victory (v. 9) make the psalm useable for a variety of situations and circumstances. I translate the superscription:

⁸⁶ In the Elohistic Psalter, יהוה appears 45 times compared with 210 for אלהים; in the remainder of the Psalter, יהוה occurs 584 times and אלהים only 94. See Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 256, n. 4. It is interesting to speculate whether the use of אלהים in these psalms reflect northern influences (e.g., Pss 42, 80), as the “E” source of the Torah is also thought to have a northern derivation, or perhaps it reflects Canaanite influences. Avoidance of using the personal name, YHWH, may also reflect later, post-exilic developments; see Tate, *Psalms*, 44.

⁸⁷ James L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994), 12.

“For the Leader. On stringed instruments (בַּנְיִינָה); A *Mas̱kil* of David. When the Ziphites came and told Saul, ‘Is not David hiding with us?’”

By connecting this poem to a stressful event in David’s life, one in which he eventually escapes, the wisdom editors perhaps use the poem as an instruction to emphasize the need to remain faithful and trust in God even in difficult circumstances, with a legendary example from the life of David to lend authority to the teaching. The expressions of confidence and vow to offer sacrifice provide further material to teach the importance of worship in the life of pious Israelites.

Psalm 55: The Elohist grouping of *Mas̱kil* psalms (Pss 52–55) concludes with this long and complex lament. The opening plea (vv. 2–3) moves to a very personal description of the terror and fear experienced by the psalmist, who seeks refuge in the wilderness from armed enemies (“the wicked” v. 4; vv. 4–9). This is followed by imprecatory prayers in vv. 10 and 16 that enclose a description of enemies within the town and its walls (vv. 11–12), and a very personal lament over the betrayal of a close friend (vv. 13–15). Expressions of confidence that God hears the speaker’s call and will deliver him from the “battle” (קָרָב, v. 19) occur in vv. 17–20, followed by a further complaint against a singular enemy (vv. 21–22) of deceitful speech (חֶלֶק מִחֶמְאָה פִּי, “smoother than butter [is] his mouth” v. 22), and concluding expression of confidence (vv. 23–24). The poem shifts from singular to plural, mixing prayer, complaints, and expressions of confidence. With both Psalms 54 and 55 having superscriptions associating them with similar circumstances in David’s life, it seems likely that the editors read them together as a pair; the declaration of confidence at the conclusion of Ps 55:22–23 is thematically similar to the conclusion of Ps 54:6–9.⁸⁸

As with Psalm 54, the wisdom editors ascribed Psalm 55 also to David’s flight from Saul for similar didactic purposes: to emphasize the importance of faith and prayer in the midst of terror, oppression and fear. In Psalm 55, however, the additional element of personal betrayal by a close

⁸⁸ Tate, “Psalms,” 107.

associate (“and you, a man my equal, my companion and familiar friend” [אלופי ומידעין] v. 14) adds another dimension to the instruction.

Psalm 74: Moving from the last grouping of *Maskeil* psalms attributed to David, in Book 3 the term is first encountered in Psalms 74 and 78, both attributed to Asaph and the “Asaphite” guild of Temple singers/musicians. Psalm 74 conveys the deep pain, loss, sense of abandonment and distress which Israel experienced following the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.

Verses 1–11 form a community lament because אל הים is absent and angry. They plead that God “remember” (זכר v.2) the community of Israel which he formed and placed upon Mount Zion, and which now watches in horror as enemies destroy the sanctuary (קדש) with hatchets, axes and fire. *Verses 12–17* form a liturgical prayer which parallels Canaanite creation stories and Genesis 1 (also Job 3:8; 40:25; Ps 89:10–13; Isa 27:1) in recounting how God, as “king from of old,” harnessed chaos and brought order to creation, stirring the sea, bringing forth dry land, fixing the limits of earth, times and seasons, and smashing and crushing the heads of “dragons” and “Leviathan” (לוייתן; תנינים) (vv. 13, 14). This description of primeval history and God’s creative power evokes parallels in the wisdom literature, especially Job (see Job 38–40) and Sirach (43).

Verses 18–23, comprise a concluding plea asking God to remember (זכר) how the enemies blaspheme (vv. 18, 22), protect Israel (vv. 18–19, 21, 23)—described as “your dove” and “lowly ones” (ענייך) to symbolize their peaceful nature and humility—recall (“behold”) the covenant and its promises in the midst of this “dark land” (מחשכי־ארץ v.20), and “rise up” to champion their cause.⁸⁹ Prophecy and signs (אור) have ceased (v. 9), leading to a continual question, “how long” (עד־מה v. 9–10) will this blaspheming and destruction continue, and will God’s rejection (v. 1), the

⁸⁹ This division is based on that of Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2003), 21.

reviling of God's name by enemies (v. 10), and the apparent absence of God's protection for the "lowly ones" continue *forever* (לְנֶצַח, vv. 1, 10, 19)?

Laments can serve didactic functions by recalling past events in history through which the community learned something about themselves and their relationship with God. In Psalm 74, the experience of exile made Israel aware of its sinful nature that provoked God's anger and led to destruction and dislocation; it also heightened the importance of remembrance and continual prayer in seeking resolution, forgiveness and renewal. This powerful poem exhibits wisdom elements as it moves from a stark description of current distress and a plea for help, to reflection on God's creative mastery over primeval forces, and continues the prayer, or conversation with a seemingly absent and "angry" God, with an implicit realization that can and will bring them forth from the "dark land" (v. 20) of destruction, humiliation and abandonment. In this context, the *משכיל* must have been applied to a poem originating in the Asaph guild for the purpose of using it for instruction and worship to reflect on the Exile and its lessons for ongoing Israelite history to emphasize obedience to Torah and persistence in prayer.

Psalm 78: Second only to the extensive Torah-wisdom Psalm 119 in length, Psalm 78 shares affinities with the other "historical psalms" 105, 106, 135, and 136 that review Israel's past national history for both didactic and liturgical purposes; I classify Psalm 78 as an historical Torah-wisdom psalm. The title, "*Mas̱kîl* [of] Asaph," and the extensive wisdom vocabulary and themes in its first part (vv. 1–11), followed by two longer narrative sections (vv. 12–39; 40–72) that recite the history from the exodus to God's firm choice of Zion and the Davidic dynasty, reveal a strong didactic-wisdom intention for the psalm by its final compilers and editors. As with Psalms 105 and 106, the national story becomes an ongoing source of teaching and reflection. While the narrative sections emphasize how God chose Zion to replace the failed and defeated Northern Kingdom and shrine at Shiloh, pointing to events between 922–722 B.C.E. and a pre-exilic origin, the prophetic-didactic nature of the poem makes it suitable for ongoing post-exilic use to emphasize the centrality of David and Jerusalem. I propose that the psalm was added to the *Mas̱kîl* collection in the post-exilic period

to serve such didactic purposes. Tate observes that in post-exilic contexts the psalm could serve to emphasize David and Zion, and also have “a futuristic emphasis, the Zion and David yet to be (as in Jer 31:1–6).⁹⁰ Based on evidence from Qumran, Tate proposes that it may be a text used for a covenant renewal ceremony. Such liturgies recalled the great, saving actions of YHWH in past history, recollection of past sins by the ancestors, and confession of sins by the current worshippers, concluding with a renewal of their commitment to God (see Joshua 24:1–28; Deut 29:1—31:13; Neh 8:13—9:38).⁹¹

Before examining the wisdom introduction that follows the *Māskîl of Asaph* designation, I shall briefly outline the two narrative sections which serve as a didactic-wisdom recollection of past history for ongoing teaching and reflection. The first (vv. 12–39) recounts the Reed Sea and wilderness journey (vv. 12–31), which includes God’s merciful actions on their behalf, the peoples’ rebellion, and God’s anger and punishment in the manna and quail episode (Ps 78:31//Num 14:29); it concludes by describing God’s mercy, forgiveness and restraint (vv. 38–39). The second narrative section recalls the movement from Egypt to Canaan (vv. 40–64), including God’s grace in recalling—in a different order and number from Exodus—the Plagues, and God’s apportioning the tribes (40–55), rebellion (vv. 56–58), God’s anger and rejection of Shiloh (vv. 59–64), and God’s forgiveness and shepherding of Israel under the Davidic covenant (vv. 65–72). Key to understanding the pattern of these recollections is the “forgetting” (vv. 11; 42), sinning, defiance and testing (v.v. 17–18; 32; 40–41, 55–56), and remembering (vv. 35; 39), which leads to healing; the pattern of sin-punishment-election recalls Deuteronomy and its depiction of Moses’ preaching (e.g., Deut 29:1—30:20; 32).⁹²

⁹⁰ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 287. Clifford views the origin of the psalm in an eighth century “appeal for national unity” in light of the Northern Kingdom’s fall in 722, but continues to serve “as a perennial appeal to believe in God who acts in new ways” (*Psalms 73—150*, 44).

⁹¹ For more on this post-exilic covenant renewal ceremony see Tate, “Psalms,” 126. Tate claims that stylistically, the psalm resembles the preaching of the Levites in 1–2 Chronicles. Though Tate cites no specific texts from Qumran, a good example of a covenant ceremony is found in the “Charter of a Jewish Sectarian Association” (1QS; 4Q255–264a; 5Q11) in Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 123–42. Here as with Ps 74 I follow the divisions proposed by Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 42–47. Clifford proposes an earlier, eighth century date for the psalm as “an appeal for national unity” that in later interpretation becomes an appeal for faith in God who, based on actions in past history, will continue to act on behalf of the faithful (44).

⁹² Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 42–44.

While these narrative sections may likely derive from eighth century source material, the Psalm in its final form may be shaped by wisdom editors who adapted it for instructional purposes; this may account for the wisdom introduction.⁹³ The first imperative, “Give ear, my people, to my teaching” clearly parallels the instructional speech of Moses in Deut 32:1, the introduction to wisdom Psalm 49:2 (a “Korah” psalm), and by mentioning Torah (תּוֹרָה), recalls wisdom Psalm 1 and the introduction to the Psalter.

Similar to my analysis, Beat Weber likewise views Psalm 78 as using a recital of Israel’s history as a wisdom instruction; he notices the use of the keyword תּוֹרָה in both Psalm 1, at the beginning, and here, as an argument for the intentional placement of Psalm 78 as the “als ‘Mitte’ des Psalters.”⁹⁴ Like Psalm 1, he views Psalm 78 as both prayer and a teaching text (“Lehrtext”), with תּוֹרָה serving as the main keyword connecting both: “תּוֹרָה ist denn auch das prägnanteste Stickwort, das den Psalteranfang (Ps 1:2) und die postulierte Psaltermitte (Ps 78:1, 5, 10) verbindet.”⁹⁵ The psalmist states: “I will open my mouth [with] a parable” (אִפְתָּחָה בַּמִּשְׁלָּ פִי, v. 2), and pour forth a “riddle” (אֲבִיעֵה חִידוֹת), about things “heard and known” (שָׁמַעְנוּ וְנָדַעְנוּ) from “our fathers” (v. 4). This recalls the role of parents as wisdom teachers in the home, and/or teachers in wisdom schools—wisdom teachers also received the title “father”—who pass these teachings on so that future generations. By hearing and “knowing” their history, the children or students receive wisdom to help them trust in God, keep Torah and avoid the mistakes of their

⁹³ This represents my own hypothesis based on the superscription and the important role I believe post-exilic wisdom editors had in shaping the Psalter. Clear evidence for dating this (and most) psalm is lacking, however. Dahood, while also calling the psalm “didactic,” argues for an early dating (922–721 B.C.E.), based in part on the use of the imperfect verb form to express past events, which he calls normative in Ugaritic poetry (see vv. 15, 26, 29, 38 [x3], 40 [x2], 45, 49, 58, 64, and 72; *Psalms 51–100*, 238–39). The conclusion of the psalm clearly presumes the existence of the Jerusalem Temple.

⁹⁴ Beat Weber, “Psalm 78 als ‘Mitte’ des Psalters?—ein Versuch” *Bib* 88 (2007): 305–25. In this article, Weber claims too little attention has thus far been paid to the middle of the Psalter, in contrast to scholarly focus on its beginning and end. Among his arguments he focuses on its didactic nature and wisdom elements, particularly this introductory section with its focus on wisdom teaching and Torah observance (313).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

ancestors (vv. 4–11).⁹⁶ Psalm 49, which likewise begins with an imperative to “hear” using a different verb (שמע), has the speaker mentioning “my mouth” (פי, 49:4), which also will proclaim both a “parable” and “riddle” (49:5). This compilation of wisdom words and themes, following the superscription with its *Mas̄kil* identification, clearly reveals the intended purpose for the narrative history which follows to serve as didactic wisdom teaching to inculcate knowledge of the past so as to promote obedience to Torah and trust in God.

Psalm 88: Unrelieved suffering, fear, and frustration at a seemingly absent God mark Psalm 88 as among the purest and finest examples of lament within the Psalter and Hebrew Bible as a whole, as the apparently severely ill and shunned speaker describes life at the brink of Sheol, the underworld prison of the dead where the Israelites believed one will forever be cut off from God in a dark, watery, underworld. Even the concluding verse which laments the shunning of friend and neighbor due to God’s affliction ends with the word **בְּחֹשֶׁךְ**, “darkness” (v. 19). Despite the prevailing element of gloom, and the accusatory tone of the speaker, who like Job accuses YHWH — notice the frequent use of the pronoun “you”—while never admitting sin or guilt, the poem provides a candid, honest and cathartic testimony of faith by one who truly trusts in YHWH’s Covenant promise of steadfast love and faithfulness (e.g., Exod 34:6; 88:12). Despite inexplicable suffering, the speaker keeps open the conversation with God: the poem can be divided into three sections all marked by three cries of faith to YHWH, in verses 2–3, 10b, and 14. In vv. 2–10 the overwhelmed speaker declares, “my life draws near to Sheol” (וַחַיִּי לְשֹׂאֵל הַגֵּיעַ, v. 4), with several other euphemisms for Sheol—pit, grave, “darkest places,” depths—and images of God’s afflictions. This includes strong waves (“breakers”), as the speaker is “shut in” and abandoned, much like a leper forced to reside within colonies separated from society, lest they contaminate others (v. 9). The

⁹⁶ Cohen cites the medieval Jewish commentator David Kimchi, who in discussing this verse emphasized the duty to pass on instruction in Torah and history to children, who likewise will continue to pass on such knowledge to successive generations (*Psalms*, 249).

speaker's eyes “grow dim” (רַב־אֵי, v. 10) from affliction, much like a weakened, aged person whose eyes lose luster and sparkle.

The middle section, vv. 11–13, offers a series of rhetorical questions directed at YHWH and reflect a bit of bargaining by the worried and terrified speaker, who asks who will offer praise to YHWH from the grave? The psalmist asks, “will the shades (רַפְּאִים, v. 11) rise to praise you?” “Shades” here symbolizes the dead who dwell in the darkness of Sheol, where once cut off from YHWH they no longer will be able to offer praise and worship. Further, in v. 12, which I consider a key verse to understanding the meaning and intent of the poem, the speaker evokes YHWH's covenant promises of “steadfast love” (חַסֵּד) and “faithfulness” (אֱמוּנָה) given at Sinai (Exod 34:6–7). This formula of self-identification of YHWH from Exodus is repeated throughout the Hebrew Bible, with others as speaker; in this case, the speaker asks “will your steadfast love be recounted in the grave; your faithfulness in the land of perdition?” Will YHWH's wonders (פְּלִאָה) and righteousness (צְדָקָה) be made known in “darkness” and “the land of forgetfulness”—both euphemisms for Sheol (v. 13)?

The simple act of bargaining with God, along with the three-fold cry for help, and allusion to the covenant promises of steadfast love and faithfulness all serve to uphold the faith of the psalmist, who rightfully and honestly cries out for help to God from a situation of distress, suffering, shunning and abandonment. The final section, vv. 14–19, parallel the first in describing the speaker's plight of rejection, long-term terror (near death from “my youth” v. 16), and the “fury” of YHWH, which is likened to stormy waves of the sea that threaten to drown the speaker, who cannot escape (vv. 17–18). “Darkness” serves as a fitting word of conclusion in v. 19; unlike the typical pattern of laments, Psalm 88 offers no promise of thanksgiving, hope, or reversal of fortunes, but simply the harsh reality of suffering and distress for which no reason seems apparent or end in sight.

The long, composite superscription of Psalm 88 states: “A Song; A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. For the Leader; upon *Mabalath Leannoth* [עַל־מַחֲלַת לֵעֲנוֹת] a *Maskeil* of Heman the

Ezrahite.” Some conjecture that the first part of this long and complex superscript actually is a transposition of a postscript from the preceding Psalm 87, a Zion Hymn but also a Song of the Korahites. The term **מחלת**, as seen above in Psalm 55, likely derives from a term for sickness and may describe a plaintive musical form; **לענות**, similarly, likely derives from the word meaning “bitterness,” “wormwood,” or “curse,” and may also connect with a lament-style musical form.⁹⁷ Rather than connect these two terms with “A Song; A Psalm of the Sons of Korah,” as does Tate, considering the content of Psalm 88 the terms are more fitting as part of its superscription than the more optimistic ending of Psalm 87. Tate proposes that this theoretical postscript to Psalm 87 served as a conclusion marker for the Korah collection of Pss 84, 85 (86 = David) and 87, and drew attention to the psalms of Heman and Ethan the Ezrahites in Pss 88 and 89.⁹⁸ Both “Ethan the Ezrahite” (Ps 89, below) and “Heman” were listed among the very wise men whom Solomon exceeded in wisdom (1 Kings 5:11 [Hebrew]), which provides a strong connection to **משכיל** in the superscription. Both Heman and Ethan appear in the lists of scribe-singers appointed by “David” to serve at the temple in 1 Chr 6:16–33, 15:17, 19 and, as discussed above, these guilds, including the Korah and Asaph groups, are all closely connected. I conclude that Psalm 88 again provides an example of adaptation of psalm types for didactic purposes, in this case a lament to a plaintive melody which deals extensively with the questions of theodicy, alludes to Job, and may have arisen originally from the Ezrahites under the auspices of Heman and then adapted for teaching as a **משכיל**; though Psalm 89 begins on a more positive note, it also will end in lament and may be a transitional psalm highlighting the ultimate failure of the monarchy in preparation for the renewed focus on YHWH as king in Book 4 (see below). Despite differences in content, both Psalms 88 and 89 are best viewed as a pair and both adapted for didactic, wisdom teaching.

⁹⁷ BDB, 542.

⁹⁸ For his division, which connects these terms to the proposed postscript of Ps 87, see Tate, “Psalms,” 137.

Psalm 89: This second “Ezrahite” *Maskeil* Psalm is attributed to the wise man Ethan, who served in the Temple guilds (noted above). The psalm begins with two hymns (vv. 2–5; 6–18) praising God’s covenant love (חסד; אמונה, vv. 2, 3, 15, 25, 34, 50; Exod 34:6) manifested in creation, and God’s taming of seas and beasts; next, an oracle recalls the establishment of God’s Covenant with David (vv. 19–37), and the psalm concludes with a lament over the failure of the monarchy (vv. 38–52). Acclamations from heaven praise YHWH’s wonders (פל אף), and “faithfulness” (אמונתך) in the “council of the holy ones” (בסוד־קדשים, v. 6), for among the “divine beings” (בבני אלים) none can compare with YHWH (v.7). A similar reference to a divine council occurs in Ps 82:1, as do references to “gods” in Pss 135:5, 138:1. YHWH tames the seas and mythical beast Rahab (vv. 10–11), just as in Psalms 74:14 and 104:26, where YHWH respectively “crushes” and “makes sport with” Leviathan (a similar mythical beast), and ascends to his throne (v.15). Depictions of YHWH commanding the heavenly council and/or taming the cosmic order occur elsewhere in the Psalter (e.g., Pss 18:1–18; 65:6–8; 74:12–17; 77:17–21; 104; 135:5–7; 147:15–18). These heavenly events are paralleled by an earthly celebration (vv. 16–19), all of which recall Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature and may attest to the antiquity of sources used in the Psalm.⁹⁹ References to North (צפון), South (מזר), Tabor and Hermon in v. 13 provide a universal scope to the Psalm, based on the number four (locations) and the symbolism of mountains in biblical cosmology; Tabor and Hermon, being northern mountains, may provide a clue to a northern origin for this part of the poem. In Canaanite literature, mountains served as locations for worship, while in the Bible they often serve as places of Theophany (e.g., Exod 19).

Throughout the psalm, the frequent references to covenant key-words steadfast love (חסד), faithfulness (אמונה), and truth (אמת), located in each section, provide a key interpretive lens: in light of the failure of the monarchy, the speaker first recalls YHWH’s covenant promises of steadfast

⁹⁹ For further discussion of the use of Babylonian and Canaanite sources in Psalm 89, see Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 92–93.

love and faithfulness, and its manifestation in the Davidic covenant. Now, in the post-exilic period, these promises seem lost, leading to the final reference: “where is your steadfast love from of old, YHWH, which you promised to David in faithfulness?” (v. 50). I view these keywords as “covenant markers” based upon the self-identification of YHWH in Exod 34:6–7, which is paralleled with slight variations throughout the Hebrew Bible (Num 14:18; Neh 9:17, 31; Jer 32:18; Jon 4:2; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8), that call to mind for successive generations of Israelites the covenant at Sinai. In the heavenly liturgy (vv. 1–2, 6, 9, 15), and the oracle for David (vv. 25, 29, 34), God’s steadfast love, faithfulness, and truth serve to establish the permanence of God’s covenant (ברית). In the lament, however, the speaker vehemently complains that YHWH has broken this promise in the failure of the Davidic monarchy, accusing God in a manner similar to the speaker of Psalm 88.¹⁰⁰

In conclusion, the initial identification of the psalm as a משכיל לאיתן האזרחי may refer to its post-exilic context, where in light of the failure of the monarchy and the subsequent need to reinterpret Israel’s understanding of the covenant promises, Psalm 89 was promulgated by the Temple guild/scribes to rehearse the promise and ultimate failure of the Davidic monarchy in history. In composing the psalm they may well have used older materials, as attested by the influence of Canaanite mythology and the cosmic hymn and oracle for David. Finally, wisdom editors—whether they belonged to the guilds (Ethan) or later cannot be determined—took up the material to form this lament which could then be used for teaching and instruction. Psalm 89 appropriately concludes Book 3 with an honest, candid acknowledgement of the failure of the monarchy and prepares the way for Book 4’s renewed emphasis on YHWH as king.

Psalm 142: This lament provides the final occurrence of משכיל in the Psalter, in the final “Davidic” collection (Pss 138–145); like Psalms 52:1, 55:1, the superscription assigns it to David’s flight from Saul “in the cave” (1 Sam 22–24). I translate the superscription as follows: “A David *Maskil*, for when he was in the cave—a prayer.” It shows affinities with Psalm 77 as the speaker

¹⁰⁰ Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 91, 94, observes that in this section 16 verbs in the second-person singular reveal this accusatory tone; he also notes, correctly, that as in Ps 77 the lament of Ps 89 also has an individual speaking on behalf of the community.

opens with a cry to God (קוֹלִי אֱלֹהִים אֲזַעֲקֶה) in an almost identical manner, except Psalm 77, being of the “Elohistic Psalter” uses אֱלֹהִים and the *cobortative* form of the verb, אֲזַעֲקֶה. Likewise, the expression “my spirit is faint within me” (בְּהִתְעַמֵּף עָלַי רוּחִי, v. 4) appears in almost identical form in 143:4 and 77:4, both of which are also individual laments, while the description of God as the speaker’s refuge and “portion” (חֵלֶק v. 6; Ps 16:5) in “the land of the living” (בְּאֶרֶץ חַיִּים) recalls thanksgiving psalms 27:13 and 116:9. These similarities may indicate that the psalmist borrowed phraseology from other psalms in the Psalter; it contains typical elements of lament without, however, any admission of guilt. An emphasis on the experience of being alone and abandoned (v.5) recalls themes from Psalm 88:9, 19, and Job (19:13–22). As in Ps 141:9 the speaker seeks God’s protection from a “trap” (פֶּחַ) hidden by unspecified enemies (v. 4), and *lacks* help at his symbolic “right hand,” which usually refers to God’s help and presence (see Pss 16:9; 73:23; 109:31; 110:5; 121:5). Clifford speculates that a later scribe added the superscription’s reference to the traditions of David’s flight from Saul based on the phrase “deliver me from my pursuers” (v. 7).¹⁰¹

I see a three-fold structure to the lament based on the speaker’s crying out to YHWH (vv. 2, 6) and final plea to be released from “prison” (הוֹצִיאֵה מִמַּסְגֵּר, v. 8). In vv. 2–5 the speaker describes his/her drooping spirit, treacherous enemies and forsaken condition; in vv. 6–7 the speaker cries out with implied hope, recalling God as “refuge” (Pss 16:5; 62:7; 91:2; 94:22) and “portion,” while seeking divine help from overpowering enemies. Finally, in seeking release from “prison”—which may here be metaphorical for situations of distress, suffering and abandonment—the speaker makes a promise to offer a thanksgiving sacrifice (לְהוֹדוֹת אֶת־שִׁמְךָ, v. 8; e.g., Pss 30:2, 13; 54:8; 66:13–20; 116:17–19). This מִשְׁכִּיל occurs in the midst of Book 5, with its interesting mix of historical-wisdom psalms (105, 106, 107), laments (109; 137), praise and thanksgiving psalms (116; 117), psalms attributed to David (108–110), Psalms of Ascent (120–134), royal/messianic psalm

¹⁰¹ Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 291.

(110), Torah-acrostic psalms (119, 145), and creation-“hallelujah” psalms with wisdom elements (146; 147; 148). As with my earlier proposal of a shift in the latter part of the Psalter that reflects the failure of the monarchy (Ps 89), and a renewed emphasis in the post-exilic era on YHWH as king, I consider the ascription to David as a later adaptation of Psalm 142 to situations in David’s life. This serves as a teaching tool for Israel’s ongoing remembrance of traditions about David, the ideal king and leader, and also enables current students of wisdom schools to apply the content of these poems to life experience. In this case, the lament form provides a way for those undergoing distress to identify with David’s own struggles and remain steadfast in trusting YHWH. The **משכיל** ascription serves as a marker for this post-exilic wisdom editing and use of the psalm. The many common phrases from other psalms identified in Ps 142 (and others in this Davidic grouping) may also provide a clue to later authorship for this collection of “David” psalms; on the other hand, these David psalms in Book 5 may derive from the adaptation and editing of older traditions. .

Conclusion: I have examined the linguistic roots of **משכיל**, its use in the Dead Sea Scrolls—providing evidence of its meaning in a context concurrent with the final editing of the Psalter—and its use and location within the canonical Psalter. I propose that the placement of the term *Maskil* may provide evidence of wisdom editing in the post-exilic period, when Psalter was collected and edited into its final form. I have shown that this term provides a more meaningful understanding of the interpretation and use of the Psalter for didactic purposes by wisdom editors, who most probably were connected with Temple guilds and wisdom schools.

Chapter Three

Psalms 1 (2), 19, 111-112, 119, and 145: Torah, Wisdom, and Acrostic Boundaries of an Early Form of the Psalter

Among the wisdom materials in the Psalter, a relationship can be discerned among Psalms 1-2, 19, 111, 112, 119, and 145 in their use of common themes, vocabulary, and structure. I propose that when viewed together, these psalms provide evidence of post-exilic scribal activity in which this group of wisdom-oriented psalms served as the frame of an early form of the Psalter. Emphases include the happiness or blessings which accrue to those who “fear the Lord” (19:10; 111:10; 112:1), delight in God’s Torah (1:1; 19B; 112:1; 119), and live according to righteousness (צדק; 1:6; 19:10; 111:3; 112:3; 119:8, et al.); in addition, the psalms focus on God’s covenant love, righteousness, creation and kingship (2; 19A; 111–112; 119:73–80; 145). Various keywords, discussed below, are used to represent “Torah,” i.e. teaching that provides guidance to live in accord with God’s will; Torah provides instruction in the proper way (דרך, another keyword) for living. Psalms 111, 112, 119 and 145 utilize the “acrostic” form, in which successive lines begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a scribal technique used in the wisdom literature which lends order, serves as a mnemonic device, and provides a sense of completeness to a poem, as “from A to Z.”¹

These psalms illustrate the central thesis of wisdom literature: “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (111:10; See Prov 1:7; 9:10; Sirach 1:11–14, 16, 18, 20, 27); those who revere the Lord through their obedience to Torah in life will be blessed. I propose that Psalms 1-2 and 119, along with Psalm 145, an acrostic hymn in praise of YHWH, serve as a type of “wisdom inclusion” for the Psalter. Psalms 1, 111, 112, and 119 reflect a traditional wisdom orientation that promises blessings and prosperity to those who abide by Torah and revere YHWH (יְהוָה) as attested by the *’asrē*

¹ Other examples include Psalms 9-10 (partial), 25, 34, 37, and 145 (discussed below); Proverbs 31:10–31, Lamentations 3, and Sirach (Hebrew) 51:13–30. Use of the acrostic may give a somewhat artificial or “forced” sound to a psalm due the rigidity required in adhering to the format.

(**אשר**) formula (Pss 1:1; 112:1; 119:1–2), promises of prosperity (e.g., 1:3; 112:2–9; 119:72), and wisdom for proper living and decision-making (19:12–15; 111:10).²

The Psalter opens with a wisdom introduction upholding the “two ways” of traditional retribution theology in Psalm 1: the righteous who abide by Torah will prosper but the wicked will perish; Psalm 1 has affinities with Deuteronomy (e.g., 30:11–20). The Psalter concludes with a doxology of praise in Psalm 150. At an earlier stage, however, wisdom interests may have framed the Psalter with Torah-wisdom Psalm 1, along with wisdom-influenced royal Psalm 2, Psalm 19, with its respective elements of creation (part A) and Torah (part B), and the massive Torah-wisdom acrostic Psalm 119, followed by the acrostic hymn Psalm 145. According to my hypothesis, the Psalter begins with an emphasis on Torah and divine kingship (Pss 1-2), creation and Torah (Ps 19A-B); it concludes with an application of Torah in life (Ps 119), which includes laments and suffering, but ends in praise of YHWH as creator and compassionate ruler (Ps 145). With the exception of the many lament sections in Ps 119 which follow the opening stanzas (vv. 1–8 **א**; 9–16 **ב**) these psalms present what Brueggemann calls an “orientation” outlook, i.e., “psalms that reflect well-oriented faith in a mood of equilibrium.”³

I will expand upon Westermann’s proposal that Psalms 1 and 119 originally formed the boundaries of an early form of the Psalter by adding Psalm 145, an acrostic hymn, as the conclusion of this proposed framework. Psalm 119:176 concludes with the psalmist acknowledging his past sinfulness and making a plea to God; in Ps 145 the psalmist is confident and joyful, implying resolution of the uncertainty with which Ps 119 concludes and therefore making a more fitting

² The **אשר** is the masculine plural construct form of the root **אשר**, occurring most frequently as a blessing formula—only in reference to humans, not God—in Psalms (26 times) and the other wisdom books (12 times), *IDOT I*, 445–48.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 25; the book as a whole examines psalms according to three classifications, orientation, “disorientation” as found in the laments which reflect troubles, anxieties, and suffering in life, as in the laments, and “new orientation” (e.g., Pss 30, 103) which describe the situation of thanksgiving and praise after being rescued from distress and coming to a new understanding of how YHWH remains operative and faithful in life.

conclusion to this proposed framework.⁴ Based on similarities in theme, vocabulary and structure, I propose that this grouping of psalms reflect the work of post-exilic wisdom editors who arranged these psalms to provide a “didactic frame” as they edited and compiled the Psalter. Psalms 1–2 form an opening introduction emphasizing wisdom (Pss 1; 2:10–12) and YHWH as king (Ps 2)—a post-exilic emphasis in response to the failure of the monarchy. Psalm 19B joins with 19A to combine wisdom emphases of creation (A) and Torah (B). Psalms 111–112 focus on the blessings of YHWH and those who revere him and keep the commandments. Psalm 119 rounds out this Torah collection. It begins with a theology parallel to Psalm 1, promising blessings upon those who walk in the way of YHWH through obedience to Torah (vv. 1–8); however, it contains a more developed theology by embracing the reality of suffering and persecution through petitions and laments. Psalm 145, though not specifically a wisdom psalm, is an acrostic hymn of praise to YHWH as king that probably reflects the work of these wisdom writers as a way to bring closure to the Psalter. It reveals a later style of Hebrew and theological emphases, focusing on YHWH’s secure governance of creation and a positive “orientation” outlook.⁵ Together, Psalms 1 and 145 form a beginning and concluding theological frame for the Psalter. The Psalter begins and ends with a state of orientation that frames a variety of genres in between; this includes laments, thanksgivings, hymns, historical psalms, and wisdom psalms, which collectively express Israel’s historical experiences in a movement bounded by Torah (Ps 1) and Praise (Ps 145). A concluding group of *Hallelujah* psalms follow Ps 145; wisdom elements are found in Psalms 146 and 148 (discussed in chapter 8).

Leo Perdue views Psalms 1, 19B, and 119 as the product of the Chronicler’s history and composed in the Persian period along with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the Zadokite priesthood controlled the Temple cult. These scribes emphasized *Torah* and *cosmology*, as in Ezra’s prayer in Nehemiah 9, which upholds YHWH as creator and sustainer of the cosmos—land, seas, and heavenly realm (9:6; see Ps 24:1–2)—who gives “true teaching” (תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת), judgments (מִשְׁפָּטִים),

⁴ See Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (trans. J.R. Porter; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 294.

⁵ On Ps 145 as a “psalm of orientation,” see Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1984), 28–30.

statutes (חֻקִּים), and commandments (מִצְוֹת, v. 13).⁶ A clear parallel exists between Ezra’s prayer and Psalm 19, with both emphasizing Creation and Torah: the cosmos reveals the work and ordering of YHWH as creator, with the gift of Torah “grounded in the order of creation” as a source to sustain and guide life within the covenant community.⁷ The keywords noted above from Ezra’s prayer in Nehemiah 9:13 all occur in Psalm 19B, providing further evidence of the work of the Chronicler in both texts. Torah piety of the post-exilic period, as evidenced in Ezra and the Torah-wisdom psalms, identifies wisdom and Torah together, and rooted in God’s created order. Other examples of late Second Temple texts which combine these themes include the Deuterocanonical books of Sirach and Baruch (Sir 24; 42:15–43:35; 50:27–29; 51:13–30; Bar 3:9–4:4); Sirach 51:13 also mentions the “house of instruction” in which the sage taught.

As the optimistic prophecies of restoration found in Isaiah 40–55 and Ezekiel 40–48 seemed to fade due to the hardship inherent in the rebuilding process and ongoing foreign domination, the work of scribes became enhanced over the cultic activities as they edited, composed, and copied texts, engaging in instruction, proclamation and administrative tasks. Thus, according to Perdue, in this period the sages performed essential tasks aimed at maintaining “the righteous and beneficent order of creation.” Reflecting his focus on the unity of Torah, wisdom and creation in the Second Temple period, Perdue views sages from this period as authors of the wisdom psalms, which for him include Psalms 1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 119, 127, and “perhaps” 104.⁸ I propose that, despite its seeming lack of covenant language, in fact Psalm 119 alludes in several places to the Sinai Covenant through the use of keywords (חֶסֶד, steadfast love; רַחֲמִים, compassion; אֱמוּנָה/אִמּוּנָה, faithfulness; חַנּוּן, grace) which recall YHWH’s self-identification to Moses at Sinai during the renewal of the Covenant (Exod 34:6).

⁶ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2007), 138.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 151–52. Perdue notes, as I do, that each scholar seems to have a slightly or sometimes dramatically different view of which psalms qualify as “wisdom” psalms; I would add to his list, Pss 14/53, 90, 128, while noting the important wisdom sections in other psalms (e.g., 27, 36, 39, 62, 92, 94, 139, 144) and add 8, 39, and 148 to 104 as creation psalms holding wisdom elements and arising from the Second Temple period.

Psalm 1 (and Psalm 2): A Wisdom Introduction to the Psalter⁹

The opening of the Psalter begins with a wisdom theme: אֲשֶׁר־י, “happy is the one,” who guides his or her life by *Torah* in opposition to the wicked (רָשָׁעִים), whose lives are marked by sinfulness and behavior outside of Torah piety.¹⁰ Significantly, the Psalter begins with the beatitude אֲשֶׁר־י to emphasize the promise of happiness and order in the lives of those who live by Torah. Further, Book 1 begins with a double use of אֲשֶׁר־י forming an inclusion between Ps 1:1 and 2:12, the appended introduction to the Psalter, and it likewise ends with a double use in Ps 40:5, which proclaims “happy” the one who trusts in YHWH, and 41:2, which proclaims “happy” the one who wisely (מִשְׁכִּיל) looks out for the poor. Both of these examples of אֲשֶׁר־י also stress Torah values, and while not specifically forming an inclusion their usage at the close of book 1 harkens back to the opening inclusion in Psalms 1–2.

The “two ways” contrast between the fates of the righteous (צַדִּיקִים) who prosper (1:3) and the wicked who perish (הַאֲבֵד 1:6) provide a stark contrast and an important theme of Israelite wisdom literature. This traditional theology of retribution is challenged by wisdom psalms that address the issue of *Theodicy* (e.g., Pss 37, 49, 73) as in the book of Job. While Psalm 119 upholds the blessings received through obedience to Torah, it also addresses the reality of suffering.

Negatively stated, the righteous one who abides by Torah “walks not in the counsel (עֲצָה) of the wicked,” nor stands with “sinners” (חַטָּאִים), or sits with “scoffers” (לְצַיִם, v. 1), but rather delights in *Torah*, and “recites” (יְהַגֵּד) it “day and night” (v. 2).¹¹ Bernard Gosse sees here the

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the translations in this chapter are mine.

¹⁰ A solid consensus views Psalm 1 as a “wisdom psalm” and together with Ps 2 forming an introduction to the Psalter, with the “First Davidic Psalter” beginning with Ps 3 (for a listing of major scholars who include Ps 1 as among “wisdom psalms” see chapter 1). In the Jewish *Prayer Book*, Psalm 1 is assigned for the “Service at the Setting of a Tombstone,” with the note that “It [Ps 1] strikes the fundamental note of the Psalter and the Wisdom Books” (1110).

¹¹ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1—50* (AB 16; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), 1-2, identifies Ps 1 as a wisdom Psalm and notes that עֲצָה can mean “counsel,” as in most translations, or “council,” as he

impact of Proverbs 1:22, based on common vocabulary and themes: “présente le Psalmiste comme répondant à l’appel de la Sagesse de Pr 1,20-23, particulièrement 1,22,” especially on the use of לַצִּיּוֹם in both texts.¹² This presumes that the Proverbs text precedes Psalm 1. Nahum Sarna notes that the first word of the Psalm and Psalter, “Happy” (אַשְׁרֵי), is also the first word of Moses’s final speech before his death, “Happy are you, O Israel” (Deut 33:29). This term occurs throughout the Book of Psalms, ten times in Proverbs, and once each in Job and Ecclesiastes; it clearly serves as a “wisdom term,” and a marker for the work of scribes who composed wisdom psalms and edited the Psalter. Sarna further emphasizes that the *Torah* in Psalm 1 refers specifically to written documents.¹³ “Torah” (תּוֹרָה) holds a richer meaning than the usual translation as “law” and refers to “teaching” or “instruction,” which in effect guides one in living a proper life.

Psalm 1 and the massive Psalm 119 both focus on the study and recitation of Torah as an essential religious experience and act of worship which views humans as under a “divinely ordained, universal moral order” derived from Torah. Through the study of Torah an individual receives guidance for life and the power to transform society. The אַשְׁרֵי formula is a plural construct in the Hebrew; in the plural, its meaning is intensified. This happiness indicated by the אַשְׁרֵי represents an internal, deep, and divinely-inspired way of being “happy” that arises from Torah; it is not the same as “pleasure,” which may be self-centered, emotive, or “frivolous.” Note that the אַשְׁרֵי always applies to humans and not God. A major focus in this psalm and the other wisdom books is morality, ethics, and order in life. The wicked live by a “practical atheism” which views God as not

translates it, seeing it in relation to the “seat” (he translates “session” מוֹשֵׁב): “How blest is the man who has not entered the council of the wicked.”

¹² Bernard Gosse, “Le Rôle du Livre des Proverbes dans la Constitution du Psautier, en Relation avec Divers Textes Bibliques,” *RB* 114 (2007): 403–15, quote 404.

¹³ Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 26–28.

actively involved in the affairs of life and therefore somewhat irrelevant; they are arrogant, pride-filled, and derisive.¹⁴

Righteous people make a deliberate choice to *not* (לֹא) walk (הלך), stand (עמד), or “sit” (שב) sit/dwell) with the wicked, sinners, and scoffers; together, the negative particle with the verbs, “walk,” “stand,” and “sit,” paired with three terms for evildoers, “wicked,” “sinners,” and “scoffers,” first emphasize what one must *avoid* to live a proper life and be “happy.” Secondly, the righteous person “delights” (נפח) in the study of Torah. Thus, the one who *does not* “walk,” “stand” or “sit” in the counsel of the wicked, way of the sinners or company of “scoffers” will be “happy.” Sinners (טטא) are “less villainous” than the wicked; the word means “to stray” or “miss the mark”—wayward people who lose their way in life.

Sarna notes that the word אָשַׁר is related to a verbal root meaning to “walk” or “advance” and thus forms wordplay with the verb “walk” (הלך) and noun “way” (דרך); the righteous person moves in a “dynamic process” by avoiding the path or way of the wicked, sinners, and scoffers but rather walks in the path of Torah, which gives life and assures happiness. Scoffers (לציי) represent foolish, arrogant people, narcissists who sit at the city gates—a place of meeting, commerce, and civic activities (see Psalm 127)—and spout their views to others. Thus, the person who lives by Torah must disavow and shun morally evil, “harmful” social situation, many of which could be enticing or tempting.¹⁵

In my analysis of Psalm 119, the frequent pleas of the psalmist for YHWH to continue to “teach” him the ways of Torah (e.g., דַּרְשׁוּ דְרָתְךָ, v. 33) are represented by a series of “Torah keywords” (see also vv. 12, 26, 68, 124, 135, 171), which reveal the dynamic and ongoing process of discovering the meaning and application of Torah in life.

¹⁴ Ibid., 29–33.

¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

By rejecting evil ways, the “righteous” (צַדִּיקִים, v. 6) embrace Torah and order their lives according to wisdom, which assures them of happiness; this use of the אֲשֶׁר־ here presents an idealized view of wisdom, similar to that found in Proverbs, in which the righteous are promised blessing while evildoers will suffer.¹⁶ Therefore, in my proposed framework of the Psalter, אֲשֶׁר־ introduces both the beginning and conclusion of the collection. Psalm 119 further embraces the reality of suffering and persecution in life along with the need to continue studying and learning Torah as a dynamic, ongoing process.

Those who follow Torah and avoid evil are likened to trees beside a stream that give fruit and flourish due to the constant supply of moisture (i.e., God’s Torah), and thus “prosper” (v. 5; Jer 17:5-8; יִצְלַח). This description of the righteous flourishing like a tree occurs also in wisdom-influenced Psalm 92:13-14, in reference to the date-palm and Lebanon Cedar, and wisdom-influenced Psalm 52:10 (also a *Maskeil*), which speaks of an olive tree thriving in the temple—a metaphorical image of prosperity for the righteous how live by Torah.¹⁷ Wisdom Psalm 128 also uses the אֲשֶׁר־ formula to emphasize the blessings of family life for those who “fear the Lord” (יִרָא יְהוָה v.1) along with the images of a “fruitful vine” and “olive saplings” for the righteous man’s wife and children, respectively.

The wicked, however, will not “stand” (קָוָה, be established firmly, to stand) at the judgment (מִשְׁפָּט), but rather they will be “like chaff which the wind blows away” (v.4) in contrast to the righteous who prosper (v.3). Antithetical to the image of a deeply-rooted streamside tree which has evergreen leaves, permanence and fruit, the wicked resemble the chaff from threshed wheat in Palestine which blows away in the wind after being separated from the valuable grain. The nature

¹⁶ For similar use of the אֲשֶׁר־ formula see Prov 3:13; Pss 32:1-2; 33:12; 34:9; 40:5; 41:2; 89:16; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1-2; 127:5; 128:144:15; 146:5.

¹⁷ Psalm 92:7-8 present clear evidence of wisdom editing based on vocabulary and theme, while 13-15 reflect the important wisdom issues of the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked and have affinities with the theme in Proverbs (see treatment of Psalm 92 and its wisdom interpolations below); see also Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 54-55.

imagery in vv. 3-4 (paralleled in Jer 17:7-8), occurs also in Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature, in which a righteous person is compared in a simile to an evergreen tree beside a flowing stream. Here in Psalm 1 the tree is both a fruit tree and evergreen; this implies its value in providing sustenance to humans, and its leaves imply medicinal value (see, for example, Ezek 47:12). Cumulatively, the image presents the righteous as deeply rooted in the “spiritual and ethical soil of the Torah,” which provides wisdom to remain ethically and morally strong even in the face of challenges, threats or temptations. Fruit and evergreen leaves also represent the blessing which the righteous person brings to others in society—perhaps even literally providing food, medicine and shelter. Verse 3 concludes the image by stating “whatever it produces thrives”; a similar idea occurs in Josh 1:8, in which Joshua tells the people to recite the Torah “day and night” so that they properly observe its teaching. This will enable them to “prosper” (תצל יח) and “be successful” (תשכיל). This rendering focuses on the prosperous actions of the person more than his or her individual successes.¹⁸

As noted above, this contrast between the fates of the righteous and the wicked is an important marker of wisdom influence in the Psalter and appears frequently in wisdom-oriented psalms.¹⁹ In omniscience, the LORD “knows” or “regards” (יודע) the *way* (דרך) of the righteous but the *way* of the wicked “perishes” (תאבד).²⁰ “Way” here represents how one chooses to live life, either by Torah (the righteous) or sin (the wicked); this choice between the way of life or death based on obedience to Torah recalls Deuteronomy 30:11–20. Perdue calls v. 6 the “central proverb” which stands outside the chiasmic structure of the rest of the poem but serves as the “locus” for its structure and content.²¹ This makes sense, as the verse in effect summarizes the basic theme of the psalm.

¹⁸ Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 40–44.

¹⁹ James L Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994), 28 (See, e.g., Pss 1, 14/53, 32, 34, 37, 49, 52, 73, 91, 92, 94, 111-112, 119:21, 69, 78, 85 [רשעים]; 110, 119 [רשעים])

²⁰ Ibid., 2: Dahood translates דרך as “assembly,” based on the Ugaritic *drkt*, meaning “dominion, power, throne,” or a “court of judgment.”

²¹ Leo J. Purdue, *Wisdom and Cult* (SBLDS 30; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 270–71.

Conrad Schaefer notes that the first word in the psalm begins with א, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, referring to those who follow Torah and are thus “happy” (אשרי), while the last word begins with ת, the final letter in the alphabet, in reference to the wicked who “perish” (תאבד, “it [the way of the wicked] will perish”).²² This seems deliberate and emphasizes the inclusive nature of the teaching contained within the poem, as in “from A to Z.” Again, this contrast between the “ways” of both the righteous and the wicked reflect the wisdom teaching of Proverbs (2:20–22; 3:31–35; 4:18–19; 5:21–23). The one who does not forget Torah (תורתִי אל־תשכח) and keeps the commandments within his or her heart will have “length of days” (אורך ימים; see Ps 23:6), “years of life and wellbeing” (שלום, Prov 3:1-2). The heart (לב) represents the mind and center of intellectual and moral reasoning in Semitic thought, and in wisdom poetry represents a source of meditation, “the meditation of my heart” (Ps 19:15; see also Ps 49:4; Job 8:10; Eccl 5:1). The path of the righteous (וארח צדיקים) will shine like the sun (כאור נגה, Prov 4:18). However, the “way of the wicked” (דרך רשעים) will be “like darkness” and they who lack knowledge will “stumble” (יבשל, Prov 4:19; see also 15:9).

Psalm 1 also stands as the first of three specifically Torah-wisdom psalms (1, 19B, 119) which emphasize God’s instruction and direction for living; Torah serves as a mediating force between God and humans. By emphasizing as “happy” the one who delights in Torah and studies it “day and night,” the speaker harkens to Deuteronomic concerns reflected in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Jeremiah. Moses commands his successor, Joshua, to recite the “Book of Teaching” (ספר התורה) “day and night” (יוםם ולילה)—the same wording as Ps 1:2. In the laws for kings, it is commanded that the king have a copy of the Teaching (תורה), written by the priests, that he may continually study it and learn to fear the LORD and live by Torah. This will assure that

²² Conrad Schaefer, *Psalms: Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 4.

he and his descendants have “length of days”—a long, prosperous life and reign—in Israel (Deut 17:18-20).

Jeremiah uses the same simile of a tree prospering by a streamside to describe as “blessed” (ברוך) the one who trusts in the LORD (17:5-8). Combining these allusions with the literary conventions of Proverbs, Psalm 1 takes lessons from Israel’s past and applies it as wisdom teaching to guide the readers to live their lives by Torah; in effect, the Torah serves in the role of a wisdom teacher.²³ This provides an example of the dynamism of the Psalms, which combine aspects of other biblical traditions in concise poetic form that can be used as a tool to teach successive generations (see also, Pss 78; 105; 106; 136). Psalm 1 as a Torah-focused introduction to the Psalter may also serve to encourage a didactic reading of what follows: as the Psalter begins with a focus on Torah as the way of life, so the readers will read what follows as Scripture and a source of “Torah,” teaching and direction for living.²⁴

This idealized portrait of the “two ways,” with its simplistic assurance that living by Torah leads to joy and prosperity, serves the theological purpose of beginning the Psalter and its reading in the context of wisdom themes. This idealistic view, however, clashes with real life suffering and injustice, as attested by the many lament psalms which follow. If we accept that Psalm 1 exists as a later addition to the final form of the Psalter which intends to begin the book with a wisdom shaping, then we can also reasonably argue that wisdom “interpolations” have been added to other, complete Psalms to abet this post-exilic reshaping. A later developed eschatology will provide hope that this ideal, though often not realized in this life where the problem of theodicy remains (e.g., Job; Ecclesiastes; Pss 37, 49, 73), will ultimately be fulfilled in a messianic age (e.g., Dan 7:13ff.). Perhaps that age of peace and prosperity will come through an ideal Davidic king (Psalm 2), or as later discovered in light of the failure of the earthly monarchy, through the eternal, ultimate kingship of YHWH (e.g., Pss 93, 97, 99, 145). According to my thesis, this “wisdom shaping” most likely

²³ James L. Mays, “The Place of the Torah Psalms in the Psalter,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 3–12, esp. 4–5.

²⁴ James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994), 28, 42.

occurred in a post-exilic context with the final editors of the Psalter being wisdom writers and sages who may likely have had some attachment to the Temple and schools of instruction.

In addition to the strategic placement of wisdom psalms, beginning with Psalm 1, these wisdom writers add wisdom themes and language to existing psalms and psalm titles to provide a contextual reading. This first occurs with the use of **אָשֶׁר־י**, which began Psalm 1, in the conclusion of Psalm 2 (v. 12b); in addition, the imperative of Psalm 2 for the earthly kings to “be wise” (**הַשְׁכִּיל־ו**, 2:10), marks the first appearance in the Psalter of the important wisdom verb **שָׁכַל**. As discussed previously, this term serves as the basis of the didactic title *Maskil* as an important wisdom marker in psalm superscripts (and 47:7). It means “to be wise, learn, to instruct.”²⁵ The root **שָׁכַל** also appears in a noun form (111:10) and in Proverbs as a wisdom term focusing on intelligence, insight and instruction.²⁶ In the case of Psalm 2, we see the imperative for kings to “be wise” in their leadership and decision-making, and to “fear” (**יִרְאֶה**, v.11) YHWH. This implies living and governing by Torah in obedience to YHWH; those who “take refuge” (**בְּרוֹץ־יְהוָה**, v. 12) in YHWH find happiness.

Sabourin cites some plausible Egyptian influences in Psalm 1: the emphasis on walking in the ways of God; a parallel to the beatitude of Ps 1:1 in the *Petosiris* tomb from the late fourth century BCE, which similarly calls those who walk in God’s way “happy”; and the *Instruction of Amen-em-opef* (sixth century BCE), which contrasts the “silent man,” depicted as a flourishing tree in a garden, with the “heated man” who is likened to a withering tree.²⁷ Another example of ancient Near Eastern influence concerns the verb **הִגִּיד** (“recites”) that refers to the oral recitation of the text of Torah; similarly, the verb occurs in Josh 1:8 where YHWH commands Joshua to recite the Torah day and night. Rather than silent meditation or reflection, the righteous person described here engages in

²⁵ *TDOT*, 14:112–128.

²⁶ In Proverbs the verb occurs thirteen times (eight as a participle) and the noun six; in Job, the verb occurs three times and the noun once. *Ibid.*, 14:116.

²⁷ Leopold Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 373.

intense, concentrated study of Torah which includes repetitive oral recitation. This was a normative teaching and learning method in the ancient world. Sarna describes how this recitation or chanting of texts was used in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian schools. The practice described in the psalm reflects the cultural norm of the Ancient Near East in which studying normally was an oral activity. Study of Torah is a “spiritual and moral discipline,” and an act of both piety and worship.²⁸ These parallels arise from a general *wisdom milieu* in which the influence of Mesopotamian and Egyptian wisdom influenced the scribal activity in post-exilic Israel.

Many scholars note a lack of cultic references in the wisdom–Torah psalms and a more individual tone. However, to disassociate these psalms from public worship seems to me mistaken, as this recitation described by Sarna could take place in wisdom schools, in personal meditation, and in synagogue worship in the post-exilic period.

While also identifying Psalm 1 as didactic and viewing the conclusion of Royal Psalm 2 as having a “wisdom conclusion in vv. 10-11,” W. H. Brownlee views the pair as a unity based on their shared vocabulary. Brownlee views Psalm 1 as a wisdom instruction for future ministers in the royal court that is linked deliberately to the coronation liturgy in Psalm 2, where “one of the last kings of Judah” (he suggests Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin ca. 597 BCE) committed himself to fulfill the Deuteronomic Law. He thus proposes a possible pre-exilic dating for Psalm 1 which according to this view preceded Psalm 2. By comparing Psalm 1 to the “last words of David” (2 Sam 23) and Deut 17:18-20, he finds thematic and linguistic parallels which further show the connection between didactic and royal concerns.²⁹ Most scholars, however, view Psalm 1 as a later, post-exilic composition, based on its language, themes, and theological outlook: rejoicing and meditating on *Torah*, use of the אֲשֶׁר־ formula, contrasting fates of the righteous and wicked, and avoidance of the wicked. According to rabbinic tradition, Psalms 1 and 2 serve as an introduction to the Psalter:

²⁸ Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 38–39.

²⁹ William H. Brownlee, “Psalms 1—2 as a Coronation Liturgy,” *Biblica* 52 (1971): 321-34. He holds that Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin were installed by the people and reigned in “troubled times” in opposition to world powers, and thus the militant tone of Psalm 2 coincides well with their time (332); however, both kings were considered to have “done evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kgs 23:32; 24:9).

“*Happy is the man* (1:1) and *why are the nations in an uproar?* (2:1) form one Psalm” (Talmud *Ber. 9b*).³⁰

Gosse views the depiction of the LORD’s anointed (מָשִׁיחַ) at the side of YHWH in Ps 2:2 as reflecting the views of the final redaction of the Psalter under the influence of the wisdom traditions.³¹ The relationship between Psalms 1 and 2 argues for their being composed in the same period and context.

As noted above, the emphases found in Psalm 1 occur in Proverbs 1—9, which most probably dates from the fifth century BCE. By this time, Pentateuch had most likely reached its final form along with most of the prophetic books, while the *Ketubim* itself was being finalized. Perhaps the best witness to a finalization of what becomes the TANAKH is the Prologue to Sirach (ca. 180 B.C.E), which references “the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors” (NRSV). Gerstenberger views Psalm 1 as “markedly late in OT history” and reflective of synagogue customs and liturgy.³² Just as the Book of Proverbs in its final form combines earlier, pre-exilic wisdom materials with post-exilic material, most likely produced and added by the final editors, we can posit a similar development for the wisdom-Torah psalms: editors and scribes (the same ones who worked on Proverbs?) combine earlier and later sources. Perdue views Psalm 1 as a sapiential poem written and used for teaching by a sage working in a wisdom school, most probably from the Persian period, based on its focus of “meditation” (better, “recitation”) on Torah. Seeing an absence of cultic evidence in its structure, he views Psalm 1 as evidence that the Psalter served as more than a “songbook for the Second Temple,” but also as an important collection for private reflection and study.³³

Significantly, Psalms 1 and 2 serve as an intentional introduction to the Psalter that combines wisdom traditions (Pss 1; 2:10–12) with royal themes (Ps 2), reflecting the post-exilic ideal of YHWH

³⁰ Quoted in Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms* (Soncino Books of the Bible; ed. A. Cohen; Rev. Rabbi E. Oratz and Rav Shalom Shabar; London/Jerusalem/New York: Soncino Press, 1945; Revised 1992), 1.

³¹ Gosse, “Le Rôle of du Livre des Proverbs,” 405.

³² Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms I: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 43–44.

³³ Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 153–54. As stated earlier, I see no dichotomy between study and worship.

as King. Psalm 3 then begins Book 1 with a lament reflecting the reality of “real life” with its struggles of pain, betrayal, suffering, oppression, fear and uncertainty. This initial grouping of psalms provides a fitting insight into the application of psalms to life for those who pray and reflect upon them. The ideal of “walking by faith,” in this case the principles of God’s word revealed in Torah and faith and trust in YHWH as “king,” provides an ultimate hope for peace, joy and prosperity (Pss 1; 2); Psalm 3, however, expresses the struggles and uncertainties of life through lament. Later wisdom psalms will embrace lament themes in light of the questions of *theodicy*—why do the rich prosper while the righteous suffer, and why does a just God allow this? This will be seen especially in Pss 37, 49, and 73, but also relevant in Pss 34, 36, 94, and parts of Psalm 119.

Psalm 19: Wisdom in Torah and Creation

Regardless of whether parts one (Creation vv. 2–7) and two (Torah vv. 8–15) are a composite of two originally separate poems, the Psalm as a whole reflects important wisdom elements: the revelation of God’s power and glory by discerning God’s creative works (see Psalms 8; 33; 104; 148; Sirach 24; 42-43; Job 38-39) and a comprehensive understanding of God’s Torah, as revealed in the list of key words which describe its various aspects (Pss 1; 119). Tate points out that the two divisions differ in subject, language and meter, but views these originally separate poems as deliberately joined and meant to be interpreted as a unit.³⁴ This seems logical. Part 1 contains parallels to Mesopotamian and Egyptian poetry in its references to the sun and praise of creation; the psalmist reinterprets these pagan texts to provide a polemic against astral worship: for the Israelite, rather than being deities, the heavens simply bear silent witness to YHWH, their creator.³⁵ Later wisdom editors, then, combined the meditation on the revelation of YHWH in creation with a wisdom-torah hymn extolling Torah as revelatory of the perfection, restorative power, wisdom, order and will of YHWH in life. Sarna, however, views the psalm as dating from the reforms of Josiah

³⁴ Marvin Tate, “Psalms” in *Mercer Commentary on the Bible* (vol. 3, Wisdom Writings; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001), 73.

³⁵ On the influence of Near Eastern sources and their reshaping by the psalmist, see the discussion by Jonathan T. Glass, “Some Observations on Psalm 19” in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy O. Carm.* (JSOTSup 58; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 147–57.

(622/21 BCE) as a deliberate polemic against astral worship which, in addition to the threat to Israelite religion from the Canaanite gods Baal and Ashtoreth, was practiced by King Manasseh (687/6–642 BCE), who “worshiped all the host of heaven” (צבא השמים; 2 Kgs 21:3, 5). After discovering and promulgating the “Book of the Law” (ספר התורה), Josiah had all these idols removed, and deposed the priests who offered incense “to Baal, to the sun (לשמש), to the moon, constellations, and all the host of heaven” (2 Kgs 23:5–6; 11–12).³⁶ While plausible, it seems more likely that the combination of creation theology, wisdom and Torah in Psalm 19 arose in its final form in the post-exilic period when, in light of Israel’s past history of infidelity and resulting exile, wisdom teachers emphasized strict monotheism.

Affinities between Psalm 19B and 119:1–9 are manifest in its use of various key words to describe Torah; in addition, both Pss 19A and 119:89–91 emphasize how order in the heavenly and earthly realms reflects God’s word. Psalm 19 presents a type of dialogue between divinely ordered forces in the heavenly realm and concrete expression and experience of divine order on earth through the effects of *Torah* in life. In part one (vv. 2–7) the Israelite composer utilizes and reshapes Canaanite mythology of the gods of creation and justice, *El* and *Shamash*. The heavens and the firmament give inaudible praise to El through their beauty and order; in Job 38 YHWH similarly draws on the beauty and order of creation in answering Job from the whirlwind.

Metaphorically, the “heavens declare the glory of God” (השמים מספרים כבוד אל) and the “firmament announces” (מגיד הרקיע) God’s handiwork (v. 1); a wise person will thus discern the presence of God’s power and glory by observing the created world. The order and operations of nature and creation reveal their divine source. The movement from day to night “pours forth” (יביע) divine speech (אמר) and “proclaims knowledge” (יחוד-דעת). I see obvious affinities with Psalm 104 in the emphasis on God’s oversight and ordering of the processes of nature (e.g., setting the limits of the earth; placing a “tent” for the Sun). Likewise, a primitive cosmology views the

³⁶ Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 72–74.

firmament (רָקִיעַ, v.2) as a dome in the sky from which night day, luminaries, clouds go forth from the “storehouses” (אֹצְרוֹת; see Ps 135:7) as if running on a circuit (vv. 5–7). This cosmological imagery occurs in the Priestly creation story (Gen 1) and in Pss 104:2–3, 135:6–7, and 148; further, in Psalm 148 the heavens, sun, moon, and stars “praise” YHWH metaphorically (148:33–4), just as they silently proclaim God’s glory in Psalm 19. Unlike the parallels in other Near Eastern sources, however, in these texts all of creation reveals the order and handiwork of YHWH, and thus creation becomes a type of sacramental expression of God’s order and will. Psalm 19A also stands with Psalms 8, 33, 104 and 148 as creation psalms that contain wisdom elements.

Without speech or words (אִין דְּבָרִים, v. 4) the luminaries silently give witness to the Creator’s glory from one end of the earth to the other; in part two, however, the Torah (תּוֹרָה) of YHWH studied and recited orally, will be proclaimed in conjunction with this silent witness of creation. Personified as a bridegroom (בַּחֲתָן, v. 6), the sun (שֶׁמֶשׁ) comes forth from its bridal chamber to run its daily circuit from one end of the heavens to the other, with its inescapable heat (חֶמֶד) comparable to the passion and virility of a bridegroom. God sets a “tent” (אֹהֶל, v. 5c) for the sun; this metaphor draws on Ugaritic mythology in which gods dwelt in elaborate tents, and here likewise refers to an elaborate structure, akin to the concept of the “tent of meeting” which accompanied Israel in their wilderness journey. The metaphor of a tent for YHWH occurs also in Pss 15:1; 27:5, and 61:5. However, in contrast to the Ugaritic literature in which gods dwell in tents, here YHWH provides a tent for the subordinate sun, a servant who reveals the Creator.³⁷

In both Akkadian and Canaanite mythology, *Shamash* represents the god of justice; wisdom was personified as God’s agent in bringing forth and ordering creation (Prov 3:19–20; 8:22–32). Here the psalmist reshapes the Canaanite mythology to make the sun subservient to YHWH, the creator and source of order, and in part 2 equates wisdom with Torah: wisdom serves thus as God’s

³⁷ Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1—72* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002), 113.

agent in creation and also reveals God in the written words of Torah. Psalm 19 A and B combined present the natural revelation of God in creation with the revelation of God's will through Torah.³⁸

In part two, the key words—"Torah," "testimony," precepts, commandment, "fear of YHWH," and ordinances—also appear in the long acrostic wisdom-Torah psalm 119 and present the true path or "way" of living.³⁹ One who lives by what each keyword represents receives a corresponding benefit: "restores the soul," "makes the simple wise," "gladdens the heart," "gives light to the eyes"—itself a euphemism for enlightened faith—"endures forever," and "righteous altogether." Likened to fine honey and gold, living by these aspects of God's Torah promises life and prosperity; the speaker, however, also realizes the importance of honestly reflecting upon his or her faults and seeks help to avoid them, so that he or she may prosper: "Then I shall be blameless and innocent of the great transgression" (v. 13). The context of this Torah portion is "meditation of my heart" (וְהִגִּיוֹן לְבַי, v. 15), another important aspect of wisdom (the verbal form יְהַגֵּה in Ps 1:2). The silent language of God's love and power revealed in creation (v. 1) has affinities with Psalms 8, 33, 104 and 148, which also contain wisdom elements as they reflect on God's revelation in nature, the role of humans (Psalm 8: humans dominate; 104: equal partners with the rest of creation), and how God's wisdom reveals itself through creation (104:24).

Though most earlier scholars view 19A and B as originally separate poems which were joined at a later date, most contemporary scholars emphasize a close relationship between the two parts as part B serves as a type of didactic commentary on the revelation of God in nature expressed in part A.⁴⁰ Whybray views the psalm in its final form as an example of post-exilic editing of older existing material, "expressing a Torah-oriented theology of which there is no hint in the original

³⁸ Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 154–55.

³⁹ The key words common to both Psalms 19 and 119 include: *Torah* (תּוֹרָה), *Decrees* (עֲדוּת), *Precepts* (פְּקוּדֵי), *Commandments* (מִצְוֹת), *Fear/reverence* (יְרֵאָה), and *Judgments* (מִשְׁפָּטִים); Psalm 19 lacks reference to *Statutes* (חֻקִּים) which occurs throughout Ps 119.

⁴⁰ Nahum Sarna argues for an original unity and views Ps 19 in its entirety as a polemic against pagan worship; see his *On the Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 70–96.

psalm.”⁴¹ I propose that part A derives from an older creation-wisdom hymn, influenced by Egyptian and/or Babylonian sources but adapted to emphasize creation as the domain of YHWH, while part B arose in the circles of post-exilic wisdom editors to emphasize the connections between creation and Torah as revelatory of God’s will and presence. Among the didactic-wisdom elements in the psalm in addition to creation and praise of Torah are the comparative saying (v. 11), which proclaims the superiority of the judgments (משפט) of YHWH superior to fine gold, and the rhetorical question (v. 13) asks how one can discern (יבי) errors.

Purdue divides 19B into two strophes (vv. 2–10; 12–15) with v. 11 serving as an “intervening couplet” describing Torah as more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey (even liquid honey from the cone); the first strophe exalts Torah and the second shows how meditation on the Torah leads to an awareness of sin and desire for repentance and reconciliation. He further classifies Psalm 19B as a “cultic wisdom psalm” containing elements of lament.⁴² Purdue’s observations are prescient, but his division of the psalm mixes the clearly different creation and Torah sections unnecessarily. A better division is vv. 2–7 (A) and vv. 8–15 (B), with the Sun serving as a unifying element between the sections, following the use of the Sun as symbolic of the Law in other ancient Near Eastern sources—some of which likely influenced the writer (s) of this poem.⁴³

In arguing for the unity of the psalm in its canonical form, Sarna posits that the focus on light radiating from the sun (vv. 5b–7) “may be intentionally, if inferentially, correlated with the spiritual enlightenment imparted by Torah” in part 2, citing Prov 6:23a as a warrant: “For a commandment (מצוה) is a lamp, and Torah (is) light” (אור my trans.).⁴⁴ This makes good sense as the reference to the sun in vv. 5b–7, which of course implies radiant light, thematically parallels v. 9b, which uses both “commandments” (מצוות) and “enlightens” (מאירה) as descriptive of Torah’s

⁴¹ Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 46.

⁴² Purdue, *Wisdom & Cult*, 296–97.

⁴³ Glass, “Psalm 19,” 148–56, provides extensive documentation of these sources, which include the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and Ugaritic literature, as does Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*.

⁴⁴ Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 74–75.

effects. In effect, Psalm 19 combines the emphasis on Torah in Psalm 1 with the revelation of God's glory in creation and the heavens in Psalm 8. However, in Psalm 19 the proclamation of human dominion in Psalm 8 is tempered with an acknowledgment of human failure and the need for forgiveness and help from YHWH to be cleansed of sin, perceive error and thus avoid offense, and offer an acceptable prayer (vv. 12–15).

In the creation hymn (vv. 2–7) of Psalm 19 the word **לש**, the most ancient Near Eastern title for “God” which was used in Canaanite literature to refer to the chief god, occurs in v.1, while in the Torah hymn (vv. 7–15) the personal name for Israel's God, **יהוה**, occurs seven times. The more generic term **לש** applies to divine revelation in creation while the personal name **יהוה** more specifically applies when discussing Torah.⁴⁵ This observation bolsters Sarna's view that both the cosmos and Torah are sources of divine revelation; the use of **לש** in the creation hymn may also reflect the influence of older Near Eastern sources. In conclusion, wisdom aspects of Psalm 19 include its thematic and verbal links to both Pss 1 & 119—Torah, an “orientation” outlook on life in which the righteous will be rewarded while the wicked punished, wisdom vocabulary, and creation theology. Collectively, this provides evidence for a post-exilic date of final composition, probably consistent with the activity of the Chronicler, in which older materials were adapted to combine creation and Torah as agents of wisdom and divine revelation.

Psalms 111—112: Acrostics in praise of the Lord and Wisdom

These psalms stand in direct relationship to each other based on their similar acrostic structure and shared vocabulary. Acrostic structures reveal precision and skill on the part of scribal authors who possibly came from scribal schools connected to the wisdom interests in post-exilic Israel.⁴⁶ For example, in both psalms each line, rather than verse, introduces a successive letter of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁶ For a recent view of Ancient Near Eastern evidence for the relationship between acrostic structures and wisdom interests see Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “Additional Elements of Alphabetical Thinking in Psalm XXXIV,” *VT* 52 (2002): 326–33. Hurowitz notes that references to the god Nabû, the Babylonian patron of

Hebrew alphabet. **Psalm 111** praises God for establishing Israel through works and teaching, which are “studied” (דרש) by all who delight in them (הפציהם, v. 2b); this use of דרש (“to seek, investigate, study”) parallels its use in Ps 119:45 in which the speaker studies God’s precepts. Here one can interpret God’s works as “ethical demands” which are carried out by the upright who delight in them.⁴⁷ Psalm 111 emphasizes the works (מעש, vv. 2, 6, 7), “actions” (פעל, v. 3), and “wonders” (נפל אהיו, v. 4) of YHWH, described as “splendor and glory” (הוד-והדר, v. 3); they manifest YHWH’s enduring righteousness (v. 3b), graciousness and mercy (חונן ורחום, v. 4). In sequence, the Psalm describes these works with historical references to the liberation from Egypt (vv. 2–4), feeding in the wilderness, covenant at Sinai, and redemption (vv. 5–9a)—all of which manifest the holy and awesome name of YHWH (קדוש ונורא שמו, v. 9b). “Awesome” here derives from a participle form of the verb “to fear,” which combined with “holy” emphasizes the total otherness of YHWH, as manifested in the works recited in the poem; the repetition of words for “eternity” (vv. 3, 8, 9, 10; shared with Ps 112, see below) further heightens the permanence of God’s works.⁴⁸

This focus on the great works of YHWH (גדלים מעשי יהוה, v. 2; see vv. 6, 7 for further use of מעש) as a source of divine revelation, truth and justice (vv. 6–7), are themes expressed in the (later?) acrostic Psalm 145 (vv. 4–12), which at one time may have served as the conclusion of an earlier form of the Psalter. Clifford notes that the sequence of “liberation, guidance in the wilderness, and governance in the land (v. 9) found here also occurs in Psalms 105 and 106. He observes that Psalm 111 “links narrative and ethics” as God’s mighty acts include truth, justice, and enduring precepts (נאמנים כל־פקודיו, v.7), and the eternal covenant (v. 9b).⁴⁹ Recital of historical actions as a means to teach ongoing generations about the nature of God and the need for reverence, fidelity and obedience to Torah occurs here and also, in addition to Psalms 105 and 106,

scribes, in Akkadian acrostics, suggests the relationship of this technique with the scribal profession; see pp.331–32.

⁴⁷ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 182.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 181–82.

in Wisdom Psalm 78. Like Psalms 111-112, these historical/didactic psalms most probably are post-exilic compositions used by wisdom teachers to teach obedience to Torah through historical recital.⁵⁰

Psalm 111 then concludes with a central thesis of wisdom literature: “The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord” (ראשית חכמה יראת יהוה), v. 10), and all who do this have “understanding” (שכל, “intelligence, understanding”).⁵¹ This wisdom arises from reflection upon God’s historical works, the permanence of *Torah* and covenant, and evokes a response of reverence and joyful praise.

Immediately following this wisdom conclusion, Psalm 112 begins by describing the ideal pious Israelite with the ירא את־יהוה: “Happy is the one who *reveres the Lord*” (v. 1) and delights in his “commandments” (מצותיו). Thus, the conclusion of Psalm 111 and beginning of Ps 112 recall the opening of the Psalter with wisdom Psalm 1, assuring the happiness of the person who reveres YHWH and delights in Torah. Continuing with this “orientation” view of wisdom, this person will be blessed with powerful descendents “in the land” (Ps 37:11) who will carry on the name and line of their progenitor. Shared vocabulary between the psalms includes “fear of the LORD” (above), “upright” (שרים, 111:1; 112:2, 4), “delights” (הפי, 111:2 [noun]; 112:1 [verb]), “righteousness” (צדק, 111:3; 112:3, 9), “eternity/enduring” (עולם, 111:5, 8, 9; 112:6; עד, 111:3, 8, 10; 112:3, 9), and “gracious and merciful” (חנון ורחום, 111:4; 112:4)—this last pair an essential part of the self-identification formula for YHWH (Exod 34:6–7; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8 and parallels). Notice from the above list that several of these words occur in the equivalent verse in both psalms. Thus, while Psalm 111 is correctly classified as a hymn of praise, it contains thematic and linguistic parallels with Psalm 112 that reveal a common authorship; in addition, with the wisdom conclusion in Ps 111:10,

⁵⁰ Tate, “Psalms,” 126, 152–53, also favors a post-exilic dating for Pss 78, 105, and 106 and proposes that these psalm may have been used in covenant renewal ceremonies.

⁵¹ Here the noun form of the root שכל is used, from which the verbal form “to be wise” derives and also the root form of the psalm title משכיל.

which leads smoothly into the wisdom Psalm 112, the strong links between Pss 111 and 112 merit their being read and interpreted in tandem.

Psalm 112:2–4: Describe the one who reveres the Lord in a manner reminiscent of the Prologue and Epilogue of Job. It has an “orientation” outlook similar to Psalm 1, in which the righteous, God-fearing is assured of happiness and prosperity. In addition, the pious one will have mighty offspring in the land, who are upright (ישרים), blessed, wealthy (הון־ועשר), enduring in righteousness (צדק), receive guidance (“Light shines in darkness for the upright”), and mirror God’s covenant love in their graciousness (חנן), compassion (רחום), and righteous. Shining light (אור) for the righteous recalls Proverbs 13:9, in which “the light of the righteous person rejoices” while the lamp of the wicked burns out. In his examination of wisdom vocabulary, Avi Hurvitz designates הון, “wealth,” as an important wisdom term as it appears 18 times in Proverbs out of a total 26 times in the Hebrew Bible. In the Psalter it appears in Ps 44:13, a communal lament (and a psalm), here in Ps 112, and again in Ps 119:14.⁵² While a negative context surrounds the use of הון in Ps 44:13 (“You have sold your people for no riches/wealth”) here and in Ps 119 it appears in a positive context, describing the blessings which accrue to the righteous one who fears the LORD (Ps 112) and as a metaphor for the value of the Lord’s testimonies (“I delight in the way of your testimonies [עֲדוֹתַי] as above all riches [הון]”; 119:14).⁵³ Hurvitz concludes, as I do, that its use in Psalms 112 and 119 occur in strong wisdom contexts and, therefore, both psalms are classified as “wisdom psalms.”⁵⁴

⁵² Avi Hurvitz, “Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of ‘Wisdom Psalms’” *V/T* 38 (1988): 41–51, see especially 45–47.

⁵³ Author’s translation; in a previous chapter, I discuss the term משכיל in the Psalter, particularly in Superscriptions, and conclude that this term, derived from the wisdom root שכל, serves as a marker for the editing of wisdom editors and probable didactic purposes for the psalms, of various genres, which contain the term.

⁵⁴ Hurvitz, “Wisdom Vocabulary,” 47. However, in my analysis both of these psalms easily qualify as “wisdom psalms” even if the term הון was lacking; Hurvitz seems to imply the presence of the term seals their classification as such.

Vv. 5–6: Because the righteous God-fearer lends generously (חונן ומלֹוה), “acts graciously and lends”) and acts with justice (משפּט), he or she will have stability in life (“will never be moved”) and a lasting memory in the community (לִזְכֹּר עוֹלָם). The exact same phrase, “acts graciously and lends” (חונן ומלֹוה) occurs in wisdom Ps 37:26. An everlasting remembrance may include many children to carry on the family line and an enduring reputation for righteous living—similar to the presentation of Job in the Epilogue (Job 42:10–17), and a stark contrast to the skepticism of Ecclesiastes regarding human destiny (Eccl 9:1–12). Likewise, in Ps 41:2 and Proverbs those who give to the poor will be happy (14:21, מִחֻנֵּן עֲנִיִּים אֲשֶׁרֵי, their descendents will receive an inheritance (Prov 13:22), and the righteous will “never be moved” (בִּלְיִמוּטֹו Prov 10:30). The verb מוּט in the Niphal, as used in the Psalm and Proverbs, means to “totter,” “stumble” or fall; thus by acting by acting with righteousness and reverence one receives assurance of stability in life.

Verses 7–8: A “firm heart” (נִכּוֹן לִבּוֹ) in Semitic thought means a “confident mind” or stable moral character as the heart in Semitic thought represents the organ of intellect and moral reasoning. This moral fortitude enables the righteous to remain steadfast and confident in the face of “an evil report”: “*An evil report he will not fear,*” because he “trusts in the Lord.” Verse 8 extends the heart metaphor: “his heart is steadfast” (סִמּוּךְ לִבּוֹ); the psalmist is fearless is able to look upon his foes with confidence in his ultimate triumph.

Verse 9 provides a concluding observation of upright (יֹשְׁרִים), righteous person (צַדִּיק) as giving to the poor, enduring in his or her righteousness (or “right-relationship” with God) and exalted state of being. Literally, his “horn is raised in honor,” announces the psalmist’s strength of character, while the wicked gnash their teeth in vexation, and ultimately their desires came to an abrupt end (v. 10): in their vexation (כַּעַס) their desires “perish” (תֵּאבֵד). Thus, Psalms 1 and 112

both begin with אֲשֶׁר, proclaiming the happiness of those who live by Torah, and conclude with אֲשֶׁר, to describe the ultimate and inevitable end of the wicked.

Psalm 119: An All-Inclusive Celebration of Torah in Life

With 176 verses, Psalm 119 stands out as by far the longest psalm in the Psalter and with its rigidly-organized Acrostic structure of eight verse stanzas which correspond to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and inclusion of Torah keywords throughout, it presents the most detailed and comprehensive application in the Hebrew Bible of Torah as a source and guide for life. Clearly the emphasis on teaching and instruction in Psalm 119 reflects the interests and composition of post-exilic wisdom writers. During this era reverence for Torah becomes more central in Israelite religion in light of the Exile experience, in which lack of fidelity to YHWH as expressed through Torah is viewed as a major cause of the destruction and deportation; the proclamation and interpretation of Torah as central to the identity of the restored Jerusalem community in this era occurs, for example, in Ezra's speech (Neh 8). In addition, failure of the Davidic monarchy (Ps 89:39–52) and a waning influence of the priesthood and cult parallels a heightened emphasis on YHWH as king (Books 4, 5), the study of Torah as a form of worship and instruction, and concomitant rise of scribal influence religious practice and the composition and editing of the Psalter.⁵⁵ Among wisdom elements within this poem, Perdue points to the opening אֲשֶׁר sayings (vv. 1-2), the “catechetical question and answer” which begins the *Beit* stanza (v. 9), the identification of wisdom with Torah (as in Sir 24) and the speaker's love of study, fear of God, prayers for wisdom and knowledge, God as creator, the contrast between the righteous and the wicked and use of wisdom vocabulary.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 156–57 where he analyzes the influence of post-exilic scribes in producing this psalm. Gerald H. Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Int.* 46 (1992): 129–42, nicely summarizes views on this post-exilic shift from a cultic to a more widespread use of the psalms beyond the temple, “at a time when the sages had the upper hand in restructuring the community's perception of those cultic practices” (138); Wilson also rightly notes the postexilic shift from an emphasis on the earthly monarchy, which had failed (e.g., Ps 89) to a renewed emphasis on YHWH as king, especially as this is emphasized in books 4 and 5 (136), and the interpretation of the Exile as resulting from Israel's lack of obedience to Torah (140).

⁵⁶ Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 303; in addition to viewing the psalm as the product of post-exilic wisdom circles, likening its authorship to that of Sirach, he persuasively argues that it served as a cultic prayer (312).

Further evidence of the post-exilic origins of Psalm 119 and its importance for post-exilic Judaism appear in the Qumran Psalms Scrolls, where copies of the psalm hold pride of place. Two manuscripts, 4QPs g and h, appear to consist solely of Ps 119, which attests to the high value placed on Torah as an essential guide for life among the Qumran sectarians.⁵⁷ Thus, the first two stanzas, *Aleph* and *Beit*, serve, respectively, as a prologue and thematic introduction to the poem, presenting the Torah keywords, and emphasizing the happiness assured for those who keep the way (וַיִּרְדּוּ, vv. 1, 3, 5, 9, 14) and path (וַיִּשְׁרְטוּ, vv. 9, 15) of Torah. Beginning with the *Gimmel* stanza (vv. 17–24) elements of lament and thanksgiving occur. Through its acrostic structure, which emphasizes completeness, and use of keywords and themes, Psalm 119 presents *Torah* as the primary source of divine revelation, guidance for life and source of hope in the midst of suffering and oppression in the post-exilic era of foreign domination.

Like Psalm 1, Psalm 119 begins with the אֲשֶׁר־י (vv. 1-2) declaring similarly the happiness of the person who lives by *Torah*, using the noun “way” (וַיִּרְדּוּ, vv. 1, 3) and verb “walk” (וַיִּלְכוּ, vv. 1, 3) to emphasize from the start that guiding one’s life by Torah assures happiness. In its collection of keywords for *Torah* Psalm 119 resembles Psalm 19B, which uses all the same keywords except קַח (“statute”), and recognizes God as creator (v. 73) whose word dwells in heaven (v. 89), just as the heavenly realms “proclaimed” God’s glory in Ps 19A. With its guidance for authentic living, honest expression of repentance for sin, and confident trust and petition to God in the midst of suffering, the psalm provides an orientation for life which calls for steadfast obedience to YHWH and Torah while realistically acknowledging issues of theodicy. In this sense, it shows a development from the traditional retribution theology espoused in Psalm 1. Before proceeding further in our analysis, I will address the issue of how we understand Torah in Psalm 119 and the context of the Psalm within the larger Psalter.

⁵⁷ For an overview on the Psalms in the Qumran documents, see Dwight D. Swanson, “Qumran and the Psalms,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (eds. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2005), 247–61, on Ps 119 see 252.

Contemporary scholars hold a variety of views on the structure and meaning of Psalm 119. Jon Levenson proposes that the lack of reference to Moses, the Covenant, Promised Land, cult or priesthood place this psalm in a unique context in which the idea of Torah transcends a written book; Psalm 119 embraces a fluid and prophetic view in which ongoing spiritual illumination continues to guide the speaker's understanding and application of Torah to life.⁵⁸ David Noel Freedman and Adam Welch list these omissions of Israelite theological concepts in Psalm 119: creation (but see vv. 64; 89–90), the patriarchal promises, covenant, the Temple, past or future Davidic dynasty, or Yahweh's actions in salvation history. Further, while recognizing Psalm 119's parallels to Deuteronomy in vocabulary (7 of the psalm's keywords are found in Duet) and language (loving Torah; listening and keeping it), they note how in Deuteronomy, Torah is grounded in YHWH's actions in history; in Psalm 119, however, Torah is separated from history, lacks the mediation of Moses, and is the *only* theological expression of YHWH's revelation and actions.⁵⁹ Similar to Proverbs, the commandments (מצוה) in Psalm 119 “indicates the counsel of a sage rather than juridical or cultic norms,” i.e. this broad and fluid understanding of Torah and its synonyms views it as advice or teaching which guides one to success in life.⁶⁰

In addition to viewing Psalm 119 as “mixed genre” (Gunkel) and recognizing its use of language reminiscent of Deuteronomy—seeking God's justice against his persecutors and concern with keeping the commandments—many scholars view the psalm as entirely divorced from liturgical, cultic, and traditional concerns. Because of its frequent use of the language of lament, some scholars classify the psalm as a lament; I disagree and propose instead that the psalm uses mixed elements,

⁵⁸ “The Sources of Torah: Psalm 119 and the Modes of Revelation in Second Temple Judaism,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 559–74, for his more detailed examination of Ps 119 and its parallels with Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and other texts, and his claim that in its original state, the psalm reflects a fluid understanding of Torah, similar in respects to *Sirach* and *Jubilees*. See especially 563–69.

⁵⁹ David Noel Freedman and Andrew Welch, “Conclusion: The Theology of Psalm 119” in David Noel Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego 6; ed. William Henry Propp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 88–89.

⁶⁰ Levenson, “The Sources of Torah: Psalm 119 and the Modes of Revelation in Second Temple Judaism,” 566.

including lament and thanksgiving, in the broader service of emphasizing devotion to Torah, which remains the central focus and answer to life's questions.⁶¹

As pertinent as these observations are, I argue that, in fact, by failing to view Psalm 119 within its larger canonical context, these scholars wrongly divorce it from traditional liturgical and covenantal concerns. Among various “keywords” discussed below, I also propose that the use of covenant keywords **טוּר** (e.g., vv. 41, 64, 76, 88, 149, 159), **קוּר** (e.g., vv. 77, 156), and **אמונה** (e.g., v.30) serve to recall the covenant tradition and formula from Sinai (Exod 34:6–7) by implication. As an integral part of the Psalter, perhaps even the conclusion to an earlier, initial collection of psalms, Psalm 119 ought to be viewed as a wisdom-Torah poem from the post-exilic period which served to inculcate reverence for Torah and most likely was used in tandem with other psalms, some of which include traditional covenantal and liturgical concerns. Most probably, because of their thematic similarities, Psalms 119, 19, and 1 were read together, and with their emphasis on following the way of Torah may well have been used in tandem with entrance liturgies like Psalms 15 and 24, in which the requirements for worship are set forth.⁶²

Some of the major motifs of this lengthy psalm appear through the repetitions of keywords in addition to the synonyms for Torah found in every verse. Only verses 3, 9, and 122 lack any of the Torah keywords; otherwise, each stanza contains multiple references to the Torah keywords. The identification of wisdom with Torah, reflective of late post-exilic scribal views (see Sir 24; Baruch 3:9–4:4), occurs most clearly in the **ב** stanza (vv. 97–104), which combines Torah keywords with wisdom-oriented verbs (see below). Repeated words include the verb “to meditate” (**פִּיֵּשׁ**, vv. 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148), which emphasizes the absolute necessity for continual meditation and recital of Torah as a source of wisdom, revelation of divine will, and moral guidance which preserves order

⁶¹ Freedman and Welch, “Conclusion: The Theology of Psalm 119,” 93, citing William Soll, *Psalm 119: Matrix, Form and Setting* (CBQMS 23; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1991), call it a lament. Kent Aaron Reynolds, “The Answer of cxix 9,” *VT* 58 (2008): 265–69, challenges Soll’s interpretation of v. 9, in which he argues that the psalm is not a lament but serves to “convince the reader to observe God’s word” (268).

⁶² Reynolds, “The Answer of Psalm cxix 9,” 268, observes the similarities of purpose between Pss 119, 15 and 24.

in life and avoids a return to chaos.⁶³ The speaker, often called “your servant” (עַבְדְּךָ, v. 23; the root “servant/service” occurs 14 times in the psalm), studies Torah as a way to understand God’s ways and wonders—even in the face of opposition (“princes sit and speak against me” v. 23). The speaker raises his/her hands to study the commandments and precepts “which I love” (v. 48), in the face of false accusers (v. 78), and throughout the night watches, i.e. at all times (v. 148). Study of Torah, which reveals divine will, and gives life, must therefore touch every aspect of living.

Another keyword, noted above, is “way” (דֶּרֶךְ, vv. 1, 3, 5, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37, 59, 168) which serves in this context as a synonym for Torah while also presenting a sense of movement as in a pilgrimage through life guided by Torah.⁶⁴ Abraham Cohen holds that because of its use of keywords, the author (s) of Psalm 119 certainly knew Psalm 19, but here expanded upon these words with a massive acrostic which “weaves them into a verbal fugue,” and hence his Cohen’s title for the psalm “Torah: the way of life.” Though recognizing the individual nature of the speaker’s reflections on Torah, he describes the speaker as “the spokesmen of his co-religionists” and posits a fifth century disciple of Ezra as its author.⁶⁵ It also recalls the “two ways” motif of Psalm 1 that contrasts the “way” of the righteous versus the way of the wicked; the way of the righteous leads to rejoicing (Pss 1; 119:1) but the way of the wicked (119:29, “false ways”: דֶּרֶךְ שֶׁקֶר) leads to destruction. With strict and precise structural composition, the writer/speaker of Psalm 119 maintains a focus entirely on Torah, as represented by דֶּרֶךְ and its synonyms, with repetitions of thought and an intensely personal, devotional nature. However, as noted above I view the psalm as having a cultic usage along with more didactic and devotional use within Temple schools along with private devotion (for literate people). Whybray notes that “I” and “me” occur over 240 times in the poem, thus making it a devotional prayer in which the speaker seeks guidance and wisdom from YHWH as teacher (vv. 12, 26, 33, 68, 124, 135, 171) who provides knowledge (vv. 27, 29, 32, 34, 73, 99, 100, 104, 125, 144, 152,

⁶³ Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, 291–97, admirably examines the repetition of words and themes in Psalm 119 as a means to understand its overarching theology.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁶⁵ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms*, 394.

169); this desire for knowledge, conveyed through the use of several important wisdom terms (למד, “teach”; בין, “insight”; ירה, “instruct”; שכל, “intelligence”; ידע, “to know”) qualifies it as a wisdom psalm.⁶⁶ These requests for instruction from God recall Proverbs 2:1 in which God is presented as the personified wisdom teacher (“My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commandments” v. 1) who provides understanding and wisdom, described as “fear of the LORD and knowledge of God” (v. 5).

Structurally, Clifford observes a “dramatic” movement from the introductory (“Prologue”) *Aleph* and *Beth* stanzas towards more expression of complaint and petition with the *Gimel* stanza (vv. 17–24), reaching a turning point in the central stanza (ל, vv. 89–96), after which the tone becomes more positive.⁶⁷ Positively, the stanza does emphasize the permanence of Torah and creation, as God’s Word “stands firm in the heavens,” where the LORD reigns (v. 89), while the God “established the earth,” which stands firm (תעמד, v. 90). Three times in this stanza the speaker uses verbs for standing or being firm: נצב (v. 89), and עמד (vv. 90, 91); this serves to emphasize the permanence and divine origins of Torah. In my observation the second half of the psalm continues to express lamentation (e.g., vv. 107; 141; 157) balanced by confidence in Torah.

An important observation needs to be made on the very center of the poem, v. 88. Occurring at the conclusion of the *Kaph* stanza, dominated by pleas for deliverance and acknowledgment of persecution balanced by “hope” in God’s word, the speaker concludes with reference to God’s חסד: “According to your steadfast love, give me life, and I will keep the decree of your mouth.” At the very middle of the poem, the speaker calls upon God to act in accordance with the covenant promise (Exod 34:6) of steadfast love, faithfulness, mercy and compassion. Proclamation of a keyword or phrase in this cultural context, wherein many preserved Scripture in

⁶⁶ Norman Whybray, “Psalm 119: Profile of a Psalmist,” in *Wisdom, You are My Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (ed. Michael L. Barre, S.S.; CBQMS 29; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997), 31–43, here 34.

⁶⁷ Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 211.

memory, would naturally call to mind the wider passage of Scripture. An example of this from the first century is the NT depiction of Jesus quoting the second verse of Psalm 22 on the cross (“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me”); for the ancient reader, the clear reference to Psalm 22 would naturally call to mind the poem in its entirety, which moves from lament to thanksgiving.⁶⁸ We see this frequently, for example, in the lament Psalms. In Ps 88:12 the speaker poses a challenge and bargains with God by asking how God’s “steadfast love” and faithfulness will be proclaimed should he or she be permanently consigned to Sheol. Again, in response to the view that Psalm 119 has no interest in the covenant or traditional aspects of Israelite theology, I argue that implicitly, through keywords the psalm references Sinai and the traditional covenant promises. However, at this stage in Israel’s history, these promises find their fulfillment in Torah.

Analysis of Select Stanzas: What follows is an examination of select stanzas at the beginning, middle and end of the Psalm that provide a thorough understanding of its main theological concepts, keywords and ideas, and reveal its movement from the ideals presented in the initial stanza to the more lament-oriented reflections on real-life experience and Torah in the latter sections.

Aleph: One argument for positing an earlier form of the Psalter bounded by Psalms 1 and 119 arises from their nearly-identical opening verses: Psalm 1 uses the אֲשֶׁר־י formula to proclaim the happy state of those who avoid evil and delight in Torah, and Ps 119:1, 2 begin with אֲשֶׁר־י to proclaim “happy” the one whose “way is blameless” (תַּמִּימֵי־דַרְךְ) and “walks in the Torah of YHWH” (הִלְכִים בַּתּוֹרָה), observing his decrees (עֲדוֹתָיו) and seeking YHWH wholeheartedly, i.e., with full mental faculty. By emphasizing the happiness or blessed state of those who direct their lives according to Torah, both psalms contain a similar thesis: those who abide by Torah will prosper. This theme from Psalms 1 and 119 emphasizing walking in the way of Torah as a guide for

⁶⁸ Since literacy was rare in ancient Israel, memorization of literature was common; thus, key phrases would call to mind the larger context in which they originated. In his analysis of Psalm 78, Jeffery M. Leonard discusses how medieval Jewish commentators used partial citations to represent larger references that the readers were assumed to know and how this applies to biblical texts: “In biblical texts as well, when weighing the possibility that one passage depends upon another, it is important to consider the possibility that the later author assumes that the lemma will already be known” (“Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case” *JBL* 127 [2008]: 261).

successful living occurs in the *Community Rule* of the Dead Sea Scrolls in connection with the leadership of the **משכיל**: “A text belonging to the instructor [**משכיל**], who is to teach the Holy Ones how to live [“walk”] according to the book of Yahad’s Rule.”⁶⁹

Shared vocabulary between Pss 1 and 119:1–2 includes “way,” “Torah” and the previously mentioned **אשרי** formula. Thus the opening verses of Psalm 119 and Psalm 1 serve as a type of inclusion which bounds this hypothetical early Psalter with emphasis on the “way of Torah” as the way to life and happiness. Immediately following this introduction, the successive verses list the various synonyms for Torah: in addition to **עדת** and **דרך**, they include “precepts” (**פקודים**), “statutes” (**חוק**), “commandments” (**מצוות**), and “judgments” (**משפטים**). Wisdom-oriented verbs accompany these terms, “walking” (vv. 1, 3), “commanded” (**צוה**, v. 4), and “learn” (**למד**, v. 7), along with verbs for “keeping” and “observing” (**שמר נצר**, vv. 2, 4, 5, 8); the speaker searches (**דרש**, v. 2) and “beholds” (**נבט**, v. 6) Torah, an emphasis which occurs throughout the psalm. Superlatives emphasize how diligently the speaker will pursue Torah: with his whole and “upright” heart (**לב**)—the heart being the source of intellect and moral reasoning in Hebraic thought—he will seek Torah and praise YHWH (vv. 2, 7), and “diligently” (**מאד**) observe God’s decrees (v. 4).

Beth: While Clifford views this stanza as a continuation of the introduction, I view the *Aleph* stanza, with its affinities to Psalms 1 and 19B, and use of the main keywords for Torah, as more properly the introduction. The **ב** stanza sets the tone for what follows—a mixture of Torah mediation along with lament and thanksgiving. In verse 9 the speaker identifies himself as a student in a wisdom school who asks a rhetorical question for which the Torah observance provides the answer: “How can a young man remain pure in his path?” I take the young man (**נער**), the subject of the sentence, as the speaker, who voices the concerns of an earnest student of Torah. Just as the

⁶⁹ English translation from Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 126.

psalm idealizes Torah, so the speaker throughout represents the ideal Torah student.⁷⁰ He provides the answer: “by keeping your word” (לשמר כדברך); the following verses twice reference his heart (לב), as he “seeks” (דרש) God with “my whole heart” and also “stores up” (צפן) God’s “promise” or “word” (אמר) within the heart. The two synonyms for “word” used here, along with “seek,” the root of which also holds the meaning to “search out” or “study” (as in *midrash*) and “store up” together emphasize all-consuming goal of intellectual appropriation and embrace of Torah as an ongoing pursuit in life. The heart symbolizes the mind and intellectual, moral core, which will continually seek meaning through constant study of Torah; the speaker “stores up” God’s word safely within his or her mind. Seeking YHWH here is equivalent to studying and storing up Torah within, as God’s teaching reveals the divine will and presence. This focus on the Torah as “treasure” occurs throughout the psalm. In verse 12 the speaker blesses YHWH and requests “teach me your statutes” (חקיך), using a key wisdom verb, למד, “to teach.” These themes of studying and requesting to be taught by God continue throughout the psalm.

Another key theme, rejoicing or delighting in Torah, first occurs in v. 14 with the speaker’s acclamation “I delight in the way of your testimonies”; this verse contains the keywords “way” (דרך) and “testimony” (עדות). Repeated statements of the psalmist’s joy in Torah occur throughout the psalm to reveal how joy in life-giving Torah surpasses all the suffering he or she endures. Keywords convey this joy, both verbs שוש, ששע, חפצ, and nouns ששון, ששע. Thus, parallel to the repetition of Torah keywords are keywords emphasizing Torah as joy (vv. 14; 16; 24; 35; 47; 70; 77; 92; 111; 143; 162; 174). This emphasis on joy in the Torah as a source of life and hope, despite situations of lament, leads Bratcher and Reyburn to observe, “The dominant theme

⁷⁰ Reynolds, “The Answer of Psalm cxix 9,” 265, 268–69, interprets the verse as praising Torah and portraying an ideal student of Torah. He argues for the traditional question and answer rendering of the verse against Soll’s proposal that the entire verse be viewed as a question (William Soll, “The Question of Psalm 119:9,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 687.

running through this long psalm is that of joy”; they likewise classify it as a wisdom psalm.⁷¹ The second line describes delighting in Torah as “above all riches” (יָדָר); for the psalmist, studying and storing up Torah provides true wealth, in contrast to those who measure wealth in perishable material goods. Avi Hurvitz views יָדָר as an important wisdom keyword which, when used in a wisdom context provides evidence for the classification “wisdom psalm.”⁷² The speaker “meditates” (אָשִׁיחַ; v. 15; see vv. 23, 48, 78, 79) on God’s precepts (פְּקֻדָּה) which enable him or her to behold the divine path (v.15), which again builds on the idea that Torah reveals God’s presence, will, and intentions.

The speaker protests that “I will not forget your word” (לֹא אֲשַׁכַּח דְּבַרְךָ, v. 16); vv. 9 and 16 bracket the strophe with a commitment to keep Torah (v.9) and always preserve it by never forgetting (v. 16). This theme of remembering (זָכַר) becomes a plea for God (v. 49) to *remember* “your word to your servant,” alluding to God’s covenant promises which “give hope,” and for the speaker to “remember your name in the night” (זָכַרְתִּי בַּלַּיְלָה שְׁמֶךָ) and “keep your Torah” (יְהוָה וְאֲשַׁמְרָה תּוֹרָתְךָ, v. 55; also v. 153). Both God and the speaker will keep their respective commitments; the reference to remembering YHWH’s name in the night evokes the image of evening prayer, either in the Temple or in private meditation. The idea of keeping commitments alludes to a covenantal relationship. Emphasis on “not forgetting” God’s Torah occurs at the beginning (v. 16), the middle (vv. 83, חָקִיד לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי, and 93, לֹא־אֲשַׁכַּח פְּקֻדֹתֶיךָ), and end (v. 176, לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ) and becomes a key theme in the psalm. This frames the Torah meditations, pleas and thanksgivings in light of this initial commitment to “never forget” or stray from Torah as the primary source of guidance in life. My analysis, then, will next focus on the middle sections of the Psalm and

⁷¹ Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 997.

⁷² Avi Hurvitz, “Wisdom Vocabulary in the Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of ‘Wisdom Psalms,’” *V/T* 38 (1988): 45–47.

its ending as an appropriate way to analyze its major thematic and linguistic structures following this initial introduction (ס) and guide for what follows (ב).

Yod: In v. 73 the speaker acknowledges God as creator, using the anthropomorphic image of God’s hands creating and sustaining the speaker (see Ps 8:4, “when I behold the heavens, the work of your fingers” and Ps 102:26, “Of old you established the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands”). In the parallel line, the speaker connects this creative activity of God with the pursuit of Torah, utilizing two important verbs for wisdom literature, **בין** and **למד**, the first being imperative, “give me insight,” and the second cohortative, “that I may learn your commandments” (**מצותי**). Calling upon a central thesis of wisdom literature—“fear” or reverence of YHWH is the source of wisdom and knowledge (e.g., Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10)—the speaker asserts in v. 74 that those who fear/revere (**ירא**) YHWH will observe the pious speaker and rejoice because he hopes in God’s word. This implies that the speaker’s living witness to God’s Torah manifests itself in positive ways which provides encouragement. The speaker professes humility (v. 75), and “knows” (**ידע**) God’s “righteous judgments” (**צדק משפטי**) are carried out in faithfulness (**אמונה**)—another keyword descriptive of the covenant relationship. This naturally leads in the next verses to a clear allusion to the covenant at Sinai: “May your steadfast love (**חסדך**) comfort me, according to your promise to your servant (**באמרתך לעבדך**, v. 76).” Following this the speaker calls for God’s compassion (**רחמיך**) that he may have “life,” reminding God that “I trust in your Torah” (v. 77). Recalling YHWH’s promise of steadfast love to those who keep his commandments, the speaker makes a plea for YHWH to remember and provide comfort during current distress.

While the speaker’s distress remains unspecified, by mentioning the “insolent” (**זדים**, v. 78) we can surmise it involves harsh words from arrogant oppressors who without cause ridicule and shame the righteous. As in the previous verses, with the exception of v. 75, the second line uses a Torah keyword: while praying for the shaming of the insolent, the speaker continues to “study your

precepts” (אֲשִׁיחַ בַּפְּקוּדֵיךָ). Uniquely, in this psalm expressions of lament are always tempered by commitment to Torah and an unwavering hope that the speaker’s commitment and God’s covenant commitment will eventually prevail despite current woes. Again in v. 79 the speaker prays for those who “fear” YHWH and “know your decrees” to once again “turn” towards the speaker; perhaps this prayer seeks restoration of status after being wrongly shamed by the insolent. The stanza ends with the speaker’s final plea to fully embrace (יְהִי־לִי בְּתוֹמֵיךָ) YHWH’s statutes (חֻקֵיךָ) and thus avoid shame. While Torah brings wisdom and guidance for proper living and decision making, those who reject or fall away from Torah will surely engage in shameful behavior—a reflection of the teaching of Proverbs (e.g., Proverbs 1).

Kaph: Clifford describes vv. 81–88 as “the low point” in which the speaker suffers from physical and psychological exhaustion and yearns for relief.⁷³ Viewing the *Kaph* stanza as the low point seems apt considering the metaphors of “longing” (בַּל־תָּהָה, v. 81) for deliverance, with the speaker’s eyes “consumed” (בַּל־אֵי, v. 82) for YHWH’s promise (אִמְרֵי־ךָ, a Torah keyword), and wondering if and when comfort (נַחֵם) will be forthcoming. Viewed in the wider context of the psalm as a whole, this stanza maintains the speaker’s emphasis on seeking, finding, and appropriating Torah in life. For example, the speaker’s “longing for deliverance” stands in parallel with hope in God’s word (לְדַבְרֵךָ יִחַל־תִּי); the search for God’s promise, when found, will bring the long-awaited comfort.

Meanwhile, the speaker suffers persecution and likens himself to a wineskin dried in smoke over the fireplace—brittle, worn, and aged—but maintains “I have not forgotten your statutes,” again emphasizing the key theme of “remembering” and “not forgetting” which occurs throughout the psalm. This emphasis on not forgetting Torah (לֹא אֲשַׁכַּח), as noted above, first occurs in v. 16 at the conclusion of the prologue to the Psalm—the *Aleph* and *Beit* stanzas—combined with

⁷³ Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 214.

keyword “word” (דברך), and in the *final* verse 176 with the keyword “commandments” (מצוותיך). I noted above how this usage at the beginning (v. 16), middle (v. 83) and concluding (v. 176) sections of the psalm use “not forgetting” as a framing device. To forget Torah would be tantamount to cutting off life-giving nourishment (see below on v. 93). The verb “forget” with the negative particle also occurs with the keywords “precepts” (פקך, vv. 93 and 141), and “teaching” (תורה, in vv. 109 and 153). This emphasis on “not forgetting” various aspects of Torah stands in tandem with “remembering,” which occurs most prominently in the *Zain* stanza (זכרתי משפטך, v. 52), and keeping the Torah (פקדיך נצרת, v. 56). Verbs for keeping (שמר; נצר) occur throughout the psalm in relation to the Torah keywords (e.g., vv. 5, 9, 17, 33, 44, 55, 60, 63, 67, 69, 88, 100, 115, 129, 145, 146, 166, 167, 168).

The speaker believes that Torah, represented by its various keywords, will be a source of salvation for those who commit their lives to it in study and practice. By using the verb בלה, meaning to be “consumed,” the speaker emphasizes the all-consuming nature of the search for wisdom. Though the “insolent” (זדים, v. 85) have dug pits for the speaker, flouted Torah, and nearly wiped the pious speaker off the earth (v. 87), he/she confidently asserts that “all your commandments are faithful” (אמונה, v. 86), lending a sense of permanence to God’s word which forms the basis for the plea for God’s help in the midst of unjust persecution (שקר רדפוני).

Standing at the exact midpoint of the Psalm, as noted above, in v. 88 the speaker asks YHWH to “preserve me according to your steadfast love” (חסד) so that he/she may keep the “decree of your mouth” (עדות) —both allusions to חסד (Exod 34:6) and עדות (Exod 40:20–21) as they occur in reference to the covenant at Sinai and the “testimony” or “pact” kept in the Ark of the Covenant, respectively. These allusions, therefore, challenge the commonly-held notion that Psalm 119 somehow avoids any reference or concern with the covenant or worship. Interestingly, in the *Qumran Psalms Scrolls* a notable textual variant with the MT occurs in 119:83. Where the MT has “I

do not forget your statutes” (חֲקִיךָ), 11 QPs has חסדכֶה, “your steadfast love,” and in v. 88, where the MT has “give me life” (חַיֵּנִי), the Qumran scroll has “have mercy on me” (חַוּנֵנִי).⁷⁴ It appears that the Qumran copyists worked with a Hebrew text that differs from the underlying text for the MT. The Qumran text either emphasized these terms for covenant love, or somewhere in the transmission process the terms were changed; in v. 83 the use of a covenant keyword where the MT has a Torah word may reflect the idea at Qumran that God’s covenant love and Torah are synonymous..

Lamed: Repetition of the word לעולם, “forever,” partially dictated by the acrostic structure, enables the speaker to emphasize the permanence of God’s word, which stands forever in the heavens (v. 89), and the permanence of the speaker’s commitment to keep God’s life-giving precepts by “never forgetting” (לֵעֹלָם לֹא־אֲשַׁכַּח פְּקוּדֶיךָ, v. 93). Verbs for standing or establishing are used to emphasize YHWH’s permanence: his word is established in the heavens (נָצַב בַּשָּׁמַיִם, v. 89), the earth “is established and it stands” (בִּוְנַנְתָּ אֶרֶץ תַּעֲמֹד, v. 90), while YHWH’s judgments “stand to this day” (לְמִשְׁפַּטֶּיךָ עֲמָדוֹ הַיּוֹם, v. 91). This contrast between temporal earthly and human designs and the eternity of God reaches its climax in v. 96, in which the psalmist declares a “limit” (קֵץ) to every (temporal) design, but YHWH’s commandments are without limitation.

T. Booj translates נָצַב in v. 89 as “in command,” according to the participle or noun forms of the root to emphasize that from heaven YHWH rules over all creation by his Word. While this translation seems acceptable, his argument that the idea of the word “standing” forever in heaven “would contrast conspicuously” with the idea of YHWH sending the word (he cites Isa 9:7; 55:11; Pss 107:20; 147:15), seems unnecessary; I interpret this to mean the word sent by YHWH stands, i.e., has

⁷⁴ See Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (STDJ 17; eds. F. Garcia Martinez and A. S. Van der Woude; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 103–04.

permanence and transcends spatial and temporal limitations. Therefore, contrasts between standing and sending are irrelevant.⁷⁵

If one fails to delight (שעשע) in Torah, he or she will “perish” (עברתי) in affliction (v. 92); this dichotomy between keeping Torah and having life or rejecting it and perishing recalls the “Two ways” of Psalm 1. By gaining personal insight into God’s testimonies (עדתך אתבונן), v. 95), the speaker will prevail against the wicked who lie in wait to destroy (לא אברני); ironically, though the רשעים seek to destroy the righteous, by rejecting Torah they assure their own destruction (v. 92). The Hithpael form of the verb ביין (“to perceive”) is a reflexive which serves to emphasize the interior and personal appropriation of God’s testimonies by the speaker in private meditation. As noted above, while the speaker recognizes the limitations of temporal designs (“I have seen the limits of perfection” תכלה ראיתי קץ), the commandments remain “exceedingly broad” (מצותך מאד רחבה), v. 96—an implied recognition of the transcendent and sacred nature of Torah.⁷⁶

Mem: This key stanza uses several important verbs to express wisdom teaching and provide perhaps the strongest evidence in the psalm outside the *Aleph* stanza of the probable origins and use of the psalm within wisdom schools and circles. In v. 97 the initial מה functions as an adverb emphasize the depth of the speaker’s love for Torah: “Oh, how I love your teaching!” The verb “I love,” אהבתי, describes the speaker’s intimate commitment to Torah—see its parallel usage in vv. 47, 48, 113, and 163—using a verb often applied to personal human relationships. The speaker makes Torah his/her mediation (שי) “all day,” a hyperbolic usage which reveals that study and recitation of Torah occupies a major portion of each day; this provides further evidence of a wisdom

⁷⁵ T. Booj, “Psalm 119, 89-91,” *Biblica* 79 (1998): 539–41, on v. 89 see 41.

⁷⁶ The feminine noun תכלה means “completeness, perfection”; paired with the word “limit,” however, removes any sense of divine perfection, and therefore the word applies to human concepts of completeness or perfection (see *BDB*, 479).

school context for the psalm. In vv. 15 and 27 the verbal form of שׂיח was used but here it is a noun that further specifies how the speaker appropriates the beloved Torah in daily life. Verse 98 uses the verb חכמ to make clear that the commandments, synonymous with the Torah which is the object of his/her daily love and study, provide the speaker with greater wisdom than unspecified “enemies,” and “it always remains with me” (כי לעולם היא־לי). Cohen observes that while “commandments” is in the plural, the verb “make wise” and the pronoun in second stitch are singular, to emphasize that the Torah, though consisting of numerous precepts, is above all a unity.⁷⁷ With Torah as a continual source of nourishment and guidance one remains above the “enemies,” elsewhere described as “wicked” or “insolent,” and most likely those who arrogantly ignore or reject Torah.

In another instance of probable hyperbole, in v. 99 the speaker takes this claim one step further by implying that his intelligence exceeds that of “my teachers” (מלמדֵי השכלתי). Here the speaker uses the verb שכל, “to be intelligent,” or “be wise,” the root of משכיל discussed previously and in its Hiphil form, as used here, an important marker for wisdom poetry. This and the following verse emphasize the importance of teaching and how in the psalmist’s case it bore fruit as he or she excelled to the point of surpassing the teachers. The second stitch again uses the noun שׂיח to complete the assertion: because YHWH’s “testimonies” (עֲדוּתָהּ) are a source of constant study, the speaker gains surpassing insight. A Jewish commentary rejects the seeming arrogance implicit in the claim by noting, “He had received instruction by many teachers; but he maintains that by constant mediation upon God’s testimonies he has obtained the truest discernment of Torah as the best guide of living.”⁷⁸ The speaker extends this line of argument in v. 100 by claiming a deeper personal insight (אתבונן) than elders (מוֹקֵנִים), who are synonymous with “teachers” in the preceding verse,

⁷⁷ Cohen *The Psalms*, 407.

⁷⁸ Cohen, *The Psalms*, 407. With Cohen, I submit that the writer (s) of Psalm 119 was familiar with, and used, Ps 19 as a source, based on the shared keywords and imagery such as in 19:11//119:103.

through “keeping” (נצרתִי) God’s precepts. Constant study of Torah enables the student to surpass his/her teachers in wisdom.

In order to maintain this commitment to Torah, however, the speaker must avoid “every evil way” (אָרָח)—with “way” or “path” here serving as antithetic to its use in vv. 9, 15, where it represents the way or path of Torah—by literally “retraining my feet” (כָּל אֶתִּי רִגְלִי) from taking the wrong path in life (v. 101). With YHWH as instructor (הוֹרֵתֵנִי), the speaker avoids straying from divine rules (מִמִּשְׁפָּטֵיךָ סָרְתִי, v. 102); the verb here means “to turn” and reflects again the concept of “two ways” advanced in Psalm 1 and throughout the wisdom literature. The wise person embraces Torah and opens him or herself to divine instruction, mediated through wisdom teachers, which enables one to make proper choices in life. Using an image from Psalm 19:11, where the “judgments” (מִשְׁפָּטֵי יְהוָה) of YHWH are likened to the sweetness of honey (מִדְּבַשׁ) from a honeycomb, here the words of YHWH in the speaker’s “palate” (נֶאֱחָבִי, “my cheek”) are sweeter than “honey” (מִדְּבַשׁ, v. 103) in the mouth. As the stanza began with an assertion of the speaker’s “love” of God’s Torah, so it concludes with another acknowledgment of personal insight into God’s precepts—using the verb אֶתְּבוֹנֵן a second time—which lead him to “hate” every “false way” (אָרָח שֶׁקֶר), again emphasizing the contrast between loving Torah and choosing the way of goodness and life, versus hating sin and the way of evil and falsehood.

Num: This stanza provides important images which represent how Torah in fact becomes representative of the divine presence. Because God’s word is both “lamp” (נֵר) for the speaker’s feet and a light (אֹר) for his path (v. 105), it illuminates and guides one’s movement in life and represents the divine presence, as the image of light represents God’s presence and favor throughout the psalms (e.g., Pss 27:1; 67:1). Because Torah provides guidance and life, therefore, the speaker has “sworn and confirmed” (נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי וְאֶקְיְמָהּ, v. 106) to keep these “righteous ordinances”; the verb קָוַם in

the piel as used here means “to establish” or “confirm.” God’s “ordinances” or “judgments” (משפטים) are righteous (צדק) because they epitomize truthfulness, honesty, and divine justice. Despite affliction, which may be past or current according to the verbal form (נעניתי), the speaker maintains hope in the life-giving power of Torah by using the imperative “give me life according to your word” (חיני כדברך, v. 107). An example of the cultic aspect of this Psalm and Torah in the post-exilic period, in v. 108 the speaker asks YHWH to accept “the freewill offering of my mouth”; “freewill offering” (נדבות) represents a freely given, spontaneous prayer, based on Torah, which in this period (post-exilic, Persian) becomes equated with the temple and its rituals as a source of life and renewal.⁷⁹ Along with the freewill offering the speaker requests that God “teach me your judgments,” which previously were described as “righteous” and reflect the desire of the speaker to live according to God’s established order (v. 89).

The expression, “Though my life (נפש) [is] in my hands continually (תמיד)” seems to be an expression of danger and instability: recognizing human finitude, the most secure place for one’s life force is in YHWH’s “hands” (Ps 31:6, “Into your hands, YHWH, I commend my spirit (רוח)”; see Ps 25:1, “To you, YHWH, I lift up my soul (נפש)”—a symbol of power.⁸⁰ Human hands too often create lifeless idols or engage in sinful behavior (Pss 115:4-8; 135:15-18) and thus are best raised in prayer for YHWH’s help (Ps 28:3, “when I lift my hands towards your inner sanctuary”). Despite this precarious existence, the speaker again confirms his or her constant loyalty to Torah in terms of “not forgetting”: ותורתך לא שכחתי, “but I will not forget your Torah” (v. 109).

Throughout Psalm 119 expressions of lament and instability are tempered by references to keeping Torah; the speaker faces real-life problems and laments them, but upholds faith in Torah as a source of hope and stability in the face of despair and instability.

⁷⁹ Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 160.

⁸⁰ Both the “Spirit” or breath (רוח) and “soul” or self (נפש) can refer to the individual person and their life-force, as they do synonymously in these examples.

Though the wicked set traps for the speaker (נתנו רשעים פח לִי), he or she will not stray (לא תעיית) from YHWH's precepts (v. 110). This implies more confidence despite the enemies' laying of traps and snares as compared, for example, to the situations in Pss 35:7–8, 140:6, 142:4, in which the speakers lament a similar situation and respond with lament to the Lord for help; here, the speaker simply asserts trust in Torah, which seems to imply God's help in response. YHWH's decrees, therefore, are the speaker's eternal (לעולם) heritage; while the critical apparatus of the MT supports the noun form of נחלתִי, but the verbal form in the text (*Ketib*) works well: "I have made your decrees my heritage forever." Using the verb implies the deliberate acts of incorporating Torah into his or her life, perhaps as a student in wisdom schools. Thus, the speaker turns his heart, or "mind," (לב) to work or do YHWH's statutes "forever, to the last" (לעולם עקב, v. 112).

Samek: Each verse contains a Torah keyword (Torah; word; commandments; word; statutes x2; decrees; and judgments), and starkly contrasts the righteous and wicked: the psalmist hates the double-minded (סעפים שנאת) but loves Torah (תורתך אהבת; v. 113); YHWH puts an end to the vain deceit (v.117) of the wicked, who are like dross (סגים), while the psalmist "loves your decrees" (v.118). The construction, "turn from me, evildoers" (סורו ממני מרעים), v. 115, uses a form of the combination סור מרע (e.g., Ps 34:15) previously identified as a key wisdom marker. The stanza concludes with an emphasis on the psalmist's fear of YHWH, but couched in terms of Torah: "My flesh shudders from fear of you (פקחדך), and I fear/revere (יראת) your judgments" (v.120).⁸¹

Tav, The Conclusion: Compared to its beginning, a very different mood pervades the conclusion of this massive Psalm: it began with optimistic assurances that those who follow the way

⁸¹ On the importance of *sur-meru* see Hurvitz, "Wisdom Vocabulary in the Psalter," 41–51; in keeping with the exaltation of Torah, which in Ps 119 is synonymous with Yahweh, the psalmist takes the common wisdom construction, "fear of the Lord" and substitutes the Torah keyword משפט.

of Torah will be happy, but now concludes with a desperate plea (vv. 169–70) that YHWH will hear and help the speaker, who seeks to live and continue to praise YHWH (v. 175).

In parallel with the speaker’s cry that his plea draw near to YHWH (תִּקְרַב רַנְתִּי), is the plea for “understanding according to your word,” using the causative imperative form of the verb בִּיַן (v. 169). This stands in synonymous parallelism with the following verse, in which the speaker requests that his petition come into God’s presence (תְּבוֹא תַחֲנֹתִי לְפָנֶיךָ) and thus “deliver me according to your promise” (בְּאִמְרֹתֶיךָ הַצִּילֵנִי, v. 170). Throughout the psalm pleas and cries for help have been balanced with requests for understanding and assertions of the speaker’s ongoing commitment to abide by Torah, as represented by the various wisdom verbs and Torah keywords. I view this as a sign of the profound faith of the speaker who, despite suffering, experiences of uncertainty, oppression and danger, continues to uphold Torah as a life-giving connection to YHWH and hope of deliverance. This becomes clear in the next two verses which likewise stand in synonymous parallelism: the speaker “pours forth” praise from his lips because God continues to “teach me your statutes” (כִּי תִלְמַדְנִי חֻקֶיךָ, v. 171), and “sings” (תִּעַן) or declares God’s promise with his tongue because God’s commandments are just (v. 172). In v. 171 the verb “to teach” is in the piel imperfect and therefore has a causative effect, which is best translated as an ongoing action, i.e. God continues to teach the speaker. The verb I translated above as “to sing” (עָנָה) also means “to answer”; since the verses mention the tongue and lips in reference to how the speaker orally proclaims Torah, I translate “sings” as this seems to imply worship, as one uses lips and tongue to manipulate sounds when singing. Usually, the verbs “recite” (הִגִּיד) or “speak” (דַּבֵּר) would be used to convey simply speaking of Torah.

These expressions of commitment and worship lead again to a cry for help, now couched as a request for YHWH’s hand (יָדְךָ), a symbol of power, to help the suffering speaker (עֲזֹר, v. 173).

This request is again justified with reference to the speaker’s commitment to Torah: “I have chosen

your precepts.” The speaker’s longing for salvation or deliverance (לִישׁוּעַתֶּךָ) is balanced by his delight in Torah (v. 174), again connecting life with Torah: one who delights in, and lives by, Torah confidently yearns for deliverance from suffering, evil, and oppression. Most probably this psalm pre-dates the belief in the resurrection of the dead, which arises in the Maccabean period; the psalm reflects a context in which “deliverance” refers specifically to suffering or oppression.⁸² Such deliverance will allow the speaker to live and continue to praise YHWH (תְּחִי־נַפְשִׁי וְתִהְלֵלֶךָ, “Let me live, and my soul will praise you”), with YHWH’s judgments (בְּשִׁפְטֶךָ) as an ongoing source of help (v. 175). Three elements form the conclusion: (1) an acknowledgment that the speaker has strayed like a “lost sheep” (כִּשְׂהָ אֵבֶד), (2) a plea for YHWH to seek out “your servant” (עַבְדְּךָ), and (3) the final assertion that the speaker will never forget YHWH’s commandments (מִצְוֹתֶיךָ).

I detect a movement in this psalm from its presentation of an ideal in the beginning stages, to the experiences of theodicy, and desperate pleas for help and guidance through life’s difficulties. In a sense, the speaker moves from idealism to the cold, hard realities of daily life, where traditional wisdom theology often fails to hold up (as in Job, for example). Lament and expression of suffering sets Psalm 119 apart (in addition to its size) from Pss 1, 19, 111, and 112, despite linguistic and thematic similarities. I propose that this element of suffering arises from the experience of Exile and foreign domination. What makes this psalm unique is the constant embrace of, and commitment to, Torah despite suffering and hardship; never does the speaker lament with despair or without an underlying hope based on Torah.

I will attempt to expand upon Westermann’s thesis that Ps 119 may have been the conclusion of a “frame” for an early version of the Psalter, by proposing instead Psalm 145, an acrostic hymn of praise, as the conclusion for this proposed frame. Psalm 119 concludes with an element of unresolved suffering and searching; by adding Psalm 145, the editors who produced this

⁸² Daniel 12:1–3, dating from the Maccabean Revolt (ca. 165 B.C.E.), specifically describes a resurrection and judgment in which the righteous will awake to eternal life (יְקִיְצוּ אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם): “they will awake, some to eternal life”), while the wicked are scorned (לְחֹרְפוֹת לְדִרְאוֹן עוֹלָם; v. 2).

framework and a “resolution” to the uncertainty in which Ps 119 concludes. In this schema, the framework begins with the ideal, moves through stages that reflect the experience of suffering and exile, and concludes with hope and praise.

Psalm 145: An Acrostic Hymn Extolling God’s חסד for All Creation

My proposed grouping of Torah Psalms and Acrostics as a framework for the Psalter by post-exilic wisdom editors concludes with this acrostic hymn which extols God’s greatness, wonders, kingship, and covenant love (v. 8) for all creation. An inclusion frames the psalm: in verse 1 the speaker extols YHWH as king and blesses his holy name (ואברכה שמך), while in v. 21 he praises God, with all people (“all flesh”) blessing God’s holy name (ויברך כל-בשר שם). In addition, the use of לעול-ם-עד, “forever and ever,” in vv. 1, 2, and 21 begin and end the psalm by emphasizing how the speaker and all peoples continually praise and bless YHWH. The use of the verb “to bless” (ברך) at the beginning (v. 1), middle (v. 10), and end (v. 21) serve as a “prelude, interlude, and postlude” which serves to intensify the psalm’s emphasis on YHWH’s divine sovereignty, a key theme of the psalm.⁸³ As the closing psalm of the final Davidic collection (Pss 138–145), Psalm 145 prepares for the five concluding *Hallelujah* psalms, with the reference to “all flesh” in 145:21 anticipating the final verse of the Psalter, with its acclamation “let all that has breath praise YHWH” (150:6). Structurally, vv. 1-2, 4-7, 10-12 and 21 offer praise; v. 3 emphasizes YHWH’s greatness (גדל); vv. 8-9 recall the self-identification of YHWH in terms of covenant love (Exod 34:6) based on common keywords; v. 13 speaks of YHWH’s eternal kingdom; and vv. 14-20 describe YHWH in terms of covenant love towards all creation.⁸⁴

Its unique superscription, תהלה לַדָּוִד, “[A song of] praise of David,” occurs only here in the Psalter. The plural form of praise, תהלים, was designated as the Hebrew title of the Psalter by

⁸³ Reuven Kimelman, “Psalm 145: Theme, Structure, and Impact,” *JBL* 113 (1994): 37–58; on the use of “to bless” to emphasize divine sovereignty, see 40–41.

⁸⁴ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 337–38.

its final editors. Though psalms of supplication are more numerous in the Psalter than praise psalms, Alter explains the use of *Tehilim* as a title based on the theology of the editors and later rabbinic tradition: “the assumption of post-biblical Jewish tradition was that the purpose par excellence of the poetry of psalms was to praise God. This assumption accords with the view of the ancient editors,” since the final six psalms are all praise psalms.⁸⁵ Though lacking specific references to Torah, the emphasis on God’s works and compassion for all creation recall the effects of Torah as outlined previously in Psalms 19 and 119, and the central reference to covenant love in vv. 8-9, along with God’s righteousness and punishment of the wicked (vv. 17, 20) likewise emphasize themes found in psalms 1, 19, and 119.

By emphasizing YHWH’s greatness, mighty works, divine kingship, righteousness and punishment of the wicked, the psalm forms an *inclusio* with Psalms 1-2, and interprets the Psalter in light of YHWH’s over all creation. The attribution to David reflects the post-exilic emphasis, found in Books 4 and 5, on YHWH’s Kingship in light of the failure of the monarchy; symbolically, “David” praises YHWH as king. Brueggemann describes it as a song of creation, which uses the acrostic structure to emphasize the stability, fullness, congruity and order of creation and life: “This is Israel in its most trustful, innocent, childlike faith.”⁸⁶ In Jewish tradition the Psalm 145 is recited three times daily and, according to rabbinic tradition, “Whoever recites this psalm thrice daily may be assured that he is a son of the World to come,” based on v. 16, “You open your hand and satisfy every living thing with favor.”⁸⁷

Several keywords help define the theology of this psalm: כּוֹל, “all,” is used nineteen times, and serves as a rhetorical device to emphasize completeness in praise of God and also the eternity of God. “Works,” מַעֲשֵׂה (vv. 4, 9, 10, 17), “mighty deeds,” גְּבוּרוֹת (vv. 4, 11, 12), “wonders/wonderful works,” נִפְלְאוֹת (v. 5), “greatness,” גְּדוּלָה (vv. 3 [x2], 6), “kingdom,” מַלְכוּת (vv. 11, 12,

⁸⁵ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 500.

⁸⁶ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 28–29.

⁸⁷ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms*, 469; for its use in the Jewish liturgy, see Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book* (Rev. ed.; New York: Bloch, 1963), 84–89 and 198–201 for the morning service; 272–75 for the afternoon service; and 514–19 for the Sabbath morning service.

13 [x2]), and “dominion,” ממשלה (v. 13) all apply to YHWH and serve to emphasize the power, glory and permanence of YHWH’s rule over creation.⁸⁸

I view the use of what I call the “covenant formula” of divine attributes from Exodus 34:6, restated in slightly modified form here in vv. 8–9 and in 86:15, 103:8 (see also: Num 14:18; Jer 32:18; Jonah 4:2; Neh 9:17, 31), as an important interpretive key to the psalm and the Psalter. YHWH is gracious (חנון), “compassionate” (רחום, also v. 9), and “slow to anger and great in steadfast love” (ארך אפים וגדל־חסד); this recalls the renewal of the covenant at Sinai and the divine self-identification. While in Exod 34:6 YHWH is depicted as reciting the formula, in all subsequent uses of the formula others recite it. I propose that the use of this formula intentionally recalls YHWH’s covenant commitment at Sinai which thus provides a central underlying thesis for Psalm 145 and the Psalter as a whole: God remains faithful, providing חסד, and hope. Verses 8–9 serve to transition the psalm from introductory praise to a focus on divine kingship and compassion in vv. 10–21. Psalm 1 begins the Psalter with an emphasis on Torah while Psalm 145 concludes with a focus on God’s חסד.

Verses 1—7 (Aleph—Zain): Following the introductory praise and blessing by the speaker in vv. 1-2, he emphasizes the greatness of God in v. 3 by twice using “great” (גדול), noting that YHWH’s greatness remains beyond full human comprehension (אין חקר “unsearchable”); this evokes strong praise (ומדלל מאד, “and greatly to be praised”). The perspective widens to “all generations” (דור לדור) who continually laud (ישבח) and declare (יגידו) YHWH’s works and mighty deeds (v. 4). Verse 4 echoes Ps 78:4, in which the speakers, presumably wisdom teachers or parents passing on history to their children, declare they will not “hide” what they have learned previously from “our fathers,” but will tell coming generations about God’s might, glorious deeds, and wonders. This passing on of the community’s history from parents to children—and more

⁸⁸ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 338.

formally within wisdom schools—provides a sense of belonging, connection to the community, and ongoing hope and expectation that YHWH will continue to manifest mighty deeds and wonders in their lifetime.⁸⁹

The speaker will meditate (אֲשִׁיחֶהָ, v. 5) upon YHWH’s majesty, glory, splendor, and “wonderful works” (נִפְלְאוֹת), and declare his greatness (וּגְדוֹלַת יְדֵי אֱסַפְרָנָה, v. 6). In the MT the first colon of v. 5 lacks a verb; however, 1QPsa reads, יִדְבְּרוּ, “they will speak,” for וְדַבְּרִי, “matters,” in the MT. The difference may be explained by a metathesis of ך and ך.⁹⁰ The LXX follows the reading in 1QPsa. People will speak (אֲמַרְוּ, v. 6) of the power of God’s “awesome deeds” (נִוְרָאוֹתֶיךָ), and “pour forth” (יִבְעֹטוּ) in ecstatic speech the remembrance of YHWH’s abundant goodness and sing of YHWH’s righteousness (v. 7). By proclaiming YHWH’s awesome deeds, greatness, and permanence the psalmist recalls vocabulary and themes from Pss 111–112. The cumulative effect of this initial outpouring of praise is to emphasize the transcendence and power of divine rule in Israel’s history.

Verses 8—9 (Het and Tet): I noted above in the analysis of Psalms 111, 112, and 119 allusions to the Covenant and Sinai and YHWH’s self-description (Exod 34:6); here the reference becomes specific as the vocabulary used is nearly verbatim. Following the initial praise and recounting of God’s works, power and majesty, these verses provide the reasons why YHWH has acted such in the past and will do so in the future: YHWH is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, rich in steadfast love and therefore has “compassion on all his works” (וּרְחַמִּיו כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו, v. 9). Brueggemann views vv. 8–9 as reflective of “Israel’s oldest theological assertion about God, which is certainly older than royal reality in Israel.”⁹¹ While vv. 1–7 derives from a “royal, didactic setting,” vv. 8–9 emphasizes YHWH’s fidelity towards all creation, which becomes in effect YHWH’s covenant partner.

⁸⁹ Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 302.

⁹⁰ Kimelman, “Psalm 145,” 38, note 7. If one takes the Qumran text as an older witness than the MT, then “they speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty” is the preferred reading. See also, Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll and the Book of Psalms*, 75, 113 for the manuscript evidence.

⁹¹ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 29.

We therefore interpret the psalm “as an extrapolation from these verses to see how YHWH’s characteristic self-giving is experienced in the daily blessings of creation.”⁹² The “royal, didactic setting” mentioned by Brueggemann clearly provides a later, post-exilic understanding of the universe under divine governance; like the didactic use of historical psalms (105, 106, 136), this psalm provides an example of the didactic use of praise.

Verses 10—21 (Yodh—Tav): Following the affirmation of YHWH’s חסד and רחום (steadfast love and compassion) as the source and assurance life and hope, in v. 10 the speaker personifies YHWH’s “works,” who give thanks (יודין) along with his “faithful ones” (חסידים, pious Israelites). This unity of both created works and humans in praise of the creator evokes Pss 19A, 104, and 148 in which personified creation gives praise to YHWH along with humans. In vv. 10–13 the use of words for works, kingdom, power, and glory emphasize YHWH’s sovereign rule and majesty over the order of creation. This leads naturally in vv. 14–20 to an emphasis on how YHWH’s rule manifests itself in compassion and care for the weak and needy.

Most translations (e.g., RSV; NRSV; NAB) add the missing *num* verse in 13b by following 1QPsa which includes it: נאמן אלוהים בדבריו וחסיד בכול מעשיו, “YHWH is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds.”⁹³ This makes good sense as it provides a transition from the focus on the divine attributes in vv.8–13 to an explication of how YHWH applies them in caring for the needy in vv. 14–20. Possibly the Masoretes excluded the *num* verse by accident or used a manuscript that lacked it; the presence of this verse in the LXX and 11QPs argues for its originality since both predate the MT.

In v. 14 a series of participles describe how YHWH “supports” (סומך) those who fall (נפלים) and “raises up” (זוקף) those “bent over” (כפופים); these participles emphasize the ongoing nature of God’s actions. Brueggemann describes it as “an assured ongoing process that

⁹² Ibid.; see also his *Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 123–24, for a contemporary application of the psalm.

⁹³ Text of Ps 145:13 in 11QPs, from Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll*, 75, 113.

Yahweh does regularly and everywhere.”⁹⁴ Verses 15–16 describe how God feeds all creatures that look with expectation (שָׁבֵרוּ) for their daily needs. As cosmic creator YHWH’s greatness cannot be fathomed (v. 3b), but YHWH still remains intimately involved with creation in providing for its care and sustenance. Verse 17 utilizes wisdom vocabulary redolent of Psalm 1 in describing YHWH’s righteous ways (צַדִּיק; יְרֵכָיו, respectively), and recalls the covenant formula of vv. 8–9 in describing YHWH as “gracious” (חַסִּיד) in all his works. This leads naturally to the assertion in vv. 18–19 that these benefits are specifically for YHWH’s covenant partners—those who call upon him in truth (אֱמֶת) and fear/revere him (יִרְאַיָהוָה). In wisdom literature the “fear of the YHWH” is considered beginning of wisdom and knowledge (see Ps 111:10; Prov. 1:7, 9:10). The righteous ones who are the object of YHWH’s love and compassion direct their lives according to wisdom. The assurance that those who revere YHWH will be heard and have their needs provided reflects the orientation theology of Psalm 1, in which the righteous receive the promise of prosperity. That YHWH “hears” and “delivers” (v. 19) those who revere him and cry out in truth alludes to situations of distress or “disorientation” in which YHWH seems absent or far away; for the righteous, however, YHWH remains near and attentive, transforming lament into liturgical praise.⁹⁵

Verse 20 follows the antithetic parallelism of Ps 1:6, in which the first line emphasizes YHWH’s care for the righteous, while the second describes the destruction of the wicked.⁹⁶ This again reiterates an essential aspect of traditional wisdom theology in which the righteous will ultimately prosper while the wicked are destined for destruction. Brueggemann sees in this verse another allusion to the formula of Exod 34:6–7 in terms of YHWH’s commitment to both rescue and judge: “This verse is a harsh and sobering qualification of the grand claims of the psalm,” as it moves from

⁹⁴ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 30.

⁹⁵ Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (trans. J.R. Porter; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 228.

⁹⁶ Both psalms use slightly different vocabulary to make the same point: in Ps 1 the Lord “knows” (יָדַע) the way of the “righteous” (צַדִּיקִים), while in Ps 145 the Lord “watches over” (שָׁמַר) all how love him (אֹהֲבָיו); in Ps 1 the way of the wicked will “perish” (אָבַד), while in Ps 145 they will be destroyed (שָׁמַד). If as I propose Psalms 1 and 145 serve as an intentional framework for the Psalter, the thematic parallel between the closing verses of these psalms may be intentional.

a purely positive voice to one of judgment and destruction.⁹⁷ With Brueggemann I see in this verse an underlying awareness of the reality that in life theodicy is unavoidable and the righteous do at times suffer. However, the psalmist has moved beyond the stage of lamentation and disorientation to assert confidently that YHWH's promised blessings will eventually accrue to the righteous: "The gifts of YHWH become carefully administered *rewards*."⁹⁸ Verse 21, as noted above, concludes the psalm with an inclusion of praise in which the individual voice of v. 1 is now joined by "all flesh," representing all human beings, in praising the holy name of YHWH. This prepares for the final series of *Hallelujah* psalms which together form a closing doxology to the Psalter.

Conclusion: The relationships in vocabulary, theme, and structure in this group of psalms provides evidence of post-exilic scribal editing and a framework for an early form of the Psalter bounded by Psalms 1 and 145. In response to the realities of the post-exilic period, marked by foreign domination, the fall of the monarchy, and a heightened role for scribes connected to wisdom schools as purveyors of Torah and instruction, these psalms reveal the increasing importance of Torah and instruction over sacrificial offerings (as also seen in Pss 50 and 51:18–21). This framework of Torah and Acrostic psalms provides further evidence of the work of wisdom editors in the development of the Psalter.

⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 31.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

Chapter Four: Wisdom in Book One

Introduction: Having argued that the *Mas̱kil* psalms (chapter 2) evince post-exilic wisdom editing, and that the Torah-wisdom psalms and acrostics psalms 1-2, 19, 111-112, 119, and 145 (chapter 3) serve as a framework for the canonical Psalter, I now proceed to examine other wisdom psalms and wisdom interpolations in each of the five books. In Book 1, I shall focus on psalms 25, 33, 34, 37, and 39, which I consider predominately wisdom psalms, though they are of mixed genre, and sections of psalms 26, 36, and 40 that contain wisdom material. The *Mas̱kil* psalms (14; 32; 41:1) and Torah/acrostic psalms (1; 19) from Book 1 have been previously discussed (chs 2, 3).

Psalms 25 and 34 share a similar acrostic structure, which lacks a *Vav* verse and concludes with another *Pe* verse following the final *Tav*, and shared vocabulary and thematic emphases. Both psalms emphasize the important wisdom themes of “fear of YHWH” and teaching. These commonalities may evince a common authorship, either an individual or from a scribal group. Psalm 25 contains affinities with Psalm 119 in its use of keywords for instruction (לִמְדָה, יְרָחֵם; also used in Ps 34), emphasis on “way” or “path” (דֶּרֶךְ, אֶרֶץ) of proper living, along with reference to YHWH’s covenant love, using the keywords חַסֵּד, רַחֵם, and אֱמוּנָה. While Psalm 25 can also be classified as a lament and 34 as a thanksgiving, their shared acrostic structure, wisdom themes and vocabulary qualifies them both as wisdom psalms—possibly sharing a common source with Ps 119. Psalm 33 can also be classified as a hymn in praise of YHWH as creator—an important wisdom theme, as seen previously in Ps 19A—but also contains wisdom themes and words. Psalm 37 is perhaps the best example of a “pure” wisdom psalm, with a clear acrostic structure, vocabulary and themes; structurally and thematically it resembles the Book of Proverbs and deals with issues of retribution. Psalm 39 combines lament with wisdom features reminiscent of Ecclesiastes. Together, these psalms along with the *Mas̱kil* psalms and wisdom interpolations in Psalms 26, 36, and 40 provide the heart of post-exilic wisdom editing in Book I within the larger wisdom framework of the Psalter.

Psalm 25: A Prayer for God's Covenant Love and Instruction

Psalm 25 combines a personal supplication with wisdom teaching and covenant language. Covenant language includes petitions in vv. 6–10 for YHWH to “remember” (זָכַר) his “steadfast love” (חַסֵּד, vv. 6, 7, 10), “compassion” (רַחֵם, v. 6), and “truth” (אֱמֹנָה, v. 10)—a direct allusion to the covenant formula in Exodus 34:6. Wisdom elements include the verbs “instruct” (יָרָה, v. 8), “guide” (דָּרָךְ, v. 9) and “teach” (לָמַד, v. 9); the speaker and others like him “keep his [God’s] covenant and testimonies” (לִנְצְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְעֵדוּתוֹ, v. 10). Like Psalm 119, Psalm 25 uses keywords for instruction and Torah in the context of an appeal to YHWH’s covenant love. Key terms include “way” (דָּרָךְ, vv. 4, 5, 8, 9), “path” (אֶרֶץ, vv. 4, 10), “fear” (יִרָא, vv. 12, 14), and “good” (טוֹב, vv. 8, 13).¹ Verse 14 combines keywords for both wisdom and covenant: the counsel (סוּד) of YHWH is given to those who fear him, to whom “he makes known his covenant” (לְהוֹדִיעֵם וּבְרִיתוֹ). The speaker is a humble sinner who admits to great iniquities (v. 11), suffers deeply from some unspecified troubles of “my heart” (vv. 17–18) and cruelty from enemies (v. 19), but remains committed and hopeful of YHWH’s promise towards those who “fear the Lord” (Prov 1:7; 2:9; Pss 1; 111:10; vv. 12, 14) and keep the covenant.

I divide the psalm into five parts: vv. 1–5, an introductory appeal for teaching and guidance; vv. 6–10, prayer for pardon and appeal to YHWH’s covenant promises; vv. 11–14, prayer for pardon and reflection on the way of wisdom; vv. 15–21, appeal for forgiveness and help; and v. 22 a concluding petition for redemption.

¹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1—50, With 2004 Supplement by Marvin E. Tate* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: 1983; Thomas Nelson, 2004), 215–22. Craigie concludes, “It is the acrostic structure of the psalm, together with the frequency of terminology associated with the wisdom tradition, which suggests it should be interpreted primarily as a literary work, which was only employed within Israel’s worship at a later date in its history” (218). I agree with this assessment which supports my view that wisdom-oriented psalms were used in worship, and received their final shaping in the post-exilic period when the role of sages and wisdom “schools” became more prominent.

Some scholars propose a chiasmic structure, with vv. 1–3 and 19–22 as the boundaries of the psalm, and vv. 8–11 and 12–15 forming its central reflection, while vv. 4–7 and 16–18 are parallel prayers against sinfulness.² In this proposal, vv. 16–18 take up the prayer of vv. 4–7; in the latter, the speaker sought guidance and called upon God to remember the covenant promises of steadfast love and compassion, while requesting that God not remember the speaker’s sins of old. This proposed chiasm fails to emphasize the centrality of the speaker’s plea to be taught and have YHWH remember the covenant promises. In contrast, I view the acrostic as providing a ready-made structure. My proposed divisions provide a linear movement in the psalm. However, the chiasm does emphasize the ongoing emphasis on prayer for deliverance in the structure of the psalm.

Brueggemann notes that Psalm 25 “begins with the premise of Psalm 1 but then goes on to make demands of God”; he sees a movement towards a “candid” reminder to YHWH of the covenant promises (vv. 6–10) while the psalmist honestly expresses the experience of suffering in which **צָרָה** seems absent.³ In its conclusion the speaker moves again towards hope for redemption (the added **בְּ** v. 22); the last word, “troubles” (**צָרָה**), means the suffering remains unresolved. Brueggemann views Psalm 25 as part of a larger movement in the Psalter from the idealized “orientation” worldview of Psalm 1, through the reality of suffering and seeming loss of God’s presence and love as expressed in psalms of disorientation (e.g., Ps 25), with wisdom Psalm 73 standing as the central “pivot” in the Psalter. The latter books 4 and 5 reflect the post-exilic worldview that reemphasizes YHWH as king, culminating with a reorientation expressed in the doxology of Ps 150 at its conclusion. Honest, candid expression of lament, “enraged suffering,” challenges the “simplistic theological

² Norbert Lohfink, S. J., and Erich Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah and the Psalms* (trans. Everett R. Kalin; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 57–84, on the chiasmic structure, 7–75. Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 218, propose a slightly different chiasm: 1–3/19–21; 4–7/15–18; v. 11 as central, surrounded by 8–10 and 12–14. Konrad Schaefer describes “three movements”: the first, in vv. 1–7 and 16–21, respectively, prays for relief; the second movement, in vv. 8–15, consists of a “wisdom reflection.” He observes the repeated use of cognates and synonyms for “way” and “path,” along with the acrostic structure, as wisdom elements (*Psalms* [Berit Olam; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001], 61–62).

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 197.

affirmations of Psalm 1.”⁴ If the psalm originated within scribal circles in the post-exilic period, when the community lived under the pressures of foreign domination and became more self-reflective of past sinfulness in light of the exile (e.g., Ezra 9), the awareness of individual sinfulness (vv. 7, 11, 18) in the psalm may reflect these experiences and the efforts of wisdom teachers to emphasize the need for repentance and obedience to Torah.⁵

Vv. 1–5: The speaker begins with a confident assertion that he will “lift up my soul” (נפש) to God; this represents the stance of prayer in which the supplicant stands with upraised hands in a posture communicating reverence and openness to the divine will.⁶ Verse two begins with another *Alaph*, אלהי, “my God,” followed by the *Beth*, בטחתי, “I trust”; this can be explained by a scribe inadvertently transposing “my God” from the end of line 1. According to Rabbinic tradition, the name of God is not considered part of the acrostic (Kimchi).⁷ Immediately following this initial expression of trust and submission, the speaker asks for protection from being shamed by enemies who threaten to “triumph over me” (אל-יעלצו אויבי ל, v. 2b). Relying on traditional wisdom theology, the speaker prays in v. 3 that those who “hope” (קוּיך) in YHWH will never be ashamed; rather, those who act deceptively without cause (ריקם) merit shame. This leads to a petition to be taught and guided in vv. 4 (ד) and 5 (ה) reminiscent of Psalm 119:25–32 (ד), 33–40 (ה): “make me know your ways (דרכיך; teach me your paths” (ארחותיך למדני, v. 4). In v. 5 the verbs “guide me” (הדריכני) “teach me” (למדני) are connected with knowing “truth” (אמת); the promise of God’s deliverance enables the speaker to remain continually hopeful (קוּיְתִי, “I hope”). All this

⁴ Ibid., 198.

⁵ John Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. I: Psalms 1–41* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; ed. Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 368.

⁶ The noun נפש describes the inner being of a living person, or the breathing self; both the inner נפש and outer בשר (“flesh”) self are conceived of “as resting on a common substratum” (BDB, 659). In this case, Robert Alter translates “I lift up my heart,” calling the נפש “the essential self” (*The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* [New York: Norton 2007], 84).

⁷ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms* (Soncino Books of the Bible; ed. A. Cohen; Rev. 2d ed.; New York: Soncino, 1992), 71.

terminology occurs in Ps 119:25–40; hope (vv. 3, 5) for the just and the emphasis on “ways” and teaching reflect wisdom concerns.

Vv. 6–10: Here the psalmist appeals to YHWH with the keyword “remember” (זָכַר). First, the speaker asks YHWH to remember the covenant promises of steadfast love and compassion (Exod 34:6), noted above, “for they are of old” (כִּי מֵעוֹלָם הָמָּה, v. 6). Next, he/she simultaneously asks YHWH to *remember not* (אַל־תִּזְכֹּר) the sins of his youth and transgressions (v. 7a), while antithetically appealing again that YHWH “*remember me according to your steadfast love*” (בְּחַסְדְּךָ), with the added qualification “for your goodness’ sake” (לְמַעַן טוֹבֶךָ, v. 7b). This appeal to covenant love occurs frequently in lament Psalms (Pss 6:5; 31:17; 51:3; 88:12; 115:1) where the psalmist reminds God of the covenant promise of חַסֵּד as a means to provoke a seemingly absent God to respond to the psalmist’s needs. Alter notices the “startling juxtaposition” of the unidiomatic “me—you” (אֲתָה־לִּי) in v. 7: the second person pronoun is normally not required with the imperative verb.⁸ Perhaps this usage is meant to intensify the psalmist’s personal appeal for YHWH to act.

By referring to the sins of his youth, the psalmist recalls the rebelliousness of youth and asks that YHWH continue to show compassion despite past sins; the reference to “youth” (נְעוּרִי) also contrasts with the antiquity and eternity of YHWH.⁹ At another level, youthful sins and transgressions may serve as a metaphor for Israel’s past sins which resulted in divine punishment and displacement during the Exile.¹⁰

Following this appeal the psalmist expresses confidence because YHWH is “good and upright” (טוֹבֵי־יֵשֶׁר) and will “instruct sinners in the way” (יְוָרֵה חַטָּאִים בְּדֶרֶךְ, v. 8). This

⁸ *The Book of Psalms*, 85.

⁹ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 371.

¹⁰ Lohfink and Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 57–84, interpret Ps 25 in relation to Ps 24 and Isaiah 2:1–5 (Micah 4:1–5) as texts describing the pilgrimage of the nations to Israel; in this context, they interpret the “sins of my youth” in 25:7 as referring to their former worship of “other gods with no real existence” which they now reject for they are the object of YHWH’s instructing “in the way” of Torah and Covenant (77).

presumes God will remember the covenant promises, forgive repentant sinners, and lead them again in the path of Torah. The verb for “teaching” and the noun “way,” along with the verbs “to guide” and “to teach” used in vv. 8–9 reveal the strong wisdom orientation of this psalm. The “humble” (ענויים) in v. 9 are those who, unlike the arrogant, live in submission to God and seek instruction.¹¹ Thus, one who follows the way of YHWH walks in “paths of steadfast love and truth” by “keeping his covenant and testimonies” (לנצרי בריתו ועדתיו), v. 10)—a theme found throughout Psalm 119, (vv. 119:1–16; 97–121) in which the speaker, despite suffering and persecution, abides by Torah because he expects YHWH to respond favorably. Similarly, the speaker of Psalm 25 keeps Torah with the expectation that God will respond with חסד. This marks the first of 21 appearances of the word ברית in the Psalter; its pairing with עדתיו (“his testimonies”) occurs also in 2 Kgs 17:15 and Ps 132:12—both later, post-exilic texts contemporaneous with the redaction of the Psalter. Though the word תורה is absent from Psalm 25, the other keywords “way” and “testimonies” refer to Torah (e.g., see Pss 1:1, 2, 6 for way with Torah; and 19B for testimonies and Torah). Further, mention of the covenant renewal ceremony at Sinai (Exod 34:6) also includes both ברית (Exod 34:10; 27; 28) and עדה (34:29) in reference to the stone tablets on which the commandments are engraved.¹² I see similarities between Psalm 25 and other wisdom psalms that use similar terminology to emphasize Torah and Covenant (Pss 19B; 119).

Vv. 11–14: Acknowledging the gravity of his sins, which are “great” (רב), the speaker seeks pardon (סלחת) “for your name’s sake.”: In Exod 34:6–7, YHWH’s self-description includes steadfast love, compassion, “slow to anger” (ארך אפים) and “forgiving iniquity (נשא עון); the speaker of Psalm 25 appeals to YHWH to provide those benefits now. The most common term for forgiveness in the O.T. is the verb נשא, “to lift up.” When forgiving sins God takes away (“lifts up”) the burden

¹¹ Cohen, *The Psalms*, 72.

¹² Lohfink and Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 78–81.

of guilt and disorientation that weighs heavily upon the sinner; this verb first appears in the Psalter in v. 18. Here, however, the use of סלח, a technical term for pardon or forgiveness used always in reference to God, probably serves to emphasize the admitted gravity of the speaker's sins. Only YHWH can pardon these serious and abundant sins.¹³ Appearing at the exact center of the psalm, the plea for forgiveness likewise recalls the covenant at Sinai, in which the self-identification of YHWH includes forgiveness of sins (Exod 34:7) and Moses' plea for forgiveness (וסלחת לעוננו, 34:9). Earlier, in seeking forgiveness on behalf of Israel, Moses asked YHWH to “show me your ways”; this terminology is repeated in Ps 25:4–5, thus showing further connections in the psalm to the covenant renewal in Exodus 33 to 34.¹⁴ These allusions and parallels serve to deliberately recall Israel's past sin and the renewal of the covenant as part of post-exilic wisdom instruction; this instruction emphasizes repentance, forgiveness and the ongoing relevance of the covenant promises, now viewed in terms of the promise of a “New Covenant” (Jer 31:31–34). Verse 11, the *lamed* (ל) in the acrostic, is the middle of the psalm and serves as a transition to a reflection on the benefits which accrue to those who fear the Lord.

Verse 12 proceeds with a wisdom statement on “fear of the LORD” (ירא יהוה), Prov 1:7; 9:10; Pss 34:8, 10, 12; 111:10) as the proper attitude to receive divine instruction; one who reveres YHWH will be instructed in the proper way (יורנו בדרך 'בחר), “he will instruct him the way he should chose”). As in Ps 119, *way* and *path* serve as euphemisms for Torah as a guide for proper living. This also reaffirms the promise of v. 9, that YHWH will guide the poor and humble in the proper and teach them the proper way of life. The verb ירה, “to teach,” used here and in v. 8, derives from the same root as תורה; it occurs elsewhere in wisdom psalms (Pss 32:8; 119:33), and in effect—along with the words for “way,” noted above—implies the missing noun, *Torah*. Verse 13 describes the blessings for those who fear YHWH: they will abide in goodness (טוב תלי), while

¹³ For the use of סלח see BDB, 699; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 373.

¹⁴ Lohfink, and Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 82.

their offspring will inherit the land (וְזָרְעוֹ יִרְשׁ אֶרֶץ)—a direct parallel to Ps 37:11, providing assurance that those who fear YHWH and live by the way of Torah will receive the covenant promises of land and offspring (e.g., Gen 12:1–3). This also recalls the “two ways” theology of Psalm 1: those who walk in the way of Torah will receive blessing, but the wicked will perish. The verb “abide” (לָוַן) in the first colon often has a temporal meaning of “staying the night” (see Ps 30:6); in the second colon, the verb “inherit” (יָרַשׁ) makes clear that the blessings will indeed be permanent.¹⁵ The assurances of prosperity for the God-fearing occur also in Ps 34:11, and the assurance that the offspring of the righteous will retain possession of the land recalls Proverbs 2:21–22, and in the Torah, Deut 30:15–20: those who obey Torah prosper and inherit the land.

More importantly, the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel transcends the giving of material rewards in return for fidelity and manifests itself in the “friendship” (סֹד, v.14) of intimacy and love that YHWH shares with those who revere him. In a later stage of Judaism the term סֹד became more prominent as a reference to the divine Assembly of God symbolically present in the worshiping congregation. Those who revere YHWH receive admission to the congregation and receive “friendship” or counsel and revelation of the covenant.¹⁶ Being aware that this relationship with YHWH is rooted in intimacy and love enables the speaker to maintain a stance of hope and leads to honest and candid prayer in the concluding verses of the psalm.¹⁷

Vv. 15—21: With confidence the speaker offers a final prayer that God will continue to honor the covenant promises. In constantly turning his eyes towards YHWH (עֵינַי תָּמִיד) the speaker recalls the stance of prayer in v. 1, “I lift up my soul/self” (נַפְשִׁי אֲשֶׁן) to YHWH—a

¹⁵ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 374.

¹⁶ Lohfink and Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 83.

¹⁷ Craige, *Psalms 1—50*, 221. The Hebrew term translated here as “friendship,” סֹד, also holds the meaning “counsel”; this usage emphasizes Yahweh’s role as Divine teacher, who provides counsel and instruction for those who revere him. For this use of *sōd* see Goldingay, *Psalms*, 374. It could be argued that the use of סֹד here is dictated by the acrostic structure, but its use in reference to the worshiping assembly as “friends” of Yahweh to whom the covenant is revealed makes it a more useful term in this context than the parallel term עֲצָדָה.

common poetic image in the psalms for prayer (see Pss 28:2; 34:6; 104:27; 123:2; 141:8; 145:15). The speaker's confidence may be rooted in past experience of being delivered from troubles: "for he brings forth my feet from the net" (הוֹאִי־יוֹצִיא מִרְשֵׁת רַגְלֵי כִי v. 15).¹⁸ Maintaining steady, focused prayer to YHWH, the speaker remains confident that the current unspecified distress, likened to having one's feet caught in a trap, will be alleviated. The imperative request, "Turn towards me" (פִּנּוּ v.16), seeks YHWH's favor, metaphorically depicted as having YHWH "turn" to look upon the supplicant (e.g., Pss 11:7; 67:2). Experience of the divine presence is likened to having God look upon the supplicant as a parent looks down with love upon a child; conversely, when God seems absent the psalmists lament that God hides his face (e.g., Pss 27:9; 30:8; 44:25).

Verse 17a is variously translated: "relieve the troubles of my heart" (RSV; NAB), or "my deep distress increases" (NJPS), depending on the translation of the verb הִרְחִיבוּ ("cause to enlarge; relieve"). Clifford proposes a better translation, "widen the constrictions of my mind," translating "my heart" (לִבִּי) according to the Semitic understanding of "mind" or intellect; like RSV he translates the verb in the sense of giving relief.¹⁹ Isolated and in dire straits (מִצְרִיק v.17b), the speaker pleads to be set free as if from a trap; in Psalm 107, מִצְרִיק occurs in each refrain (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28) where the speaker recounts past situations of distress in which Israel cries to the Lord for help and rescues them. In 107:28 the noun occurs with the verb יִצֵּא, as here. Psalm 107 is a hymn which concludes with a strong wisdom statement (v. 43) which, like Psalm 25, combines petitions for rescue with teaching. The seeming absence of God leaves the speaker alone and suffering ("for I am alone and afflicted"; כִּי־יַחֲדֵד וְעֲנִי v. 16b), seeking to be set free (הוֹצִיאֵנִי, "lead me out" v. 17b).

In vv. 18 and 19 the speaker again requests that YHWH "look" (רָאָה, e.g., 9:14; 10:14; 14:2) upon the speaker's distress and requests forgiveness, while complaining of unjust oppression by

¹⁸ NJPS translates the verb יִצֵּא as future, "He will loose my feet from the net," as does RSV, which emphasizes confidence in a future deliverance; Craige, *Psalms 1—50*, 216, 221, translates the verb in the past tense ("brought forth") while Goldingay, *Psalms*, 375, translates it in the present ("brings forth").

¹⁹ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 141.

numerous (כִּי־רַבּוֹ, “for they are many”) enemies. The expected *qoph* (ק) is missing here from the acrostic, with vv. 18–19 both beginning with *resh* (ר).²⁰ The imperative רִאֵה, “see,” also has the meaning “inspect” or “regard,” and in this context represents the desire that God regard the speaker’s undeserved oppression and distress. This request is urgent, and comes after the speaker has described his repentance (v. 11) and fidelity (v. 15). Here the most common term for forgiveness in the Psalter, the verb נָשָׂא (“to lift up, raise, carry, forgive”) occurs for the first time. As human sinfulness imposes a heavy burden of guilt and disorientation, one needs God’s help in carrying and lifting the burden of sin to provide relief; the petition reveals the speaker’s repentance and acknowledgment that alone he cannot carry or relieve the burdens caused from past sins. Connections between repentance, forgiveness and wisdom occur in Psalm 32 (a *Maskeil* psalm), where the speaker recounts the burden of sin, the process of repentance and confession, the experience of forgiveness (נָשָׂא 32:5), and then goes forth to instruct and teach others in “the way you should walk” (אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ וְאֹדֶךָ בְּדַרְךְ־זוֹ תֵלֵךְ, 32:8).

The keywords “teach” and “way” are central to Psalms 25 and 32, which I view as examples of how wisdom teachers used the human experience of sin, repentance, and forgiveness as a way of illustrating the need to remain faithful to Torah. After asking YHWH to “regard” his suffering in v. 18, the speaker now asks YHWH to “regard” (רִאֵה) the enemies who are its source. They are described as numerous (רַבּוֹ), violent (חַמְסִים), and hateful (שִׂנְאֹנִים v.19). The reader gets the sense of being entrapped by cruel, spiteful enemies—something which historically reflects the experience of Exile for many Jews—who act with violence (physical and/or emotional v. 19). This leads naturally to the plea in v. 20 for preservation and deliverance, which may originally derive from Israel’s exile experience or persecution under ongoing foreign domination. In this context of

²⁰ A plausible explanation for the missing ק is that the missing verse began with קִרְאֵה, “meet” or “proclaim,” which a scribe inadvertently omitted, possibly because of the similarity of רִאֵה in v. 19. See Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1—50*, 216–17 who translates the verse “Meet my affliction and trouble, and take away all my sins.”

disorientation, the speaker prays to be spared from being shamed since he “takes refuge” in God (בך); this forms an inclusion with the initial plea to be spared shame in v. 2, which was based on the speakers “trust” in God (בך בטחתי אל-אבוש).

The *Tav* (ת) verse offers a prayer that “integrity and uprightness” (תם וישר) will preserve the speaker because he “hopes” (or “waits” קויתיך) for God; this, too, forms an inclusion with the beginning of the poem where in v. 3 the speaker prays that all those who “hoping” (קוים) will avoid shame, which instead ought to be reserved for the “treacherous” (הבוגדים). The collective use of the verb in v. 3 and the singular here reveal that the personal prayer of the speaker also applies collectively to the faithful of Israel who, like him, keep the covenant and trust in God’s steadfast love. Having previously confessed past sins, the speaker now prays for perfect, complete (תם) integrity and uprightness in life, manifested in obedience to God and the covenantal commitments. Following the ideology set forth in Psalm 1, the speaker believes that one who is upright and hopes in God will be assured of protection. This prepares for the final petition for the redemption of all Israel in the second *Peb* verse.

Verse 22 (Peb x2): As the psalm begins in the *Aleph* א verse with the psalmist entering into prayer by raising himself (נפש) to YHWH in a stance of worship and submission, and pleading for forgiveness in the middle *Lamed* ל verse, it now concludes in the second *Peb* פ verse with a prayer for redemption (פדתי).²¹ Despite the speaker’s recollection of God’s covenant promises of חסד, confession of sins and confidence that ultimately YHWH will punish the wicked and reward the righteous who live by Torah, the psalm ends in unresolved tension.²²

²¹ Schaefer interprets the metaphor of “lifting the soul” in v.1 in relation to use elsewhere as a reference to prayer in Ps 86:4, and in the evening sacrifice in Pss 28:2, 134:2, and 141:2 (*Psalms*, 62). Alter interprets it as a reference to fervent prayer or pleading (*The Book of Psalms*, 84).

²² Because it ends in this state of unresolved distress, I disagree with Lohfink and Zenger’s attempt to read Psalm 25 in close relationship to 24 and 26, which differ greatly in context and content (*The God of Israel and the Nations*, 58–64), as it seems somewhat forced to view Ps 25 as being primarily about the pilgrimage of

Conclusion: The element of lament in this poem builds upon the idealized retribution theology of Psalm 1 by reflecting the reality of sin, suffering and oppression in human experience. The orientation of Psalm 1 provides a necessary ideal; in reality, however, life is often beset with ambiguities and disorientation as expressed in this psalm. In response, the speaker reminds God of the covenant promises while at the same time acknowledging and confessing sinfulness and pleading for forgiveness and redemption. Brueggemann's juxtaposition of Psalms 1, 25, 103, and 150 to describe a movement within the Psalter reflective of Israel's historical experience, and all human experience, from orientation, to disorientation, to new orientation, provides an excellent mode of interpreting Psalm 25 in its canonical context.²³

Wisdom Elements in Psalm 26

This psalm presents a strongly liturgical context in which the Psalmist acts as a priest engaging in ritual washing before performing his duties within the sanctuary. Thematically, Psalm 26 parallels Psalms 15 and 24, entrance liturgies that set forth the ethical requirements for authentic worship, and wisdom-oriented Psalm 101, in which the psalmist declares an aversion to evildoers, praise of God's חסד, and studies Torah ("I will study [אֲשַׁכִּילֶהָ] the way of the blameless" 101:1–2).²⁴ The psalmist begins with a plea for God's vindication, asserting "for I have walked with integrity" (כִּי־אֲנִי בַתְּמִי הִלְכֹתָ v.1); this parallels thematically the opening verse of wisdom-Torah Psalm 119, which commends those who are "blameless" in their way of life (תְּמִי־דֶרֶךְ) through obedience to Torah (הִדְלַל כִּים בַּתּוֹרָה), "walking in Torah".

the Nations rather than arising out of Israel's and the individual poet's experience of covenant, sin, and suffering. As I conclude, Brueggemann's canonical understanding of the Psalm in relation to his interpretive categories seems more plausible (*Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 202–3.)

²³ Brueggemann, *Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 189–213.

²⁴ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler observe the psalmist's assumption that the wicked shall be punished while the righteous should be rewarded as the basis for the prayer, which "Like Ps 25, this psalm uses some of the language of wisdom literature." ("Psalms" in *The Jewish Study Bible* [New York: Oxford, 2004], 1310). For my treatment of parallels to other wisdom psalms mentioned: for Psalm 73, see chapter 6; for Psalm 101, chapter 7; Psalm 119 was treated in chapter 3.

Verse 6 provides a verbal parallel to wisdom Ps 73:13: “I will wash my hands in innocence as I go around your altar, YHWH.” With the promise of God’s חסד “before my eyes,” the speaker “walks” in God’s truth (וְהִתְהַלַּל בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה v. 3), i.e., in the way of God’s Torah, which prepares him to live a life guided by the principles of wisdom. These are elaborated in vv. 4-8, 11, and consist of avoiding association with evildoers (מְרַעִים רְשָׁעִים, v.5) ritual washing, giving thanks and praise for God’s deeds, reverence for the Temple and a blameless way of life (בְּתוֹרַת, vv. 1, 11). An inclusion occurs with “I have walked in integrity” in v.1 and “I have walked in your truth” in v. 3; in addition, repetitive use of the first-person singular pronoun on nouns and verbs in vv. 1–3 mark this as an introductory section that sets the basis for what follows.²⁵

In asserting that “I have not sat” (לֹא יָשַׁבְתִּי) with “men of deceit” (עַם־מְתִישׁוֹא v.4a), and “I will not sit” (לֹא אֲשֵׁב v. 5b) with the wicked, the psalmist recalls a central claim of wisdom Psalm 1:1. The metaphor of “not sitting” with evildoers also forms an inclusion in vv. 4–5 and supports the initial claims of the psalmist in vv. 1–3: one who lives with integrity and according to “truth” avoids associating with evildoers. The initial proclamations of the psalmist’s integrity prepare for the liturgical rites in vv. 6–8: washing hands, giving thanks, proclaiming God’s “wonders” (נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ), and love for the “house” (בֵּיתְךָ) and “dwelling place of your glory,” clearly refer to the Temple. The verb “to walk” appears in vv. 1, 3, and 11 and serves to emphasize in each case the psalmist’s loyalty to the ways of Torah: walking without blame (1, 11), and in truth (v. 3).²⁶

Vv. 9–10 parallel the references to the evildoers in vv. 4–5, this time in the form of a prayer to be removed from their presence (v. 9), and a description of them as “crafty” (זָמָר) and giving bribes (v. 10). Verse 11 forms an inclusion with vv. 1–3, as noted above, while v. 12 concludes the psalm with another reference to the psalmist’s integrity as “my foot stands in a level [place],” i.e., “in

²⁵ W. H. Bellinger, “Psalm XXVI: A Test of Method” *VT* 4 (1993): 453. I divide the psalm in six parts: vv. 1–3; 4–5; 6–8; 9–10; 11; and 12

²⁶ Conrad Schaefer, identifies the use of “to walk” in vv. 1 and 11 as forming an inclusion for the psalm which presents the main theme of the psalmist’s innocence (*Psalms, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry*; ed David W. Cotter; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 63.

the congregations” (במקרה לים); the speaker lives by Torah and, therefore, on “level” rather than crooked ground, which makes him fit for worship. While categorically Psalm 26 best reflects a prayer of innocence and confidence, the parallel with Psalms 1, 73, and 101 is unmistakable; guided by חסד and אמת, the speaker describes a life lived according to Torah and wisdom.

Psalm 33 and the Revelation of Wisdom in God’s Creation

I classify Psalm 33 as a “wisdom-creation” hymn, combining elements of praise (vv. 1–5; 20–22), creation theology (vv. 6–9), and wisdom (vv. 10–19). The connection between wisdom and creation in post-exilic Israel is evident especially in Proverbs 3:18; 8:22–30; Job 28, and Sirach 24. Conrad Schaefer views Psalms 33 and 32 as paired didactic hymns; Psalm 32 combines confession and instruction, while Psalm 33 combines praise and instruction, especially in its emphasis on God’s creative word and governance of the cosmos.²⁷ Like Psalm 25, the central element of Psalm 33 is God’s covenant love, (vv. 5, 18, 22), manifested in all the earth, and given to those who trust in YHWH’s promise (v. 18), and pray for it as a source of hope (v.22). YHWH’s חסד stands in relationship to God’s righteousness and justice (צדקה ומשפט, v. 5). The psalmist alludes to the Genesis creation stories by describing the creative word (דבר) and breath (רוח) of God (vv. 6–7, 9) as the source of creation. In addition to creation theology, wisdom themes include the “fear/reverence” of the YHWH (vv. 8, 18), the אשׁר״י (“happy is” v. 12), God’s plans and counsel (v. 11), and proverbs describing the vanity of human efforts (vv. 16–17). In addition, the psalm’s 22 verse structure coincides with the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, thus mimicking the acrostic structure—though without each verse beginning with the successive letters—to emphasize wholeness and completeness.

Vv. 1—5, Initial praise: The imperative to “sing joyfully, you righteous, in YHWH; praise is fitting for the upright,” begins the poem where Ps 32:11 concluded: calling upon the righteous

²⁷ *Psalms* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 81–84.

(צדִיקִים) and upright (יִשרִים) to be rejoice in the Lord. Both the conclusion of Psalm 32 and the introduction to Psalm 33 share common vocabulary: the verb “praise” (רָנַן), reference to “righteous ones” (צדִיקִים) and the “upright” (יִשרִים).²⁸ Intertextual parallels occur in Ps 147:1, which similarly describes praise to Yahweh as “fitting” using the same Hebrew term (נִאֲוָה), while both Pss 33:2 and 92:2, 4 (144:9), use the hiphil form for giving thanks (לְהַדְרִיחַ, 92:2; הוֹדִי, 33:2) to God, and mention the harp and ten-stringed lyre. Significantly, both psalms 92 and 147, like Psalm 33, combine elements of the hymn with wisdom and creation motifs. I propose a direct relationship in the placement of Psalms 32 and 33. Psalm 32 moves from repentance and conversion to wisdom instruction, concluding with rejoicing in God’s חֶסֶד; Psalm 33 continues and expands upon Psalm 32 with the further praise of God’s חֶסֶד and wisdom teaching. In addition, the word pair “right and just” (צדִיקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט v.5) represent two primordial qualities of creation which God “loves” and favors (e.g., Pss 37:28–29; 94:4).²⁹

Reference to the “lyre” (כִּנּוֹר) and “ten-stringed harp” (בְּנַבֵּל עֲשׂוֹר v.2) reveal the liturgical character and cultic use of the psalm; further examples of the cultic terms in wisdom poetry occur in Ps 49:5, with *kinnôr*, and in wisdom-influenced Ps 92:4, with *kinnôr*, *‘āsôr* and *nēbel*.³⁰ One plausible proposal for its cultic use views v. 1 as an imperative call to worship from the leader to the musicians (vv. 2–3), with the remaining parts sung antiphonally between two parts of a choir. Though impossible to determine with certainty, it may have been used specifically at an autumn festival or covenant renewal; similarities with Judges 5 lead some scholars to posit a setting in the monarchical period.³¹ By directing the imperative command to “skillfully pluck the strings with shouts” (בְּתִרְוָעָה v. 3) to the singers and worshippers, the speaker anticipates the contrasting fates

²⁸ The word translated “befits” (RSV) or “it is fit” (NJP) נִאֲוָה, can be taken as the adjective “becoming/lovely,” but better as the pilel perfect of the verb נִאֵה, “to be lovely, pleasant.”

²⁹ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 82.

³⁰ These terms occur also in Psalms 81:3 (*kinnôr* and *nēbel*), 98:5 (*kinnôr*), 149:3 (*kinnôr*), and 150:3 (*kinnôr* and *nēbel*).

³¹ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 271–72.

of those who revere and hope in God's steadfast love (יִרְאוּ לַמִּיחָלִים לַחֲסֵדוֹ, v. 18) with those who trust in human power and implements of war (vv. 16, 17).³² The word here translated "shouts" also means "war cry": those who express their reverence for and trust in God with joyful cries in worship will also ultimately prevail against their foes.³³ The cultic use of Psalm 33 at a covenant renewal ceremony seems most plausible in its emphasis on God's steadfast love, creation, and vindication of those who fear the Lord. The alphabetical structure and other wisdom elements favor a post-exilic date.

Vv. 6—9, Creation: Following the proclamation in v. 5 that the earth is "full" of God's חֲסֵד, v. 6 explains why: the heavens were created by God's "word" (דְּבַר) and all the "hosts" (צְבָאִים) by "the breath of his mouth" (בְּרוּחַ פִּי). This focus on the creative breath-spirit and word of God recalls both the Priestly (Gen 1:1–2:4b; see 1:1 for רִוּחַ) and Yahwist (Gen 2:5–7) creation stories (see also Ps 104:29–30, רִוּחַ, and Ps 148:5, צוּרָה וְנִבְרָאוּ). The psalmist begins by describing the creation of the heavens and their "host," symbolizing the concept of YHWH's heavenly council and the ancient concept that God's throne was located in the heavens. Other psalms respectively describe the divine council (Pss 82:1, 138:2), the winds and fire as God's ministers (Ps 104:3–4), God's "tent" in the heavens (Ps 19:5), and God's throne above the cherubim (Ps 99:1). Parallels to this emphasis on creation by divine word occur in both Egyptian texts and the NT concept of λόγος (e.g., John 1:1).³⁴ Similar to Psalms 8 and 19A, verse 6 reflects typical ANE cosmology but

³² Schaefer, *Psalms*, 82.

³³ *BDB*, 929.

³⁴ Examples from Egyptian texts include the *Hymn to Amun* (Eighteenth Dynasty), the Sun god: "From whose eyes men came forth, and from whose mouth the gods came into being. Who creates the herbs that give life to the cattle, and fruit trees to mankind" (VI. 3-4); also, the *Hymn of Mer-Sekhmet*: "Praise to you, Amun-Re-Atum-Harakhti, who spoke with his mouth and there came into being men, gods, cattle great and small, everything that flies and alights" (7.5, 7.6). Quoted from Walter Beyerlin, ed., *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 14, 26.

adapts it in a distinctively Israelite manner: rather than being “gods” in their own right, the heavens and their hosts/armies of stars and planets reflect their sacred source, YHWH.³⁵

From these metaphors of YHWH’s heavenly realm, the speaker next moves to describe the sea (ים) and the “deep” (תהומות) in v. 7, which again evokes the Priestly creation story: YHWH brought order to the chaos represented by the waters and the deep (Gen 1:9–10; see Ps 104:5–9). In the Song of Moses (Exodus 15), which describes YHWH’s defeat of enemies and power over creation, God’s breath (רוח) causes the waters to pile up and the floods to stand “like a heap” (גד, v. 8), while he covers Israel’s enemies with the “Deep” (תהומות, v. 5).³⁶ The use of the terms for “heap,” גד, and “deep” (תהומות), in Psalm 33 points to the influence of the older Exodus text on the psalmist’s theology (Exod 15:8; see also the use of גד in reference to the Song of the Sea in wisdom-historical Ps 78:13).³⁷ Furthermore, like Psalm 33, the Song of the Sea emphasizes God’s steadfast love (חסד Exod 15:13) as reflected in the divine activity on behalf of the people. Both the sea and the deep represent powerful, foreboding elements of chaos which only God can control.³⁸ Similar references to God’s control over the heavenly hosts, the earth, and seas occur in Psalm 89:6–15 where, as in Psalm 33, God’s steadfast love, righteousness, and justice are revealed in divine governance (89:3, 15). Active participles (נתן, “puts”; בנס, “gathering”) convey God’s ongoing creative activity; this

³⁵ Nahum Sarna offers a detailed analysis of the adaptation of ANE cosmology by Israelite psalmists as a polemic against astral worship; the psalmists modify the material by emphasizing YHWH as the only creative power in contrast to the multiple gods of the ANE texts (*On The Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* [New York: Schocken, 1993/1995], chapters 2 [on Ps 8] and 3 [on Ps 19]).

³⁶ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 273, also notes the allusions to Exodus 15 here.

³⁷ Mitchell Dahood translates the MT כנר (*kannéd*) as *kened*, according to the Ugaritic root *knd* and the Akkadian *kandu*, meaning “jar,” thus: “He gathers into a jar the waters of the sea.” He thus rejects the parallels with Exod 15 but rather connects 33:7 with Job 38:8–10, 22, 37; Ps 135:7; Isa 45:3; and Jer 10:13, all of which refer to storehouses containing snow, hail, and water (*Psalms 1—50* [AB 16; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965–66], 199–201). Dahood’s proposal seems unnecessary as the MT construction makes fine sense when read hyperbolically as a reference to the awesomeness of divine power.

³⁸ For example, Pss 29:3; 32:6; 42:8; 69:2–3; 74:13; 77:17–20; 78:13; 88:7–8; 107:25–26; 124; 130:1;

harnessing of terrifying, chaotic forces in the original creative acts continue in ongoing human history.

Prayers embracing “all the earth” (כָּל־הָאָרֶץ) usually occur in liturgical hymns (e.g., Pss 66:2; 96:1; 100:1); in Ps 33:8 they occur synonymously in a wisdom context, with line A stating, “Let all the earth fear the Lord” (יִירָאוּ מִיהוָה), while line B calls upon “all who dwell in the world” (כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֶל) to “be in awe” (מִמֶּנּוּ יִגֹּרֻוּ). The imperfect verbs here have a jussive sense, and so the previous past action (Qal perfect) of YHWH creating the heavens and their host (v. 5), and God’s present (ongoing) control over forces of chaos represented by the sea and deep (active participles; v. 7), culminates in a future-oriented prayer concerning the earth in v. 8. A triadic movement from heavens, to seas/deeps, to earth occurs in these verses. This command for all the earth to “fear YHWH” recalls the central thesis of wisdom literature: the beginning of wisdom and knowledge is “fear of YHWH” (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28). This imperative to fear YHWH frames the wisdom teaching between vv. 8 and 18, in which the psalmist proclaims the “eye” of YHWH—representing God’s omniscience over creation—is upon those who “fear him” (יִרְאוּ, v. 18) and hope in YHWH’s steadfast love (see above). Fear of YHWH in wisdom literature represents reverence to God as revealed in Torah and Creation.

This connection between wisdom and creation occurs in the wisdom poem of Job 28, which after describing elusive wisdom in terms of the created world—things of land, sea, the deeps, beasts and humans—concludes that “fear of YHWH is wisdom” (Job 28:28). Similarly, Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 describes herself as YHWH’s craftsman (אֵמֶן, Prov 8:30), and later asserts, “the beginning of wisdom is fear of YHWH” (9:10). At a date later than the probable composition of Psalm 33, Sir 24:22–31 connects wisdom with both Torah and creation. These texts, particularly Job and Proverbs, which may be contemporary or earlier than Psalm 33, provide a context to understand the connection between wisdom and creation in the psalm.

Verse 9 serves as an inclusion for this section by returning to the theme of God’s creative word as in v. 6: “For he spoke and it came to be” (כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי). Again this alludes to Genesis 1, where the same verb, אָמַר, is used for each of God’s creative actions. In addition to creating, YHWH gives commands which “stand,” reflecting both the permanence of what God has established and God’s ongoing divine involvement and control over human affairs (הוֹאֵר צוּרָה וַיַּעֲמֵד).³⁹ Similar recollection of God’s giving a “command” for creation to be brought forth and to “stand” or “endure” forever (וַיַּעֲמִידֵם עַד לְעוֹלָם) occurs in Ps 148:5–6, as part of its more detailed description of the heavens, earth, and oceans giving witness (praise) to their Creator.⁴⁰

Vv. 10—19, Wisdom: Verses 10–11 use antithetic parallelism to emphasize the superiority of God’s wisdom over human plans: YHWH “frustrates” (הַפִּיר) the “counsel” (עֲצַת־גּוֹיִם) and “hinders” (הַנִּיאַ) the “plans” (מַחְשְׁבוֹת עַמִּים) of humans (using the synonymous terms “nations” and “peoples”; v.10); in contrast, YHWH’s counsel (עֲצָה) and plans (מַחְשְׁבוֹת לְבוֹ) stand and endure for all generations (v.11). Similarly, Prov 19:21 contrasts the “many plans (מַחְשְׁבוֹת) in the heart of man” with the counsel (עֲצָה) of YHWH that stands firm (תִּקּוּם). Human designs by nature are limited and imperfect, while God’s divine plan and counsel transcends human comprehension and by nature endures forever. Both Isaiah 55:9 and Ps 40:6 also use the term מַחְשְׁבָה in reference to the superiority of God’s designs. Verses 10–11 mark a transition from the previous focus on God’s creative activity and power to an emphasis on God’s control over the human affairs

³⁹ Lohfink and Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 93, suggest that the first colon speaks of the creation of the heavens and their host by the word of YHWH, while the reference to “command” in the second alludes to YHWH’s subduing of the sea. The use of an emphatic הוּא in both colons of v. 9 serve to emphasize divine creative power over the cosmos in the past, present and future as presented in the preceding verses of what I view as a “creation inclusion” in vv. 6–9.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Ps 148:5 uses the verb בָּרָא (וַיְבָרֵא) to describe God’s creative actions, the same verb used in Genesis 1:1 and used only of God’s creative work in the Bible.

throughout history; just as creation depended upon God's *Word*, so history depends upon God's *counsel*.⁴¹

The nation that embraces YHWH as God recognizes this truth and, therefore, receives blessing: “Happy (אַשְׁרֵי) the nation whose God is YHWH” (v. 12a). This “nation” (גוֹי, normally used in reference to non-Israelites) is also identified as “the people” (עַם; also Pss 95:7; 100:3) whom God chooses for his inheritance (לְנַחֲלָה לוֹ, v. 12b). This raises the question of the identity of the “nation” mentioned here: is this a poetical reference to Israel, or does it imply the inclusion of non-Jews who also become covenant partners? With its focus on the universal theme of God's creative acts, and lack of parochial references, it seems plausible that references in Psalm 33 to “nations” refers to God's universal dominion, which transcends parochial connotations; even pre-exilic texts like Isa 2:1–5 envision *goyim* joining in worship of YHWH on Zion.⁴² If the psalm in its final form is post-exilic, it stands in contrast to the parochialism of Ezra-Nehemiah and in line with the outlook of Jonah.⁴³ Nonetheless, the psalm clearly arises out of distinctly Israelite wisdom and worship traditions, the focus of which remains Israel and worshipping Israelites.

More importantly, the term translated “happy,” אַשְׁרֵי, is an important wisdom term—the first word of the canonical Psalter which introduces wisdom Psalm 1 in describing the fate of the righteous person who lives by Torah and avoids evil. Previously this term served as an opening description of the fate of the repentant and forgiven individual in Ps 32:1–2; next it appears in Ps 34:9b to describe the fate of the one who takes refuge in God. Its use in three consecutive wisdom-oriented psalms may reflect common editing and/or authorship within scribal groups. Its most frequent usage in the Hebrew Bible occurs in the Psalms (26 times), and the other wisdom books:

⁴¹ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 273.

⁴² Lohfink and Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 116, posit that the lack of direct reference to Israel in argues for the inclusion of non-Israelites as potential covenant partners in the theology of the psalm.

⁴³ Arguments for a post-exilic setting include style and theology—i.e., the 22 verse acrostic-like structure, creation theology, and the idea that worshippers turn to YHWH in times of crisis (exile; post-exilic period). On the other hand, others argue that acrostic structures can be pre-exilic (e.g., Psalms 9, 10), and observe similarities between the psalm and Judges 5, e.g., episodic structure and use of repetition (see Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 271). Regardless of its original setting, my concern is with its placement and possible editing by post-exilic wisdom teachers in the shaping of the Psalter.

once each in Job (5:17) and Ecclesiastes and frequently in Proverbs, particularly in the oldest collections (e.g., Prov 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 29:18), and in contexts specifically connected with wisdom (Prov 28:14; 3:13; 8:33ff.; 31:28). Though related to the term **בֵּרַכָּה**, as both terms describe a “blessed” state of being, it differs in that it never refers to God but always to people; the reference in 33:12 marks the first time in the Psalter where it refers to a collective group (“nations”) rather than an individual.⁴⁴ Verse 12 provides an answer to the prayer in v. 8 that used the jussives referring to those who “fear YHWH” (“let them fear”; let them stand in awe”); those who fear YHWH become the YHWH’s inheritance in v. 12. They base their existence upon God’s plans and designs because they recognize divine autonomy and omniscience in history and creation.⁴⁵ Goldingay describes the **אֲשֶׁר־י** formula in v. 12 as a “proverbial formulation about good fortune” (this is how he translates the term) and sees the reference as pointing directly to YHWH’s possession of Israel and the covenant relationship (Isa 40:1; 41:8–9; 44:1–2; 47:6; 48:12; I would add Jer 31:31–33; Ezek 36:28; 37:27).⁴⁶ Covenant love (**חֶסֶד**) is bestowed upon those who act with righteousness and justice (v.5), fear the Lord (vv. 8, 12, 18), and hope in him (v. 22); **חֶסֶד** occurs in vv. 5, 18, 22.

Verses 13–18 emphasize YHWH’s omniscience with metaphors for seeing; he beholds (**מִבֵּיַט**) and looks (**רָאָה**) from the divine throne in heaven upon human beings and their earthly activities (v. 13); from the heavenly dwelling (**מִמְכוּן־שְׁבֹתוֹ**), YHWH “gazes upon” (**הִשְׁגִּיחַ**) those dwelling on earth (v. 14). Following an interlude in vv. 15–17, the seeing metaphor returns with

⁴⁴ The **אֲשֶׁר־י** formula serves as an introductory word in Pss 1:1, 32:2 (see above), 41:2—in reference to the one who cares for the poor, in tandem with the key wisdom term **מִשְׁכִּיל**—112:1 (Torah/acrostic) for the one who “fears the Lord,” and 128:1 (wisdom) to describe the one who “fears YHWH.” It appears at the end of Psalm 2 as an inclusion with Ps 1 in opening the Psalter; it appears in Ps 65:5 (thanksgiving), three times in Ps 84:4, 5, 6, a pilgrimage hymn for Zion, and once in Ps 137:9 to describe the state of those Israelites who avenge their suffering. It also occurs in wisdom contexts in Pss 119:1–2, to describe the Torah-observant, 127:5 to describe the fate of one who has sons to help defend his interests at the city gates, where legal proceedings occurred, in 144:15 (x2) to describe the God-fearing, and 146:5 to describe the one who hopes in God. It appears at the end of Books 1 (41:2, above), 3 (89:16, those who follow YHWH), and 4 (106:3, to describe those who act with justice). Interestingly, its frequent use in Book 5, the latest collections that reflect the work of wisdom editors who compiled the Psalter in its final form, attests to its importance in wisdom circles. See *TDOT* 1, 445–48 for more details on its lexicography.

⁴⁵ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 273.

⁴⁶ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 469.

mention of God’s “eye” (עֵינַי)—an anthropomorphic image emphasizing divine scrutiny—which remains focused on those who hope in God’s steadfast love (מִיְחַלְיִם חֶסֶדְךָ, “the ones hoping in his steadfast love” v. 18). Divine omniscience extends from seeing/observing to forming (צָרָה) the mind (לֵב) and discerning (מִבִּינִי) human activity (v.15); these participles emphasize the ongoing activity of God in forming and examining humans and their actions. The contrast between the divine dwelling in the heavens and earthly, human existence in these parallel lines also emphasizes the distance between God and human subjects.

Verses 16–17 reflect early Israelite war traditions as they emphasize the futility of the earthly power of kings, warriors, and horses: despite their power, none are able to save (לְהַשִּׁיעַהוּ), deliver (יִנְצֵל), or rescue (יִמְלֹט). These images again recall the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:3), where YHWH is the true “warrior” who overcomes the horses and chariots of Pharaoh’s armies (15:1, 4); similarly, the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:19–22) describes the defeat by YHWH of the warhorses and armies of the kings of Canaan.⁴⁷ Both the *Song of the Sea* and *Song of Deborah* are considered among the oldest texts of the Hebrew Bible. Here we have an application of longstanding Israelite traditions as a teaching tool in a later context. With this interlude on the futility of human strength versus divine power and omniscience, the psalmist returns to the “seeing” metaphor in v. 18 (above) and concludes the wisdom section in v. 19 that only YHWH can “deliver” (לְהַצִּיל) from death and maintain life in the midst of famine—which itself alludes to the results of war.

Vv. 20–22: Concluding Praise: These verses return to the initial theme of praise in vv. 1–5 but with a more interior emphasis, as the psalmist speaks of the collective “soul” which “waits” for YHWH (נַפְשֵׁנוּ חִכְתָּהוּ), and heart/mind that “will rejoice in him” (שִׂמְחָה לְבָנוּ, v. 22). These terms, respectively, represent the self/life force and the mind; based upon past experience, the worshippers collectively wait for YHWH’s protection and guidance in the present and the future. YHWH is “our

⁴⁷ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 274.

help and our shield” (עֲזָרָנוּ וּמִגְנָנוּ הוֹיָא v.20). Militaristic images of God as a “shield” occur frequently in the psalms (Pss 3:4; 7:11; 18:3; 89:19; 144:2) and emphasize divine protection from evil. In v. 21 the verb “rejoice” (שָׂמַח) is in the future tense (*yiqtol*), which serves to move the discussion from present experience to future hope: in their minds/hearts the people will rejoice because of their trust in YHWH, based on past and current experience.⁴⁸ The second line of v. 21 provides another reason for confidence as the speaker proclaims on behalf of the community that they “trust in his holy name” (כִּי בַשֵּׁם קָדְשׁוֹ בִּטְחוּנוֹ). In a culture where knowing someone’s personal name signifies a relationship, the “holy name” YHWH represents the essence of God for the believer—God is holy, awesome (Pss 86:11; 99:3; 105:3; 106:47; 111:9; 145:21)—and provides the reason for trust.⁴⁹ Finally, just as the first praise section concluded with a proclamation of divine כָּסֶד (filling the earth), so the final praise section concludes the psalm with another, closing reference to the key underlying theme of כָּסֶד, but this time with a jussive verb which makes the reference a wish: “*may your steadfast love be upon us*” (יְהִי־כָסֶדְךָ). The speaker confidently requests this because the community hopes in YHWH (יִחַלְנוּ).

Conclusion: Psalm 33, while normally classified as a hymn, also contains strong wisdom influences which point to its dual liturgical and didactic use. Combining references to the exodus event, covenantal theology, creation theology, and wisdom language, the psalm provides an example of how didactic-liturgical poems were used as wisdom instruction. Its position following wisdom Psalm 32, a *Masqil*, may reveal an intentional pairing by wisdom editors, with Psalm 33 expanding upon the concluding praise of Psalm 32.

⁴⁸ Goldingay, *Psalms 1—41*, 472.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Psalm 34 and the Relationship of Thanksgiving and Wisdom

Between its opening blessing/praise of YHWH (אֲבָרְכֶהָ, v. 2) and closing plea for redemption (פִּדְדֵנִי, v. 23) Psalm 34 moves from a hymn of thanks and praise (vv. 2–11) to a wisdom instruction (vv. 12–22), concluding with a confident plea for redemption (v. 23). The repetition of key wisdom words “hear” (שָׁמַעַ v. 3, 7, 12, 18), “fear” (יִרָא v. 8, 10 [x2], 12), “good” (טוֹב v. 9, 11, 13, 15), “righteous” (צַדִּיקִי v. 16, 20, 22), and the contrasting “evil” (רָע v. 14, 15, 17, 20, 22), along with the theme of deliverance (נָצַל; hiphil vv. 5, 18, 20), convey the traditional wisdom orientation that the righteous who fear YHWH will ultimately prosper (אֲשֶׁר, v. 9b), despite the disorientation experienced in the reality of persecution by the wicked. Thus the initial praise and thanksgiving may confidently recall God’s past deliverance from distress and/or be an expression of prophetic hope in the midst of current suffering, based upon traditional wisdom teaching that the righteous who fear YHWH will prosper (“lack nothing” v. 10b; Ps 1; Prov 10:27–32). Presented in an acrostic structure parallel to that of Psalm 25—lacking a separate *Vav* verse and concluding with an extra *Peb* verse—Psalm 34 clearly reveals the work of wisdom writers. In addition to the wisdom vocabulary and acrostic structure, wisdom teaching (v. 12, אֵל מִדְּכֶם יִרְאֶת יְהוָה, “I will teach you the fear of YHWH”) becomes its primary overarching emphasis.⁵⁰ Cumulatively, the above evidence leads me to classify the psalm as a “wisdom-thanksgiving” psalm and to hypothesize common authorship with Psalm 25.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 477 rejects the term “thanksgiving” in favor of “testimony” since the psalm never directly addresses YHWH. He sees a direct structural relationship with Ps 33 in that both begin with a declaration and call for others to join in (Ps 33 using the form of a hymn to do this), and then moves away from this initial declaration to an emphasis on teaching; likewise, both psalms use an acrostic form, Ps 33 with its 22 verse structure to coincide with the Hebrew alphabet, and Ps 34 with a traditional acrostic form using consecutive letters of the alphabet.

⁵¹ Among the scholars cited in chapter 1 who classify Ps 34 as a wisdom psalm include H. Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*; S. Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship*; R. E. Murphy, “a Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms’”; L. Purdue, *Wisdom and Cult*; A. Hurvitz, “Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter”; R. N. Whybray, “The Wisdom Psalms”; J. K. Kuntz, “Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter.” Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 173, and Erhard Gestenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to*

Verse 1, Superscription: The superscription connects the psalm to events recounted in 1 Sam 21:14, where David deliberately feigns madness to save himself while surrounded by the Philistine king *Achish* and his men in the city of Gath. Here, however, the king's name is *Abimelech*, who appears in Genesis 20, long before the time of David; most scholars believe a scribe made a mistake in recollection of copying. As with other Davidic psalms, a later writer or editor probably—in this case, from a wisdom school—added the superscription to lend authority to the poem by attributing it directly to David and events in his life. The medieval Jewish commentator Rashi argued for the accuracy of the text by claiming that Abimelech was a royal title rather than a proper name; Ibn Ezra suggested the king may have had two different titles, this being one of them. The midrash *Shocheh Tov* claims that after Achish spared his life, David wrote this psalm in gratitude to God with the additional intention of using his personal experience to show others the way to salvation.⁵² Alter suggests a later editor (s) linked the psalm to this event in Davidic history based upon its emphasis on God's power to rescue the righteous from serious, imminent threats (vv. 5, 7–8, and 16–23).⁵³

Vv. 2—11, Praise and Thanks: In vv. 2 and 3a, the speaker begins with an initial self-exhortation to praise God: “Let me bless” (אֲבָרְכָהּ) YHWH at all times (v. 2); his praise continually in my mouth. Let my soul/self glory in YHWH (תְּהַלֵּלֵנִי, v. 3a); let the humble will hear and be glad.” By using a cohortative verb in v. 2 with jussives in v. 3, the psalmist expresses a strong wish and desire to praise God. This continues with an imperative exhortation for others to “magnify (גִּדְּלוּ) YHWH with me,” and a plural cohortative prayer that together they (presumably the speaker and the humble) exalt YHWH (וְנִרְוַמְמָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוָה, “let us exalt his name together” v. 4).⁵⁴ This initial personal and communal exhortation to praise prepares for the recollection of how YHWH

Cultic Poetry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 146–49, regard it as a thanksgiving hymn, despite the many wisdom elements.

⁵² Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Revised Second Ed.; Revised by Rabbi E. Oratz and Rav Shalom Shahar; Soncino Books of the Bible; ed. A. Cohen; London/Jerusalem/New York: Soncino, 1945/1992), 99.

⁵³ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 117.

⁵⁴ Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 147. Translation mine; emphasis added.

heard and answered the speaker's prayer by saving him from dire circumstances—the reason for praise—which then lends itself to wisdom instruction.

By recalling how “I sought YHWH and he answered me” (דרשתִי אֶת־הוָה עֲנֵנִי), the speaker prepares to instruct others to confidently turn to YHWH in times of need and be “radiant” (וְנִדְהִי) and without shame (אֶל־יִחְפְּרוּ, vv.5–6).⁵⁵ The self-identification of the speaker as “poor” (עֲנִי) reveals a previous situation of misery, oppression and possibly poverty; YHWH has “heard” and responded with deliverance from fears (v. 5) and salvation (v. 7). Divine care, represented by the “angel” (מַלְאֲכֵי־הוָה), surrounds and delivers those who “fear” YHWH (לִירְאוֹ, v. 8). In wisdom literature, those who fear YHWH represent the wise (Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10). Use of past experiences as the basis for present instruction recalls Psalm 32, in which the psalmist uses past experiences of sin, repentance, and forgiveness as a means to instruct others to walk in the way of Torah. Thanksgiving for deliverance also becomes a form of instruction in which the one delivered passes on his or her experience and knowledge to encourage others. By using three different causative verbs to represent “deliverance” and salvation (הִצִּילֵנִי, v. 5; הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי, v. 7; יַחַלֵּצֵנִי, v. 8) the speaker emphasizes the completeness and totality of deliverance for those who “fear YHWH.” Reference to the angel as an intermediary for YHWH recalls both the older Elohist texts of the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen 22) and historical books (e.g., Judges 6:11; 13:3) and here serves to emphasize divine protection.

Imperatives to “taste and see” YHWH's goodness (v. 9a) and “fear YHWH” (v. 10a) are paralleled by assurance of resulting benefits: they will be “happy” (אֲשֵׁרִי, v. 9b) and will not be lacking life's necessities (כִּי־אֵין מַחְסוֹר, v. 10b). The metaphor of tasting and seeing the goodness of YHWH recalls similar experiential images in Ps 119: in 119:103 the speaker proclaims the Lord's

⁵⁵ Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 147, notes that the use of דָּרַשׁ rather than קָרָא here is among several indicators of a later, post-exilic context for the psalm; among other such terms he includes יָרָא and קָדַשׁ (v.10) as later names for the community.

words are sweet—“sweeter than honey to my mouth”; in 119:159, the speaker exclaims “See how I love your precepts.” For the metaphor of tasting in 34:9, Clifford notes: “Experience is the best teacher that God is a refuge.”⁵⁶ The “happy is” formula (אשר) and emphasis on fearing YHWH (ליראיו; יראו; ליראיו) represent important wisdom terminology. By contrasting “young lions” that go hungry with those who “seek” (ודרשו) YHWH and have what they need (לא־יחסרו); “they do not lack”), the psalm implicitly upholds traditional wisdom theology: the just will be rewarded while the wicked receive punishment. Repetition of the word “good” (טוב, vv. 9, 11) and words for “lack” (noun v. 10; verb v. 11) illustrate this teaching. Cumulatively, the images of YHWH’s responsiveness to the speaker’s needs, a protecting “angel,” provision of good things, and the promise of happiness, orient the psalm towards the hope and promise of traditional wisdom theology and prepare for the next section of more specific wisdom teaching.

Vv. 12—22, *Wisdom Instruction*: Appropriately, it is the Lamed verse, standing at the center of the Psalm, that contains the central thesis: the “fear/reverence” of YHWH (יראת) —mentioned previously in vv. 8, 10—is the essence of the teacher’s instruction. As noted previously, in the Wisdom literature the “fear of YHWH” is synonymous with wisdom. With the exhortation “Come, sons/children, listen to me” (לְכוּ־בָנִים שְׁמַעוּ־לִי v.12a), the speaker echoes the frequent exhortations given by the wisdom teachers in Proverbs (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1, 20; 5:1, 7; 6:1, 20; 7:1). Both the home, where both mothers and fathers provided practical wisdom teaching (Prov 1:8), and the formal wisdom schools connected with the temple and royal court, served as the main conduits of wisdom teaching in ancient Israel (Sir 51:23). The speaker declares that he will “teach” (אלמדכם, v. 12b) them the fear of YHWH. Verbally Psalm 34:12 and Proverbs 4:1 are remarkably similar, as the exhortation in Proverbs also contains the plural “hear” (שמעו) and “sons/children”

⁵⁶ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 175.

(בְּנִים); both texts emphasize the benefits of wise behavior (see Prov 4:6, 8–9) and instruction (Prov 4:11).

Verse 13 uses a rhetorical question to prepare for the description of the God-fearing righteous person. “Who is the person who delights in life, [and who] loves many days (יָמִים), so that he can experience goodness (לְרֵאוֹת טוֹב)?” By using an active participle, the psalmist describes loving “days”—representing daily life—as an ongoing activity. Uniquely, the speaker describes delighting in life, in contrast to the usual emphasis on delighting in God or Torah (1:2; 40:9; 73:25; 119:35); this description serves to unite the two concepts of delighting in God/Torah with loving life itself.⁵⁷ Love for God and enjoyment of life naturally go together, in contrast to any idea that piety and enjoyment of life are mutually exclusive. In vv. 14–15 the wisdom teacher provides a clear description of how to find true fulfillment and enjoyment in life. First, one must guard one’s “tongue” from evil and “lips” from speaking deceitfully (v. 14; see Ps 15:3; 24:4). This recalls the Decalogue’s prohibition against bearing false witness (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17), and frequently occurs in the Psalms (e.g., 5:10; 10:7; 12:3–5; 17:10; 22:8; 31:14; 36:2–5; 41:8; 55:21). “Tongue” and “lips,” lines A and B, respectively, synonymously emphasize the mouth as an organ of speech that can be used for good or evil; an active participle conveys that guarding (נָצַר) one’s speech is an ongoing duty in life.

Verse 15 exhorts the students to “turn from evil and do good” and to seek and pursue peace (שְׁלוֹם). Four times the word “good” (טוֹב) occurs in the psalm; here it stands in synonymous parallelism with “peace” to express two essential aspects of wise living. The expression in v. 15, “turn from evil” (סוּר מֵרָע) serves as an important wisdom marker, occurring ten times in Proverbs and Job and twice in the Psalter—here and in 37:27—to emphasize the importance of rejecting

⁵⁷ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 483.

wicked behavior.⁵⁸ In the wisdom poem of Job 28:28 the expression occurs as part of the climactic statement regarding wisdom: “Indeed, the fear of YHWH is wisdom, and turning from evil [is] understanding” (סור מרע בינה); here as in Job 28 both key wisdom themes of fearing YHWH and turning from evil occur together, providing evidence that such expressions were an important element of post-exilic wisdom instruction.⁵⁹ Verses 16 & 17 use anthropomorphic expressions to describe how God’s “eyes” and “ears” are upon the righteous to look upon them and hear their cries (v. 16), and the common expression “the face of YHWH” (Pss 4:7; 13:2; 30:8’ 31:17; 67:1), usually a sign of favor, in v. 17 serves as an imprecation against the wicked: “The face of YHWH is against those doing evil (פני יהוה בעשי רע).” I suggest that the word “face,” as used here, holds dual meanings of favor for the righteous and anger at the wicked; God’s “eyes” upon the righteous in v. 16 imply God’s “face,” while in v. 17 that divine “face” looks angrily upon the wicked. This angry divine gaze results in the cutting off (לדבריה) of all remembrance (זכרם) of the wicked. Cutting off remembrance means any legacy of the wicked will disappear and, therefore, probably alludes to Sheol, the underworld prison of the dead in ancient Israelite thought.⁶⁰ In contrast to the activity of the צדק, who bring order to society, the evildoers cause disorder which requires their removal from the community and the loss of any hint of immortality through the dissolution of their memory.⁶¹

Without specifying the righteous, in v. 18 the speaker mentions that “they cry (צעקו) and YHWH hears and delivers them (הצילם) from all their troubles”; presumably, “they” refers to the righteous, though the transition from the wicked in the previous verse is somewhat awkward. YHWH is near (קרוב) to the brokenhearted (נשברי לב) and saves those whose spirit is “crushed” (דכא),

⁵⁸ Avi Hurvitz, “Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of ‘Wisdom Psalms’” *V/T* 38/1 (1988), 47–49.

⁵⁹ This is my translation of Job 28:28. If as I propose Ps 34 derives from a later, post-exilic context, it is plausible that the scribes who composed the psalm were familiar with Job and influenced by its use of “fear of the Lord” and “turn from evil.”

⁶⁰ My translations of verse 16 and 17; though the word “Sheol” is not used here, the concept of Sheol includes being cut off from God and forever consigned to the dark underworld—a most terrifying thought for a pious Jew (e.g., Pss 30:4; 88:4).

⁶¹ Leo J. Purdue, *Wisdom & Cult* (SBLDS 30; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 279.

v. 19). “Heart” and “spirit” represent the mind and life force, respectively, both of which receive divine care and protection. The righteous (צדיק) suffer many trials, but YHWH “delivers him from all of them” (יציילנו; v. 20). Verses 18–20 form an inclusion to highlight God’s deliverance of the righteous by using the construction “from all” (מכלם; מכלל) and the verb “to deliver” (נצל) in vv. 18 and 20. God protects (שמר) the bones of the righteous—none of which shall be broken (לא נשברה; v. 21). This apparent allusion to the Passover regulation in Exodus 12:46 reinforces how much God values and cares for the righteous. Repetition of words for breaking (שבר) and “crush” (דכא) in the preceding verses may derive from a context of persecution or suffering, possibly the experience of foreign domination in the post-exilic period. The final verses parallel Psalm 1 in emphasizing the death and condemnation of the wicked (אשם, v. 22) in contrast to the redemption (פודה) of the righteous, who will not suffer condemnation (לא יאשמו, v. 23). Cumulatively, Psalm 34 combines elements of thanksgiving with wisdom instruction; wisdom elements dominate the structure of the psalm, which is why I classify it as primarily a wisdom psalm.

Psalm 36: Hope in God’s Covenant Love Framed by Wisdom Teaching

Framed by its beginning (vv. 2–5) and concluding (vv. 11–13) sections of wisdom teaching, Psalm 36 celebrates the promise of God’s covenant love (vv. 6–10), which is metaphorically located in the heavens (v. 6), the mountains and “deeps” (v. 7a); this covenant love provides salvation for humans and beasts (v. 7b), refuge, nourishment, and life (vv. 9–10). God’s covenant love is expressed by the keywords חסד (steadfast love) and אמונה (faithfulness)—recalling the renewal at Sinai and YHWH’s self-definition (Exod 34:6)—with צדקה (righteousness) and משפט (justice). The wisdom sections contrast the respective fates of the wicked (רשע, vv. 2, 12), and the righteous who “know” God (לידעיה) and are “upright of heart/mind” (ישרי לב, v. 11). In typical “orientation” wisdom teaching, the wicked or “evildoers” will perish (נפלו פעלי און, v. 12, “the workers of

iniquity will fall”), while the righteous enjoy the blessings of God’s covenant love, symbolized by a rich banquet of food and drink in God’s “house” (Temple) and the fountain of life and light (vv. 9–10). Psalm 36 offers a powerful contrast: the “upright of heart”—those who live by Torah—receive the blessings and promise of God’s covenant love, described in rich metaphors of heavens, mountains, depths, a sacred banquet, and the fountain of life. On the other hand, the wicked engage in deception and iniquity, fail to reverence God and cause harm; they will ultimately be destroyed.

By emphasizing the blessings received by the righteous in God’s “house” (בֵּיתֶךָ, v. 9), and the disorder and destruction of the wicked who “cease to be wise and do good” (חָדַל לְהַשְׂכִּיל, v. 4), Psalm 36 reveals its likely origins within wisdom schools associated with the Temple cult, where it may have been used to teach retribution theology and the virtues of obedience to Torah.

The poem is framed by an inclusion based on the initial description of the wicked in v. 2 with their ultimate destruction in v. 13. The structure of the Psalm 36 parallels Psalm 1 but in reverse, as the speaker begins with a meditation on the wicked and then reflects upon the righteous in terms of God’s covenant accrued to them, then concludes, as in Psalm 1, with the destruction of the wicked.⁶²

Vv. 2–5: Initially, the poem describes “An oracle on transgression of the wicked, deep within my heart” (נִאֻם־פֶּשַׁע לְרָשָׁע בְּקֶרֶב לִבִּי); reading here the *Ketib*, the psalmist ponders in the depths of his heart/mind the problem of rebellious behavior by the wicked.⁶³ פֶּשַׁע often refers to breaking the covenant or political revolt, and here stands in stark contrast to חֶסֶד, the keyword for

⁶² Craigie recognizes vv. 2–5 as wisdom poetry, vv. 6–10 as a “hymnic” depiction of God’s חֶסֶד towards humankind, and vv. 11–13 as “principally prayer.” The variety of genres present in Ps 36 lead to the astute conclusion that the psalm is a “literary and devotional composition” in which the psalmist blends genres to achieve his purpose; this creative blending sets the background of the psalm “in the wisdom tradition” (*Psalms 1—50*, 290–91).

⁶³ Many translations emend “my heart” to “his heart” and thus describe the transgression as planned deep within the mind of the wicked one. See, for example, RSV, NAB, Craigie uses this emendation and separates אָנֹכִי, “Oracle,” as a title, “An Oracle. Transgression belongs to the wicked person” (*Psalms 1—50*, 289).

covenant fidelity.⁶⁴ This initial description of the wicked mentions other body parts: the wicked have “no fear of God before their *eyes*” (v. 2b), flatter themselves before their *eyes* (v.3), and the words of their *mouth* are iniquity and deceit (דְּבַר־פִּיָּו אֹן וּמַרְמָה v.4); both inwardly, in their thoughts and plans, and in speaking, they promulgate evil. These evildoers “cease to be wise, to do good things” (חָדַל לְהַשְׂכִּיל לְהַיְטִיב), v. 4b); they directly oppose wisdom. The verbs שָׁכַל, a key wisdom term, and יָטַב, represent the actions of a wise person who fears YHWH and lives by Torah. The psalmist uses negatives—these wicked ones specifically *do not* act wisely or do well—to exhort and teach wisdom. Furthermore, these evildoers specifically plot evil (אֹן יַחֲשֶׁב) “upon their beds,” i.e., in private within their homes. They “stand in a way that is not good” (יִתְצַב עַל־דֶּרֶךְ לְאִטּוֹב)—i.e., they deliberately reject Torah, while “he never rejects evil” (v. 5; the singular represents evildoers in general). By describing the wicked as plotting and executing evil acts, both privately (on his bed) and publicly (in the way) the psalmist implies a direct contrast to the Torah-observant Israelites who live by the *Shema* (Deut 6:4–7), and embrace the commandments in their hearts, discuss and teach them in the home, “on the way” in public, and when laying down upon their beds and upon rising.⁶⁵

Lacking fear and having deceptive vision, the wicked described here contrast with the righteous, who receive a vision of light (“in your light *we see* light”; v. 10). The speaker prays that the “feet of the arrogant” (רַגְלֵי גֹאֲוֹן) and “hand of the wicked” (יַד־רָשָׁעִים), representing their evil activities in daily life, be neutralized from coming upon (אֶל־תְּבוֹאָנִי, “may it not come upon me”) and oppressing (אֶל־תִּדְּנֵנִי “may it not oppress me”) the righteous (v. 12).⁶⁶ Could this sobering

⁶⁴ John S. Kselman, S.S., “Psalm 36” in *Wisdom You are my Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (CBQMS 29; ed. Michael L. Barré; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997), 7. Kselman also views the psalm within the wisdom tradition but postulates a Northern provenance between the 10th and 8th centuries B.C.E.; he also emends “my heart” to “his heart” in his translation (3, 5, 7).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁶ While noting the use of body parts to convey these contrasts, Kselman also sees a chiasmic structure connecting vv. 5 and 12: the description of the wicked who plot malice upon their beds and act in a way “that is not good” (v.5), correspond to the foot of the arrogant and their inability to rise after falling (v. 12); the

description of the evildoers arise from the experience of oppression among post-exilic Israelites, living under foreign domination?⁶⁷ I suggest this is the case, with the psalm serving as a tool to teach proper behavior in daily life under such circumstances. This prepares for the sharp contrast in the next section which describes the blessings to be accrued to the righteous.

Vv. 6—10: Covenant Love: A sharp transition occurs in this section as the psalmist moves directly from meditating on the wicked to a description of the blessings of God’s covenant love.

Verse 6 takes two key attributes of YHWH’s self-description, steadfast love (חסד, Exod 34:6; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8) and faithfulness (אמונה, Ps 89:3, 6, 9), and places them in the “heavens” (השמים) and “skies” (שחקים). This metaphor highlights how God’s covenant love transcends boundaries or limits:⁶⁷ Divine love forms an unbreakable, permanent bond (Ps 89:34–35). Extending this metaphor to the other divine attributes of “righteousness” and “justice,” in v. 7 the speaker places them respectively in the “mountains of God” (בהרריאל) and the “great deep” (תהום רבה); the mountains represent might, permanence and a place of revelation, while the deep represents either the oceans or the depths of the earth. Collectively, these two verses show how in Ancient Israelite cosmology, each level of the three-tiered cosmos—the heavens as the highest level, the mountains representing the earthly, and the deep representing the lowest level—come under the influence of YHWH’s steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness and justice.⁶⁸ Divine love encompasses humans and beasts (ובהמה), as YHWH saves them both (תושיע יהוה; v. 7b).

By using creation metaphors of heavens, skies, mountains, great deeps, and beasts, the psalmist draws on aspects of observation and experience to convey and teach YHWH’s divine goodness and power. Such use of experiential observation and creation metaphors reflects the work

reference to the bed and an inability to rise represent, for him, an allusion to the *law of talion* in that the wicked plotting on their beds will “fall” into the underworld (Sheol) and never be able to rise up (“Psalm 36,” 5).

⁶⁷ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 292.

⁶⁸ Kselman, “Psalm 36,” 9–10.

of wisdom teachers operating within the wisdom tradition (e.g., Job 38–41; Prov 8; Pss 8; 19; 33; 104; 148; Sir 24; 39:12–35; 42:15–43:35).⁶⁹

In vv. 8 and 9 the reception of YHWH’s covenant love is associated with something precious, a shelter, a rich banquet (Ps 63:6), and drinking from a sacred stream—all metaphors used elsewhere to emphasize the mediation of divine blessing. Examples of sacred meals include the covenant meal in Exod 24:9–11, the divine banquet in Isa 25:6, and the *Todah* in Ps 116:12–19. The adjective “precious” (קִיָּוֶה), used here by the psalmist to describe covenant love (רַחֲמֵי יְהוָה), also occurs in Pss 72:14 (verbal form) and 116:15 to emphasize how YHWH deems humans precious; its use in the Psalms accurately conveys the depth of covenant love between the two parties, humans and God, who hold each other as sacred. The verb “take refuge” (סָתַר) and phrase “shelter of your wings” (בְּצֵל כַּנְפֵיךָ) occur several times in the psalms in reference to the Temple: e.g., Pss 17:8, with the verb סָתַר, “hide”; 57:2; and 61:5, with the noun “shelter,” סֹתֵר, instead of shadow. “Your wings” may refer to the Cherubim within the sanctuary or serve as a metaphor for YHWH’s care modeled on the ancient Near Eastern concept of the deity having outstretched wings on the solar disk (see Ps 84:12).⁷⁰

Similar adaptation of ANE depictions of the Sun god and other astral deities to God occurs in Pss 8, 19 and 148; the Israelite poets adapt these ANE wisdom traditions as a polemic against pagan deities by emphasizing how the sun and other elements of creation are subordinate to, and created by, YHWH.⁷¹ Dahood views vv. 8–10 as reflective of Canaanite terminology used in Ugaritic

⁶⁹ In support of this I cite Kselman, who also sees in 7b and allusion to the Priestly creation story where God creates beasts and humans on the sixth day (Gen 1:24–27), using the same terms אָדָם and בְּהֵמָה, respectively; he states: “The allusion may be significant, given the wisdom cast of Psalm 36, and the often documented connection between wisdom and creation” (“Psalm 36,” 10).

⁷⁰ Kselman, “Psalm 36,” 11.

⁷¹ For a detailed exposition on the adaptation of ANE materials as a polemic against pagan deities, see Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1993), especially chapters 2 (Ps 8), 3 (Ps 19), and 8 (Ps 93); on the ANE background to Ps 148 see Delbert R. Hillers, “A Study of Psalm 148” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 323–334.

texts that describe how Baal bestows eternal life on select individuals by inviting them to a sacred banquet of food and drink.⁷²

Describing the guests as “sated with the richness of your house” (‘ריוֹן מִדֶּשֶׁן בֵּיתְךָ, v. 9a), the psalmist reveals an extraordinarily rich feast with messianic implications; a similar description occurs in Ps 65:5, in which the speaker prays that they (worshippers) be “sated” with the good things of your house (בֵּיתְךָ), and “your holy temple” (קֹדֶשׁ הַיְכָלְךָ). The banquet imagery includes drinking: “and from the stream of your delights you cause them to drink” (תִּשְׁקֶם וְנָחַל עַד־נִיחַ); this recalls Genesis 2:10 where the river flowing from “Eden”—עֵדֶן, the same root as “delight” in Ps 36:9—provides water for the garden and earth.⁷³ In Psalm 65 the psalmist enters the temple to praise God for forgiveness (vv. 2–5), recounts God’s bounty and works in creation (vv. 6–9), and prays for rain and a rich harvest (vv. 10–14). Then he prays for water that will fructify the earth and adds banquet imagery (65:10–13). Some scholars associate Psalm 65 with the feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), which marks the conclusion of the summer harvest and start of the rainy season.⁷⁴ Psalm 65 most likely predates Psalm 36.⁷⁵ I propose that in a later, post-exilic context, the wisdom teacher who authored of Psalm 36 knew of the banquet imagery in Psalm 65 and utilized it to teach that righteous people who avoid evil and direct their lives according to Torah (Ps 1) receive divine love and blessings.

Verse 10a, “With you [YHWH] is the fountain of life” (מִקְוֵה חַיִּים), parallels Prov 13:14, “the Torah of the wise is a fountain of life” (תּוֹרַת חֲכָמִים מִקְוֵה חַיִּים); since the “Torah of the wise” comes from YHWH, both Ps 36:10 and Prov 13:14 emphasize, as in Pss 1, 19b, and 119, the life-giving nature of Torah as a guide for life. Though some (Dahood) interpret this as a reference to

⁷² *Psalms 1–50*, 221–22.

⁷³ Kselman, “Psalm 36,” 12.

⁷⁴ The application to Tabernacles is advanced by John S. Kselman and Michael L. Barré, “Psalms.” (*NJBC*; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 536, and Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, “Psalms” in *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 1351.

⁷⁵ The earlier edition of Abraham Cohen’s commentary on the psalms posits a date in the period of Hezekiah and sees affinities between Pss 65 and 46 (*Psalms*, Soncino Books of the Bible [ed. A. Cohen; London: Soncino, 1945], 201).

the afterlife, the context of Psalm 36 and Proverbs most probably predates a belief in the resurrection, which derives from the Maccabean era (see Dan 12:1–3).⁷⁶ Proverbs 10:11 provides another parallel between the wisdom traditions and Psalm 36: “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life” (מקור חיים פי צדיק), while “the mouth of the wicked (רשעים) conceals violence”; both texts contrast the righteous vs. the wicked, an important wisdom marker. The parallel with Proverbs here provides further evidence of the source and context of Psalm 36 within the wisdom tradition. “In your light (באורך) we see light” (v. 10b) draws upon the tradition of the “light” (אור) of God’s face as a metaphor for divine presence and blessing in life (e.g., Pss 4:7; 44:4; 89:16).

Vv. 11–13, Conclusion: The conclusion consists of a wisdom-oriented plea praying for the extension of God’s steadfast love to those who “know you” (משך חסדך לי ידעך) and God’s righteousness to the “upright of heart” (וצדקתך לי שרילב), v. 11); each synonymous line includes a term for God’s covenant love and a term describing the righteous. The wise who have knowledge of God and live according to Torah receive divine blessing. The wisdom-oriented nature of the expression in v. 11 is seen in the parallel use of the phrase “to those who know you” in Eccl 9:11, where the sage notes that even the wise (לחכמים) and perceptive (לנבנים) are destined to death. The term “upright” (שר) occurs frequently in wisdom literature (Prov 2:21; 3:32; 11:3); by combining these terms in the prayer for covenant love, the psalmist associates divine blessing with wisdom.⁷⁷ In contrast, v. 12 prays for protection from the “foot of the arrogant” (רגל גאורח), and that the “hand of the wicked”—the hand being a symbol of power—not “drive me away.” Foot and hand serve as metaphors for the power and oppression of the wicked, and parallel the earlier

⁷⁶ Dahood, *Psalms 1—50*, 222; Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 292 disagrees with Dahood’s application of Ugaritic texts to this verse. The references to “eternal life” in those cited by Dahood (*UT 2 Aqht* [CTA 17], vi. 27–31) refer to the gods; humans, however, are considered mortal in these texts.

⁷⁷ Kselman, “Psalm 36,” 13; he also notes that, combined with the three-fold use of חסד, “the covenantal sense of the verb ‘know’ (the mutual acknowledgment and recognition of suzerain and vassal) may be hinted at here.”

mention of the eyes and feet to describe the wicked (vv. 2–4). Collectively, the use of body parts to describe the wicked form a chiasm which emphasizes the depth of their evil. Kselman notes the term **נאוף** also occurs frequently in the wisdom literature (Prov 8:13; 14:3; 16:18; 29:23; Job 35:12) as a synonym for the wicked.⁷⁸ Verse 12 forms an inclusion with v. 2 by focusing on the wicked, but with a dramatic turn: whereas in v. 2 the wicked had “no fear of God” (**אין־פחד**) before their eyes, in the conclusion “the workers of iniquity fall” (**נפלו פעלי און**), are “thrust down” (**דחן**) and are unable to rise again (**קום ולא־יכלו**).

Psalm 36 concludes by asserting the blessings of covenant love for the righteous and the certain destruction of the wicked. While Psalm 36 recognizes the deceptive power of the wicked, the psalmist responds with hope in God’s covenant love and the traditional retribution theology of Psalm 1 that the wicked will be punished while the just will prosper. At this point in the Psalter, however, we have moved beyond the simplistic, idealized worldview of Psalm 1 to one that upholds wisdom in tandem with lament. This reflects the experience of exilic and post-exilic Israel, in which foreign domination required an honest reevaluation of the ideals set forth in Psalms 1 and 2.

Psalm 37: an Acrostic Poem of Traditional Retribution Theology

Psalm 37 addresses the question of theodicy—why does a just and loving God allow the suffering of the righteous—by asserting the validity of the traditional retribution theology. The righteous ones who live according to Torah (37:31) will ultimately prosper while the wicked, despite temporary dominance and prosperity, will perish (v. 38). Psalm 37 accords well with the orientation of Psalm 1: both psalms uphold a neatly ordered worldview in which fairness prevails and God acts according to the covenant promises.⁷⁹ With its neat and comprehensive acrostic structure, wisdom

⁷⁸ “Psalm 36,” 13; note that RSV, NAB, and NJPS amend Prov 14:3 as “back” (**גוף**); see *BHS* critical note a on 14:3).

⁷⁹ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1984), 42, thus classifies Psalm 37 as a psalm of “orientation” in his three-fold interpretive schema of “orientation, disorientation, and new orientation,” as it presents a “reliable” and “exceedingly well ordered worldview” in which the righteous are blessed—exemplified through the metaphor of inheriting the land—while the wicked are “cut off” and perish.

keywords and themes, Psalm 37 “is the most obviously sapiential of all the psalms,” with a strong resemblance to Proverbs.⁸⁰ The main theme of the psalm involves inheriting or being cut off from the land: the land (אֶרֶץ) serves as a metaphor for divine blessing and, perhaps in later contexts, as a symbol for eternal life. The righteous will inherit the land (יִרְשׁוּ-אֶרֶץ, vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, and 34 [לְרֶשֶׁת אֶרֶץ]), abide forever (v. 27) and receive salvation and deliverance (vv. 39–40), by avoiding vexation and anger over the temporal prosperity of the wicked (vv. 1, 8), trusting in God with loyalty and patience, turning from evil and doing good (vv. 2–7, 27 [סֹר מִרָע]), and keeping Torah within one’s heart/mind (תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהִים בְּלִבּוֹ, v. 31).

Verses 8-9 form a summary or “thesis statement” of the Psalm: “Desist from anger, abandon wrath; do not be indignant for it leads to evil (v. 8). For the evildoers will be cut off (יִכְרְתוּן); but those who wait (וְקִוּוּ) for the Lord, they will inherit the land” (יִרְשׁוּ-אֶרֶץ; v. 9). Brueggemann notes the unique and important word pair, יָרַשׁ (“to inherit” vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34) and כָּרַת (“to cut off” vv. 9, 22, 28, 34, 38), which refer to “the world of large land conquest” and “cultic or military defeat.” By juxtaposing these terms, the psalmist presents possession of land as either a threat or possibility: the righteous who act morally within the community receive land as a blessing from YHWH, whereas those who act disruptively are excommunicated. Interestingly, each use of כָּרַת is passive (niphāl), while יָרַשׁ is an active verb; this creates the sense that wickedness results in land loss, while land acquisition is a positive, active result of faithfulness.⁸¹ Though use of the acrostic imposes rigidity on the structure of the psalm, Clifford observes four distinct divisions, which I follow here: vv. 1–11 (exhortation to avoid becoming indignant over the wicked and to trust in YHWH); vv. 12–20 (The Lord defends the righteous from the wicked); vv. 21–26 (contrast between the dishonest wicked who will be cut off and the generosity of the righteous, who will be blessed);

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 237–39.

and vv. 27–40 (wisdom exhortation to turn away from evil, trust in YHWH and do good, embrace Torah, and thus receive deliverance and salvation).⁸²

Vv. 1—11 (aleph—van): The opening (א) verses begin by exhorting the righteous to avoid indignation (אל-תתחזר, vv. 1, 7, 8) and jealousy (אל-תקנא, v. 1) over the actions and apparent power of the wicked by using two nature similes: like grass (כי כחציר) they will quickly wither (מהרה ימלו), and like the fresh herb fade away (וכירק דשא יבולו). The image of grasses quickly fading under the hot Palestinian sun serves as an apt and common metaphor for the transitory nature of life, in this case for the evildoers (Pss 90:5-6; 102:12; 103:15-16; 129:6; Job 14:2; Isa 40:7). The use of active participles to describe the actions of the wicked in this section (מרעים, vv. 1, 9; עשה, vv. 1, 7c) reveal the ongoing nature of their activity. These participles contrast with the imperatives given to the righteous to “trust” (בטח, vv. 3, 5) in YHWH, “dwell in the land and feed on faithfulness” (שבן-ארץ ורעה אמונה, v. 3), “delight” (התענג, v. 4) in YHWH, “commit” (גול, v. 5) to YHWH, “be still” (דום) before YHWH and “wait” (והתחולל, v. 7) for him.

In addition to the imperatives to avoid indignation and jealousy, these verbs lend a rather desperate tone to the instruction, which may be a response to deeply felt anger and jealousy by the faithful as they endure suffering and question whether the covenant promises hold true (Pss 49, 73). The imperative to dwell in the land and “feed” on faithfulness assures the righteous that order will prevail; “feed on faithfulness” serves as an exhortation to steadfastly trust in YHWH’s covenant love (Pss 86:15; 92:3). The rewards for avoiding anger and trusting in God are clear: the righteous will “inherit the land” (vv. 9, 11), YHWH will give “the desires of your heart” (משאלת לבך, v. 4), he will “bring forth” (והוציא) their righteousness and justice “like light” (כאור) and “the noonday sun” (כצהריום, v. 6). The assurance that the righteous will receive their heart’s desire occurs also in

⁸² Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 188–93.

Proverbs 10:24, which also proclaims that the wicked will fall by their own plots; the assurance that the righteous will shine and be “like noon” occurs in Job 11:15–19, a speech in which Zophar addresses Job’s lament with traditional wisdom theology. Vindication, represented by righteousness and justice (צדק וּמִשְׁפָּט), may be temporarily obscured as if behind a cloud which, when it moves, brings forth bright sunlight.⁸³ They will delight in “abundant wellbeing” (רַב שְׁלוֹם v.11)—an assurance proclaimed in Ps 119:165 for those who love Torah. Land and wellbeing/peace constitute two important aspects of the covenant promises (Gen 15:15; Pss 29:11; 72:7). Meanwhile the wicked will be “cut off” and disappear (וְהִתְבּוֹנַנְתָּ עַל־מְקוֹמוֹ וְאֵינְנוּ), “and you will look upon his place and it is no more,” v. 10); in other words, they will cease to be a threat or even exist.

Vv. 12—20 (Zain—Kaph): After describing the destinies of the righteous and the wicked in the first section, this section describes the attacks of the wicked upon the righteous and YHWH’s response. Though the wicked “plot” (זַמַּם) against the righteous and “gnash their teeth”—symbolizing their hatred and anger (חָרַק, v. 12)—YHWH “laughs” (יִשְׁחַק־לֵו) at them, for their “day,” the Day of Judgment and punishment, is coming (v. 13).⁸⁴ The image of YHWH laughing at the wicked recalls Ps 2:4, where YHWH “laughs” at oppressive kings and upholds his chosen one.⁸⁵ Using military and hunting imagery, the wicked are depicted as drawing their swords and preparing their bows to cause the “poor and needy” to fall (הַפִּיל), and “to slay those way is upright” (vv.13–14). The ones whose way is upright (יִשְׂרָיִ־דָּרַךְ) refers to those who live by Torah (Pss 1; 119:1, 3, 5, 9, 14-15).

Because the “poor and needy” are vulnerable before the vicious hatred of the wicked, YHWH acts as a warrior against the wicked: he causes their swords to enter their own hearts, and breaks (תִּשְׁבַּרְנָה) both their bows and their arms—symbols of oppressive power (vv. 15-17). Since

⁸³ Cohen, *Psalms* (1945), 111.

⁸⁴ The gnashing of teeth and laughter are powerful metaphors of the means by which the wicked prosper: “very often their prosperity seemed to emerge directly from their oppression of the faithful and innocent” (Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 298).

⁸⁵ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 189.

“hearts” (לִבָּם) in Hebrew refers to the intellectual faculty, or “mind,” the image of swords entering the hearts of the wicked serves as a metaphor for the failure of their evil plans; the very plans hatched against the righteous, represented by “swords,” will inevitably backfire and destroy the wicked.⁸⁶ The powerful metaphors of hunting and battle convey both the pain caused by the wicked and YHWH’s fierce defense of the righteous. Using antithetic parallelism, in v. 17 the poet effectively contrasts the diametrically opposing behaviors and fates of the righteous and the wicked: the arms of the wicked *will be broken* (הִשְׁבַּרְנָה) while YHWH continues to uphold (סִוְמַךְ, v. 17b) the righteous. By using the future tense of the verb “to break” twice in reference to the oppressive power and activity of the wicked (vv. 15, 17), the poet expresses assurance of imminent divine justice; use of active participles (“upholds” v. 17; “knows,” יָדַע; v. 18) conveys the ongoing nature of YHWH’s actions towards the righteous.⁸⁷ The righteous receive protection from shame and famine (v. 19); in contrast to the “day” of judgment upon the wicked, YHWH “knows” the days of the blameless (תַּמִּימִם), who shall receive an eternal heritage (וְנַחֲלָתָם לְעוֹלָם, v. 18). Then as now, famine was a threat for those who lived off the land and were dependent upon weather and security for adequate food supplies. The promise of being satisfied in the midst of famine (שָׂבַעוּ) is related directly to the promise of land; the inheritance of land includes assurance of fruitful produce. Verse 16 uses the preposition בְּ to form a “better” saying that contrasts the greater value of being righteous and poor than wealthy and wicked (מִדָּוָן/טוֹב)—a theme found also in wisdom Psalms 49 and 73, and closely paralleled in Prov 16:8 (see also 16:16, upholding the greater value of wisdom compared to gold).⁸⁸

⁸⁶ For heart as a reference to mental faculties, see *BDB*, 524–25; a good example of this usage is seen in Prov 7:3, “Bind them [the teacher’s words] upon your fingers; write them upon the *tablet of your mind* (לִבְךָ עַל־לִוּחַ).”

⁸⁷ In vv. 15 and 17, the nouns sword, bows, and arms precede the verbs “to enter” and “break” so as to emphasize these objects, which emphasizes how Yahweh will destroy the implements of oppression.

⁸⁸ Other examples of the “better” saying in wisdom literature include Prov 12:9; 15:16, 17; 17:1; 19:1, 22.

This section began with a description of the ongoing actions of the wicked against the righteous (v.12) but concludes with a confident assertion that the wicked shall perish (׳אֲבָדוּ, v.20; Ps 1:6). Using another plant metaphor, the wicked are likened to meadow grass that quickly burns in fire and vanishes like smoke (בָּלוּ בְעֶשֶׁן כָּלוּ, v. 20b; see Pss 1:4; 90:5; 102:5)—an effective image in the dry, hot climate of Palestine, where man-made or natural fires quickly consume vegetation.

Vv. 21—26 (Lamed—nun): Contrasting portraits of the wicked and righteous occur through the use of the verb לָוָה: the wicked borrow but fail to repay (לָוָה רָשָׁע וְלֹא יִשְׁלֵם, v. 21), while the righteous generously lend (מָלוּהוּ, v. 26). The verb חָנַן, “to be gracious,” is paired with לָוָה in both verses and heightens the contrast; the righteous “acts graciously and gives” (v. 21), and “acts graciously at all times” (כָּל־הַיּוֹם חוֹנֵן, v. 26), in contrast to the stinginess of the wicked. This contrast forms an inclusion with vv. 21 and 26 that frame the section by emphasizing the grace and generosity of the righteous, whose offspring receive blessing (v. 26). The wicked are cursed and cut off. The terms חָנַן and מָלוּהוּ also occur in Ps 112:5, an acrostic wisdom psalm that, like Psalm 37, contrasts the wicked and the righteous.

Between the framing of vv. 21 and 26, the psalmist describes the contrasting results which the righteous and wicked experienced based on their behaviors. Those “blessed” (מְבָרְכִיו, i.e., the righteous) will inherit the land, while those “cursed” (מִקְלָלָתוֹ the wicked; v. 22) will be cut off; blessing and cursing here recall the teaching of Deuteronomy, in which consequences are based directly on deeds (e.g., Deut 30:15–20). A “strong man’s steps” (מַצְעַד־יִגְבֵר)—figuratively representing movement through life for the righteous person—will be established by YHWH, “when he delights in his way” (דַּרְכּוֹ יִחְפֶּיץ, v. 23): living by Torah is the “way” of living that pleases God and results in divine guidance and order. The first strophe of verse 23 parallels exactly Prov 20:24a, which raises questions of whether one text borrows from the other or if they share a common source. The second strophe in Prov 2:24 also mentions “way” but as a question: “What can man

know about his way?” (וְאֵדָם מִהֵיבִין דְּרַכּוֹ) In both Psalm 37 and Proverbs, the implication is that the proper “way” of life is lived in accordance with Torah and under divine guidance.

Even when the righteous face the inevitable hardships in life and “fall,” they will not be cast down or away (כִּי־יִפֹּל לֹא־יֹטֵל, v. 24a), but YHWH “supports his hand” (יָדוֹ סוֹמֵךְ), an image conveying recovery and ongoing support (see Pss 49:15; 73:24, YHWH “receives” לִקַּח the righteous). In v. 25 the psalmist acknowledges, “now I am old” (גַּם־זָקֵנָה), which implies significant life experience and accords well with the expected status of a wisdom teacher who draws on a lifetime of observation and experience in addition to knowledge of Torah as sources for authoritative instruction. The teacher’s claim that in all his years he has never seen the righteous abandoned or “their children seeking bread” serves as testimony to the assurance and hope that ultimately God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked.⁸⁹ The word translated “children,” זָרְעוֹ (“his children”), in Hebrew refers both to plant seed and human offspring; it occurs also in v. 28 in reference to the children of the wicked who will be cut off, in contrast to the well fed children of the righteous.

Vv. 27—40 (samek—tan): Imperatives to “turn from evil and do good things,” look to the Lord and keep his way, for God vindicates the righteous: The concluding section of the psalm is marked by three imperative statements of instruction for the righteous: they must “Turn from evil and do good” (סוּר מֵרָע, v. 27; Ps 34:15; Job 28:28), “wait for YHWH and keep his way” (וּשְׁמַר דְּרַכּוֹ, v. 34), and finally, “Watch the blameless” (שְׁמַר־תָּם) and “observe the upright” (וּרְאֵה יֶשֶׁר, v.37). Each of these statements reflect themes from the wisdom literature, emphasizing turning from evil, discussed above in relation to Ps 34:15, following the “way” of God (Pss 1; 119), and upholding the upright and “blameless” behavior as a model for students to see and observe. Though the wicked spy

⁸⁹ This claim seems exaggerated in light of v. 14, in which the psalmist acknowledges that the wicked have successfully oppressed the righteous, and v. 23 where the righteous “fall”; the statement is therefore based on the psalmist’s firm belief that ultimately the promises of traditional wisdom theology will be fulfilled (the wicked will perish and the righteous will be vindicated).

(צופה) and seek (מבקש) to kill the righteous (v.31), YHWH will not abandon them to the power of the wicked (v. 32). Contrasts between the righteous and the wicked receive further emphasis by use of the verb בקש (to seek): while the children of the righteous *need not seek* bread (v. 25), the wicked *seek* to kill, but ultimately will be vanquished by God, and the psalmist *sought* but could not find him (ואבקשדו ולא נמצא), v. 36).⁹⁰ The psalmist uses the important word pair “blameless/upright” (תם; שר) to describe proper behavior—they should “mark” (שמר) the blameless and “observe” (וראה) the upright. This word pair is used to describe Job (1:1, 8; 2:2), occurs several times in Proverbs (2:7, 21, 29:10), and occurs in Ps 25:21.⁹¹

Those who abide by these imperatives receive assurance that they shall “inherit the land” (37:29, 34); the wicked, however, shall be cut off from having posterity (v. 28), land (v. 34), or a future (v. 38). Proverbs 2:21–22 similarly states that the “upright shall dwell on the earth” and the “blameless” remain there (תמימים יותרו בה), while the wicked and “treacherous” are “cut off from the earth” (יכרתו) and “rooted out” (יסחו). In contrast to the violent, dishonest wicked person, the peaceful person (לאששלום) will have a “future” (אחריות, vv.37–38). The use of “future”—in this context meaning “posterity”—in these verses parallel its use in Proverbs to describe the positive future for the righteous (Prov 23:18; 24:14) and lack thereof for the wicked (14:12; 16:25 with “death” מות; 20:21, “no blessing”; 24:20, “no future”).⁹² These imperatives restate the major themes of the psalm emphasized in the surrounding verses: the righteous inherit the land but the wicked will be cut off; the righteous’ speak wisdom (יהגה חכמה, v. 30), embraces Torah intellectually and morally (“within his heart” בלבו, v. 31), and receive

⁹⁰ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 92.

⁹¹ Brueggemann, *Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 240–41. As Brueggemann notes, in Job the word pair becomes a source of contention as it appears that both Job’s wife and God eventually disregard Job’s blamelessness (2:9; 22:3) which brings forth issue of *theodicy*—why the righteous suffer—as the major issue of the book until its conclusion. In Proverbs, with its “orientation” outlook, the word pair predictably occurs in contexts which promise the rewards for righteous behavior (God’s protection [2:7]; inheriting the land 2:21); and to contrast the righteous and the wicked [29:10], respectively).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 242.

protection, deliverance, and rescue from the Lord (vv. 33, 39–40). Psalm 37 combines in one poem most of the key elements of wisdom literature with a style that reflects knowledge of, and possibly borrowing from, Proverbs. It deals with the question of theodicy by confidently exhorting the righteous to remain steadfast in their commitment to Torah, despite the prosperity and persecution of the wicked, for in the end those who take refuge in God are rescued and saved.

Psalm 39: A wisdom-influenced reflection on the transitory nature of life

This individual lament psalm meditates in a very personal and intimate way on the transitory nature of life, reflected in the speaker’s increasing sorrow, disturbed thoughts, and internal turmoil (vv. 3-4). These reflections lead to the ultimate conclusion that life is “vapor,” (הַבֵּל; vv. 6, 7, 12). The thematic and linguistic aspects of this psalm, particularly the pessimistic reflection on the transitory nature of life and the use of הַבֵּל—translated as “vanity,” “vapor,” or “nothingness”—as a key word, place this poem within the traditions of Job, Ecclesiastes and also wisdom Psalm 90. Whybray in fact classifies it as a “pure wisdom psalm” based on these thematic similarities and observes wisdom vocabulary and a didactic purpose which “clearly classifies the psalm as a wisdom psalm.”⁹³ The opening verses of Ecclesiastes set forth a similar pessimistic reflection on the transitory nature of life and the ultimate uselessness of possessions and wealth in the face of certain death from this life—“all is vapor/nothingness” (הַכֹּל הַבֵּל, v. 1:2)—a theme which continues throughout the book.

The psalmist begins by recalling how he planned to “watch my ways” (אַשְׁמְרֵה דַרְכֵי) to avoid sinful speech and “muzzle” (אַשְׁמְרֵה לִפִּי מִחֶסֶם) his mouth in the presence of the wicked (רָשָׁע לִנְגֹדִי, v. 2). By recalling how carefully he avoided sinful speech while in the presence of the

⁹³ *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 63–64. Among the wisdom vocabulary he identifies the phrase “I will guard my way” (אַשְׁמְרֵה דַרְכֵי v.2) as paralleled in Prov 2:8; 16:17; “chastisement” (הוֹכַחַתָּהּ, v. 12) as “a rare word almost exclusive to Proverbs” and occurring also in Pss 38:15 and 73:14 and twice in Job; and “hope” (תּוֹחֵלֶתֶךָ, v. 8), a word occurring only six times in the OT, three of which are in Proverbs and one in Job. Further, the didactic nature of the psalmist’s warnings about the ephemeral nature of life reflects the wisdom tradition.

wicked, the psalmist sets the stage for the reflections that follow. Despite the psalmist's attempts to avoid anger that could lead to sinful speech by keeping silent, he experiences suffering and the absence of God, which leads turmoil and a pessimistic view of life.⁹⁴ In addition, the psalmist endures physical suffering (נגעך, “your punishment”; v. 11), guilt over sin and the resulting chastening (v. 12). Though YHWH is his “only hope” (תוֹחַלְתִּי, v. 8), he accuses him for deliberately causing suffering, using an accusatory tone reminiscent of Psalm 88. YHWH has caused his silence (*you have done it* עשית, v. 10), and the psalmist seeks an end to end the punishment. The psalmist perishes from YHWH's punishing blows (מִתְגַּרְתִּי יָדְךָ, “the blows of your hand” v. 11); the respective images of being silenced, punishment, and being beaten symbolize inner turmoil, physical pain, and the experience of divine wrath. Though the psalmist continues to pray to YHWH, he ultimately realizes life is transitory (v. 12) and concludes that peace will come when at last YHWH “looks away” and he will “depart to be no more” (v. 14). I divide the psalm as follows: vv. 2—4, internal reflection of the psalmist's turmoil; vv. 5—7, open reflection upon the ephemeral nature of life; vv. 8—9, central plea and confession of sin; vv. 10—14, final prayer and reflection upon the psalmist's situation in life and its imminent end.

The superscription attributes the poem to “Jeduthan” (לְיִדְיָתָן), a title found also in Pss 62:1 and 77:1 and most probably a reference to one of the court musicians identified in Chronicles, along with Asaph and Heman (1 Chron 9:16; 16:38, 41–42).⁹⁵ Like the speakers in Psalms 37, 49, and 73, the speaker here questions his or her suffering which, though unspecified (“your blows” נגעך v.11), may represent various types of persecution, illness, and fear; in this case the psalmist acknowledges sinning and seeks forgiveness (v. 9). Despite keeping silent and avoiding sin (vv. 2-3),

⁹⁴ Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 308.

⁹⁵ Of these examples, only 1 Chron 16:38 uses the spelling יִדְיָתָן, as in Ps 39:1; the others use the variant יְדִיָתָן which the MT critical apparatus suggests as a correction for 16:38. I view these titles as later additions reflective of their strands of scribal authorship and/or usage in both the temple cult and wisdom schools. The connections to Chronicles argue for the cultic use of Ps 39, which may also have served as “a private song of a literary, non-cultic nature” (Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 308.)

the speaker's "sorrow increased" (כִּאֲבִי נֶעְכַּר, v. 3), leading to deep internal strife, described metaphorically as a "smoldering heart" (חֶם־לֵב) and "musings" (הִגִּיגִי) like a burning fire (v. 4). By pairing "heart" with "hot," and "musings" with "burning," the psalmist reveals how despite the outer silence, internally he intensely scrutinizes and reflects upon life and its experiences. This leads the psalmist to break silence and lament openly that we have no knowledge of the length of our lives other than that we are frail and life is short (vv. 5-7; Eccl 9:12). In v. 5 the psalmist twice uses the verb "to know" (יָדַע), first with a hiphil imperative, "cause me to know (הוֹדִיעֵנִי) my end and the measure (מִדָּה) of my days," and then with a jussive, "let me know" (אֲדַעֲהוּ) how "forsaken I am" (חָדַל אֲנִי). Most modern translations (e.g., RSV; NRSV; NJPS) translate this verse as referring to the length of the psalmist's life; Clifford claims it refers to the length of the psalmist's affliction.⁹⁶ Since the psalm emphasizes the ephemeral, limited nature of life, both interpretations apply; the psalmist, in my view, views life itself as hopelessly afflicted and limited, and at best seeks a brief respite before its inevitable end (v. 14).

With symbolic images, the psalmist conveys the insignificance and limited nature of human existence—describing life as "handbreadths" (מִפְּחוּת) and "breath" (הֶבֶל), in which humans are like passing "shadows" (צֶלֶם). Similar imagery is used in other wisdom texts (see Pss 62:10; 73:20; 90:9-10; 144:4; Job 7:6, 16; 14:1, 5; Eccl 6:12). A "handbreadth" (1 Kgs 7:26; Jer 52:21), one of the smallest Hebrew measures, represents four fingers; used here it emphasizes the miniscule nature of human life before the eternity of God (as in Ps 90).⁹⁷ Therefore, our efforts to store up riches in this life ultimately are vanity (הֶבֶל, vv. 6-7). A shadow, which lacks solidity and quickly fades with the movement of clouds and changing angles of the sun, provides an apt metaphor for how quickly our finite, contingent human existence passes. The futility of storing up riches in the face of certain

⁹⁶ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 199; he cites ANE and biblical parallels (e.g., unspecified "Mesopotamian medical omens"; Ps 74:9; 2 Sam 24:13; Jer 25:11, 12; 29:10) as examples of the gods of God setting specific periods for affliction.

⁹⁷ On the handbreadth as a measure, see Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, 309. He notes how in this verse the handbreadth refers to an individual's lifespan, while "vapor" refers to all humanity.

death, when all such possessions will be lost, clearly parallels both Psalm 49 and Ecclesiastes (e.g., 49:11, 13; Eccl 3:18-23; 5:12-16; 6:1-6). An Egyptian inscription in the Tomb of *Petosiris* (end of the fourth century B.C.E.) offers thematic parallels to Ps 39:6–7 (and wisdom Pss 49:7–20; 73:20): “When a man perishes, his possessions also perish . . . He goes suddenly like a dream, and no one knows the day when he comes.”⁹⁸ Like the speaker in Psalm 49, the psalmist here begins with a personal reflection in which he or she sets out to understand the dilemma posed by the experience of theodicy; the psalmist comes to realize that the ephemeral nature of life makes the heaping up of riches and behavior of the wicked “vanity,” as ultimately God punishes evildoing and life in this world comes to an end.

Despite the plea to know the future, in v. 8 the psalmist ultimately places hope in YHWH asking, “and now YHWH, what do I trust in (מַה־קְּוִיתִי)? You are my hope (תּוֹחַלֵּתִי).” Ultimately, when confronted with the question of theodicy, the finite and temporal nature of life, and the unanswerable ultimate questions, the speaker submits to God in trust. Next the speaker acknowledges transgressions and seeks deliverance (מִכָּל־פְּשָׁעֵי הַצִּילֵנִי, v. 9), lest he or she become a “taunt of fools” (חֲרִפַּת נָבָל). In his desire to avoid being scorned by “fools,” the psalmist expresses an important theme of wisdom literature—the contrast between wise behavior and foolishness. In this case, should the psalmist’s malady remain it will appear as retributive punishment from God in which even the fools do sit in judgment upon the speaker. The key idea is *shame*, and in the cultural context illness and suffering were often looked upon as divine punishment (e.g., Job’s three friends).

In v. 10 the psalmist returns to silence following the brief outburst in v. 4. After reflecting on the futility of life and its concerns and seeking forgiveness for unspecified sins (vv. 6–9), the psalmist figuratively and literally loses his voice: “I became silent; I could not open my mouth; for

⁹⁸ Hellmut Brunner, “Egyptian Texts,” in *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. Walter Beyerlin; trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1978), 62–63; lines 4–5. Brunner also cites *The Teaching of Amenemope* (chapter 7, 9:10–19) as containing thematic similarities to Ps 39, as it instructs to “not set your heart on riches” as they are fleeting and our fate is beyond our control (54).

you [YHWH] did [this]” (נאל מתי ל א אפתח פי כי אתה עשית). YHWH is now directly accused of causing the suffering; this provokes a request for YHWH to remove the “plague” because the psalmist is consumed by the “strife” (תגרות) of YHWH’s hand (יד)—a symbol of divine power (v. 11). The word for “blows,” נגע, applies to physical punishment (a blow/slap) or illness, while “strife” connotes a context of anger and retribution; with the verb “to consume” (כלה), the context becomes divine punishment which threatens annihilation and death. The parallels with Job’s plight here are strong: divine punishment, in the form of a serious affliction, threatens death. Unlike Job, however, the psalmist readily acknowledges sinfulness and seeks forgiveness—perhaps in an act of desperate bargaining with God.

This leads to wisdom reflection with similarities to Ecclesiastes in v. 12, where the psalmist acknowledges divine retribution for sin, and the futility of our trust and value of material things: “you dissolve what we treasure as a moth.” In addition to Ecclesiastes, this recalls Psalm 49 and its presentation of the ultimate futility of material riches. The psalmist’s experience leads to the conclusion that humans are but a “breath” (הבל). When faced the reality of our finite, contingent nature, and inability to control our ultimate destiny, the psalmist realizes (as in Pss 37, 49, 73, 90), along with Job (7; 14) and Ecclesiastes (5:7–19), the futility and false hope of material riches, status and power. Wisdom leads us to submit to the reality of our finitude and trust in God rather than live under the allusions of false power, wealth and control.

Following this wisdom reflection, the psalmist prays that YHWH will hear and not be “silent” to his or her suffering but rather realize that, like those who have gone before, he or she, too, is a passing “sojourner” (גר; cf.. Ps 119:19). Like a non-native traveler lacking legal status and protection, the psalmist seeks YHWH’s guidance. Divine silence in the midst of suffering recalls the terror of the speaker of Psalm 88 who, in addition to feeling abandoned by God, fears being completely cut off from God in Sheol. Ending on a pessimistic note, the speaker asks YHWH to “turn away from me” (השע ממני)—a sharp contrast to the normal psalm prayer for God to “shine

your face upon me” (Ps 67:1) or “bend your ear” (Ps 86:1)—that he or she may have some happiness or a burst of joy (אֲבִל יָגֵד) before departing to be “no more” (אִי־נִי). This recalls Job questioning when God will “look away from me” (תִּשְׁעָה מִמֶּנִּי, Job 7:19), so that he may figuratively “swallow my spittle” in his anguish; later, in Job’s third reply he uses the verb in reference to humans in general as he reflects upon the ephemeral nature of human life: “Look away [הִשְׁעָה] from him that he may desist” (14:6). Similarly, this request from the psalmist arises through reflection and honest lament over the reality of his or her suffering and finitude, sinfulness, shame and fear. Nevertheless, throughout this experience of “disorientation” the psalmist keeps open the conversation with God and embraces wisdom teaching: our earthly existence and the things we consider wealth are ultimately “vapor, vanity, or breath” (הִבֵּל). In the end wisdom calls humans to submit to divine power.

While having the outward form of a lament, Psalm 39 exhibits themes and vocabulary consonant with the wisdom literature and provides an example of a psalm of “disorientation” used for didactic purposes, to instruct those who study and pray the psalm about the ephemeral nature of life, the vanity of pursuing riches, and God’s control over human destiny.

Wisdom Elements in Psalm 40

This poem combines a thanksgiving for deliverance from an unspecified distress (vv. 2–13) and a continuing lament and plea for help (vv. 14–18), which is celebrated within the congregation (vv. 3b, 9). Likened to the “pit of destruction” (בֹּרַר שְׂאוֹן) and a “miry bog” (v. 3a), the distress suffered by the psalmist appears life-threatening.⁹⁹ The initial thanksgiving preceding the lament and

⁹⁹ The image of “pit” and a miry bog (v.3) represents the speaker’s previous distress in terms representative of *Sheol*, the underworld prison of the dead—a dark, watery place where one is cut off from God and consigned after death and thus an object of great fear for the pious Israelite (see Ps 88:4-5, 12)—from which God has “brought up” (עָלָה) the speaker, thus rescuing him or her from irreversible gloom (Ps 30:4, הֲעֵלִית מִן־שְׂאוֹל נַפְשִׁי). This in turn evokes a response of thanksgiving, described as a “new song” (חֲדָשׁ שִׁיר, Pss 33:3; 96:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10), a joyful celebration of a new existence (“new orientation”) following a period of distress and fearful uncertainty (“disorientation”).

plea may reflect use of the “prophetic perfect,” in which the speaker confidently anticipates God’s forthcoming deliverance while still undergoing trials. Thematically, wisdom elements appear within the initial thanksgiving for deliverance with the **אשר** in v. 5 proclaiming “blessed/happy” the one who trusts in YHWH and avoids “proud” and deceitful behavior—similar to the contrast between the way of the just and the wicked in Psalm 1. Wisdom elements in v. 6 include the psalmist’s reflection upon YHWH’s “wonderful deeds and thoughts towards us” (**נפל אתיך ומחשבתך אל ינו**), which recalls YHWH’s historical actions in creation and history (e.g., Pss 33; 78).

Most significantly, in vv. 7–9, the psalmist expresses to YHWH his realization that having an “open ear” (**אזניים כרית ל**), literally “ears you have dug for me”) surpasses sacrificial offerings (v. 7); presumably, having an “open ear” metaphorically represents obediently listening to Torah. This reinterpretation of YHWH’s “desire” (**חפצת** vv. 7, 9) in terms of an “open ear” as more important and pleasing to YHWH than “meal offerings,” “holocausts,” or “sin offerings,” may be evidence of a later date when the temple cult had faded in importance and wisdom teaching, emphasizing the prominence of Torah, became more prominent.

Wisdom-oriented language occurs in v. 8 where the speaker proclaims that “in the scroll of the book it is written for me” (**במגל-ת-ספר כתוב עלי**), that to do YHWH’s will (**רצונך**) is his delight (**חפצת**, v. 9a). Reference to the “scroll” likely refers to a Torah scroll; the psalmist’s delight coincides with YHWH’s Word. This wisdom section culminates in v. 9b, where the psalmist proclaims “your torah is within my heart” (**ותורתך בתוך מע**), signifying his internalization of Torah. It seems plausible that in Psalm 40 a hymn combining thanksgiving with a lament-plea received later wisdom editing to emphasize the primacy of Torah in a post-exilic context. Whybray views verse 9 as an interpolation of Torah material which provides a “new meaning” or reinterpretation to the thanksgiving which precedes it in terms of “the gift of Torah.” He notes the resemblance of 40:9b to Psalms 1:2 and 37:31, and the otherwise smooth transition from the

proclamation of God's thoughts and deeds in v. 6 to speaking the "good news of deliverance" in v. 10, as evidence for the likelihood that vv. 7–9 constitute a later wisdom interpolation.¹⁰⁰

Reinterpretation of the cult occurs also in Psalms 50, 51:18–19, and Isaiah's critique of inauthentic worship (Isa 1.) In Psalm 40, the thanksgiving and lament-plea occur in the context of the psalmist's hope for, and expectation of, God's covenant promise of "steadfast love" (חסד), "faithfulness" (אמונה אמת), and "compassion" (רחם, vv. 11-12).¹⁰¹ This provides hope and confidence and enables the psalmist to remain steadfast in obedience to Torah. Though enduring some type of persecution and suffering, the psalmist maintains optimism, hope and even offers thanks and praise in light of the enduring power of YHWH's steadfast love and truth, which "continually preserve me" (v. 12; Pss 106:1; 118:1; 136:1). Trust in YHWH serves as the central point of the wisdom teaching in this psalm (יבטחו ביהוה, v. 4; יהוה מבטחו, v. 5), which parallels a central theme we observed in Psalm 37: those who "trust in YHWH" (בטח ביהוה, v. 3) will "dwell in the land."¹⁰²

Conclusion

While Psalms 34 and 37 embrace the problem of evil with confident wisdom instruction focused on the need to remain faithful and trust in YHWH who will ultimately vindicate the pious, Psalms 25 and 40 give the perspectives of those who have suffered and experience God's presence, power, and love in a way that brings that wisdom teaching to light. Psalm 26 presents a liturgical,

¹⁰⁰ Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, 47–48. Though many scholars view 40:1–13 and 14–18 as the combination of two separate psalms—noting the change from thanksgiving to lament, and also that 40:14–18 are reproduced in Ps 70—I agree with Craigie that Ps 40 should be viewed as a unity (*Psalms 1—50*, 314). Psalm 70 would therefore represent the work of later editors who used 40:14–18 as an addition to Book 2 to serve as a prelude to Psalm 71.

¹⁰¹ As noted previously, I see these references in the Psalms as direct allusions to the covenant formula given by YHWH to Moses in Exod 34:6–7 (and parallels). The psalmists often allude to these key terms when reminding YHWH of these promises during times of distress (as here and in other examples to be cited), or in describing God (e.g., Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8). Note the psalmist uses both "God" and "YHWH" as divine titles.

¹⁰² In addition to literally having land on which to live, grow crops and raise a family, also becomes a later metaphor for heaven or the new creation.

confident assertion of righteousness; Psalm 39 parallels Ecclesiastes sober reflection upon the transitory nature of human existence. In chapter 2, my examination of the *Maskeil* psalms shows that, in Book 1, the term occurs twice in wisdom contexts: psalm 32 (title) and 41:2 (an introductory wisdom statement). Book 1 began with Psalm 1, which as I proposed in chapter 3, forms part of an original framework for the structure of the Psalter bounded by psalms 1 and 119—and later 145. I have discussed evidence of wisdom editing of the Psalter in the use of *Maskeil* in psalm titles and a few places within psalm texts, and an earlier framework for the Psalter based on Torah psalms and acrostics. Now, with my analysis of wisdom elements in Book 1, I have discussed the inclusion of both complete wisdom psalms and wisdom editing of existing psalms. The wisdom material includes linguistic and thematic aspects. This carries forward into the remaining books of the Psalter; next we observe wisdom in Books 2 and 3, combined as such because the amount of specific wisdom material is more sparse in quantity—though two major wisdom psalms, 49 in Book 2 and 73 in Book 3, reveal the hand of wisdom editors in these books and, as we shall see in the case of Psalm 73, it provides a “wisdom center” for the entire Psalter.

Chapter Five: Wisdom in Book

Introduction: Besides the *Maškil* Psalms in Book 2, discussed earlier several key wisdom psalms and themes occur in Book 2 that reflect the editing and influence of wisdom teachers and editors in the final editing and composition of the Psalter. They provide further evidence of the importance of the Psalter as a source of both teaching and worship, which I contend are not mutually exclusive; the probable proximity of wisdom schools to the Temple, and liturgical elements within wisdom Psalms (Psalm 49:5, for example, mentions the harp כנור along with several key wisdom terms). I shall begin with an examination of Psalm 49, a Korah psalm, considered by the majority of scholars to be a wisdom psalm. This psalm deals with issues of wealth, oppression, and theodicy in a manner reminiscent of Ecclesiastes. Following this, Psalms 50 and 51, attributed to Asaph and David, respectively, contain strong wisdom elements. In addition to being a type of prophetic liturgy, Psalm 50 also exhibits the influence of wisdom traditions, while Psalm 51, primarily a lament, also contains a wisdom interpolation. An exposition of Psalm 62 will likewise reveal a strong wisdom shaping, both in vocabulary and themes. Finally, the conclusion of Psalm 64 reveals what I think may be wisdom interpolations by later editors. Both of these psalms are attributed to David; in Book 2, the Davidic king continues to play a prominent role as defending the righteous (see Ps 72:1–4).¹

In this chapter, I continue to observe the pervasive yet diverse influence of wisdom traditions in the shaping of the Psalter; the fact that psalms with (later) attribution to the guilds of Asaph and Korah, and to David all contain wisdom elements argues for the predominant role of wisdom teachers and editors in developing the Psalter. While I do not detect a specific strategy in the placement of these psalms 49, 50, 51, 62, and 64, it should be noted that Psalm 49 concludes a Korahite group, while Psalm 50 stands alone as an Asaph psalm before the regular Asaph collection

¹ Jerome F. D. Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2008), 64.

begins with Wisdom Psalm 73, which itself inaugurates Book 3. Further, Book 2 concludes with Psalm 72, a royal psalm attributed to Solomon, the traditional patron of Israel’s wisdom traditions. Book 2 concludes with a psalm attributed to the father of Israelite wisdom, while Book 3 begins with another wisdom Psalm—one that contains strong thematic affinities with Psalm 49.

Psalm 49: Wealth, Arrogance, and the Ultimate Meaning of Life

Psalm 49 belongs to the collection of *Korabite Psalms* (Pss 42–49; 84, 85, 87, 88), ascribed to the “Sons of Korah”; this superscription refers to a group of Levitical choristers (2 Chron 20:19) and its presence here attests to the liturgical use of wisdom psalms in worship.² Psalm 49 is a “wisdom psalm” containing affinities with the instructions found in Proverbs 1–9 and the reflections on wealth and the ephemeral nature of life in Ecclesiastes.³ Thematically, it parallels themes found in Psalms 37, 39, and 73, as it focuses on human mortality, the disparity between the prosperous wicked and suffering righteous; in particular, Psalm 49 addresses the issues of wealth. It begins with an imperative address to a universal audience of “all peoples” and the “world” (כָּל־אֲדָמָה), including both rich and poor, to “hear” and “give ear,” i.e., listen attentively to the wisdom teacher’s instruction (vv. 2–3).⁴ Speaking to a universal audience of all classes of people on the issues of wealth, arrogance,

² See my previous discussion of this guild in chapter 2, note 4. The relationship between temple singers and wisdom schools, as discussed by Mowinckel, and Purdue’s view that wisdom and cult are related (see chapter 1), supports this view. Erhard S. Gerstenberger observes parallels to the exhortative introduction of Psalm 49:1–5 in Psalm 78:1–4, Judges 5:3, Deut 32:1–3, Job 33:1–7, Hosea 5:1, Amos 8:4, and Jeremiah 5:21, and proposes a cultic context for the psalm in the exilic or post-exilic era, as attested by the sharp division between rich (dominating) and poor people typical of that period (*Psalms; Part I: with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* [FOTL XIV; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988], 203–204, 206). Psalm 49 provides an example of cultic, liturgical use—particularly in the mention of the harp (כַּנְנוּר) in v. 5 as a means by which the psalmist will convey the teaching—along with wisdom teaching; Gerstenberger suggests notes these liturgical elements and opines that the psalm originated in wisdom schools (204).

³ For examples of similar language and themes in Proverbs, see 1:5–19; 2:1–2; 3:13–35; 4:14–22; 5:1; 8:32–36; 9:10–12; in Ecclesiastes, see especially 3:16–22; 5:7–19; 8:10–13.

⁴ Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (ed., David W. Cotter; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 123.

and human mortality, the psalmist reveals his or her role as a wisdom teacher who addresses perennial human problems.⁵

Vocabulary in vv. 2–5 confirms the wisdom context: the psalmist will speak of “wisdom” (חכמה), offer a meditation (הגות) of understanding (תבונה) from the heart, a “proverb” (משל) and a “riddle” (תידה, vv. 4–5). In addressing the problem of those who boastfully trust in material wealth and oppress the poor, death will be the great equalizer, and ultimately only God has the power to redeem and save. The boastful rich live delusional lives of folly, while the poor who trust in God will be ransomed (פדה, vv.8, 16) and taken to safety (יקחני, v.16).⁶ Psalm 78 has a similar introduction: an imperative plea to “give ear” (האזינה, 78:1; 49:2), mention of the “mouth” as a conduit of wisdom speech (78:2; 49:4), from which come a “parable” and “riddles” (78:1–3).⁷

In addressing the disorientation caused by the arrogance of the wealthy, the faithful psalmist laments seemingly insurmountable, unfair situations in life and seeks answers from God; this enables the psalmist to move toward a new orientation based on wisdom that reveals the folly of trusting in wealth.⁸ By presenting death as the ultimate equalizer or source of justice—since the oppressive wealth and power of the rich will lose all meaning and power at death—the teaching in Psalm 49 provides hope. For this reason, perhaps, it is appointed for use “in the house of mourning” in the

⁵ Robert Alter, in observing the “universalist orientation” of Psalm 49, its instructive nature and wisdom vocabulary, claims: “there is no other poem in the collection (Book of Psalms) that has such pronounced Wisdom features.” *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 171.

⁶ Peter C. Craigie interprets “take” in this verse as referring to how having wisdom provides meaning and purpose to life and enables one to remain calm and confident in the face of inevitable death; in reference to the issue of an after life, he concludes that the psalm, “in keeping with the Psalter as a whole, has no explicit theology and hope of life after death . . .” (*Psalms 1—50* [WBC 19; 2d ed.; Thomas Nelson, 2004], 361).

⁷ In chapter 2 I examined Psalm 78 among the *Mas̄kil* psalms and classified it as a wisdom-historical psalm; it uses historical reflection and wisdom elements for didactic purposes.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of interpreting the psalms by the categories of “orientation, disorientation, and new orientation,” see Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

Jewish Prayer Book.⁹ Although stylistically and thematically different from Korah Psalms 46—48 that precede it, Psalm 49 fittingly brings this collection to a close by developing themes of the preceding psalms: God alone rules the world and controls human destiny.¹⁰

I see a relationship between Psalm 49 and the following Asaph Psalm 50, since both focus on instruction; while Psalm 49 follows more traditional wisdom patterns, Psalm 50 has elements of wisdom instruction—with God as the teacher. Richard J. Clifford notes the similarities between Proverbs 1–9 and Psalm 49 in that both focus on the “transaction” between a teacher and student; the teacher uses personal experience and tradition in a process that helps the student come to understand wisdom.¹¹ Riddles and a chiastic structure heighten the poetic value, and the Hebrew text offers a number of translation possibilities. I shall examine the structure and Hebrew text of the psalm while offering several proposals for translation that differ from the standard translations, here represented mainly by the Revised NAB psalms and the NRSV.¹²

Structural Analysis

I divide the Psalm into three sections: Verses 2–5 are an introductory exhortation by a wisdom teacher; vv. 6–13 provide wisdom teaching on the futility of trusting in wealth in the face of certain death—the reason why the wise person need not fear the temporary status of the rich. In vv. 14–21, with language reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, the wisdom instructor focuses on the vanity of wealth and the redemption of the just. Within and between these sections, however, are chiastic relationships and riddles, to be noted in the analysis below.

⁹ Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, *The Authorized Prayer Book: Hebrew Text, English Translation with Commentary and Notes* (Rev. ed.; New York: Bloch Publishing, 1963), 1088–1091.

¹⁰ Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1—72* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002), 238.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 238–39.

¹² The main source for chiastic structure in this paper is David J. Pleins, “Death and Endurance: Reassessing the Literary Structure and Theology of Psalm 49,” *JSOT* 69 (1996): 19–27; for the riddles, Leo G. Perdue, “The Riddles of Psalm 49,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 533–42.

Verses 2–5: Wisdom terminology used by the psalmist in this introductory section, along with the universal nature of the instruction, clearly identifies him as a wisdom teacher. The psalm begins with an introduction exhorting all peoples to “hear” (שמעו) and “give ear” (האזינו); these imperative verbs convey a sense of urgency. Speaking to residents of the temporal world (הדל), the psalmist addresses those “of lowly birth or high estate” together—literally, בני אדם, i.e., humans in general, and בני־איש, referring to people of higher social stature—as regardless of their worldly status, all are equally bound by the realities of life and death (v. 3a).¹³ This universal call is further emphasized in the second stitch, which speaks of “rich” (עשיר) and “poor” (אביון). The words for wisdom and understanding in v. 4, noted above, are both plural in form, which may emphasize the ongoing and extensive nature of this instruction. This moral teaching provides enlightenment that promises the bearer “redemption” (v. 16). Publicly the psalmist speaks wisdom (ידבר), while understanding is meditated upon within the heart/mind (והגות לב).¹⁴ The word הגות is in the construct; the psalmist’s meditation is “of my heart”—the seat of moral reasoning and intellect. Before the psalmist expounds upon the issue at hand he makes clear that what follows comes through deep reflection and conviction.¹⁵

¹³ Abraham Cohen differentiates between אדם and איש as referring, respectively, to “men generally” and those of “higher station” or “leaders” in the community (*The Psalms* [2d ed.; London/Jerusalem/New York: Soncino, 8, 152].)

¹⁴ The feminine noun הגות is etymologically related to the verb הגה, which often refers to public recitation as, for example, in Psalm 1:2 with regard to Torah; here, however, in parallel with the verb “to speak” the psalmist probably intends to emphasize both *external* and *internal* aspects of wisdom. For הגות as “meditation, musing,” see *BDB*, 212.

¹⁵ *BDB*, 212, points out that this word only occurs in the construct. Mitchell Dahood points this as the infinitive absolute, *hāgôt*, claiming that a verbal form is necessary to “keep the sentence moving,” and which he oddly translates as a future, “my heart shall proclaim.” While recognizing the normal infinitive absolute does not have the ה ending, he claims the psalmist used this form to create a “rhyming sequence” with the חכמות and תבונות. *Psalms 1* (AB 16; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 297. Dahood’s typically unusual and unique opinion in this case seems implausible and unnecessary; the MT rendering seems most accurate.

In v. 5, a literal rendering of the Hebrew translates, “I will incline (אָטַח) my ear to a proverb,” and “I will open (אֶפְתָּח) my riddle to the music of a lyre”: the riddle or parable occurs in vv. 13 and 21, which emphasize that “humans” (אָדָם) and “beasts” (בְּהֵמָה), regardless of stature, are destined for death—only God has the power to redeem (vv. 8, 16). The word “open” is often read as “solve”: listening attentively, the speaker “opens” the hidden meaning of the riddle, thus solving his problem. The harp (כִּנּוֹר) reflects the liturgical use of the psalm in worship; similar references to the harp occur in wisdom-oriented Pss 33:2 and 92:4.¹⁶ David J. Pleins sees a chiasm here with v. 2 calling for hearing, and v. 21 ending with “silence” (דָּמָה); one first hears and then becomes silent when receiving wisdom teaching.¹⁷ By conveying a sense of attentive listening at the outset, the psalmist encourages a similar attitude among the listeners for what follows.

Another chiasm is formed with vv. 3–4 and 20–21a, which both uphold the necessity for humanity (אָדָם) to seek wisdom; in vv. 3–4 the psalmist provides the pattern of speaking and meditation for “all peoples.” Ultimately, if a human will not discern (לֹא יִבִּין), he or she will be reduced to silence (v. 21). The chiasm in vv. 5 and 19 begins with the speaker seeking to be attentive to God—“I will incline my ear.” Usually in the psalms, the image of inclining the ear is a plea for *God* to symbolically stoop down (“incline your ear”) and listen (Pss 86:1; 88:3); here the *psalmist* inclines the ear to symbolize his desire to learn God’s wisdom. Verse 19 provides a direct contrast: the false autonomy of trusting in oneself (כִּי־נַפְשׁוֹ בַחַיּוֹ יְבָרֵךְ: “While alive he will bless his soul”) and praise from others for doing well (יְשִׁיבֶךָ: “They will praise you”) is futile in the face of

¹⁶ Norman Whybray views this reference to musical instruments as raising questions about the origin of the Psalm if one holds to the idea (e.g., Mowinckel; Gunkel) that wisdom psalms are non-cultic; he proposes the possibility that the reference to music refers to “the psalmist’s *inspiration* rather than his singing,” i.e., the “inner meditation” of the previous verse (*Reading the Psalms as a Book* [JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996], 65). As I note above, wisdom psalms need not preclude both instructional and liturgical use, but most probably were used in a variety of settings, though originating in wisdom school contexts.

¹⁷ Pleins, “Death and Endurance,” 20.

impending death.¹⁸ Instead of parsing תִּטִּיב (“you will do well”) as a hiphil 2d masculine singular, Pleins parses it as 3d feminine singular, connecting it to נִפְשׁ in the first line, reading “for it (נִפְשׁ) improved you”;¹⁹ this makes נִפְשׁ the subject of the verb and emphasizes the folly of self-absorbed people who fail to hear wisdom, leading to their destruction.

Verses 6–13: This next section focuses on the folly of trusting in material wealth, which will be unable to save a person from inevitable death (vv. 8–11). Several parallels to Proverbs occur here: the wealthy trust in their riches (Prov 10:15) as a source of security, but at death, or on “the day of wrath, it is of no avail” (לֹא־יִוֹעִיל, Prov 11:4). Using language reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, the psalmist presents death as the “great equalizer,” since the wise (חֲכָמִים), the fool and brutish will perish (כָּסִיל וְבֵעַר אֲבָדוֹ v.11); for this reason the psalmist will not fear (v. 6), despite current troubles and seeming injustices. Reference to the “fool” and “brutish” reflect wisdom vocabulary (Pss 73:22; 92:7; 94:8). Assurances that the wicked will perish (אָבָד) occur frequently in the wisdom psalms (Pss 1:6; 37:20; 92:10; 112:10), but here a more sober or realistic view predominates as the psalmist includes *both* the wise and foolish—a view held by Ecclesiastes (2:16). Ecclesiastes admits that wisdom has an advantage over folly because it provides more clarity for living (Eccl 2:13–14); the psalmist, however, seems more optimistic than Ecclesiastes regarding the fate of the righteous, who will be “taken” up by God. Ultimately, the conclusion of Ecclesiastes upholds the value of wisdom (13:9–14).

In v. 6 the psalmist asks why he or she should fear (אִירָא) in evil days when, surrounded by persecutors (עֹקְבֵי), the speaker becomes painfully aware of the wealth and great riches (עֲשָׂרִים) of the oppressors (v. 7). These themes of fear and riches are paralleled in vv. 17–18, where the psalmist

¹⁸ The critical apparatus in *BHS* cites two manuscripts that point the verb “to bless” as pual: “בִּוְרָךְ: he will be blessed” (1131).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

teaches that the righteous need not fear (אֲלֹהֵי־אִשׁ) the increasing riches and wealth (כְּבוֹד) of the wicked, since at death “it will not go down with them” [to Sheol]. A key word in this section is בְּטַח, “trust” (v. 7); the negative connotation here begs the question of trust: do we trust more in material wealth or religious, spiritual commitments?²⁰

Verses 8–9 emphasize that redemptive power belongs to God alone, since no man can “redeem his brother” (לֹא־פֹדֶה אֶת־אָחִיו). The most intimate human relationships cannot affect redemption without faith. A translation issue arises with the אָח, “brother,” which is often emended as אִשׁ, “surely.” I prefer the MT, which expresses intimacy in relationships and therefore heightens the tragic consequences of trusting in wealth rather than God.²¹ The infinitive absolute of פֹּדֶה (“to redeem”) used here adds emphasis that would be redundant if we emend אָח to אִשׁ, “surely.”

One cannot give God a ransom (כֶּפֶר), since redemption is “costly/precious” (קִיָּן). By using קִיָּן, the psalmist emphasizes the impossibility of humans to redeem themselves without God (it is too costly), and the great value and importance of redemption as something precious, an ultimate goal for a person of faith. Human arrogance, often associated with wealth and power, often leads to a sense of invincibility, which the psalmist absolutely rejects. The force of this verse is to emphasize that no finite human person, foolish or righteous, can escape the power of death and their destiny in Sheol. Here the NAB attempts to make the verse inclusive and renders, “one cannot redeem oneself, pay to God a ransom”; by omitting reference to a “brother,” this rendering lacks force and intimacy. Dahood translates קִיָּן as “but the mansion,” claiming that the root קִיָּן refers

²⁰ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 110.

²¹ Craigie (*Psalms 1—50*, 357) and Alter (*The Book of Psalms*, 172), prefer אִשׁ, which is found in a few Hebrew manuscripts. Because the psalmist emphasizes the futility of human efforts to amass wealth and power, it seems to me more plausible to follow the MT; no one but God alone has the power to redeem.

to “mansions” as a euphemism for Sheol, based on Palmyrene funerary inscriptions.²² This rendering makes “man’s redemption” an eternity in the “mansion” of Sheol, where one is forever cut off from God and in essence ceases.

Verse 9b takes up the issue of inevitable death, in which humans “cease” (לִּחְדַּל) for eternity; לִּחְדַּל here forms a play on words with חָלַל, “world,” in v. 2: those who inhabit the physical world are destined, regardless of stature, to physical death.²³ Verses 8–9a form a chiasm with v. 16: in opposition to the foolish in 8–9a, whose soul cannot be redeemed (לֹא־פָדָה) through human effort, the psalmist confidently asserts that God will “redeem my soul” (יִפְדֶּה־נַפְשִׁי) and “take me” (יִקַּח־נִי).²⁴ Notice the change from the third person plural of נָפְשׁ in v. 9 to the first person singular in 16, which differentiates the faithful speaker who has wisdom from the collective fools. The chiasm provides a contrast between “giving” (לֹא־יָתִיב, “he cannot give”) in v. 8 with “taking” in v. 16; only God can ransom human life from death. Because humans lack the power to redeem themselves, “the pit” (הַשְּׁחָת) is an inevitable part of human destiny (v. 10). Though it lacks the interrogative *He*, this verse is translated as a question in the New Jewish Version (NJPS): “Shall he live eternally, and never see the grave?” NAB has the same essential meaning without presenting it as a question. The “pit” is another word for Sheol, thus forming a chiasm with v. 15, which uses shepherd imagery to describe the destiny of the rich in Sheol, where “death will shepherd them”: ironically, God is often depicted as shepherd in the Hebrew Scriptures (Pss 23:1; 79:13; 80:2), but here “death” (מוֹת) is shepherd.

²² *Psalms 1*, 299. This translation proposal is intriguing, but I question why the psalmist would use “mansions” to refer to eternity in Sheol here, when in v. 15 Sheol and “habitation” (מוֹזָבֵל) are used to describe the ultimate fate of the fool.

²³ Craigie, noting the parenthetical nature of verse 9, conjectures that it might be a later editorial addition (*Psalms 1—50*, 359.).

²⁴ Pleins, “Death and Endurance,” 22–23.

Verse 11 summarizes the wisdom teaching of the previous verses: all human beings will perish—“wise,” “foolish,” and “ignorant”—only to leave their temporal wealth to others. The word pairs translated “fool” (כסיל) and “folly” (כסל), and “others” (אחרים) and “descendants” (אחריהם) connect vv. 11 and 14. Though all are destined to die, the wise can take comfort knowing that the reputation of the rich fools will follow them to the grave.²⁵ These words likewise reflect the vocabulary of the wisdom literature.

This section concludes with vv. 12–13, which serve as the pivot of the psalm’s chiastic structure.²⁶ Many modern translations (RSV, NRSV, NJPS, NAB) follow the Old Greek and Syriac and emend קרבם (“their inward thought”) as קבר (“grave”)—a scribe may have inadvertently transposed two consonants (ב; ר).²⁷ I prefer the MT reading. In their foolish arrogance, the unreflective rich fools believe “within” that their wealth and fame will endure forever; in reality, however, they “will not abide” (בל-ילין) but are “like the beasts” (בהמות) who perish (נדמו). The word translated “perish” (נדמו), reappears as the last word in the poem, thus connecting this verse and v. 21. In v. 21, however, the problem with אדם is that he “does not understand” (יבין א), a play on words with “will not abide” in v. 13; while failing to abide equates with perishing, here failure to understand makes “silenced” or “dumb” a better translation נדמו.²⁸

Verses 14–21 concludes the wisdom teaching: those who vainly trust in their wealth will be herded like sheep in Sheol, the underworld prison of the dead where they will be forever cut off from God. On the other hand, those with wisdom will experience redemption by God: “Certainly, God

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁶ Ibid., 26.

²⁷ See note in Craigie (*Psalms 1—50*, 357), and the discussion by Alter (*The Book of Psalms*, 173)—both of whom emend the MT to קבר in their translations.

²⁸ Paul R. Raabe, “Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 213–27; see 216. Raabe calls vv. 13, 21 an example of “antanaclasis,” in which a word is repeated with a change in meaning.

will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol.” אֲדָאֵלֵהֶם יִפְדֶּה־נַפְשִׁי יְדִשְׂאוּלִי (v. 16a).²⁹ In the second line, the psalmist confidently proclaims how God will do this: “For he will *take me*.” The verb קָחַנִי (“take me”) raises theological questions: does it refer to an afterlife, or simply an assurance of God’s ultimate justice in a pre-resurrection context? In its original context, the psalm most likely was composed *before* Israel had developed a belief in an afterlife or resurrection. Belief in the resurrection of the dead and an afterlife most probably developed in ancient Israel in the Maccabean period; the Book of Daniel provides the most specific reference to the resurrection (12:2).³⁰ If taken in a pre-resurrection sense, the verse more likely reflects the central thesis of Israelite wisdom literature: “fear of YHWH” is the source of wisdom; one who properly reveres YHWH need not fear or be constrained in life by the prosperity of the wicked since YHWH provides meaning and ultimate justice.³¹ Like Ecclesiastes, the psalm rejects wealth as a source of meaning in life. On the other hand, later rabbinic commentary associates v. 16 with reference to an afterlife: “But I, who have bent my ear to the parable—God will redeem my soul so that I do not go to the grave,” which is explained as a reference to the immortality of the soul, “my soul should not be taken with my body when he [God] takes me. . .”³²

In v. 14, which Alter calls “not intelligible,” the NAB translation, “pleased with their wealth,” interprets כִּפְיָהֶם יִרְצוּ (“they are pleased [with what is] in their mouths”) as referring to the abundant wealth of the rich (v. 7); the prosperous rich delight in boasting of their riches. Another possible rendering is “pleased with their speech,” denoting their arrogance and misguided trust in

²⁹ I interpret the adverb אֵן as providing emphasis (“certainly”); NJPS and NRSV translate it as “but,” which fails to express the emphatic nature of the psalmist’s statement.

³⁰ John Perry provides an excellent, concise argument for the development of a theology of the resurrection of the dead in Israel as a response to the crisis engendered by the persecution of Antiochus IV from 167–165 B.C.E. (*Exploring the Evolving View of God: From Ancient Israel to the Risen Jesus* [Franklin, Wis.: Sheed & Ward, 1999], 201–19).

³¹ Craigie views the psalm as lacking any explicit eschatology or theology of an afterlife, but rather confidence in the wisdom teacher’s instruction in which, like Ecclesiastes, human finitude must be faced honestly and life be guided by fear of the Lord (*Psalms 1—50*, 361).

³² Based on a citation from the Medieval commentator Rashi in *The Book of Psalms* (2d vol.; ed A. J. Rosenberg; New York: Judaica Press, 1991), 184–85.

their personal autonomy and false sense of security and power.³³ Verse 15 presents numerous translation possibilities. I render it as follows: “like sheep they are set/appointed (שֶׁתוּ) to/for Sheol. Death will shepherd them, and the upright will have dominion over them in the morning (לְבִקְרָה וַיִּרְדּוּ בָם יֹשְׁרִים), and their form will waste away; Sheol will be their home.” Here NAB, RSV, and NRSV emend the text to read, “straight to the grave the descend,” reading the adjective שֶׁר as a verbal form meaning “straight,” and amending בִּקְרָה to קִבְרָה, “grave.” Along with NJPS I prefer to follow the MT as is: after the “night”—metaphorically referring to the oppression of the rich—God’s justice will prevail in the morning, or day of redemption, when the “upright” (those with wisdom) receive vindication. The word מְזוּבָל can mean “home,” “dwelling,” or as in NAB, “palace.”

The key translation issue in v. 16 is the meaning of לְקַח, “to take”: though later interpretations, both rabbinic and Christian, interpret in terms of the afterlife, as noted above, this belief developed later.³⁴ Among the most ancient psalms in the Psalter, Psalm 18 uses Canaanite mythology to describe God’s deliverance of a righteous servant from danger, described in terms of cosmic chaos.³⁵ In 18:17 the psalmist states, “He [God] sent from on high and took me (יִקְחֵנִי); he drew me out of the many waters.” The usage of לְקַח in Psalm 18 provides a good context for understanding the meaning of the verb in Psalm 49. The word is better interpreted in terms of redemption from oppression in this life, looking towards covenant promises of peace, long life and

³³ Alter translates, “and after, in words alone, they show favor,” noting that literally the Hebrew reads, “and after them in their mouth they show favor” (*Psalms*, 173). The LXX has, “and afterwards, they will commend their sayings (εὐλογήσουσι διάψαλμα). Following the statement on the ultimate end of all humans in v.13, the boasting and “commendation” of the sayings of the rich in v.14 seems all the more futile, and this coincides with the major theological insight of the psalm: trusting in, and boasting of, temporal wealth is foolish and futile in light of God’s control over our existence and our ultimate destiny.

³⁴ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 124.

³⁵ Craigie notes that among scholars a general consensus views Psalm 18 as ancient, dating to the eleventh to tenth centuries B.C.E., probably “from the time of David or shortly thereafter,” as it utilizes an older form of Hebrew in which the imperfect tense is commonly used to express past time. He compares 18:5–20 with the Canaanite myths of Baal, Mot, and Yam, in which the psalmist apparently adapted the Canaanite myths to give a cosmic dimension to Yahweh’s deliverance (*Psalms 1—50*, 172–74).

prosperity. The promise of God’s redemption becomes the reason why the speaker need not fear (v. 17), despite the increasing “riches of his [foolish rich person] house” (כבוד, normally meaning glory, refers to wealth in this context). The use of לקח here appears to be an intentional allusion to the stories of Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:9–10), both of whom are “taken” (לקח) by God.³⁶

Having counseled that God will ultimately vindicate them, the psalmist teaches the righteous, who presumably as “wise ones” fear God, not to fear (אל-תירא) the increasing wealth of the rich (v. 17). The psalmist continues to share his/her wisdom in v. 18: paralleling and contrasting the use of לקח in v. 16, instead of being taken by God, the rich man will be unable to take his wealth with him when he dies (כי לא במותו יקח הכל; I translate this as “For when he dies he will not take anything”). This recalls Job’s initial claim that as he came from the womb naked, so he shall return naked to the “womb” of Sheol; likewise, Eccl 5:14–15 uses the metaphor of nakedness at birth and death to drive home the point made by the psalmist: wealth becomes meaningless at death.

Despite the arrogance of the rich who flaunt their wealth, at death their possessions will be taken and given to others. Only God can give life and redemption. Verse 20 contrasts the temporal arrogance and self-assurance of the rich fool with his or her ultimate fate: never seeing the “light” (אור) symbolizes the eternal darkness of Sheol. This parallels Job 10:21–22, in which a distraught Job declares his imminent destiny in Sheol, the land of “deep gloom” (חשך צלמות), in which “light is like darkness” (NJPS; literally, “shines like darkness” (תפע כמוראפל). Verse 21 concludes the poem by summarizing this progression of thought: without understanding, i.e., wisdom, one’s destiny is Sheol. Temporal wealth and status becomes folly in the face of death.

³⁶ Roland E. Murphy, “Psalms,” (*JBC*; Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), 585.

The Riddles and their Solutions: Leo G. Perdue proposes two riddles with solutions in Psalm 49. The first riddle in v. 21 is answered in v. 13; his interpretation challenges the notion that these two verses serve as a type of refrain, as he re-points the final verb in v. 21, **דָּמָה** as **דָּמַם**, while retaining the niph'al perfect tense. This changes the root meaning from “to perish” to “be dumb”; he claims this provides a more suitable parallel with **בַּל-יִלְיִן** in v. 13 (“cannot abide”) as an expression for death.³⁷ However, this emendation seems forced, is not supported by the ancient versions, and weakens the theme of death found throughout the poem: **הַשְּׁחַת**, “the pit” v. 10; **יִאֲבָדוּ**, “they will perish” v. 11; **בַּל-יִלְיִן**, “they will not abide” and **נָדְמוּ**, “they perish” v. 13; **שְׂאוֹל**, “Sheol” vv. 15–16; **בְּמוֹתוֹ**, “in his death” v. 18; **לֹא יִרְאוּ אֹר**, “they will never see the light” v. 20; and **נָדְמוּ**, “they will perish” v. 21. While the relationship between vv. 13 and 21 is clear, Purdue’s proposed emendation seems unconvincing. A more important aspect of the two verses is the word play and comparison between **בַּל-יִלְיִן** in v. 13 and **וְלֹא יִבִּין** in v. 21. An undiscerning person who rejects the autonomy of God by trusting in wealth surely will perish (v. 21); therefore, in answer to the problem of the prosperity of the wicked, the poem asserts the temporal nature of their prosperity—it will not last.

The second proposed riddle and solution are found in vv. 8 and 16: whereas human beings cannot ransom themselves (v. 8), God will redeem the **נַפְשׁוֹ** of those who with faith trust in God’s autonomy and justice and will take or receive (**לְקַח**) such persons from the “power of Sheol” (**מִיַּד-שְׂאוֹל**). Perdue also emends **אָח** (“brother”) in v. 8 as **אָךְ**, based on a supposed scribal error (BHS also notes this possibility in the critical apparatus), thus having both verses begin with “surely.”³⁸ I prefer reading v. 8 as “brother” to emphasize that only God has the power to redeem; we cannot save or redeem even our closest relatives. The riddle of redemption, then, can only be

³⁷ “Riddles of Psalm 49,” 538.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 541.

answered with the assertive affirmation of God’s singular redemptive power. Therefore, Perdue’s analysis of the poem’s meaning coincides in essence with my proposal above.

Conclusion

Psalm 49 presents a classic example of biblical wisdom poetry based on its thematic content and vocabulary; it contains linguistic and thematic similarities to aspects of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Such a poem most probably arose within wisdom schools associated with the temple. It holds timeless appeal and pastoral applicability as it addresses the problem of seeming inequalities among humans by upholding the autonomy and justice of God, and the reality of death as the great equalizer.

Some wisdom elements in Psalms 50 and 51:

Psalm 50 utilizes a prophetic style in which God—אלהים יהוה—אל, “God, God the LORD,” (v. 1) emphasizing YHWH as supreme God and judge—proclaims a covenant lawsuit from a storm theophany reminiscent of the theophany at Sinai in Exod 19:16–19. As thunder, lightning, cloud, and trumpet blast caused the Israelites to tremble at Sinai in preparation for Moses’ reception of God’s Commandments, so here the theophany is transferred to Zion with “consuming fire” and an intense storm (וסביביו נשערה מאד) (v. 3) in preparation for God’s proclamation against covenant violations.³⁹ This lawsuit will conclude with a covenant renewal and acceptable sacrifice (vv. 14, 23). Zion is described as “the perfection of beauty” (מכלל-יפי), the place where God

³⁹ Richard J. Clifford makes this comparison, and in observing the transference of the Holy Mountain from Sinai to Zion mentions Psalm 48:1, in which Zion is equated with Mt. Zaphon, located in the north and the home of Baal, the storm god in Ugaritic literature (*Psalms 1—72* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002], 244). This transference of sacred mountain locations to Zion reveals both the importance and centrality of Zion as the location of the temple (especially after the one temple rule), the transcendent nature of theophanies, which transcend time and space, and particularly in the storm imagery (and Psalm 48 in reference to Zaphon), the influence of Ugaritic concepts in the Hebrew psalms.

dwells in the temple and “appears” or “shines” (הוֹפִיעַ, v. 2).⁴⁰ From this sacred vantage point, God commands (דִּבֶּר וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-אֲרֶץ) “he spoke and summoned the earth” the heavens and the earth (v. 2-4) to “testify” (עוֹד, v. 7) against Israel, with whom a covenant was established by sacrifice (v.6). Though they offered ritual sacrifice, their failure to offer a sacrifice of praise based on obedience to Torah (vv. 8-15) made the ritual offerings worthless (see Pss 40:7; 51:18-19); God seeks a sacrifice of praise (תּוֹדָה) and honor (וְתִכְבְּדֵנִי, vv.15, 23) manifested in discipline, obedience, and avoidance of sinful behavior (vv. 16-21).

I divide the psalm in three parts: vv. 1–6, an introduction with storm theophany and divine summons; vv. 7–15, instruction regarding proper disposition for sacrifice and God’s omniscience; vv. 16–23, condemnation of covenant violations, sinful behavior, and a final reminder of the blessing to be assured for those who offer proper sacrifice. God concludes the rebuke with the promise that those who offer a sacrifice of praise will be guided to salvation (v. 23).

Thematically and verbally, wisdom themes occur in God’s command for the people to “listen” (שָׁמְעוּ; v. 7) to divine teaching and testimony against improper behavior. As the omniscient creator of all that exists, God needs no sacrificial offerings in the flesh and blood of animals but rather a sacrifice of praise (זֶבַח תּוֹדָה; vv.14, 23) manifested in authentic obedience to the commandments. This reflects, on a communal level, the role of a wisdom teacher, in this case God, calling students to listen and learn from his teaching how to properly live life in obedience to the commandments, which assures God’s blessing (vv. 15, 23). Those who offer praise (תּוֹדָה) as their sacrifice and who set their way of life (שֵׁם דֶּרֶךְ) according to the commandments, honor God and receive salvation (אֶרְאֶנּוּ בִישַׁע, “I will show him salvation”; v. 23).

⁴⁰ Similar descriptions of God being revealed in a storm occur in Exod 19:16–20, as noted, and Deuteronomy 33:2 (The *Song of Moses*); Elihu’s speech to Job (37:15), and the God’s whirlwind speech (38:1); in Ps 94:1, God is called upon to “appear” (הוֹפִיעַ) and judge the wicked.

The emphases in the psalm on obedience to the commandments (חֻקִּים), the covenant (בְּרִיתִי, v. 16), and discipline (מוֹסֵר, v. 17) express the concerns of wisdom teachers. God calls the “wicked” (רָשָׁע) to account for their hypocrisy in reciting the commandments and covenant, but “hating” discipline by engaging in evil activities and maligning their own kin (vv. 17-20). Psalm 50 gives priority to wisdom and Torah over cultic concerns. Wisdom terminology also occurs in God’s command to the wicked “who forget God” to “understand this” (בִּינֹנֵנָא זֹאתָ, v. 22): only by authentically living one’s life according to the commandments does one offer acceptable “sacrifice” and pay your vows to the most high” (שָׁלֵם לְעֵלְיוֹן נִדְרֶיךָ, v. 14); only those who live by Torah, represented by the “way” (דֶּרֶךְ, v. 23), receive blessing and salvation.

Psalm 51: This penitential lament psalm also provides a stinging rebuke to inauthentic cultic sacrifice (v. 18), and upholds the primacy of humility as “sacrifice” (v. 19), manifested in repentance and sincerity of heart. After the psalmist’s initial confession of sin, which he views as part of the human condition from birth (“I was brought forth in iniquity; in sin my mother conceived me,” v. 7), and before describing a cleansing ritual (“Purge me with hyssop . . . wash me . . .” v. 9), a wisdom statement occurs in v. 8 that may be an interpolation. The psalmist declares that God desires “truth in the inward being” (הִזְן־אֱמֶת חִפְצָת בְּמַחֲוֹתָ), and therefore asks God to “teach me wisdom in my secret places” (בְּסִתְּמֵי חִכְמָה תוֹדִיעֵנִי, v. 8), i.e., he seeks a deep, inward conversion to authenticity and truth by attaining “wisdom.” “Inward being” and truth in v.8a synonymously parallel “secret places” and wisdom in 8b.⁴¹ If verse 8 is removed, the psalm still flows smoothly from v. 7 to v.9, which raises the question of whether the reference to seeking wisdom in v. 8 reflects a later

⁴¹ The noun מַחֲוֹתָ represents the heart as the center of wisdom and morals, as also in Job 38:36; סִתְּמֵי is a passive participle that also refers to the inner being as the center of wisdom; see *BDB*, 376, 710. Marvin Tate interprets this verse as referring to wisdom that is implanted in the womb even before birth (*Psalms 51—100* [WBC 20; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990, 6]).

interpolation by wisdom editors who adapted this psalm for didactic purposes. In addition, the references to sacrifices in vv. 18–21 could also plausibly be a later addition to the original lament.⁴²

In the midst of his confession, the psalmist injects a statement upholding the importance of truth and wisdom within the core of a person as God’s desire; failure to live according to truth and wisdom results in sin. The movement from lament and sorrow over sin to a new orientation in life will be accomplished by attaining wisdom within (בסתרם), which manifests itself in authentically living by God’s Torah. By seeking mercy and reminding God of the covenant promises of steadfast love and compassion (v. 3; see Exod 34:6), honestly confessing and repenting of sin, and seeking wisdom, the psalmist will experience renewal in heart and spirit (vv. 4–14).

Repeated use of cleansing language (“blot out” vv. 3, 11; “wash,” “purify,” vv. 4, 9, “purge” v. 9), and reference to renewal of heart and spirit (v. 12) recall Ezekiel 36:24–28 and prophecies of Israel’s restoration in the exilic/post-exilic era.⁴³ This enables the forgiven psalmist to go forth and teach other transgressors the way of Torah (אלמדה פשעים דרכיך), that they too may turn from sin. The emphasis on a forgiven and converted sinner teaching others the “way” of proper living—לְדַרְשׁוֹת serves as a circumlocution for Torah in wisdom psalms (1:1, 6; 25:8–9, 12; 119:1, 5, 25, 32)—recalls Psalm 32:8, which raises the question of a common source for both psalms among sages or

⁴² Norman Whybray proposes that because vv. 20–21 show a favorable attitude toward sacrifice, they are a later addition, either intentionally composed or from another source. These verses optimistically call upon God to do good and show favor to Zion (היטיבה ברצונך), rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and be pleased with “sacrifices of righteousness” (זבחי צדק), whole and burnt offerings upon the altar; reference to rebuilding Jerusalem argues for a post-exilic context for the psalm in its final form (*Reading the Psalms as a Book* [JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996], 106).

⁴³ Clifford, *Psalms 1—72*, 251. Alter notes the references to purging with hyssop in v. 9 (“Purge me with hyssop,” החטאני באזוב) recall purification rituals in which hyssop was used to sprinkle blood from a sacrificial animal (Lev 14:4, 7), or water (Num 19:18–22); however, these references may be used as symbolic references to internal, spiritual cleansing. A spiritual interpretation, bolstered by the negative sacrificial language in vv. 18–19, opposes the idea that the psalm refers to a specific purification ritual. (*The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* [New York: Norton, 2007], 182). I suggest that the final positive references to renewed sacrifice in vv. 20–21 reveal the intention of the final redactors and its use in worship and prayer in a post-exilic context, regardless of whether it refers to specific rites, or the conversion of individuals or the community from sinfulness to authenticity (e.g., Psalm 50; Amos 6:21–27; Isaiah 1:1–18; Micah 6:7–8; Malachi 1:1–14).

wisdom schools. Both psalms highlight the futility of trying to conceal sinfulness from an all-knowing God while emphasizing the benefits of honest repentance and confession. If we can trace wisdom influence in the final redaction of this psalm, then we also have more evidence of the relationship between wisdom and cult as the result of repentance and obtaining wisdom is a situation in which his or her (or the community's) sacrifice is therefore acceptable to God.

Wisdom Elements in Psalm 62

This song of trust contains wisdom themes and vocabulary. The psalmist speaks with confidence and security and remains at “rest” (דָּוַמְיָהּ נַפְשִׁי, v.2; דָּוַמְיָ, v.6) despite the plotting and cursing of enemies (vv. 4-5), because ultimately God’s steadfast love (רַחֲמֵי) provides assurance that God will reward or punish people according to their deeds (v. 13). The psalmist realizes through prayer and experience that God is “salvation,” (vv. 2-3, 7), “rock” (vv. 3, 7-8), “stronghold” (vv. 3, 8), “hope” (v. 6), “glory” (כְּבוֹד, v. 8), “refuge” (vv. 8-9), and source of power (v. 12). Similar images of strength occur in Psalm 61:3-4, along with other linguistic parallels: “steadfast love” (61:8; 62:13), and “pay” (שָׁלַם 61:9, vows; 62:13, according to deeds). Despite these similarities, however, Psalm 61 is the prayer of a king while Psalm 62 provides a confident, wisdom-oriented meditation on God’s power and covenant love in contrast to the ephemeral nature of human life (v. 10). The two occurrences of סָלַח (vv. 5; 9) provide the basis for a neat three part division: vv. 2-5, 6-9, and 10-13; Schaefer divides the psalm into “two movements,” vv. 2-8, “trust and perplexity about the enemies,” and 9-13, which invites the people to trust in God and provides instruction.⁴⁴

The image of God as “rock” and “refuge” (צִוְרָה; מְחַסֶּה) occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible and the Psalms (e.g., Pss 18:3; 144:1-2) and here provides hope and comfort in the midst of

⁴⁴ For the three-part division see Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51—100* (WBC; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990), 119; for Schaefer’s two movement and rhetorical analysis, see *Psalms*, 149-52.

humiliation and slander by enemies who “bless with their mouths but they curse within themselves” (בפיו יברכו ובקרבם יקללו, v. 5). The psalmist uses the noun, קרב, (“inward part,” “bowels,” or “interior”) to present the wicked as “heartless”; their inner source of morals and action brings forth evil.⁴⁵ In contrast, when speaking of (to) the righteous in the wisdom section the psalmist chooses the more common לב, “heart,” while encouraging them to trust in the Lord (vv. 9, 11). The wise who heed the exhortation to “pour out your hearts before God” (v. 8) and not trust or put “vain hope” (תהבלו, v.11) on oppression and robbery (גזל), therefore, have a heart which represents a moral and rational way of living. Dishonest and arrogant persecutors shame and humiliate the reputation of the psalmist; in a culture of honor and shame such slander is likened to killing (תרצחו, v. 4, “you slay”). Surrounding the description of the enemies’ setting upon and “slaying” the innocent, who are likened to a besieged fortress or tottering fence (v. 4), are the two similarly-worded descriptions of God and the speaker’s proclamation of confidence (vv. 2-3, 6-8).

Following the imperative to “trust” God and “pour out your hearts (לבבכם) before him” in v. 9, wisdom teaching and vocabulary occur in vv. 10–12. Reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, the root הבל, “vapor,” is used as a noun in v. 10 and in verbal form in v. 11, to describe humans and their vain pursuit of material wealth. A numerical saying, “once . . . twice,” in reference to the psalmist hearing the divine proclamation that strength belongs to God alone, occurs in v. 12; this idiom of repetition emphasizes the validity and importance of the statement and is a common feature of the wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 30; Job 40:5). This wisdom section begins with a proverb preceded by the particle אף—used also in vv. 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, and usually translated as “truly” or “only”—which serves to emphasize the contrast between God (God truly is rock, salvation, stronghold, rest, hope, vv. 2, 3, 6, 7) with the finite humans (who delight in lies; a mere breath, weightless, vv. 5, 10). The proverb in v. 10 utilizes the wisdom vocabulary of Ecclesiastes in emphasizing the finitude and

⁴⁵ On this use of קרב see *BDB*, 899.

transitory nature of both poor (בני־אדם) and rich (בני־אש) people. These same terms for common and rich people are also used in wisdom Psalm 49:3 to address all of humanity (see also Psalm 4:3). Here the psalmist proclaims that all humans, inclusively, are ultimately “vapor” (הבל; see, e.g., Eccl. 1:2; 14; 17) and “a deception” (כזב). They are likened to a weightless item placed on a scale which therefore rises as they are “breath” (הבל); thematic and linguistic similarities occur in Pss 39:6–7 and 144:4, which describe the ephemeral nature of human life.

As noted above, v. 11 uses a verbal form of the root הבל to emphasize that trusting in false gains through oppression, robbery and power (חיל) are worthless. This is followed by the numerical aphorism mentioned above: “once [אחר] God has spoken, twice [שתי] I have heard,” that true might (עז) belongs to God alone.⁴⁶ The wisdom section concludes with reference to God’s covenant promise of (חסד, Exod 34:6), stating that as חסד—the unbreakable, fidelity and commitment of covenant love—belongs to God, so God will reward (שלם) each person according to their works (v. 13).

Clearly Psalm 62 exhibits wisdom influence in its contrasting fates between those who trust in God and those who delight in falsehood, slander, oppression, might and robbery; ultimately those who trust in God receive the promise of חסד. Further, the first movement in vv. 2–8, which emphasizes trust in God in the midst of oppression and slander by enemies, provides a very personal reflection by the poet that comes to fruition in the second, wisdom-oriented movement in vv. 9–13. The psalmist concludes by exhorting the assembly to trust in God and avoid the false illusion of human strength, oppression, and violence as all such behavior, and all humanity, remains “breath”

⁴⁶ For the numerical saying as an element of wisdom literature, and a detailed expose of the language, themes and rhetorical aspects of wisdom literature, see J. Kenneth Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel—Their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimensions,” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (Pittsburg, Penn.: Pickwick Press, 1974), 186–222, esp., 192–93.

(הבל) before God, the true source of power and permanence.⁴⁷ In contrast to the vanity of sinful human behaviors, those who trust in God and act accordingly receive the promise of enduring covenant love (חסד) that gave the psalmist silence and protection in the midst of enemies and oppression.

A Wisdom Interpolation in Psalm 64

This Davidic psalm contains three movements, beginning with a general plea for protection against the wicked people who oppress the blameless and righteous (vv. 2–7)—a common dichotomy in wisdom literature. Next, using retribution theology—representing a traditional orientation in wisdom literature, in which the righteous are assured of God’s ultimate intervention and justice (e.g., Ps 1:6)—God suddenly intervenes to destroy the wicked (vv. 8–9). This leads to a new orientation in the concluding wisdom section (vv. 10–11), an interpolation in which all people are called upon to “fear” God, “understand” God’s works, and then be assured of refuge in YHWH and rejoicing for the righteous (v. 11).

In section one an individual speaker cries out to God for help and protection (vv. 2–3), against a group of vicious enemies called the “council of evildoers” (מסוד מרעים, v. 3). They are described (vv. 4–7) using metaphors of speaking (lit. “tongue”) like a sword or poison-tipped arrow (v. 4), which they “shoot in secret at the blameless” (לִירַת בְּמַסְתְּרִים תִּם) suddenly (פְּתָאִם), without fear (לֹא יִירָא) of reprisal. In contrast to the righteous, whose fear of the LORD “is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Sir 1:14), the evildoers have no fear of God. Fear of the Lord represents reverence and respect for divine power and autonomy. The words for “council,” “evildoers,” and “blameless” represent the initial conflict between the righteous and

⁴⁷ Following the division of the Psalm by Conrad Schaefer, who also explores the linguistic and rhetorical features and views vv. 9-13 as wisdom-influenced; *Psalms*, 149-52.

the wicked. The word for “suddenly” reappears antithetically in the next section as God will “suddenly” fire his own metaphorical arrows right back at the wicked. In addition to encouraging one another (v. 6), these evildoers devise schemes within their “deep heart” (וּלְבַב עֲמִקָּה, v. 7).

As noted above, the tone shifts in vv. 8–9 in which God will “suddenly” (פְּתָאוֹם) shoot with divine arrows, leading to the downfall of the wicked (v. 9); structurally, the two uses of פְּתָאוֹם mark the transition from disorientation to new orientation as the oppressive actions of the wicked are turned back upon them by God. This prepares for the concluding wisdom teaching (vv. 10–11), which calls on all people to “fear” (וַיִּירָאוּ), proclaim God’s works, and “understand his actions” (מֵעֲשֵׂהוּ הַשְּׂכִילִי, v. 10). Imperatives to “fear” the Lord represent a central tenet of wisdom theology as the foundation of wisdom as noted above. A wise person will observe and understand God’s power and glory through creation and God’s works of justice; the psalmist uses the key wisdom root שָׁכַל to convey this teaching (see Proverbs 8; Job 28; 38–40; Sir 24; and creation psalms 19A; 33; 104:24) as examples of the revelation of wisdom through God’s works. This leads to a conclusion in which the righteous (צַדִּיק) will be glad and the “And all the upright in heart shall exult” (וַיִּתְהַלְּלוּ כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵלִים, v. 11), thus completing the wisdom dichotomy between evildoers and the righteous. While in general Psalm 64 fits the pattern of an individual lament, its lack of specificity regarding the incidents described within, but focus on the “blameless” and “righteous” lead Tate to emphasize its focus on faithful worshippers of God, with the speaker being a leader within that community.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 133; Tate also refers to Jeremias’s view that the psalm is a “cult prophetic lament-liturgic” that uses prophetic and wisdom language, with the speaker being a prophetic leader in the community. This view comes closer to my proposal here, that a general prayer used for anticipatory or current situations of distress has been adapted and shaped by wisdom teachers to emphasize retribution theology as a source of confidence. Wisdom, then, is attained by the one who observes God’s works and thus remains steadfast.

Underlying the movement from lament to confidence, however, are important wisdom elements which contrast the wicked vs. the righteous, retribution theology, fear of the LORD, and “understanding.” I propose that an existing lament form, used to anticipate impending or current problems, has been adapted by wisdom teachers to emphasize traditional wisdom retribution theology as a method to maintain trust and hope. Further, one can achieve understanding by fear of the Lord, observation of God’s works; this, in turn, leads to rejoicing.

Conclusion: Wisdom influence in the structure and theology of the Psalter in Book Two occurs most profoundly in Psalm 49, which both linguistically and thematically holds strong parallels to the established conventions of wisdom literature. In examining Psalm 62 I likewise pointed out the strong wisdom terms and themes present within the psalm. Psalms 50, 51, and 64 are rarely viewed as having connections to the wisdom traditions, but in each psalm I have pointed out important wisdom themes, features, and terms; though not wisdom psalms per se, this trio contains elements that reveal the underlying influence of wisdom in their compilation and/or editing.

Chapter Six: Wisdom in Book Three

Introduction: As the Book of Psalms expresses a range of real-life experiences, from lament, doubt, and suffering to joy, hope, and understanding, it reveals the reason for its ongoing significance for individuals and communities of faith. Using both the voices of individuals and the community, the Psalter contains a movement of emotions and theologies, from confident assertions of traditional retribution theology in Psalm 1, through the uncertainties and joys of life expressed through the variety of psalm types and mixed-types (Pss 14/53; 25; 36, 40; 49; 88; 90; 144) and, in the end, a confident doxology of praise that represents confident, sure faith in God’s glory and love (Ps 150).¹ Walter Brueggeman has identified a movement from confident piety (“orientation”), lament and doubt (“disorientation”), to a new, deeper understanding of God’s steadfast love (“new orientation”) in studying the movement from lament to thanksgiving in the Psalter.² In positing that the final canonical form of the Psalter reveals the work of wisdom editors, I observe this movement: from the orientation in Psalm 1, through disorientation in doubt and questions of theodicy in the body of the Psalter (e.g., Pss 39; 49), to a new orientation representing a wiser, more mature understanding of God’s justice and love in Psalms 145–150.

Psalm 73, located in the center of the Psalter, contains in its 28 verses this same movement from orientation (v. 1), through disorientation (vv. 2–16), to a new orientation of trust in Yahweh (vv. 17–28)—in essence, this centrally located psalm provides a microcosm of the Psalter’s movement. Psalm 73 begins Book 3 and centers the Psalter by dealing with the questions of theodicy, and concludes with a renewed emphasis on God as the enduring source of life and refuge. Book 3 will conclude with a lament over the failure of the monarchy and the exile (Ps 89:39–52); Psalm 73 anticipates this and provides a way to move forward theologically from lament to a new orientation based upon wisdom.

¹ These representative examples from the five books of the Psalter are all discussed in this dissertation.

In addition to the use of Torah psalms, acrostics, the *Maskeil*, and wisdom-oriented psalms of mixed genre, another important clue for the work of wisdom editors in shaping the Psalter appears through the placement of particular psalms at the so-called “seams” between the five books; these seams reveal wisdom influence, of which Ps 73 stands out most prominently.³ Wisdom psalms, or psalms containing wisdom language and themes, appear at the beginning (Pss 1–2) of Book 1, at its closing in 41:2–3; in the heading of Book 2 (Ps 42, *Maskeil*) and at the start of Book 3 (Ps 73); at the start of Book 4 (Ps 90), and its conclusion (Ps 106); and in the beginning of Book 5 (Ps 107:43) and its conclusion (Ps 145, acrostic; wisdom elements in Pss 146–148).⁴ The presence of wisdom at these seams adds to the evidence of the influence of wisdom teachers or schools in the formation of the Psalter.⁵

The Relationship between Royal Psalms, Lament, and Wisdom: The Context for Psalm 73

Brueggemann and Patrick Miller posit a theological movement in the Psalter that responds to changes necessitated by the fall of Jerusalem, in Psalms 74, 79, and the failure of the monarchy, in Ps 89:39–52.⁶ This movement is anticipated in the concluding verses of Psalm 72, a royal psalm ascribed to Solomon, as vv. 18–19—also the concluding doxology of Book Two—suddenly shift praise to the God of Israel, and v. 20 states that the prayers of David have ended. Psalm 73 follows as an “alternative script” that reflects the emphasis on divine kingship, further expressed in the enthronement Psalms 93–100, and by a wisdom-oriented renewed kingship in Psalm 101, which

² Walter Brueggeman, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), see especially chapters 1–5.

³ See Gerald H. Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Int* 46 (1992): 129–142 for a detailed discussion on the importance of these “seams” in the shaping of the canonical Psalter.

⁴ The wisdom elements in Psalms 1–2, 41, *Maskeil* (Ps 42), and 145 were discussed earlier.

⁵ In addition, to the wisdom Psalms 1, 73, and 90, and the wisdom elements mentioned in the others, the historical recital in Psalm 106 serves a didactic purpose, much as in Psalm 78; the desire for “wisdom” **חכמה**, is explicit in Psalm 90:12 and 107:43. Psalm 145 concludes, in my theory, an early form of the Psalter marked by Torah and acrostic psalms (see chapter 3), and wisdom elements along with creation theology—an important aspect of the wisdom literature—occur in Psalms 146 and 148, which will be treated later.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann and Patrick D. Miller, “Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker,” *JOT* 72 (1996): 45–56.

extolls the king who lives and rules with “integrity of heart” (בתם־לִבִּי, v. 2).⁷ Though attributed to David, the placement of Psalm 101 and its content seem to evoke ideals of behavior and leadership in an exilic or post-exilic context. With the receding importance of the earthly, Davidic king comes a heightened emphasis on Divine kingship. The psalmist begins by immediately invoking YHWH’s “steadfast love and justice” (חסד־וּמִשְׁפָּט) of which he will sing; this, too, can be taken as evidence of renewed emphasis on divine, rather than human, kingship. The emphasis on blamelessness, a pure heart, and nearness to God reflect themes found in Ps 73:1, 23–28; Ps 73 in turn embraces the themes of Psalms 1 and 2, respectively: the wicked shall perish and those who take refuge in the Lord will prosper.⁸

In Psalms 15–24 a “royal vocabulary” can be discerned, which is also reflected in Ps 73:17–28; Brueggemann and Miller use this evidence to posit a king as the speaker of Psalm 73, who models genuine faith. Psalms 15–24 form “an envelope of concentric circles that have at their center the torah Psalm 19.”⁹ Psalm 19, discussed previously, is bounded by royal psalms 18, 20, and 21. The “royal vocabulary” described by Brueggemann and Miller in this series includes terms also found in the wisdom literature: עֶבֶד (servant), צַדִּיק (righteous), תָּמֵם (upright/blameless), בָּר לִבִּי (pure of heart), נְקִיּוֹן כַּפַּי/נְקִי כַפַּיִם (innocent/clean hands), יָמִין (right hand), מִקְדָּשׁ (holy place), and בְּטַח (trust). This terminology finds parallels in Ps 73:18–28, the section in which the speaker confidently speaks of God as a “Davidic torah keeper.”¹⁰ Psalm 24 speaks of the requirement that those who seek to enter the sanctuary be “pure in heart” (בָּר־לִבִּי) and have clean hands (כַּפַּיִם נְקִי); these idioms reappear in Ps 73:1, 13. This use of similar terminology in Psalm 73 connects it to

⁷ Though usually classified as a royal psalm, I follow Robert Alter in viewing the themes and vocabulary of Psalm 101 as more reflective of the wisdom traditions—reflecting themes from Proverbs, e.g., describing the contrast between the wicked and the righteous, evil vs. good, and the psalmist’s focus to “study the way of the blameless” and “walk in integrity of heart” (v2). See Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 350–51.

⁸ Ibid., 51–3.

⁹ Ibid., 48.

the royal language, particularly of Psalms 18 and 24.¹¹ In addition, similar references to a pure heart and washing hands occur in Psalm 26:2, 6, a wisdom-oriented liturgical composition. Attempts to ascribe Psalm 73 to a king, however, are both limiting and unlikely; I see the similar terminology as further evidence of a canonical structure and purpose arising from wisdom school editing.

Brueggemann's examination of lament and the importance of God's covenant love, **רסח**, in Psalms 25 and 103 further support the depiction of Psalm 73 as the "wisdom center" of the Psalter.¹² In Psalm 25, an acrostic which I classify as a wisdom psalm, the speaker laments his or her loneliness, affliction, distress, trouble, the presence of foes, and the reality of his or her sin (vv. 16–21). In vv. 6–7, 10 the speaker calls on God's steadfast love (**רסח**) and faithfulness (**אמת**). Vv. 8–10, 12–14 also reflect wisdom influence in the speaker's description of the benefits of God's instruction and guidance for the humble (**עניי**): those who fear the Lord receive instruction, prosperity, and offspring to inherit the land (and continue the family line). Likewise, Psalm 103 embraces hope and trust in God's **רסח** after, or in the midst of, sin, guilt, and human frailty (see especially vv. 9–18). Psalm 25 occurs in Book 1, which contains many laments and references to the Davidic monarchy (especially in superscriptions); Psalm 103 occurs in Book 4, which emphasizes YHWH as king in a post-exilic, post-monarchial context. Brueggemann believes that through its journey of suffering and lament, hope and praise, Israel comes to accept God's **רסח** "as the premise of life" that enables Israel to proceed in the movement from the obedience of Psalm 1 to the confident doxology of Psalm 150.¹³ In the center of this he sees Psalm 73 as the "linkage" for the movement from obedience to praise.¹⁴ Though not found in Psalm 73, the word **רסח** seems implied in the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise," 75–78, where he focuses on Psalms 25 and 103 as representative of the realities experienced on Israel's journey from the ideal of obedience set forth in Ps 1 to the confident praise of Ps 150. His choice of these two psalms seems random, but they do represent the movement from the ideals set forth in Psalm 1 to the praise of Psalm 150.

¹³ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴ Ibid., 80.

transformative experience of the psalmist in the sanctuary (v. 17); compare Psalm 26 where the speaker acknowledges the presence of God's יְהוָה (v. 3), with comparable themes and vocabulary in references to the temple, purification rites, and integrity.¹⁵

Psalm 73 as the Wisdom “Center point” of the Psalter

Standing at the middle of the Psalter, Psalm 73 utilizes the genres of individual lament and thanksgiving and subsumes them within the reflective and instructive focus of the wisdom tradition to address a perennial problem of humanity: why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper.¹⁶ Thematically Psalm 73 parallels the major theme of wisdom Psalm 49, as it asks the question, why must the pure of heart, the loyal servant of God, suffer? Whereas Psalm 49 focuses more on the issue of wealth, Psalm 73 focuses more on the behavior and lavish lifestyle of the wicked. The seeming unfairness and anxiety experienced by the righteous sufferer finds resolution in the Temple (v. 17), where the psalmist receives clarity that ultimately the wicked will be banished (vv. 18–20), while God's covenant love and fellowship with the righteous endures forever (vv. 23–28). In its 28 verses the psalm moves from orientation, through the experience of disorientation, finally arriving at a new orientation of trust and affirmation of God's abiding presence and love.

The psalm can be conveniently divided into four units: (1) v. 1 reasserts the simple, “oriented” Torah piety of Psalm 1 and serves as the anticipated conclusion; the conclusion, following the lament and struggle with issues of theodicy, re-presents that piety with a new, more mature orientation. (2) vv. 2–16 deal with the issue of theodicy: a pious Israelite confronts the challenges to

¹⁵ Other examples of the use of יְהוָה in a transformative context include Ps 13:6, where the psalmist's lament turns toward hope through his “trust in your steadfast love.” In Ps 36:6, 8, 11, where the psalmist proclaims confidence in God's יְהוָה three times as he describes God's “house,” a sacred banquet and refuge in the midst of a wisdom-oriented lament against the wicked; in Ps 40:7–11 the psalmist invokes God's יְהוָה in a “great assembly,” which presumes the temple (Psalms 36 and 40 are examined for the wisdom content in chapter 4).

¹⁶ Hans Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans. Keith Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 169, states that the didactic nature of psalm 73 is indisputable and that “Psalm 73 took the form and structures of the song of petition and individual thanksgiving and incorporated them into the reflective method of the wisdom tradition.”

traditional Torah piety because of the prosperity of the wicked (see Jer 12:1–2 and Job 21:7–16). (3) v. 17 serves as the point of transformation, wherein the speaker experiences a religious revelation while visiting the sanctuary of God (מִקְדָּשׁ־אֱלֹהִים). From this point, the speaker has a renewed confidence and understanding of God’s actions and therefore a renewed faith. (4) vv. 18–28 reassert this renewed and strengthened faith and understanding, as the speaker asserts that trust in God and “nearness” to God is the greatest “good” (טוֹב, v. 28) while those wicked who are far from God will ultimately perish.¹⁷ Thus, its beginning and conclusion frame the psalm with an orientation (v. 1) and “new orientation” (v. 28) reflective of the themes of Psalm 1.¹⁸

Using a narrative form, the psalmist intimately describes his or her *past* experience of disorientation, with vivid metaphors to describe the wicked (vv. 6–9, 20), his or her own experience of doubt (v. 22), and *present* confidence and hope (vv. 23 ff.). While the wicked doubt God’s knowledge (יָדַעַת; יָדַעַת, v. 11), the psalmist seeks to know (לִדְעוּתָהּ, v. 16) why God allows the wicked to prosper and the innocent to suffer. The situation remained painful for the psalmist: “wearisome in my eyes”; in this metaphor, the eyes represent the psalmist’s internal thoughts based on observation of the wicked and his or her own suffering. Eventually, the psalmist receives divine revelation in the sanctuary where “I will perceive their end” (אֲבִינָה לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם, v. 17)—terminology reflective of Job and Proverbs.¹⁹ This revelation marks the movement of thought from disorientation to a new orientation based on faith and trust in Yahweh. Use of verbs emphasizing the psalmist’s desire to know (יָדַעַת) and perceive (בִּיָּן) reveal the wisdom character of the psalm.

¹⁷ Brueggemann and Miller, “Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker,” 46–47.

¹⁸ J. Clinton McCann challenges the usual notion that vv. 17 and 24 hold the most theological significance of Psalm 73 and instead focuses on vv. 1, 15, and 28; based on this, he divides the psalm as follows: vv. 1–12 (12 lines) outline the problem of the psalmist’s plight and the prosperity of the wicked; vv. 13–17 are the “turning point”; and vv. 18–28 (12 lines) are the “solution” (“Psalm 73: A Microcosm of Old Testament Theology” in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.* [JSOTSup 58; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987], 249). This outline seems plausible, but I question why v. 15, in which the psalmist reflects on how giving in and speaking like the wicked would result in betrayal, is considered to be as prominent as the conversion experience and revelation of v. 17.

Though the psalm contains elements of lament and thanksgiving, wisdom elements dominate as the psalmist seeks understanding in response to suffering and injustice. The psalmist's self-description as a "stupid beast" (בַּעַר, v.22) occurs elsewhere in Proverbs (twice) and in two other wisdom-oriented Psalms (49:11; 92:7).²⁰

A relationship can also be discerned between Psalm 73 and Psalms 74, 75, and 76. Psalm 74, a *Mas̄kîl* psalm that laments the destruction of Jerusalem, reflects the lament of 73:2–16; the "conversion experience" of 73:17 is reflected in the thanksgiving Psalm 75, which celebrates divine intervention and judgment. Psalm 76 expands on the description of the fate of the wicked in 73:18–23, as it speaks of God's judgment upon the wicked and praise in Zion.²¹

Analysis of Psalm 73: from Orientation, to Disorientation, to New Orientation

Psalm 73 begins by reaffirming the traditional wisdom theology of Psalm 1: "How good God is to Israel, to those whose heart is pure" (NJPS).²² This "anticipated conclusion" recalls the ideal of Torah piety and orientation presented in Psalm 1.²³ This initial grounding of the psalm in confident trust provides an underlying context to the issue of theodicy—why do the wicked prosper

¹⁹ Marvin Tate reads אָחַר יָתוּם in this context as referring to the future (as in Prov 24:14) and translates it as "I comprehended their destiny" (*Psalms 51–100* [WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990], 227, 229).

²⁰ Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 65–66; In addition to his observations of its use of wisdom vocabulary, Whybray describes the psalm as a "pure wisdom psalm" and a unity, and doubts cultic use of the psalm (67).

²¹ Joseph E. Jensen, "Psalm 75: Its Poetic Context and Structure," *CBQ* 63 (2001): 416–29, develops these connections, seeing the relationships between Pss 73–76 in a liturgical context. These relationships, however, must reflect the placement and editing of these psalms by post-exilic wisdom writers as the differences between the psalms, and their probable dating, seems to vary: Psalm 75 likely dates from a pre-exilic cult setting; Psalm 76 may derive from kingship festivals in Zion before the exile, while Psalm 74 and 73 are clearly post-exilic. For possible dating of psalms 74, 75, and 76, see Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 245–46, 257–58, 263–64.

²² Many translations re-point לְיִשְׂרָאֵל to derive "to the upright," but I prefer the MT, "to Israel," which fits with the idea that the speaker, whether or not he is the king, speaks for Israel. By following the MT pointing, the psalm applies to wider Israel, with the individual voice of the psalmist speaking for the collective experience of Israel; this would be especially apropos if, as I hold, the Psalm arises in a post-exilic context when Israel was under foreign domination.

²³ James F. Ross, "Psalm 73," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays In Honor of Samuel Terrien* (John G. Gammie, et al., eds.; Missoula, Mont.: 1978), 161–75, calls v. 1 an "anticipated conclusion," and views the speaker as an individual; he classifies the psalm as a combination of wisdom, lament, trust and thanksgiving. I follow his interpretation on these matters.

while the righteous suffer, and why does a just God allow this to happen?—taken up in the next section. The psalmist kept his or her heart pure (לְבַרִּי לְבָב) by maintaining faith in God in thought and action and avoiding temptations to embrace the lavish lifestyle and arrogance of the wicked (vv. 4–12). The language of “pure heart” recalls the requirements for entrance to the Temple in Ps 24:4, and the assertions of innocence by the speaker in Psalm 26, who requests that God “test my kidneys and heart” (v. 2).²⁴ This first of four references to the heart in the poem occurs in a context of “orientation”; in v. 13 the psalmist laments that, despite keeping purity of heart—a morally upright lifestyle and devotion to Torah—he or she suffers. In v.21, after experiencing transformation, the psalmist recounts a previous situation of being “embittered in my heart” (see below), while the final reference in v. 26 acknowledges that ultimately our human heart/condition will fail, but God remains constant. These four references to the psalmist’s heart reveal the changing moral and intellectual experiences and frame the movement of the psalm from orientation (v. 1), disorientation (vv. 13; 21) and new orientation (v. 26).

Tate observes the three-fold use of the adverb אִשָּׁר, meaning “truly” or “surely,” at “crucial places in the psalm” in vv. 1, 13, and 18; he claims the use of אִשָּׁר gives the psalm “its character.”²⁵ The first usage occurs in the context of orientation, “truly/surely God is good to Israel”; the second occurs in disorientation, “Surely, in vain I have kept my heart pure”; and the final use occurs immediately following the conversion experience (v. 17): “Surely, you set them [the wicked] in slippery places.”

Following the *orientation* of v. 1, the psalmist moves to *disorientation* by acknowledging that he or she almost strayed off the path of Torah, applying the verbs נָטָה (“to stray”) and שָׁפְכוּ (“to slip”) to the feet and steps, respectively. In distress, the psalmist almost violated the ideal way of

²⁴ Psalm 26 also contains wisdom elements (as discussed in chapter 4) as it upholds traditional retribution theology in which the psalmist confidently expects the downfall of the wicked, while asserting—similar to wisdom-oriented Psalm 101—his purity and blamelessness (e.g., vv. 1, 6, 11–12).

wisdom presented in Ps 1:1, to “walk not in the way of the wicked,” and Ps 119:101, “I have kept my feet from all evil ways.” Psalm 73:3–12 uses several metaphors to describe the wicked (רשעים). In vv. 3–5 the psalmist admits to being envious of the wicked. They live in prosperity (שלום) and suffer no “pains”; they appear well-fed (בריא אולם, v. 4), which symbolizes success and wealth in the cultural context, and free from affliction or stress (v. 5). While the wicked suffer no anguish (עמל) or “punishment” (לא ינגעו), “they are not punished” (v. 5), the psalmist suffers constant punishment (“being punished all day” נגוע כל-היום, v. 14) and anguish (עמל v. 16).²⁶ In demeanor, their pride “is like a necklace” (ענקתמו גאווה) and their outward displays of violence are likened to a garment that covers them (v.6). Both their facial expressions and internal thoughts exude arrogance and evil (vv.7–8).

Verse 7a, “fatness comes forth from their eyes” (צא מחלב עינם), has long been a crux for translators. Metaphorically, the image conveys arrogance and snobbery. Tate notes that the LXX and Syriac texts translate “eyes” as “their iniquity” (עונמו), reading a yod where the MT has vav.²⁷ Nonetheless, each version reads the line as a metaphor for arrogance; I prefer the MT reading as it conveys the haughty looks of the arrogant. In addition to their arrogant demeanor, wicked thoughts flow from within their moral and intellectual core, the heart (v. 7b, “they pass beyond the thoughts of their heart”). Abraham Cohen interprets 7b as referring to the abundance of the wicked being beyond what they imagined possible; this in turn leads to their arrogant behavior as described in the

²⁵ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 235.

²⁶ Conrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry; Minneapolis, Minn.: Michael Glazier, 2001), 178. Schaefer notes how the inverse order of these terms heightens the contrast between the situation of the wicked and the poet.

²⁷ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 228.

succeeding verses.²⁸ With this false sense of power and importance, their speech is haughty and damaging (ממרום ידברו) “from on high they speak oppression”).²⁹

In addition to their prosperity, arrogance, malicious words and violence, the wicked also speak against God: “They set their mouths against heaven; their tongues roam the earth” (v. 9). The image describes how they speak against God, symbolized by “heaven,” and do so throughout the earth. Heaven and earth are juxtaposed again in v. 25 where, in contrast, the psalmist proclaims that in all of the cosmos, his or her only meaningful possession is God. In v. 10, the *ketib* (ישיב) describes how the psalmist’s fellow Israelites “turned away” from God (“from here,” הלה) to the allurements of prosperity enjoyed by the wicked.³⁰ The second strophe, with the metaphor of drinking “full waters” (Ps 23:5), in this context symbolizes how these Israelites turned from God to “drink” the language of the rich as they desire their affluent, carefree lifestyle.³¹ Parallels to Ugaritic literature occur in vv. 9–10 in the depiction of the wicked setting their mouths in the heavens upon earth; in some texts from Ras Shamra, mythological beings have one lip in the sky and the other on earth, by which they drain water, or as a metaphor for their ravenous appetites.³² While direct borrowing by the psalmist seems unlikely, an awareness of these myths may have informed the psalmist’s choice of words. Verse 11 summarizes the godless behavior of the wicked in a manner similar to Psalms 14:1/52:2, who doubt God’s knowledge of their ways and behavior. With no fear of impunity or divine wrath, therefore, the wicked continue to amass wealth and live in tranquility (שלו, v. 12).

²⁸ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Revised Second Edition; Revised by Rabbi E. Oratz and Rav Shalom Shahar; Soncino Books of the Bible; London/New York: Soncino, 1945, 1992), 232.

²⁹ Ross, “Psalm 73,” 164.

³⁰ The *qere* שוב, would translate “turned to” (were converted), which would require that הלה refer to the wicked rather than God.

³¹ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 229.

³² Leopold Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 377.

This leads to the speaker's reflections upon his despair in vv. 13–16. In contrast to the evil thoughts in the hearts of the wicked, the psalmist kept his or her heart pure (זכיתִי לִבְבִי, v. 13a); nonetheless the psalmist is punished (וְאֵהָרַג נְגוּעַ) “all day” with continual chastisement (וְתוֹכַחְתִּי) “every morning” (v. 14). Using liturgical language paralleled in Ps 26:6, the psalmist declares, “I washed my hands in innocence” (אֶרְחֹץ בְּנִקְיוֹן כַּפַּי)—an allusion to a liturgical rite performed by priests that may be symbolic language emphasizing the psalmist's purity, or possibly allude to the psalmist's involvement in Temple liturgy.³³ Such observant religious practices symbolize how in practice he or she avoids sullyng the hands by evil deeds. A transition begins in vv. 15–16, where in the depth of distress the psalmist considered telling the community of his or her doubts; this option is rejected as it could harm the community's faith (v. 15). Unlike Job, the psalmist internalizes his problems lest the community be harmed. Next the psalmist declares: “I thought and tried to know this” (וְאֶחְשְׁבָה לְדַעַת זֹאת) through study and meditation; the result, however, “was weariness [עֵמַל] in my eyes,” a metaphor expressing the hopelessness of finding resolution (v. 16).³⁴ The key to the psalm's movement occurs in v. 17—signaled by the particle עַד, “until”—when the reflective and depressed psalmist enters the אֱלֹהֵי-מִקְדָּשֵׁי-אֱלֹהִים, the “sanctuaries of God,” and receives insight into the ultimate justice of God and the fate of the wicked. As noted above, through worship, or perhaps private reflection in the holy place, the psalmist receives wisdom by discovering the “end” or destiny of the wicked (אֲבִנִּינָה לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם, “I will perceive their end”).

In vv. 18–20 the speaker reveals the results of his inquiry: the wicked are on a path of destruction and will fall to ruin, for they are like shadows that disappear. The current prosperity of the wicked is now understood as fleeting and worthless, for God sets them in “slippery places”

³³ Cohen describes this reference in Psalms 26:6 and 73:13 in context of the liturgical requirement for priests to wash their hands before entering the tent of meeting as described Exod 30:19–20, or according to the symbolic purification from sin before offering prayer in Isaiah 1:15–16 (*Psalms*, 76).

(בַּחֹל קוֹרָה) and causes them to fall unto ruin (לְמִשְׁאוֹרוֹת, v. 18). Despite their seeming prominence and strength, the psalmist now perceives that all of this will be swept away in an instant, and with terror (בַּל הוֹרָה, v. 19). Likening the wicked to “a dream upon waking” (כַּחֲלוֹם מִחִקְיָיו)—quickly fading from consciousness—poetically conveys their transitory presence. Using an anthropomorphism, the psalmist asserts that God will be “aroused” (בַּעִיר), as if roused from slumber and made aware of the behavior of the wicked, which will result in God “despising their image” (צַלְמֵם תִּבְזֹה, v. 20).³⁵

In vv. 21–22 the speaker has a flashback to his former numbed state and lack of understanding, and then proceeds to relate a final affirmation in 23–26: he begins, as in v. 2, with וְאֲנִי, “but as for me,” and relates that he was always with God (תָּמִיד עִמָּךְ); God will seize (אֶחֱזָקָה) the speaker’s right hand, an image conveying God’s parental care and protection. In v. 24 the psalmist proclaims “You will guide me by your counsel” (בְּעֲצוֹתֶיךָ תִּנְחֵנִי); these wisdom terms reveal how God will guide the faithful psalmist to understanding and a new orientation of hope and faith. This upholds the teaching of Proverbs: those who spurn God’s counsel (עֲצוֹתָ; Prov. 1:25, 30) will be destroyed, while those “who listen to me will dwell secure” (1:32–33). Confidently, the psalmist now proclaims, “and afterwards, you [God] will receive me [תִּקְחֵנִי] with honor”; most likely this refers to communion with God rather than the afterlife.³⁶ The troublesome discord with the ideal of

³⁴ Cohen notes that the reference to the community as “the generation of your [God’s] children,” refers specifically to pious Israelites whose faith could be undermined by the psalmist’s public proclamation of doubt (*Psalms*, 233).

³⁵ Tate notes that some ancient versions translate בַּעִיר as “in the city” (thus, “in your city you will despise their image”), while modern translators view this as a contracted form of the hiphil הִבְעִיר (from the verb עוֹרָה)—as I do here. (*Psalms 51—100*, 229). Translating it as a verb better fits the context, as no previous mention of a city or urban context occurs and such a translation limits the scope of the psalm—why should God punish despise them in the city? Is not evil behavior a universal issue? Rather, the anthropomorphic image of God being roused, becoming aware of, and angered at, the behavior of the wicked, and then rejecting their “image” provides a nice parallel with the first half of the verse and the comparison to the wicked as a fading dream.

³⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 120. The same usage occurs in Psalm 49:16, where the psalmist similarly has a transformation from distress over the prosperity of

Psalm 1 is now transcended in this renewed experience of God's love, which also engenders new trust and deepened faith. This faith is expressed in the final assertion that "nearness to God is good"—God is a refuge—and to recount God's works in praise and communion is the ultimate source of peace and a "new orientation."³⁷

Conclusion: Psalm 73 as a Microcosm of the Psalter

The journey from an ideal orientation (v. 1), to lament and the problem of theodicy (vv. 2–16), a transformation (v. 17), and a new orientation of deeper, more mature faith and understanding (vv. 18–28) leads the reader through a series of emotions and experiences that are a microcosm of the Psalter. Psalm 73's movement parallels the movement in the book of Job.³⁸ The key transformation that occurs in the "sanctuaries" of God may well refer, as Ross believes, to an experience the speaker had by participating in the deliberations of the wisdom teachers/schools that were connected to the temple.³⁹ Clifford likewise observes how the righteous speaker in Psalm 73 deeply and personally reflects upon the anguish he or she experienced due the prosperity of the wicked, the movement towards a solution (vv. 13–17)—centered on his or her visit to the Temple (v. 17)—that leads to resolution (vv. 18–27). A final public proclamation of God's goodness concludes the poem by returning to the confidence and faith that began the psalm, but now in a more personal, first person statement (v. 28). The illumination given by God and subsequent conversion results in a movement from disorientation to new orientation "that can be every believer's story."⁴⁰ Psalm 73 parallels wisdom Psalm 32 as both psalms recount a conversion experience in which the speaker admits to almost giving up (32:3–4; 73:2, 13–15), but then experiences a new orientation through a personal encounter with God (32:5–11; 73:17–28).

the wicked to a renewed confidence in God's care: "Indeed (יְיָ) God will redeem my soul from the power (lit. "hand") of Sheol, for *he will take me*" (יְיָ יִקְחֵנִי; emphasis added).

³⁷ See Brueggemann and Miller, "Psalm 73 as a Canonical Marker," 47.

³⁸ The Epilogue of Job begins in orientation, moves to disorientation after the Satan's challenges, and following the whirlwind speech (38–41) Job experiences transformation (42:1–6); Job's restoration in 42:7–17 concludes the book as it began, in an ideal situation or orientation.

³⁹ Ross, "Psalm 73," 167.

Psalm 73 stands as a central point in the Psalter that reflects the editing process at the hands of scribes and or wisdom teachers in the post-exilic period. Its location signals the reinterpretation of kingship following the failure of the Davidic monarchy, and the heightened emphasis on YHWH as king and wisdom instruction in the post-exilic period when the Psalter received its final form. Combined with the placement of Torah psalms and acrostics (discussed in chapter 3), these post-exilic editors fashioned the Psalter as a reflection on Israel's history and ongoing experience of God in the context of wisdom teaching. Psalm 73 summarizes the Psalter's movement from an idealized piety (Ps 1) through lament (Ps 25), leading to a renewed emphasis on YHWH's kingship, in light of the failure of the monarchy (Ps 89 and Books 4–5); the Psalter will culminate in a final doxology of praise (Pss 145–150). It answers the question of why the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper with a new orientation and understanding evoking faith in God as the ultimate answer. Psalm 73 provides important wisdom teaching at the center of the Psalter that anticipates, and prepares for, the doxology and total praise of Psalm 150.

⁴⁰ Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2003), 15–20, quote p. 15.

Chapter Seven: Wisdom in Book Four

Psalm 90: A Wisdom Reflection on the Finitude of Life and God's Eternity

Psalm 90 begins the fourth book of the Psalter as a response to the post-exilic gloom with which book 3 closed; in contrast to the failed monarchy, Psalm 90 reasserts God as the one, enduring and permanent refuge throughout history (vv.1-2). Despite the failure of the Davidic monarchy (Ps 89:40-53), pious Israelites must return (v.3) in repentance to YHWH. Attribution to Moses signals that the psalm returns to a pre-monarchic ideal, recalling God's sending forth of Moses as divine prophet and lawgiver to gather God's Chosen people. Like Ecclesiastes and wisdom-theodicy psalms 49 and 73, Psalm 90 emphasizes the ephemeral nature of human existence in contrast to the eternity of God; in this light, it acknowledges human sinfulness and the need for repentance (שוב).

Collectively the people seek "wisdom" (וּנְבִיא לִבֵּב הַכְּמוֹהַר, v. 12) within their heart/mind. True satisfaction in this life will be found only by being filled with God's חַסֵּד or covenant love (v. 14; Exod 34:6). Psalm 90 teaches the vanity of human sinfulness, the ephemeral nature of human life, the need for wisdom, covenant love, and divine favor (נַעַם, v.17) to "prosper the works of our hands," i.e., our endeavors in this life, with trust in God's ultimate judgment and rule. By embracing the Lord as refuge (v. 1) humans can prosper (v. 17). Moving forward in book four we will see a renewed emphasis on YHWH as king and creator.

While some commentators describe the psalm as a communal lament in which the psalmist, speaking on behalf of the community, seeks a restoration of better fortunes (as in Psalms 44, 74, 77), I view the poem as largely didactic in nature.¹ Attribution to Moses, "the Man of God," is an example of attributive authorship that lends credibility and authority to later works by invoking

¹ Abraham Cohen likewise emphasizes the psalm's focus on the ephemeral nature of life and its didactic intent: "In sublime language this psalm dwells upon the transitory nature of man's existence, but in no pessimistic mood,"; since life is precious and short it "must not be wasted in vain pursuits" (*Psalms: Hebrew Text & English Translations with an Introduction and Commentary* [Soncino Books of the Bible; Rev. ed.; New York/London: Soncino, 1945, 1992], 297).

exemplary figures; in this case God’s chosen prophet and lawgiver for nascent Israel. The superscription further describes it as a “prayer” (תפלה, also Pss 17:1; 72:20; 86:1; 102:1; 142:1), in this case a didactic prayer addressed to God.² Clifford views the ascription to Moses as alluding to Exod 32:12, where Moses pleads with YHWH to “turn” (שוב) from anger and show compassion or pardon (סלח); a similar request, using both verbs, occurs in Ps 90:13.³ Combined with the allusion to Exod 34:6 in the request for חסד in v. 12, these allusions reveal the ongoing significance of Torah traditions and the figure of Moses in the life of Israel and, presumably, in wisdom instruction.

Norman Whybray describes Psalm 90 as a “pure” wisdom psalm in which the external form of a communal lament on the ephemeral nature of life is pervaded by wisdom elements.⁴ While I share his view that the psalm contains a strong wisdom character, the adjective “pure” seems too strong; it is best described as a wisdom-oriented meditation on the ephemeral nature of life. Verse 12 stands as a transition between the meditation on human finitude and God’s eternity and wrath in vv. 1–11, and the plea for a restoration of God’s covenant love and support in vv. 13–17; the psalmist requests that God “make known” (הודיע, hophal of ידע) to the community how much time they have left so that they may attain a heart of wisdom (ונבא ללב חכמה). These wisdom keywords combine with the psalmist’s reflections on the ephemeral nature of human life in the manner of Job (e.g., Job 14:5–12) and Ecclesiastes (e.g., 1:2–11; 6:12; 9:10) to provide a strong wisdom orientation throughout the psalm.⁵

² Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51—100* (WBC 20; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990), 440. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans. Keith Crim; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1986), 168, also identifies Psalms 39 and 90, along with Ecclesiastes as “sober reflections” of the “didactic poetry of the wisdom tradition.” Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73—150* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2003), describes it as a communal lament whose focus is not on human transience; it pleads with Yahweh as to when current afflictions will last (96–97).

³ Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 97.

⁴ Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 67–68.

⁵ Robert Alter notes how the supplication in Psalm 90 “becomes the vehicle for a Wisdom-style meditation on the transience of human life,” with “a certain kinship between this poem and passages[unspecified by him] in both Job and Ecclesiastes” (*The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* [New York: Norton, 2007], 318).

Psalm 90 can be divided as follows: vv. 1—6, a meditation on the eternity of God and finitude of human existence; vv. 7—11, a meditation on human sin and God’s wrath; v. 12, a plea for wisdom in light of the ephemeral nature of human existence; and vv. 13—17, a prayer for restoration of God’s steadfast love, which leads to happiness and prosperity.

Verses 1—6: As noted above, attribution to Moses lends authority to the Psalm and, coming on the heels of Psalm 89:39–52, lamenting the failure of Israel’s monarchy, returns to the mosaic covenant at Sinai and Israel’s original foundation and settlement. The title, “A prayer of Moses, man of God,” recalls Deut 33:1, where Moses likewise is called “the man of God” as he prepares to give a blessing. Verses 1–2 are framed by the personal pronoun “you” (אַתָּה) addressed to YHWH who always existed as a refuge (מַעוֹן) for humans as the eternal God, even before giving birth (לֵד) to the mountains or bringing forth (חָלַל) earth and world.⁶ This statement brings together both the historical and transcendent experiences of God.⁷ Further, attribution to Moses recalls the Exodus events, when YHWH provided refuge and protection for Israel in their flight from slavery and oppression; this provides context for the psalmist’s pleas for refuge in the midst of life’s travails.

In verse 3 the psalmist makes a deliberate allusion to Gen 3:19 in describing how YHWH will turn (הִשׁוּב) the human person back into “dust” (דָּבָא; in Genesis, עֶפֶר).⁸ In both Genesis and the psalm returning to “dust” emphasize the frailty and temporal nature of ordinary humans, represented by אָנוּשׁ.⁹ I propose that the psalmist deliberately uses דָּבָא in place of עֶפֶר because it also holds the meaning “contrition”; like the post-exilic prophets, the psalmist interprets the Exile as a caused by Israel’s infidelity, and the humiliating experience evokes both contrition and a heightened

⁶ The word מַעוֹן, which I translate as “refuge” (see also NJPS) can also mean “dwelling place” (RSV) in reference to the heavens as the abode of God (Deut 26:15) or the Temple (Psalms 26:8; 68:6; 76:3). In this context, however, it refers to God as a refuge for his people (as in Psalm 91:9); the intimate and direct nature of the psalmist’s prayer dispenses with the need for the mediation of the Temple. See Clifford’s discussion on this term (*Psalms 73—150*, 98).

⁷ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 440.

⁸ Cohen notes: “the word for *man* (*enosh*) denotes the human being in his frailty,” as also in Psalm 8:5 (*Psalms*, 298).

⁹ דָּבָא can also be translated “dust,” as in the JPS translation and as noted in the NJPS footnote to v. 3.

awareness of human frailty (“contrition”; “dust”). Humans are finite and contingent, and by nature destined for mortality—a sobering but realistic assessment of the human condition before the eternity of God.¹⁰ This prepares for verse 4, which contrasts the finitude of humans with the eternity of God using the metaphors of a thousand years as “yesterday which past, or a watch of the night”: the dramatic image conveys how YHWH transcends human conceptions of time and space. The “night watch” (אשמורה) may refer to three divisions of the night, during which a priest kept watch over the sanctuary (see 1 Chron 9:33, which describes Levites “on duty, day and night”); in YHWH’s eternity a millennium is merely like a short unit of the day.¹¹ Verse 5a presents a variety of translation possibilities and may be corrupt. I translate, “You wash them [frail humans] away, as if they were sleeping” (זרמתם שנה יהי). Using the verb “to wash away” dramatizes the frailty and temporality of human life that can be metaphorically compared to floodwaters sweeping away a structure; in this context, “sleep” most probably refers to death.¹² Using an agricultural metaphor comparing human life to plants that spring up in the morning but quickly wither in the evening, the completes this depiction of human frailty using imagery found in Pss 1:4, 37:2, and 103:15.

Verses 7—11: Tate observes that vv. 7 and 9 form a frame around v. 8, in which the psalmist acknowledges that “all our iniquities” and “secret sins” (על מנו) are known by God—“in the light of your face” (למאור פניך).¹³ In light of YHWH’s omniscience, the psalmist acknowledges on behalf of the community—the plural “we” could represent a specific community or humanity in general—they are “consumed” (כל ינו) and terrified (נבהלנו) by YHWH’s anger and wrath. The verb כלל occurs again in v. 9b, as the psalmist acknowledges how quickly the human life span comes to an end, “Our years come to an end like a sigh” (כל ינו שנינו כמרהגה). Three words are

¹⁰ Cohen notes how ibn Ezra likewise connected this verse to Genesis 3:19, and also that the word used for “man” here, אנוש, normally refers to the frail nature of humans, as also used in Psalm 8:5 (*Psalms*, 298).

¹¹ Cohen notes that in rabbinic sources the night is divided into three watches (*Psalms*, 198); for a description of the roles of priests as overseers of the sanctuary, see Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 262.

¹² Similarly, NRSV translates, “You sweep them away,” while NJPS uses “You engulf men in sleep.”

¹³ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 442.

used to express the psalmist's awareness of YHWH's displeasure at human sin: "anger" (אִפְךָ), "wrath" (חַמַּתְךָ, v.7), and "fury" (עֲבַרְתְּךָ, v. 9); realization of YHWH's omniscience leads to fear of expected punishment and a realistic assessment of the reality of death. The word for "sigh" (הִגָּה) represents the frailty and temporal nature of human life before the eternity of YHWH.¹⁴

In v. 10 the psalmist contemplates that whether one lives seventy or even eighty years—a very long life span in the cultural context—life consists of "toil and trouble" (עֲמַל וְאֹיֵךְ). Using a metaphor of flight, the psalmist drives home the point: "For it [life] passes quickly and we fly away." Like a bird soaring quickly to the heavens and out of sight, so our lives, despite all our toil, come quickly to an inevitable end. Both the language and tenor of this verse strongly resemble Ecclesiastes and Job. This section concludes with another reference to YHWH's wrath and fury, with the psalmist seeking wisdom by asking, "Who knows" the power of YHWH's wrath (כִּי־יֹדַע); fear of God coincides with an awareness of God's fury (וּכִי־רֵאתְךָ עֲבַרְתְּךָ; "your wrath is like the fear of you" v. 11); both fear of God and desire for knowledge reflect wisdom vocabulary and themes. The emphasis on God's anger in this section appears to contradict the plea for God's steadfast love below in v. 14. Rather than emphasizing God's anger, however, I propose that this language expresses the psalmist's awareness of the consequences of human sinfulness and failure to abide by the covenant commitment (e.g., Deut 30:15–20). Because the psalmist is aware of human sin and disobedience in light of God's omniscience ("secret sins" v. 8), he fully expects and anticipates divine judgment.

Verse 12: Coming immediately after the psalmist's meditation on the limits of human existence in comparison to God's eternity, this verse provides an answer to the preceding questions and serves as a transition to the concluding section of the psalm. In light of uncertainties, the psalmist requests wisdom: "Teach us to number our days, so that it may be known, and let us obtain a heart of wisdom" (לְמַנּוֹת יְמֵינוּ כֵּן הוֹדַע וּנְבֵא לִבְבֵנוּ חִכְמָה). By pairing the infinitive construct

¹⁴ In effect, הִגָּה as used here has the same effect as הִבֵּל in Ecclesiastes—to emphasize the ephemeral nature of human life.

of the verb “to number” with the hophal of “to know,” the psalmist conveys an evaluation or judgment of the human condition, rather than a literal numbering of the remaining days of life.¹⁵ By properly evaluating our human condition, we enable wisdom to enter our thought process—the heart here represents the mental faculties of a person—and this in turn enables us to make the most of life.

Verses 13—17: This section begins with two important imperatives in v. 13: “turn back” (שובה) and “show compassion” (הרחם); together these verbs request the restoration of a healthy covenant relationship with YHWH, who has been “absent” due to human sin. Verse 14 clarifies this request as the psalmist specifically seeks, on behalf of the people, a renewal of God’s covenant love (חסדך): “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, and we shall sing joyfully and be glad for the rest of our life.” “Satisfy in the morning” (שבענו בבקר) seems to be a metaphor for renewal and healing, as “morning” implies light, freshness, and life; reception of YHWH’s steadfast love implies a renewal of the covenant relationship. A truly wise person will find this more “satisfying” than material wealth and gain (Psalms 49, 73). Singing joyfully and being glad imply both the expected happiness found in the renewed relationship with God and regular participation in worship and praise for the remainder of one’s life (literally, “for all our days”).

The psalmist continues this prayer for renewal by requesting that YHWH “make us glad” (שמחנו), in contrast to their previous experiences of suffering, when YHWH “afflicted us” (עניתנו), and they “saw evil.” Often lament psalms attribute the experience of suffering to God’s anger (see, for example, Psalms 6, 22, 44, 88); in this case, however, the psalmist seems to have moved from a reflection on present-tense experience of YHWH’s wrath (v. 11) to viewing it as something past in v. 15.¹⁶ Though having elements of lament, Psalm 90 uses more reflective language about suffering that differs from the more direct, descriptive language of individual and communal laments. Tate describes it as “a communal prayer composed of grateful reflection, complaint, and petitions for

¹⁵ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 442–43.

¹⁶ Cohen views this verse as an anticipatory prayer: “When restored to God’s favor, may their happiness be proportionate to the wretchedness they had endured” due to God’s anger (*Psalms*, 300). The verbs are in the perfect tense.

gracious divine action.”¹⁷ While I agree in general with this assessment, as noted above I view the psalm as primarily a wisdom psalm; it reflects on the ephemeral nature of life and is centered by the request in v. 12 for wisdom to better understand and properly live life.

When this petition for renewal is fulfilled, God’s “work” (פעלך) and “majesty” (הדרך)—manifestations of God’s glory and power in creation and life—will again be manifest to the “servants,” when God’s anger and wrath will be replaced by an awareness of God’s work and majesty (עבדיך; ווהדרך, v. 16). Tate notes the self-description of the community as “servants” (עבדיך) in vv. 13 and 16 represents the experience and identity of the post-exilic community, a usage seen in the post-exilic prophets (Isa 56:6; 65:8–9; 65:13–15; 66:14; Mal 3:18, 22) and in some post-exilic Psalms (123:2; 134:1; 135:1).¹⁸ Furthermore, these servants of God will again be prosperous in their own human work and endeavors (“establish the work of our hands”), as God’s “pleasantness” or “favor” will again be upon them (ויהי נעם אדני אל הינו על ינו). The word נעם (“pleasantness/favor”), describes the anticipated renewed and friendly covenant relationship between God and the community.

Psalm 92: A Song for the Sabbath with Wisdom Reflections

Similar to Psalm 33, Psalm 92 combines a liturgical hymn that praises God’s covenant love, creative acts (vv. 2–6), and contrasts the judgment of the foolish evildoers (vv. 7–12) with the blessings promised to the righteous (vv. 13–16). The Superscription, “A Psalm; A Song for the Sabbath Day,” reflects its use in later Jewish liturgy as the closing psalm for the celebration of the Sabbath; it seems probable that it originally was used in Temple rites for the Sabbath.¹⁹ In its description of YHWH’s creative acts, the wicked, and the blessings upon the righteous, Psalm 92 contains wisdom vocabulary and themes and thus combines the hymn form with wisdom reflection,

¹⁷ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 437.

¹⁸ Ibid., 437–38.

¹⁹ Nahum Sarna offers a detailed explanation of the use of Psalm 92 in the Jewish synagogue liturgies in the post exilic period that seems to coincide with the period in which the Psalter was edited and achieved its final form (“The Psalm for the Sabbath Day (Ps 92)” *JBL* 81 [1962]: 155–68).

most probably for liturgical and didactic purposes in post-exilic times. Though presented as the prayer of an individual (e.g., vv. 5, 11, 12, 16), references to praising God's covenant love in the morning and evening with musical accompaniment (vv. 3–4), and the Temple and its courts (v. 14) reveal its communal, liturgical use. I propose that Psalm 92 reflects the work of wisdom teachers/scribes from wisdom schools associated with the Temple and provides a fine example of how wisdom psalms served both didactic and cultic purposes.²⁰

Vv. 2–6: The poem begins by affirming that it is “good to give thanks” (טוב להודות) and to praise (לומר) YHWH, synonymously referred to by the name עליון (“Most High” v. 2), and to proclaim (להגיד) YHWH’s “steadfast love and faithfulness” (חסדך ואמונתך) from morning to night (v.3). The entire existence of the speaker, symbolized by “morning” and “night,” is given over to praise based on the experience of YHWH’s steadfast love (חסדך) and faithfulness (ואמונתך); these words allude to the covenant formula in Exod 34:6 that occurs throughout the Psalms.²¹ This experience of divine blessing is affirmed in cultic worship with the “ten-stringed harp” and chanting upon the lyre (עלי הגיֹון בכנור, v. 4; see Pss 33:2; 49:5).

Nahum Sarna views these references as pointing to the use of Psalm 92 for the daily *Tamid*, the daily burnt offerings in the Temple in the early morning and late afternoon.²² Biblical evidence of this service appears in 1 Chron 16:40–42; 23:30–32; 2 Chron 2:3 (MT; RSV, v. 2); 13:11; 29:20–30; 31:3; and Ps 141:2. The passages from 1–2 Chronicles mention the role of priests in the services; 1

²⁰ Robert Alter observes the use of infinitive constructs להודות and לומר in v. 2 as reflective of thanksgiving psalms, but notes, “it also has a strong Wisdom coloration as an attempt to explain why the wicked seem to flourish and what is the true order of justice in the world” (*The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* [New York: Norton, 2007], 325); Likewise, Schaefer recognizes the contrasting destinies of the wicked and the just in the psalm as reflective of the wisdom literature (*Psalms*, 231). Tate classifies the psalm as a thanksgiving, but observes “Vv 7–8, 13–16 have the characteristics of wisdom poetry,” as they contrast the wicked and righteous, respectively (*Psalms 51–100*, 464).

²¹ For example, Psalms 25:10; 36:6; 40:11; 57:11; 86:15; 88:12; 89:2–3, 25, 34, 50; 98:3; 100:5; 115:1; 138:2. Among these texts the words אמונה and אמת are synonymously used for “faithfulness.” Notice the contrast between how the formula is used here, in praise, to its use in Psalm 88:12, where the speaker, feeling abandoned, bargains with God by asking, “will your steadfast love be declared from the grave; your faithfulness in destruction?” (באברון)

²² Nahum Sarna, “The Psalm for the Sabbath Day (Ps 92),” 155–68.

Chron 16:41–42 also mentions “Heman” and “Jeduthan” among those selected to give praise to the Lord for his לְהַלְלוֹת , and that they played musical instruments. Heman also appears in the superscription to Psalm 88, a *Maskeil*, while Jeduthan appears in the superscriptions of Psalms 39, 62, and 77, the first two of which have pronounced wisdom features. Heman is variously described as among the sons of Zerah (1 Chron 2:6), with Asaph and Ethan (Psalm 89:1) as a musical director (1 Chron 6:18; 15:17, 19), and in 1 Kings 5:11 (with Ethan) as man of great wisdom from Solomon’s court. These references provide further clues to the role of wisdom scribes associated with the temple court and the Psalms.

Sarna conjectures that in its place as the last of seven psalms used in the weekly *Tamid* offerings (Pss 24; 48; 82; 94; 81; 93, and 92, according to Rabbinic sources), Psalm 92 actually was the first chosen, based on it being the only psalm in the Hebrew Psalter containing a superscription assigning it for use on the Sabbath. Thus, at the time of the Psalter’s final redaction, Psalm 92 had already been selected for use with the *Tamid* offering on the Sabbath day. Since in the LXX five of these psalms have superscriptions assigning them for the Sabbath, these psalms were already being used for the Temple service by the time the Greek Psalter received its final form in the second century B.C.E. Sometime after the Hebrew Psalter reached its final form in the post-exilic period, these psalms were selected for use in the *Tamid*. Just as Psalm 100 serves for the *Todab* (Thanksgiving) offering, and 30 for the feast of Dedication, so Psalm 92 is dedicated to the Sabbath liturgy.²³

According to Sarna, Psalm 92 holds pride of place among the seven Levitical psalms because its two dominant themes, “the cosmogonic” and “socio-moral,” correspond to the Sabbath. Cosmogonic themes occur in vv. 5–6, 8, and 10 and parallel Ugaritic text III AB.A, 8f, while the “socio-moral” occurs in the contrast between the wicked and the righteous. In addition, the seven

²³ Ibid., For the selection of psalms for the *Tamid*, see 155–59

references in the psalm to YHWH also may have made the psalm attractive for its reading on the seventh day of the week.²⁴

This analysis has much merit and provides a very plausible hypothesis for the development of temple liturgies in post-exilic Israel; the social-moral sections, however, are better described as expressions of wisdom literature. Tate questions Sarna's conclusions based on the use of "night" (לַיְלָה) in the psalm rather than "evening" (עֶרֶב), the normal word to refer to the evening offering (see Psalm 141:2); Tate views the reference to morning and night as a merism referring to continual praise of Yahweh's covenant love.²⁵ Cohen cites the Targum, which describes the psalm as spoken by Adam on the first Sabbath day; another tradition views the psalm as a response to the transitory nature of the physical world, "where workers of iniquity flourish" (v. 8), and the permanence of the spiritual world of God's glory. The Sabbath rest enables one to more clearly view these events, which leads to the optimistic outlook of this final Sabbath song.²⁶ Reflection on the transitory nature of earthly life contrasted with the eternity of God (vv. 8–9 below) recalls Psalm 90 and Ecclesiastes.

Creation and history serve to enlighten and gladden the psalmist, who celebrates God's "deeds" (פְּעֻלָּה) and "works" (בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדָיו, "works of your hands" v. 5); פֶּעַל in the Hebrew often refers to God's providential actions, while "works" completes the synonymous parallelism with an anthropomorphic image of God as a craftsman.²⁷ The psalmist continues praise of YHWH's works and "how very deep are your designs" (מֵאֵד עֲמֻקּוֹ מִחֲשַׁבְתֶּיךָ), paralleling themes found in other psalms and wisdom books which view the created order as expressive of divine governance (Pss 8:4; 19:2; 33:4; 104:24; 145:4, 10, 17; 148;; Sir 24; 43). In emphasizing the depths of YHWH's "designs" (מִחֲשַׁבְוֹתָ) the psalmist acknowledges the glorious, transcendent nature of YHWH, which ultimately lies beyond human comprehension. Psalm 40:6 uses the same terminology to stress that nothing can

²⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁵ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 466; he further notes that "night" often refers to watching out for danger or intruders (Neh 4:3, 16; Ps 90:4), visions (Job 35:10; Ps 77:7), rising to praise YHWH (Ps 119:62), and standing to pray in the temple (Ps 134:1).

²⁶ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms*, 304.

²⁷ For the uses of פֶּעַל see BDB, 821.

compare to YHWH's works; the psalmists are therefore driven to publicly "declare" them to others (נִדְבַּר, 92:3; 40:6). Likewise, Psalm 33:10–11 contrasts temporal human designs with YHWH's enduring, permanent designs (see also Pss 131:1; 139:6, 17). The psalmist's acknowledgment of the depths and wonders of God's works recalls Job's response to YHWH's creative power in the Whirlwind Speech (Job 41:1–5); the psalm expresses this with praise and proclamation, Job with silence.

Vv. 7–12: Wisdom elements predominate in vv. 7–8, which describe the wicked who lack comprehension of God's works. Unlike the speakers of Psalms 8, 19A, 33, 104, and 148, who recognize the power and majesty of God by observing creation its orderly movements, the foolish fail to perceive: the "boorish man has no knowledge" (אִישׁ־בֹּעֵר לֹא יָדַע), and the "fool fails to understand" (כִּסִּיל לֹא־יָבִין). They stand in stark contrast to the righteous who understand and appreciate God's word and works; both verbs, יָדַע and בִּין, along with the words "boor" (בֹּעֵר) and "fool" (כִּסִּיל) occur in wisdom literature.²⁸ The description of the wicked as lacking knowledge here recalls similar themes in wisdom Psalms 14:2, 4; 53:3, 5.

Verse 8 uses three lines of intensifying parallelism to describe the wicked: though they seem to prosper (פָּרַח, also vv. 13, 15), like fresh grass and blooming flowers (צִיָּצוּ), ultimately, like fading flowers or withering grass, they will perish. This parallels wisdom Ps 90:5–6, which reflects upon the transitory nature of life, and the traditional retribution theology of Pss 1:4–6, and 37:35–36, which describe the ultimate destruction of the wicked in terms of wind-blown chaff (Ps 1) and a formerly flourishing plant that disappears (Ps 37). In v. 13 the righteous will flourish (יִפְרַח) like a Lebanon cedar; this parallels Psalm 1:3 in its description of the righteous followers of Torah

²⁸ Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 54–55, cites these words as evidence of what he views as a "wisdom interpolation," and notes that בֹּעֵר occurs elsewhere only in Psalm 73:22, and Proverbs 12:1 and 30:2; כִּסִּיל "is also exclusively a wisdom word," occurring 45 times in Proverbs, 17 in Ecclesiastes, and in Psalms 49:11 and 94:8. The verbs mentioned above are, in his view, also wisdom-oriented, with "to know" being used frequently in Proverbs to contrast the wise and foolish, and "to understand" occurs frequently in Job and Proverbs, often in the hiphil as "to instruct," and seven times in Psalm 119 (vv. 100, 104).

flourishing like streamside evergreen trees. As the psalm progresses it deals with the reality of disorder caused by the wicked and the issue of divine justice by reaffirming the ultimate destruction of the wicked while emphasizing the prosperity and flourishing of the righteous; this fits well with themes of the Sabbath on creation, renewal, and living according to Torah.

V. 9: In the midst of this discussion of the boorish evildoers and their fate, verse 9 serves as a brief interlude to reaffirm YHWH's eternal governance from “on high” (גִּרְוֹם). In Ancient Near Eastern cosmology, the deities are often depicted as dwelling above the clouds, in their heavenly abodes; Israelite adaptations of this cosmology depict YHWH as ruling over the cosmos from his celestial throne (Psalms 18:7–17; 29; 68:5–6, 34–35; 82; 93:2; 102:20; 104:3–4,13; 144:7). From the “throne” above the dome of the sky (see Gen 1:8), the “breath” (רוּחַ) and voice of YHWH comes forth in wind and storm, rain fructifies the earth, while YHWH watches over human affairs (Pss 2:4; 14:2/53:3; 19:1–7; 33:13; 80:15; 135:7). Alter conjectures that the verse may be an insertion, as it lacks parallelism “and does not scan in the Hebrew”; it serves to contrast the ephemeral nature of humans with the eternal reign of God.²⁹ Tate calls this “the pivotal verse of the psalm” as it emphasizes how YHWH rules from this cosmic dwelling place—the divine throne that transcends all temporal, human powers (Pss 9:8; 11:4–6; 14:2; 102:13).³⁰ Rather than an insertion or a pivot, I propose that the psalmist intentionally placed v.9 as a center-point to the psalm, which begins with praise of the “Most High” (עַלְיוֹן, v. 2), and concludes with affirmation of YHWH's upright and perfect nature (v. 16).

Verse 10 returns to the fate of the wicked, as in v.8., by using repetition, with the first two lines beginning with the phrase, “Surely, your enemies” (כִּי הִמָּחֵה אֱיֹבֵיךָ); line 1 addresses YHWH, and line 2 proclaims “they have perished” (אֲבָדוּ). This recalls Psalm 1:6 (see also 112:10); both vv. 8 and 10 are tri-colons emphasizing the destruction of the wicked framing the exaltation of YHWH in v. 9. This use of incremental repetition is representative of early biblical poetry (Song of Deborah)

²⁹ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 326.

³⁰ Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 467.

and Ugaritic texts, and here serves to emphasize that the enemies have perished.³¹ Line three synonymously describes the “workers of evil” (פעלי און) in contrast to YHWH’s works (פעלך), which gladdened the psalmist in v. 5. These evildoers “will be “scattered” (יהפרדו); the verb emphasizes that the evildoers will be scattered as result of their opposition to YHWH.³² In Job 4:11 the verbs for “perish” and “scatter” also occur together as Eliphaz describes the perishing and scattering of lions as a metaphor for the fate of the wicked.³³ All those who threaten societal equilibrium and balance will ultimately be silenced through destruction and dispersion.

Mention of how YHWH raises the psalmist’s “horn” (קרני) and “anoints” (or moistens) him or her with “freshening oil” (בשמן רעני), v. 12) reveals the speaker’s special status before God; this does not, however, make the speaker a king but probably describes the blessed state of God’s chosen ones gathered for worship. The verb translated “anoint” (בלל) is not the usual word used for the anointing of kings and priests (משח), but means “to moisten” or “pour over”; in this case, the anointing with oil represents God’s Spirit that sanctifies the worshipper with rich blessings of divine hospitality.³⁴ With both ears and eyes the psalmist will behold the fate of the wicked—a sign that vindication and justice are assured (v. 12).

Verses 13—16: The tree metaphor, mentioned above, describes the righteous person (צדק) as a flourishing date palm (תמר) and a Lebanon cedar (ארז, v. 10); the date palm was known for its erect stature (Song 7:8), while the towering cedars of Lebanon confer a sense of permanence, power and honor (Ps 29:5).³⁵ These righteous ones who live according to Torah engage in Temple worship and prosper: “The ones planted in the house of the Lord will flourish in the courts of our God” (v.

³¹ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 326, mentions similar constructions in Ugaritic poetry in which Baal is the deity addressed. For similar constructions in the Song of Deborah, see Judges 5:5–7, 12, 19, 21, 24, 26, 27.

³² The hithpael here is translated as a future, “they will be scattered” J. Hausmann, *TDOT* 12:78; Cohen notes that one could also translate the verb reflexively, they “shall scatter themselves” (*The Psalms*, 305).

³³ Tate notes that the reflexive form of פָּרַד has the meaning “disintegration/burning/dispersion” (*Psalms 51—100*, 467).

³⁴ Some view this verse as referring to the smearing or anointing of the horn, symbolic of health and “virility” (see Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 462, note on v. 11a, and 467).

³⁵ Cohen, *Psalms*, 306.

14). Their fruitfulness and vigor will continue into old age (v. 15); the strength of the metaphor lies in the fact that palms can live up to two hundred years and continue to produce fruit.³⁶ While the wicked will perish (v. 8; Ps 1:6), the righteous will prosper—a key element in the theology of Deuteronomy (30:15–18). Verses 13–15 also recall imagery from wisdom Pss 1:3, 36:9–10, and 128:3, along with *Mas'kil* Ps 52:10 and Jer 17:2–3.

Just as the psalm began with a call to worship (v. 2), so now after having explored the depth and greatness of God's word and works, and the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked, it concludes with an affirmation of the initial call to worship. Having meditated upon this, the psalmist, using language reminiscent of the Song of Moses (Deut 32:4), proclaims that the Lord is “upright” (לְהַגִּיד כִּי־יֵשׁ יְהוָה). The psalmist uses the metaphor of God as a “rock” (Pss 18:3; 28:1; 42:10; 62:3; 144:1) in whom there is “no unrighteousness” (Ps 119:3).

The word translated “upright” describes someone who deals honestly and straightforwardly with others, someone who is loyal (Job 1:1, 8:6), or in reference—literally or figuratively (see; Ps 107:7; Isa 26:7)—to a level road. Here it describes the perfect nature of God's relationship to creation; in its plural form (יְשָׁרִים) the word refers to the faithful worshipping community.³⁷ In the Dead Sea Scrolls the root יֵשׁ describes the upright of the covenant community (יְשָׁרִים; 1QS 3:1; 4:22), who walk uprightly (יֵשׁ; 1QS 1:2; 1QH 6:10), who act upright (יֵשׁ; 1QS 3:8; 1QH 6:10).³⁸ Psalm 92, therefore, provides another example of a cultic hymn containing wisdom elements, revealing the connections between wisdom and cult. As the source of creation and Torah, God assures the righteous of prosperity and blessing; this calls forth confident, joyful praise as experienced through the Sabbath and expressed in Psalm 92.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: Volume 2, Psalms 73--150* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 664–65.

³⁸ H. Ringgren, *TDOT* 6:472.

Psalm 94: A Wisdom-Oriented Instruction for Confidence in Divine Judgment

Framed by a plea for divine vengeance against enemies (vv. 1–2) and confident assertion of God’s protection, judgment, and punishment of the wicked (vv. 22–23), Psalm 94 utilizes elements of lament (vv. 1–7; 20–21) and thanksgiving (vv. 14–19), surrounding a central wisdom instruction (vv. 8–13), to provide a wisdom instruction meant to strengthen and maintain faith despite oppression. Typical of wisdom literature, the psalm pits the wicked (רשעים, vv. 3, 13)—also described as workers of iniquity, arrogant, brutish, fools, evildoers, and destructive—against the “innocent” righteous (צדיק; נקי, v. 21). These evildoers exhibit a “practical atheism” (v. 7; Pss 14:1; 53:2) by which they commit sinful, destructive behavior while foolishly thinking God will not hold them accountable.³⁹ Through its central wisdom instruction the psalm seeks to maintain and strengthen faith; the diverse genres within the psalm, then, are subsumed under the dominant motif of instruction and edification. In recognizing the wisdom elements of the psalm, Tate notes its “sermonic quality,” and proposes that the psalmist comes from “wisdom circles” rather than cultic circles, with the psalm originating as a liturgical instruction in a post-exilic context.⁴⁰ Its concern over oppression by violent antagonists in both communal (v. 5) and individual (vv. 17–22) expressions, and reference to the “seat of destruction” (v. 20)—probably a reference to oppressive foreign rule—parallels the experience of Israel in the exilic or post-exilic period.

Vv. 1—7: While the MT of Psalm 94 lacks a superscription, the LXX translation attributes it as follows: “A Psalm of David for the fourth day of the week.” Nahum Sarna observes that the LXX superscription “accords with the rabbinic tradition that the psalm was sung in the temple each

³⁹ Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51—100*, 487. Practical atheism in essence ignores or denies God’s presence and power in human affairs while not explicitly denying the existence of gods.

⁴⁰ Tate also views Psalm 94 as sharing the same genre as Psalms 91 and 112, all of which he views as post-exilic liturgical instructions, which may have been used in synagogue worship or even in the Jerusalem Temple (*Psalms 51—100*, 487). I fully agree with Tate’s assessment and view Psalm 94 as another example of a wisdom-oriented psalm that probably was used in both liturgical and purely instructional situations.

Wednesday by the Levitical choir.”⁴¹ The *Mishnah* lists seven psalms (24, 48, 82, 94, 81, 93, and 92), each corresponding to a day of the week, which were sung by Levites to accompany the libation of wine following the *tamid* offering;⁴² Sirach 50:14–19 describes what appears to be this service ca. 190 B.C.E. According to this schema, Psalm 82, which deals with heavenly beings and the celestial throne, is assigned for the Tuesday liturgy, while Psalm 94, which takes up earthly matters, follows.⁴³ I presume the MT of Psalm 94 reflects an older version of the psalm, before it was specifically designated for Wednesday services; on the other hand, I presume, with Sarna, that the liturgical use of select psalms for the so-called *tamid* offering predates the finalization of the LXX Psalter (probably before the second century B.C.E.).⁴⁴ This provides evidence of the use of Psalm 94 in liturgical and wisdom contexts, which may be evidence of the close connection of post-exilic wisdom schools with the temple.

Beginning with the double use of **אל נקמות**, the psalmist makes a plea to the “God of vengeance” to “shine forth” (**הופיע**, vv. 1-2); this “plural of intensity” intends to emphasize God’s role in establishing and maintaining justice within society. Thus, a righteous God naturally responds with retribution against sinful behavior.⁴⁵ This also is the first of three uses of *anadiplosis*—a repetition of words or phrases for rhetorical effect—with the others occurring in the plea “how long” (v. 3) and the concluding assertion that God will “destroy” (**יצמיתם**, v. 23) the evildoers. The use of *anadiplosis* provides a threefold emphasis: in the first case, how a righteous God punishes evil; secondly, to emphasize the suffering of the righteous, and finally how the wicked will be destroyed.⁴⁶ Prayer for vindication of the righteous against the wicked represents a typical theme of wisdom psalms (e.g., 1:6; 32:10; 34; 37; 112) and Proverbs (e.g., Prov 10–24); the word translated

⁴¹ Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 191.

⁴² Nahum Sarna, “The Psalm for the Sabbath Day (Ps 92),” 155–56.

⁴³ Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 191.

⁴⁴ Sarna, “The Psalm for the Sabbath Day,” 156.

⁴⁵ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms*, 308. Tate observes that the pattern in v. 1, using the feminine plural **נקמות**, may reflect archaic usage, though he favors an exilic or post-exilic date for the psalm in its final form (*Psalms 51–100*, 488).

⁴⁶ Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 192.

“vengeance” (נִקְמָה) in this context refers to a judicial action by God against the wicked on behalf of the innocent. The innocent victims are described in v. 6 as the widow, sojourner, and orphan, groups for which the Torah prescribes special care (Exod 22:20; 23:9; Deut 10:18; 24:17; 27:19). The verb “shine forth” occurs similarly in Pss 50:2 and 80:2, both in the context of theophany; here the psalmist prays for a manifestation of God to thwart the evildoers. This leads the psalmist to pray that God “lift up” as judge of the earth, rising to the metaphorical throne from where God rules as sovereign judge of humanity, rendering (דָּשַׁב) proper recompense to the proud (עַל־גֹּאֲוִים, v. 2). The concept of God as universal judge occurs also in Pss 7:9; 50:6; 76:10, and 82. Typical of laments, the psalmist twice asks, “how long” (עַד־מַתַּי) the wicked will be able to exult (v.3; Pss 13:2-3; 74:10; 79:5).

The lament continues with a description of the evildoers’ (רָשָׁעִים) actions. In asking “how long” shall the wicked “exult” (v. 3), the psalmist describes their oppressive speech: “they pour forth and speak arrogantly” (יִבְעִיּוּ יִדְבְּרוּ עֲתָקִי), and boast (יְהַאֲמְרוּ). In examining these verses, Richard Clifford notes that “in the wisdom literature, one’s words reveal one’s true feelings and plans.”⁴⁷ In addition to words, these oppressors “crush” (יִדְכֹּאוּ) and “afflict” (יַעֲנִי) God’s people (v. 4), a probable reference to foreign domination. The verb “crush” is phonetically similar to the nouns “roaring” (רָכִים) in Psalm 93:3 and “dust” (דָּכָא) in Psalm 90:3; in Psalm 90 the reference is to the ephemeral nature of human life, while Psalm 93 refers to oppressive powers metaphorically described as roaring waves. In addition, the wicked kill those who lack status and protection (v. 6), while arrogantly maintaining, like the “fool” of Psalms 14/53, that God neither “sees” (יִרְאֶה־יָיִךְ) nor “perceives” (וְלֹא־יִבִּיֵן), v. 7; see also Eliphaz’s response to Job in Job 22:13–20). Such behavior directly violates Torah and in effect reveals their practical atheism.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Psalms 73—150* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2003), 113.

⁴⁸ Tate uses the term “practical or functional atheism” to describe the evildoers as those who ignore God’s presence and power, as noted above (*Psalms 51—100*, 42, 487). Modern conceptions of atheism—the

Vv. 8—13: Beginning in v. 8, the central wisdom section includes key terms and themes, as the speaker challenges the wicked, calling on the “boorish” to perceive (בִּינוּ בְּעֵרִים) and “fools” to understand (וְכַסִּילִים מִתִּי תִשְׁכִּילוּ); the use of terms for “brutish” and “fools” here connects Pss 94 and 92:7, and also occurs in wisdom Ps 73:22, while “fools” occurs in both wisdom psalm 49:11 and 92:7. When compared, Pss 92:7 and 94:8 are synonymous: both verses describe brutish, foolish persons who fail to know and understand wisdom. In comparing these verses, David Howard, who views Psalm 94 as having linguistic and thematic links to the wisdom motifs in psalms 90–92 and the “kingship of Yahweh” psalms 93–99, views 94:8 as “resuming the wisdom motifs present in Psalm 92.”⁴⁹

In addition to בִּינוּ (perceive, 8a), the verb שָׁכַל (“understand,” v. 8b) is an important wisdom term.⁵⁰ Used together, the verbs intensify the introduction to the wisdom instruction, providing both a sharp rebuke and challenge to those who flaunt arrogance and have no fear of God, and a sense of urgency. Verses 9 and 10 use a series of rhetorical questions to emphasize divine omniscience both to the evildoers being addressed, but more importantly to those Israelites who pray and meditate upon this psalm in instructional contexts. First, the psalmist asks, “The one who planted the ear, does he not hear, or he who formed the eye not behold?” If God forms the human organs of hearing and sight, nothing humans say or do can be outside of God’s hearing and observation. In similar fashion, Prov 20:12 asserts that God makes the ear that hears and the eye that sees. Next, using another negatively framed rhetorical question, the psalmist points out that since God instructs (רָסָה) “the nations”—providing a universal cast to the psalm—God of course can punish them and, as the omniscient source of all knowledge, God instructs humans (הַמַּלְמֵד)

belief that no God or gods exist—were uncommon or non-existent in the pre-scientific world of the Bible, so we may assume the evildoers viewed God as irrelevant and removed from daily life.

⁴⁹ David M. Howard, Jr., “Psalm 94 among the Kingship-of-Yhwh Psalms,” *CBQ* 61 (1999): 670.

⁵⁰ For a detailed analysis of the morphology of שָׁכַל and its use in the wisdom literature, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, see *TDOT* 14, 112–128, and chapter 2 of this dissertation.

אדם דעת, v. 10). Both verbs for instruction and teaching are common to the wisdom literature.⁵¹

Though the wicked may ignore God’s omniscient rule, those who receive instruction are reminded of God’s ultimate power, knowledge, and control, which inspires confidence in the midst of persecution.

To emphasize the vast gulf between temporal, imperfect human “thoughts” (מחשבות) and God’s omniscience, the psalmist uses language reminiscent of Pss 33:10–11 and 40:6, which likewise use the term מחשב to describe God’s awareness of human thoughts, and their futility (33:10; 94:11b), in comparison to divine thoughts (33:11; 40:6) and instruction (תורה 94:12). Despite the evildoers’ belief that God is unaware of human activity, YHWH knows (יהוה ידע) their thoughts and accounts them “vapor” (or “vanity,” הבל; v.11). Use of the term הבל represents a key theological term in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 1:1), and wisdom-oriented Psalms 39 (vv. 6, 7, 12) and 62 (vv. 10–11), to describe the ephemeral nature and lack of substance of human life and pursuits.

In contrast to the naive arrogance of the evildoers, however, the psalmist uses the adjective אשרי to describe those who humbly and eagerly receive God’s instruction (אשרתיסרנו יה): “who you instruct, YHWH”) and learn Torah (ומתורתך תלמדנו, v. 12). This verse also combines several important wisdom terms: אשרי, “happy,” is an important wisdom term used to describe the fate of the righteous (Pss 1:1; 2:12; 32:2; 33:12; 34:9; 40:5; 41:2); the verbs “instruct” (יסר) and “teach” (למד) and, of course, תורה, reveal the didactic focus of the psalm and its probable origin in wisdom circles.⁵² Conrad Schaefer observes the location of אשרי at the middle of the psalm, where

⁵¹ Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 114.

⁵² For the use of אשרי as a wisdom term, see *TDOT* 1: 445–48, which discusses its frequent use in Proverbs and parallels in Egyptian wisdom literature. The Piel form of יסר used here can also mean “to chastise” or punish; thus, NJPS and NRSV translate “discipline,” in which case the psalmist refers to those who changed their ways through God’s disciplinary action and then became receptive to Torah.

it serves to divide it into two halves, focusing respectively on “crisis and relief.”⁵³ Verse 13 concludes the central wisdom section by upholding the psalmist’s confidence that traditional retribution theology (e.g., Psalm 1) will prevail: God will “provide rest” (לְהַשְׁקִיט) in times of distress (“days of evil”), while the wicked will be destroyed (עַד יִכְרַה לְרַשָׁע שַׁחַת: “a pit will be dug for the wicked”).

Verses 14—19: Just as the psalmist lamented that the wicked “crush” (יִדְכְּאוּ) God’s people and “inheritance” (נַחֲלָתְךָ v.5), following the wisdom reflection, the psalmist now confidently asserts that God will neither “cast off” nor “forsake his inheritance” (וְנִחַלְתּוֹ לֹא יַעֲזֹב, v. 14). Like Job, the psalmist acknowledges that God allows the just to suffer, but disciplines them and teaches them Torah (vv. 10, 12) while preparing to eventually punish the wicked.⁵⁴ This will be fulfilled when “righteousness will return to judgment” (כִּי־עַד־צַדִּיק יָשׁוּב מִשִּׁפְּטִים, v. 15)—i.e., the administration of judgment will be marked by righteousness, with the result being the ultimate destruction of the wicked and redemption of the righteous (v. 23). By using a rhetorical question in both lines, the psalmist asks in v. 16, “Who will rise up (מִי־יִקּוּם) for me against the evildoers (מַרְעִים); who will stand up (מִי־יִתְּצֵם) against workers of iniquity?” The answer, of course, is YHWH, as the psalmist makes clear: “Unless the Lord was helper to me, I would have shortly dwelt in silence” (v. 17). Assured of God’s help, the psalmist confidently anticipates divine intervention. Using the image of slipping (“If my foot slips” 18a) as a metaphor for losing stability in life (e.g., Psalm 38:17), the psalmist confidently trusts that, in spite of current affliction and trouble, God’s covenant love will provide sustenance (חֶסֶדְךָ יְהוָה יִסְעֵדֵנִי: “Your steadfast love will sustain me”). Even though the psalmist experiences troubling internal thoughts (בְּרַב שְׂרַעְפֵי בְקִרְבִי: “When

⁵³ Conrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 233.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

my troubling thoughts within are many”), God continues to provide comfort (תַּנְחִימֵנִי; “your comforts”).

Verses 20—21: Verse 20 is presented as a question to God. In contrast to the “thrones of judgment” (בְּסֵאוֹת לְמִשְׁפָּט, Pss 122:5; 9:5, 8), the psalmist laments oppressive foreign rule, the “throne of destructions” (בְּסֵאֵי הַוָּוֶה, v. 20a).⁵⁵ These “thrones of judgment” refer to the symbolic “seat” of divine judgment and, by extension, that of the Davidic ruler. Could God have “fellowship” with foreign rulers, who “form misery by statute” (יִצַר עֲמַל עַל־יַחֲק, v. 20b)? The implied answer, of course, is “no.” In contrast to the just statutes of God (חֻק, Ps 119:5, 8), the wicked rulers—possibly a reference to the Babylonians or Persians—promote injustice and cause misery. Together they gather against the righteous (צַדִּיק) and “condemn innocent blood”; this metaphor highlights the key wisdom theme of contrasting the wicked and righteous. Blood (דָּם) symbolizes life in ancient Israel, in this case the lives of the righteous who have been threatened by oppressive rulers.

Verses 22—23: Despite oppression, the psalmist maintains faith in God’s ultimate justice according to traditional wisdom theology (Psalm 1; Prov 2:22). For the psalmist, who represents the righteous, the Lord has been a “fortress” (לִי לְמִשְׁגֵּב) and a “rock of refuge” (v. 22); in contrast, for the wicked, God will “cut them off” (יִצְמִיתֵם; used twice in v. 23). God answers the psalmist’s initial plea for divine retribution by “turning” the iniquity of the wicked back upon themselves: “And he turns their own iniquity back upon them” (וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־יָהֵם אֶת־אֲוֹנָם). Most translations (RSV; NRSV; NAB; NJPS) and commentators (e.g., Tate; Alter) translate the waw-consecutive וַיֵּשֶׁב in the future tense rather than the expected passive. In context, this works well with the future tense of the

⁵⁵ Cohen, *Psalms*, 311; Anderson views this reference as possibly a synecdoche, in which the “throne” refers to the leader (s), and thinks it more probably refers to abusive judges rather than the king (*Psalms II*, 675). I prefer to view it as a reference to the foreign rulers and their cohorts, with the psalmist intending a direct contrast to the righteous rule of the Lord and by extension the Davidic kings (of the past).

verb **צַמַּת**, used twice in the second line; the final verse, therefore, implies that God will soon enact judgment upon the wicked.⁵⁶ As noted above, the psalm begins with the use of anadiplosis in the psalmist's plea for divine vengeance, and now concludes with anadiplosis to emphasize the psalmist's confidence that God will cut them off.

Conclusion: My examination of Psalms 90, 92, and 94 reveals that Book 4 of the Psalter begins with a strong wisdom cast that carries throughout the Book. I will interpret Psalm 101 as a wisdom psalm, and will examine wisdom elements in historical psalms 105 and 106. This wisdom framework continues in Book 5 and fits well with the renewed emphasis in Books 4 and 5 on the Kingship of YHWH in the post-exilic period in response to the failure of the Davidic monarchy. In this context, wisdom teaching has become a central aspect of Israel's self-understanding; in particular, Psalm 94 appears to utilize wisdom teaching in response to the post-exilic experience of foreign domination.

Psalm 101: A Guide for Wise Living

Although most commonly classified as a Royal Psalm, I agree with Alter who calls Psalm 101 “preeminently a wisdom psalm,” in which in the psalmist's proclamation of his or her commitment to “study the way of the blameless” (**אֲשַׁכִּילָהּ בְּדֶרֶךְ תָּמִים**, v. 2) and avoid evil behavior and people parallels key themes in the Book of Proverbs.⁵⁷ Following the psalmist's initial commitment to sing and chant praise of the Lord's “steadfast love and justice” (**חֶסֶד וּמִשְׁפָּט**, v. 1), study the way of the blameless, and “walk in integrity of heart” (**אֶתְהַלֵּךְ תָּמִלְ בְּבֵן**) v.2) within his or her house,

⁵⁶ Cohen, following a passive translation, describes this use of the converted imperfect in v. 23a as “the perfect of certainty” in that the psalmist has such confidence in God's actions that he speaks as if they have already occurred (*Psalms*, 311). On the other hand, Tate argues for a future tense translation of the converted imperfect here, based on what he calls “the sequence of thought” with v. 22. He translates 23a, “He will turn back on them their iniquity” and therefore keeps all of v.23 as future tense (*Psalms 51—100*, 483, 485).

⁵⁷ Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 350. The antithetical proverbs in Proverbs 10–15 provide a good example of these parallel themes with Psalm 101. For an analysis that recognizes the psalm as a royal psalm utilizing wisdom elements associated with Proverbs for a ceremony in which the newly enthroned king states his commitment to uphold covenant obligations as the guarantor of justice in Israelite society, see Helen Ann Kenik, “Code of Conduct for a King: Psalm 101” *JBL* 95 (1976): 391–403. For typical interpretations of Psalm 101 as a Royal Psalm, see Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 135–39; and James L. Mays, *Psalms (Int)*, Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994), 321–22, who posits the composition of the psalm for use at an inaugural or other celebration for a king that presents the ideal of conduct for a ruler. The revised psalms in the *New American Bible* translate “house” as “royal court” (v. 2) and “before my eyes” as “be among my advisors” (v. 7).

the remainder of the poem describes exactly how the psalmist will fulfill these commitments (vv. 3–8). Before describing these commitments, using the wisdom terms “study,” “way,” “walk,” and “blameless,” the psalm opens with praise of God’s steadfast love and justice; in essence, the gift of God’s covenant love (חסד־ומשפט) evokes praise and dedication to wisdom. Thematically, Psalm 101 parallels Psalm 1 in the psalmist’s initial commitment to walk in the way of Torah and concluding proclamation of the destruction of the wicked; in Psalm 101 the psalmist concludes by declaring, “Each morning I will destroy all the wicked of the earth [כל־רשעי־ארץ],” and “cut off” from the city of YHWH all evildoers (v. 8).

Structural and Literary analysis: Common themes and terms exist throughout the psalm and form a symmetrical pattern: “the way of the blameless” (בדרך תמים, vv. 2, 6); “within my house” (בקרוב ביתי, vv. 2, 7); “before my eyes” (לנגד עיני, vv. 3, 7); “work/practices” (עשה, vv. 3, 7); “evil”/wicked (רשעי/רע, vv. 4, 8); and “destroy” (אצמית, vv. 5, 8). Cumulatively, the effect of this symmetry is to emphasize what Schaefer calls “the central affirmation” in vv. 5b–6a, which contrasts the “haughty eyes and arrogant heart” of the wicked, which the psalmist will not tolerate, and the “faithful of the land, that dwell with me” (בנאמני־ארץ לשבת עמדי).⁵⁸ Using haughty eyes to convey an outward look of arrogance, and “arrogant heart” (ורחב לבב) to represent an internal disposition of pride, the psalmist describes his foes as the antithesis of wisdom; these images also recall the description of the wicked in Ps 73:7, where eyes and heart also convey outward arrogance and internal dishonesty. Whether or not the psalmist represents a king, the main focus of the psalm reflects traditional wisdom theology: the contrast between the righteous/blameless with the wicked, who will ultimately be destroyed (e.g., Prov 1; Pss 1; 33:10–12; 34:20–23; 36:11–13; 37:37–38; 49:21; 53:6; 73; 112).

⁵⁸ Conrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, 247–48; Schaefer views the contrasts between positive goods to be sought and negatives to be avoided and describes the psalm as “a renewal program, possibly of a ruler” (248).

In addition to praising the steadfast love and justice of YHWH in song (v. 1), the psalmist organizes his response through the keyword “integrity” (תָּם; תְּמִים) in vv. 2 and 6: the psalmist *studies* the way of integrity and *walks* it with integrity of heart (v.2); people who likewise walk in the way of integrity are allowed to be his servants (v. 6).⁵⁹ This keyword (תָּם), meaning wholeness and completion, describes those who live by the foundational moral values of Torah. As further evidence for a royal setting, Mays notes that the word is used to describe the king’s righteousness in Pss 18:24, 27 and 78:72.⁶⁰ In addition, the reference to the person of integrity who “ministers” (שָׂרְתַנִּי), v.6) seems to present the psalmist as a person of authority who commands a staff. Several proverbs attributed to Solomon contrast the wicked with the righteous king (Prov 20:26; 25:5; 29:12); this may reflect the development of Israelite wisdom in the context of the royal court and provide a similar context for Psalm 101.⁶¹ While not denying the possible royal implications of the psalm, I view it more in terms of content, which focuses primarily on proper behavior according to wisdom—an attribute applied to King Solomon in 1 Kings 3.

The series of first person statements in which the psalmist commits to keeping the way of integrity and avoiding association with, or tolerance of, evil recall the ritual prayers that outline the requirements for worship in the temple in Psalms 15, 24, and Isa 33:15–16.⁶² In Pals 15:2 one who “walks in integrity” (הוֹלֵךְ תְּמִים) and does justice is worthy of entering the temple; this parallels the self-description of the psalmist in 101:6 who “walks in the way of integrity.” The pure of heart (בֶּרֶל־בָּב) of Ps 24:4 parallel the “integrity of heart” (בְּתָם־לִבִּי) in 101:2, while the thematic emphasis on spurning evil in 101:3 ff. parallels Isa 33:15–16. Standing in direct contrast to the heart

⁵⁹ Clifford notes that the verb הִלֵּךְ is “a biblical metaphor for conduct,” and heart (as I note) represents judgment and intelligence; thus, in his view the “king promises to make honest judgments as he rules” (*Psalms 73—150*, 137).

⁶⁰ Mays, *Psalms*, 321.

⁶¹ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101—150* (Rev. ed.; AB 21; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 8.

⁶² Kenik compares the ritual requirements in Psalm 101 with Deut 26:12–18, 1 Samuel 12:3, and Ps 18:21–25 to support her view that Psalm 101 arises from a covenant commitment ritual for the king; she posits that Psalm 18 “may well have emerged from the very event for which Psalm 101 was used” (“Code of Conduct for a King,” 396–97).

of integrity is the “perverse heart” (לבב עקש, v.4), a theme paralleled (using עקש) in Prov 10:9 and 11:20: God is pleased with those who walk in integrity but knows and punishes the behavior of the perverse. While the psalm began with praise of God’s steadfast love and justice (v. 1), and a commitment to study the way of integrity (v. 2), it concludes in v. 8 with the destruction of the wicked who upset the way of wisdom: “Every morning (לבקריום) I will destroy all the wicked of the land (כל־רשעי־ארץ), to cut off from the city of God all the workers of iniquity” (פעלי־און).

Wisdom Elements: In addition to the parallels with Proverbs noted above, I will conclude by looking more specifically at some of the key wisdom elements. Thematically, the righteous speaker, who walks in the way of integrity, sings of God’s steadfast love and justice, rejects and ultimately destroys evil, while looking with favor on the “faithful of the land” (v. 6), represents the ideals of wisdom. According to orthodox wisdom theology, the wicked will eventually be cut off and destroyed; this becomes clear in vv. 5–8. In verse 2 the psalmist commits to “study” (אשכיל), using the verb שכל, a key wisdom term used throughout the wisdom literature and the root of *Mas’kil*, which I previously discussed as a wisdom marker, both within psalm headings and texts. The noun “way” (דרך) in vv. 2 and 6 is another keyword, in particular in contrasting the way of the righteous vs. the wicked, and within the Wisdom-Torah acrostic Psalm 119.

In v. 5 the psalmist’s rejection of the “haughty of eye and proud of heart” parallels the description of the wise king in Proverbs 21:4 (רום־עינים רחב־לב). Similarly, in v.6 the psalmist embraces “the one who walks in the way of integrity” (הלך בדרך תמים), as does the wise king in Prov 20:7 (מתהלך בתמו צדיק); walking in integrity serves as a metaphor for wise living.

Rejection of a “haughty heart” and “raised eyes” (לא־גבה לבי ול־ארמו עיני) serve to affirm the humility of speaker of Psalm 131 affirmation of humility, an important teaching in Proverbs. Those who fear the Lord will be rewarded (Prov 22:4), while “haughty eyes” (עינים רמות) and a wicked heart will bring condemnation (Prov 6:17–18; see also vv. 12, 14).

Conclusion: Psalm 101 presents the worldview of orthodox wisdom teaching as attested in the Book of Proverbs; the royal aspects of the psalm, then, may parallel the attributive authorship of Solomon in Proverbs. While some Proverbs may be pre-exilic and even date from monarchic times, most scholars reject authorship by Solomon and view the final composition and editing of the book as post-exilic.⁶³ I propose that the author of Psalm 101 comes from wisdom circles that produced the post-exilic parts of Proverbs, as attested by the linguistic and thematic similarities between Psalm 101 and Proverbs. The psalmist's concluding statement about cutting off the wicked from the land is a precondition for the establishment of a righteous kingdom in Proverbs 25:5 ("take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness" RSV).⁶⁴ While the psalm may be influenced by ancient ceremonies for the coronation of the Davidic king, if as I propose the psalm in its present form derives from a post-exilic wisdom context, it can be interpreted as setting forth an ideal for leadership in a restored kingdom, or perhaps using the words of the ideal king as a source of inspiration for pious Israelites to live a life of faith and integrity (v. 6).⁶⁵

⁶³ R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 3-7; Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs* (IBC; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 200), 1-27.

⁶⁴ A Phoenician inscription, "The Karatepe," parallels the closing statement of Psalm 101 in the vizier's statement that he "removed every evildoer that was in the country" and boasts of "my wisdom" and the "goodness of my heart"—both providing points of contact with Psalm 101 and providing an example of the influence of other Near Eastern wisdom traditions in the psalms (Walter Beyerlin, ed., *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [OTL; trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 241).

⁶⁵ Allen provides a fine summary of various liturgical and royal interpretations of the Psalm (*Psalm 101—150*, 7–10).

Book Four Part Two: Psalms 104—106

Wisdom and Creation in Psalm 104: In the manner of Psalms 8, 19:1–6, 33 (Book 1), and 148 (Book 5), which praise the revelation of God in the beauty of creation—with heavens, firmament, plant, animal, and humans silently (Psalm 19) or with song (Psalms 8, 33, 148) proclaiming the divine source who creates and orchestrates creation—in Book 4 Psalm 104 likewise extols the glory of God in creation. Through observation of the created world and its orderly processes, the psalmist proclaims God as creator, sustainer and director of all. The heavens, seas, clouds, wind, fire, mountains and valleys, water springs, wildlife, plants, trees, fowl, moon and sun, course of the day, sea monsters, and the human being who participates as a member of this amazing cosmos live in a symbiotic harmony directed by God. In the midst of this recital v. 24 reveals the wisdom-oriented nature of this creation theology: “How manifold are your works, O Lord; all of them you have made *with wisdom* (בַּחֲכֹמָה); the earth is filled with your created things” (קִיִּינֵךְ). Just as Proverbs 8, Job 28, 38–41, and Sirach 24, 42:15–43:35 view creation as a product of wisdom, Psalm 104, too, projects creation in terms of wisdom theology.¹ Numerous parallels in Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom texts, in particular the Egyptian *Hymn to Aten*, the Akkadian *Hymn to Shamash* (both sun gods), and the Ugaritic *Baal Myth*, provide further evidence of the psalmist’s use and adaptation of existing wisdom literature.²

¹ In Proverbs 8 personified wisdom speaks of her activity as God’s agent in creation (v.30), while in Sirach 24 personified wisdom speaks her dwelling with God in the heavens (vv. 4–5), compares herself to the beauty of creation (vv. 13–19), and ultimately is identified with Torah (v. 22)—a development in later post-exilic wisdom teaching (see also Baruch 3:9–4:4). Job 28 proclaims wisdom as inaccessible except by God, and describes God’s creative activity as it leads to the concluding “wisdom thesis”: “Behold, the fear of the Lord is wisdom (חֲכֹמָה; see Prov 1:7; 9:10; Ps 111:10; Sir 1:12, 24), and turning from evil is understanding” (מִרְעָ וְסוֹר; Pss 34:15; 37:27). The Whirlwind speech of Job (38–41) and Sirach’s meditation on creation (43:15–44:35) parallel psalm 104 in their description of God’s power manifested in creation, describing all aspects of creation and order.

² Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101—150* (WBC 21; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 39–44. Mitchell Dahood suggests a literary influence of the Egyptian material, probably mediated through Canaanite hymnody; this reflects literary syncretism and influences in these creation hymns as also found in the wisdom literature (*Psalms III* [AB 17A; New York: Doubleday, 1983], 33). I will discuss these parallels within the text of my commentary.

Psalm 104 begins with the concluding statement of Psalm 103: “bless the Lord, my soul” (ברכי נפשי את־יהוה); clearly, a relationship exists between the two psalms, but Psalm 104 moves from the focus on the human person in covenant relationship to God (103:8; חסד) to a focus on a harmonious view of God’s good creation. Psalm 104 presents a symbiotic relationship of *equality* between all elements of creation, including the human person; joy and sustenance comes from the earth (vv. 14–15, 23), without any hint of the human person “subduing” or dominating the earth as in Genesis 1 or Psalm 8.³ The blessing formula which begins and concludes both Psalms 103 and 104 occurs only here in the Psalter. This raises the question of common authorship. Psalm 103 is best described as a thanksgiving hymn used for cultic services with a didactic intent.⁴ Psalm 103 is marked by Aramaisms (e.g., use of the כִּי suffix in vv. 3b–5; זכור v. 15; מלכות v. 20), and reflects upon Isaiah 57:16 in v. 9 and 40:6–8 in vv. 15–16 using similar vocabulary.⁵ This provides evidence of the post-exilic composition of Psalm 103; a clearly didactic element in v. 18 refers to those who keep the covenant and “precepts” (פקדיו), both referents to Torah. I propose that both psalms derive from a common post-exilic context associated with wisdom schools connected with the temple courts.

³ This verse is one of several in the Psalter that offer a variation on the covenant-formula of Exod 34:6, in which Yahweh offers a self-description to Moses as being “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”; in Psalms 86:14, 103:8 and 145:8, the psalmist proclaims this formula (with slight variations). I propose that the repetition of the Exodus formula serve as a “covenant-marker,” the keywords of which call to mind the revelation to Moses at Sinai and reassure successive generations of the enduring promise of חסד in Israel’s experience.

⁴ Allen summarizes three competing views on the genre of Psalm 103 among scholars: (1) an individual thanksgiving hymn used in a cultic setting, (2) a non-cultic individual hymn with didactic features, and (3) a cultic hymn used for the autumn festival. Central to each view is the interpretation of the “hymnic participles” in vv. 1–5, in which the psalmist speaks to himself (“my soul”) and blesses God for forgiving, healing, redeeming, bestowing covenant love, and renewing life. Allen concludes by describing it as a hymn composed for a communal thanksgiving service (*Psalms 101—150*, 27–28). I propose that the individual voice of both Psalms 103 and 104, directed to “my soul” (נפשי) at the beginning and end of each psalm, can serve a collective purpose; in addition, the psalms could easily serve both individual and communal contexts, in liturgy, instruction, and meditation.

⁵ Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 26; with regard to זכור he cites Joüon (#50e), who views the verb form here as corresponding to an Aramaic passive participle used in an active sense (note 13.a)

Psalm 104 utilizes the post-exilic Priestly creation account, has its own Aramaism (עפאים; v.12), parallels Psalm 145:15–16 in vv. 27–28, and parallels aspects of Proverbs 3:19, 8:22–30, and Job 28, and in v. 24 connects wisdom with creation. The God who “crowns” (עטר) the human person with “glory and honor” (Ps 8:6), and “steadfast love and mercy” (103:4), is presented as a divine king “clothed with honor and majesty” (הוד והדר לבשר; 104:1). God the creator, source of light, life, and glory, stretches out the heavens, rides the clouds as a chariot, and makes winds and fire “messengers,” i.e., the divine presence reveals itself in the order and elements of creation (vv. 1–4). God crowns humans with honor and steadfast love. Psalm 104 closely parallels many aspects of the Priestly account of God ordering chaos and making creation “good” in Genesis 1 but provides a more detailed description of creation in all its aspects. All “living things, both small and great” (v. 25), look to God for sustenance (v. 27) and, paralleling the Yahwist creation account (Gen 2:7; Eccl 12:7), the psalmist proclaims that life is sustained and renewed by God’s Spirit: “You send forth your spirit and they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (והחדש פני ארמה; v. 30).

Structure: Psalm 104:1ab and 35c begin and end the poem with praise; vv. 1c–4 extends the imagery of Ps 103:19, with God presiding over creation from his heavenly throne. In Psalm 104 God governs the created order and metaphorically rides the clouds as a “chariot” (רכוב, v. 3)—an image found in Ps 68:5, 34; Isa 19:1 and in North Semitic references to Baal.⁶ Verses 5–9 emphasize God’s establishing the earth; vv. 10–14, God provides water for beasts, birds, and earth; vv. 14–15, provision of plants to provide food, wine and oil for human use; vv. 16–17, trees provide homes for birds; v.18, mountains provide homes for wild goats and rabbits; vv. 19–23, the moon and sun determine the course of daily life; and in v. 24, as noted above, God creates with wisdom. This praise of wisdom reflected in God’s creative works and creatures occurs early in the second half of the poem. Verses 25–30 resume with an emphasis on the seas, living things of all sizes—including

⁶ A limestone amulet from Arslan Tash contains this inscription: “Baal has harnessed his chariot; an overpowering fountain is with him” (A 2, 3; quoted from Walter Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts relating to the Old Testament* [trans. John Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 250).

the sea monster, Leviathan—all of which find sustenance in God, who takes and gives life by removing or imparting his Spirit (רוּחַ) the principle source of renewal (see Ps 51:11–12). Verses 31–35ab again focuses on praise of God who causes the earth to smoke and tremble in a theophany (Exod 19; Pss 18:8–9; 29), and whose majesty evokes meditation (שִׁיחַ) and rejoicing (שִׂמְחָה; v. 34); the psalm concludes with a prayer for the destruction of enemies, leading to the final inclusion of praise.

Verses 1c–4: By depicting God as “clothed” (הוֹד וְהִדָּר לְבִשָׁתוֹ) with “honor and majesty” the psalm continues the images of God as King from Psalm 103:20–22, which depicts God directing subservient angels, “mighty ones,” ministers and others who carry out God’s will. Psalm 8:6 uses the term “honor” (הוֹדָה) for the human being, whom God appoints as governor of creation; in Ps 104:1, however, the term applies only to God, with humans depicted as one of many equal participants in the created order. God appears in the heavens, luminously “wrapped in light” (עֲטֹהֶ־אֹרֶךְ) and “stretching” (נֹוֹטֵה) the heavens like someone spreading a tent. Verses 2–4 use a series of active participles to describe God’s creative work—wrapping, stretching, joining, making, and walking—as an ongoing activity. God’s creative work continues in the present as a type of “daily renewal of the universe.”⁷ The image of God stretching out the seemingly infinite heavens as one setting up a tent emphasizes the absolute transcendence, autonomy, and power of God; this recalls God’s Whirlwind speech in Job 38:4–6, which describes the earth as a building set upon foundations.⁸ The participles for “wrapped” and “stretching” create a play on words in the Hebrew which is lost in translation.

Extending the depiction of God as the divine craftsman, verse 3 states that God “joins the crossbeams of his heavenly chambers above the waters”—the word עֲלֵי־יִוְתָיו “heavenly chambers,” reflects ancient cosmology in which the heavenly abode of YHWH is located above the waters (sky)

⁷ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms: Hebrew Text & English Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Soncino Books of the Bible; London/New York: Soncino Press, 1945, 1992), 337.

⁸ Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1973), 292. See also Psalms 24:2; 89:12; 102:6; Prov 3:19; Isa 48:13; 51:13, 16; Zech 12:1.

in the dome of the sky (Gen 1:6–7; Ps 29:10; Amos 9:6). The image of God riding the chariot of clouds on the “wings of the wind” evokes theophanies from Pss 18:11, 68:5, 34, and Isa 19:1; God rides upon the clouds and wind and thunders forth with strong voice from the ancient heavens (Ps 68:34), and strikes fear into foreign idols (Isa 19:1). In Ugaritic and Canaanite texts, the transcendent majesty of the god Baal is portrayed in his control over all cosmic activity.⁹ The Ugaritic texts of *The Baal Cycle of Myths* (KTU 1.1–1.2), contain a strong parallel between Baal and the depiction of YHWH in the psalms as creator who “rides” on the clouds; this is seen particularly in the battle between Baal and Yam. Encouraging Baal to destroy Yam, “Kothar-and-Hasis spoke: ‘Indeed I say to you, O Prince Baal . . . O Charioteer of the Clouds,’” and goes on to urge Baal to “Take your everlasting Kingdom”; at the conclusion of this section, shortly before Baal dries up Yam, Athtart also urges Baal, “Dry (him) up, O Charioteer of the Clouds” (1.2 iv.).¹⁰ In these texts, Baal, like YHWH in the psalms, overcomes chaos to bring order and take command of creation. This provides another example, in addition to the Egyptian parallels to be discussed below, of the adaptation of other ANE wisdom traditions by Israelite wisdom writers and editors in composing the Psalter. The major difference, of course, is the emphasis in the Psalms on YHWH and the absence of other “gods”; Psalms 82 and 138:1, however, make reference to other אלהים in the divine council (בעדת־אל, 82:1).

The “winds” or God’s “breaths” become messengers (עשה מלאכיו רוחות) that convey revelation (Ps 148:8), while flaming fire, one of the elements of creation, serve as “ministers” (משרתיו). These metaphors again emphasize how natural elements serve God’s purposes and mediate the divine presence. This depiction of divine order within the cosmos further reflects

⁹ Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 45; for Baal texts, see Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts*, 250; and James B. Pritchard, *ANET*, 131–55.

¹⁰ Cited in N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts From Ugarit* (trans. N. Wyatt; 2d ed.; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 67–69.

ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions, for example, in the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* (truth; justice; order), which serves as a divine attribute governing creation.¹¹

Vv. 5—9: Following the focus on the heavenly dwelling place and activity of God in vv. 1–4, the rest of the poem focuses on earth (הָאָרֶץ), its various life forms, landscape, and God’s direction of its activities. God “established” (יָסַד) the earth on foundations that will resist being moved (תְּמוֹט, v. 5). The verb יָסַד appears frequently in biblical texts on creation and emphasizes the stability and permanence of what God makes; the verb for מוֹט, carries a sense of instability, “tottering” or “waving.”¹² This reveals God’s persistent care for the earth and its creatures, providing order and sustenance as a personally present Divine being. A similar use of מוֹט occurs in Wisdom-oriented Psalm 62, where the psalmist confidently asserts he or she will never be “greatly moved” (לֹא־אֲמוֹט רַבָּה) because God is a “rock of salvation” and “stronghold” (vv. 3, 7). With regard to the root יָסַד, in the Whirlwind speech the Lord asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation (בִּיסְדֵי־אָרֶץ) of the earth?” (38:4), and in Proverbs 8:29, personified Wisdom describes being present when God established “the foundations of the earth” (מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ). Along with Psalm 104, these examples illustrate the adaptation of the concept of *ma'at* by Israelite sages in their presentation of creation theology.

Further evidence of God’s imposition of order upon creation is expressed through the metaphor of the “deep” (תְּהוֹם; v. 6; Gen 1:2) or “watery chaos,” which covered the earth like a garment, while the primordial waters “stood above the mountains”; at God’s “rebuke” and thundering voice, these personified elements of chaos “fled” (יָנוּסוּ) and became fearful (יַחֲפוּזוּ), quickly moving to the place God established for them (אֵל־מְקוֹם זֶה יִסְדַּת לָהֶם; v. 8; Gen 1:9–

¹¹ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of the Wisdom Literature* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 37–40.

¹² For these two verbs, see *BDB*, 413 (יָסַד), and 557 (מוֹט). Regarding v. 5b, Allen states: “Here, as in Ps 93:1, this sense [of stability and safety under God’s care] is applied to the world as under God’s control” (*Psalms 101–150*, 45).

10). God who is “clothed” with majesty (Psalm 93:1) “clothes” the earth with the waters of chaos, which in turn are placed in their proper order. In ancient Near Eastern cosmology תהום calls to mind the belief in a watery, chaotic underworld beyond human control and alludes directly to the Priestly creation story, in which darkness covers the deep (תהום) while the spirit (רוח) of God hovers and God in turn speaks and brings chaos into order (Gen 1). תהום plays an important role in two other biblical wisdom texts: in Prov 8:27 Wisdom describes how God placed the horizon (“drew a circle” RSV) on the “deep”; in Job 38:16, God questions if Job has ever “walked the mystery of the deep” (חקר תהום התהלכת).¹³ God turns chaos into an ordered base for plants, animals, and humans to survive and flourish. God’s “roar” (גערותך) evokes the image of a lion, while also bringing to mind Psalm 29 with its depiction of God being revealed in powerful natural forces; God’s order causes the waters to “rise” (עלה) above the mountains and “sink” (ירד) into the valleys, and finally arrive at their pre-ordained “place” (מקום).

Similar vocabulary and creation theology occurs in Psalm 24, an entrance liturgy, in which the speaker first announces that YHWH controls the earth (ארץ), and those dwelling upon it, for he “founded/established” (יסד) it upon the seas/waters (מים); after this, the speaker asks who will be found worthy stand in the sanctuary (מקום קדש) and worship (24:1–3; 73:17). The answer parallels the description of the righteous speaker in wisdom Psalm 73: those with clean hands and a pure heart (24:4; 73:1, 13). The word מקום often refers to the sanctuary and in later Jewish mysticism represents the divine abode; in Psalm 104 it simply refers to God’s ordering of creation, giving each element its respective place.¹⁴ In the larger context of Psalm 104, however, each “place”

¹³ *BDB*, 1063 cites the use of תהום in Job and Proverbs as referring to “subterranean waters,” and Ps 104:6 in reference to the primeval ocean, according to Hebrew cosmogony.

¹⁴ For מקום in reference to sacred places see 1 Sam 7:16, Isa 26:21 (see also Isa 66:1; Micah 1:2–3; Pss 26:8; 103:22; 132:5). In 1 Chron 16:27, it says of YHWH: “majesty and honor are before him, joy in his place” (במקומו); similarly, Ps 96:6, probably a later composition, proclaims: “majesty and honor are before

in God's good creation in itself represents divine activity and sacredness. This emphasis in Psalm 104:5–8 on God's arrangement of dry lands and waters in creation to show how God transforms chaos into an established order occurs in Genesis 1, Job 38, Proverbs 8, and the creation poems in Sir 42:15—43:33. God sets the boundaries (גבול־שמה) which the waters cannot pass over (Job 38:5–6; 10–11; Prov 8:29), preventing them from again returning to cover the earth. The emphasis here is on God, clothed with majesty and power, and directing, limiting, ordering, and providing stability in creation.

Verses 10—18: Water springs, mountains, forests, crops provide food, drink, and refuge. The image of flowing springs becoming channels (נהלים) which flow between mountains and provide drink for beasts and birds (10–12) evokes images of beauty and also God's generous provision for creation. God's "works" (מעשׂים; v.13) include "watering" the mountains from his heavenly dwelling place (משקה הררים מעל יוֹתיו; "watering the mountains from his upper chambers"), and fructifying the earth. The repetition of words related to water emphasize God's provision of this life-giving resource: God gives drink (ישקן) which satisfies (שבר) the thirst (צמא) of land and wildlife, mountains and earth (vv. 11–13). Again, this reflects ancient Hebrew cosmology: God's throne is located above the dome of the sky, from which life-giving water comes. From both springs (v. 10) and the heavens, God provides water to nurture creation; God has harnessed water and transformed it from a threat to a source of nurture and sustenance. The Egyptian *Hymn to Aton* (also, "Aton") parallels v. 10 in its depiction of a heavenly river providing water for earth: "For thou has set a Nile in heaven, That it may descend for them and makes waves upon the mountains."¹⁵ In v. 12, "Upon them (the streams) the birds of heaven dwell; between the branches their voice sings," contrasts sharply with the image of a lonely bird on a housetop used by the speaker of Ps 102:8; here they

him, strength and glory in his sanctuary," replacing מקדש with מקום "sanctuary," which anticipates the later rabbinic use of המקום ("the place") as an epithet for God. Note also the use of "majesty" (הוד) in these texts about the sanctuary, and its metaphorical use as God's clothing in 104:1.

¹⁵ ANET, lines 70–73, 371.

“dwell” (שָׁכַן) in security and sing joyfully. The verb שָׁכַן conveys a sense of security in the land, as applied to the righteous in wisdom Psalm 37 (vv. 3, 27, 29). The root often refers to the sanctuary where YHWH dwells and humans visit (Pss 15:1; 26:8; 84:2).

Next, the psalmist moves from God’s provision for wild beasts, land, plant life, and birds, to domesticated cattle: “you sprout grass for cattle.” This finally leads to humans: “and green herb [vegetables] for the service of the human being” (וְעֵשֶׂב לְעִבְדַּת אָדָם): though the human person comes at the top of this chain of creation and living things, it is only as a participant in God’s symphony of interdependent life; no hint exists of human domination or subduing creation but rather humans are willing participants in God’s creative plan (v. 14). By enumerating the diverse elements of creation, the psalmist evokes the detailed lists of plant and animal life typically found in Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions.¹⁶ In addition to the *Hymn to Aton*, noted above, the Egyptian *Hymn to Amon-Re* also describes the diverse elements of creation presided over, and sustained by, *Amon-Re*, the supreme god who “creates and sustains life.”¹⁷ It seems likely that, as with the use of Babylonian creation mythology in the Priestly creation story in Genesis 1, the psalmist had access to various ANE creation myths which he then adapted for use in a monotheistic, Yahwistic context.

Verses 14 and 23 both discuss human work and serve as a frame for the mid section of the poem; the activities of humans surround and complement those of other elements of creation, revealing a unity and harmony in God’s plan. The word עֵשֶׂב “green herb/vegetable,” occurs in Gen 1:11 as a general term for edible plants and vegetables. “For the service of the human being” can be interpreted as herbs for humans to use or herbs as the product of their labor/service (הָאָדָם לְעִבְדַּת). God makes it possible for humans to “bring forth bread from the earth” (לֶחֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ).

¹⁶ Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 46.

¹⁷ Pritchard, *ANET*, 365–67.

לְהוֹצִיא) through agricultural activity (v. 14); this became the source of the Jewish Table prayers (*Prayer Book* 278) used in the Passover meal.¹⁸

Wine and oil (v. 15) reflect health and celebration: wine (יַיִן) “gladdens the human heart,” in its use at celebratory meals and as a source of comfort (e.g., Prov 9:1–5; Eccl 9:7; Song 8:2). Similarly, oil (שֶׁמֶן) is used for comfort and healing (Ps 23), anointing priests and prophets (e.g., Exod 29:7; Ps 89:22), and as a balm in the hot, dry climate; it “makes the face to shine.” Add to these the provision of bread (לֶחֶם), the staff of life which “fortifies” (סָעַד), and we have an image of humans living in joyful harmony with creation, benefiting from its fruits but in a non-exploitive manner. The verb סָעַד means to “support, make firm, refresh” and aptly describes the importance of bread to “sustain the heart,” as used also in Genesis 18:5 where Abraham provides for the three mysterious visitors by offering a morsel of bread “to sustain your hearts.” The verb “to be full,” שָׂבַע, occurs again in v. 16 in reference to the trees being sated (watered)—more specifically in the second cola the cedars, a biblical image of strength (see Num 24:6; Isa 2:13; 14:8; 41:19; Ezek 31:8; Ps 29:5)—parallel to its use in v. 13 where the earth was sated with the fruit of God’s works. Grain, wine and oil are depicted in the Bible as staples of life (Deut 7:13).

Those abundantly nourished cedars of Lebanon provide a suitable place for birds to build their nests (v. 17), while the “stork” (חֲסִידָה) builds her nest in fir trees. Cohen notes the derivation of the stork’s name from the root חָסַד, “steadfast love,” is based in Jewish tradition on the bird’s great devotion and affection for its young. Fir trees provide height and strength to make a platform for the large nest.¹⁹ The mountain heights provide a home for the wild goats (עֲלִיִּם, “climbers”), and the rocky outcrops and holes provide safe and concealed quarters for “badgers.”²⁰

¹⁸ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms*, 339.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 340.

²⁰ *BDB*, 418.

Images of high mountains, rich forests, rocky shelter, provisions of water and food for plants, animals and humans together form an idealized and rich portrait of harmony, beauty and balance in creation; similar images are evoked in Pss 72:6, 16; 133:3. The listing of various creatures and their havens in vv. 17–18 recalls Job 38:39–39:30. Verses 11–14 parallel the Egyptian *Hymn to the Aton* (Aten), which presents beasts as “content with their pasture,” while trees and plants flourish, and birds fly from their nests, with their outstretched wings symbolizing praise of Aton.²¹ Having discussed the creation and provision of earth (vv. 5–9), water resources (springs and rain, vv. 10–13), and provision food, drink, and shelter for all living things (vv. 14–18), the poet now reflects upward, on the creation of moon and sun (vv. 19–23).

Verses 19–23: God creates the moon to determine the seasons (יָרַח לְמוֹעֲדִים), while the sun knows when to set (מִבֹּאֵן) as both are subordinate to God’s well-ordered plan; the Hebrew people follow a lunar calendar, so day begins at nightfall (moonrise). Similarly, the importance of the moon in relation to the heavenly bodies and creation appears also in creation psalms 8:4 and 148:3; in Psalm 136:9 God creates the “moon and stars to rule by night,” attesting to the ancient belief in the powers of heavenly luminaries. God “makes the darkness” so that with the arrival of night (לַיְלָה) the nocturnal animals, the “beasts of the forest” come forth to hunt (v. 20). Note that although darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ) often represents danger, fearful situations or evil (e.g., Ps 88:7, 13, 19), it also, as represented here, remains a normal, necessary part of God’s creative design.

In this orderly structure, the lions come forth in the evening to hunt for food; in the morning they return to their dens while the human person comes forth to labor until evening (vv. 21–23). The Hebrew term for labor, עֲבָדָה, carries the sense of productive work, “husbandry,” or service, even of liturgy and worship (1 Chr 25:1). This sense of order in creation again parallels the *Hymn to the Aton*: “When thou settest in the western horizon . . . Every lion is come forth from his

²¹ ANET, lines 31–34, 370.

den.” With daybreak, however, people rise from sleep and, “All the world, they do their work.”²² In observing the order and diversity of the cosmos as evidence of God’s provision and rule, the psalmist apparently draws from the milieu of ancient wisdom texts from Egypt and adapts motifs from these traditions; the main difference being the emphasis on YHWH as sole creator in Psalm 104. Some scholars view the use of ANE parallels as a deliberate polemic against polytheism.²³ While this may be true, it seems more probable that the psalmist simply adapts existing motifs from other wisdom traditions for the primary intent of praising YHWH as master of creation.

Verses 24—30: Moving from reflections on moon, sun, and the rhythms of daily life, in v. 24ab the poet summarizes his observations of God’s works as reflections of God’s *wisdom*: “How manifold your works, O Lord (מְדַרְבֵּרוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ); all of them you have made with wisdom (בְּחָכְמָה).” The idea of God’s wisdom as the agent of creation occurs throughout the Biblical Wisdom literature (see Prov 3:19; 8:22–31; Job 28; Sir 24), with wisdom itself often personified as feminine (Proverbs; Sirach). God’s wisdom-produced works are manifold, as they include all the intricacies and variety in creation: v.24c: “the earth is filled with your creations (קִנְיֵיךָ).”²⁴ *The Hymn to the Aton* provides a close parallel in its observation of what god has created: “How manifold it is, what thou hast made! They are hidden from the face (of man). O sole god, like whom there is no other! Thou didst create the world according to thy desire”²⁵ In describing the Aton’s creative activity as something “hidden” from human understanding (“the face”), the Egyptian text resembles Job 28, which describes wisdom (חָכְמָה) as something inaccessible to ordinary humans and creatures but residing only in God (see Job 28:20–21, 23). Observation of God’s wisdom-produced creation mediates the divine presence (Ps 19:1–6).

²² Ibid., 370.

²³ For example, Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 47; see also Nahum Sarna’s comments on Psalm 19 as a polemic against polytheism in *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 71–96.

²⁴ Regarding the noun קִנְיֵיךָ, Cohen notes the relationship to the verb קָנָה, “to acquire,” used as a participle in Genesis 14:22, where God is “maker of heaven and earth” (*Psalms*, 341).

²⁵ ANET, 370.

The sea, literally “great and wide on both hands,” (גדול ורחב ידים) may give insight into the author’s experience of looking out at the Mediterranean Sea which extends to the right and left as far as the eye can see (v. 25). Ancient cosmology viewed the world as flat, held up by pillars beneath—located below the pillars was the watery, dark underworld prison of the dead, “Sheol”—with the ocean (most Israelites only knew of the Mediterranean in biblical times) extending to the limits of the earth. Within the sea (ים) are numerous “creeping things” (רמש), alluding to the Priestly Genesis creation story (1:24, 26) in which on the sixth and final day of creating, God makes all types of living creatures, including “cattle and creeping things,” over which the human receives the charge to “rule” over them (רדד). Similarities in the *Hymn to the Aton* are found in its description of sea creatures “in the midst of the great green sea.”²⁶ The verbs for “rule” or “govern/have dominion over” (רדד; משל) that occur in the Genesis creation story and Psalm 8 are not found in Psalm 104. Instead, Psalm 104 presents a harmony and equality among all elements of creation.²⁷

Both “small and great” creatures live there, as ships ply the waters (Ps 107:23) and even Leviathan (לִיָּתָן), the mythical sea monster (perhaps a whale), that God forms to “play with” (Ps 104:26). Contrasting the tranquility and harmony of the seas in Psalm 104 is the crisis on the seas in Ps 107:23–32, where God must rescue the sea travelers during a violent storm, and the depiction of Leviathan in Ps 74:14, where God must crush his head. In Canaanite mythology Leviathan is a sea monster causing chaos. Similarly, Job 40:25–41:2 depicts Leviathan as YHWH’s plaything; before the Creator, objects of terror become harmless and simply another part of harmonious creation. Both Psalm 104:26 and Job 40:29 use the verb קָרַח, “to play with,” in describing God’s relation to Leviathan, which raises the question of whether one text borrowed from the other, or whether the biblical texts draw from other existing traditions, e.g., Ugaritic literature..

²⁶ ANET, 370.

²⁷ See Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:7; Properly interpreted in their context, these verbs for “rule” and “have dominion” are best interpreted as calling upon the human person, as the pinnacle of God’s good creation, to serve as wise stewards.

Verse 27 depicts the elements of creation waiting hopefully (יִשְׁבְּרוּן) for God who, like a parent, provides sustenance. God provides fruitful crops that man and beast can “gather” (לִקְטוּ), symbolically opening his hand to provide food to satisfy their needs; while God resembles a caring parent-figure, God’s parentage encompasses all life, including, but not exclusive to, humans. This aspect of divine provision occurs also in the *Hymn to the Aton*: “Everyone has his food, and his time of life is reckoned.”²⁸ In a powerful anthropomorphic image, in v. 29 the psalmist says to God, “When you hide your face, they are terrified” (תִּסְתִּיר פְּנֵיךָ יְבַהֲלוּן); human wellbeing or suffering depends completely on God’s favor, represented by God’s “face”—a stunning contrast to the positive image of God’s face shining upon the people (Num 6:24–26; Ps 67:2) as a metaphor for blessing and protection. As a child looks upward to the face of a parent for love, care, and approval, so the image of God’s face shining upon human beings represents divine care and provision of basic human needs. Without God’s presence upon them, their life breath (רוּחַ) is withdrawn, causing them to perish and return to the “dust.” This parallels Genesis 2:7 (the breath of life) and 3:19 (returning to dust). Conversely, just as the “death” of winter gives way to the new growth of spring, so God once again “sends forth” spirit and “renews the face of the earth” (תְּחַדְּשֵׁנָה)—literally “make new” or “make young again”—so that the “earth” (אֲדָמָה) upon which the human (הָאָדָם) dwells becomes a place of life and flourishing (v.30).²⁹

Verses 31—35: Reverting back to the introductory verse which proclaimed God’s “honor and majesty” (הוֹד וְהַדְרָה)—terms used in Psalm 8:6 to describe the bestowal of these divine attributes on the human person—the psalmist concludes with a prayer that YHWH’s “glory” (כְּבוֹד) continue forever. Parallel to this request is the prayer to “let the Lord rejoice in his works”; the prayer figuratively expresses the request that God continue to nurture and care for all creation. I

²⁸ ANET, 370.

²⁹ This idea of renewal occurs also in the “New Covenant” of the LORD in Jeremiah (31:31), and the “new Spirit” and “new heart” of Ezekiel’s prophecy (11:19, 36:26).

translate the imperfect verbs in v. 31 in the jussive, which expresses a wish or desire. A theophany occurs in v. 32 as the Lord looks upon the earth (line A), causing it to “tremble” (וַתִּרְעַד), and “touches” the mountains (line B), causing them to smoke (וַיִּעַשְׁשֵׁנוּ). This synonymous parallelism emphasizes God’s divine power over creation and recalls Psalm 18:9, where “smoke arose from his [God’s] nostrils” in anger as God vindicates the righteous from persecutors. The smoking mountains are also symbolic of revelation (e.g., Exod 19) and the majesty of God’s creation.

Even in light of the preceding image of awe and fear, however, the psalmist responds with joy, “singing” (אֲשִׁירָה; “*Let me sing*”) and chanting praise (אֲזַמְרֵה; “*Let me praise*”) throughout life (v. 33), unlike the “dead who cannot praise the Lord” (Ps 115:17; see Ps 88:11–13). To live with faith in YHWH and in obedience to Torah is to have life; praise of the Lord is a necessary and natural aspect of faith. One of the terrors of *Sheol*, the underworld prison of the dead, was to be cut off from God and no longer be able to offer worship (e.g., Pss 89:49; 88:4; 30:4; 6:6). Verse 34 concludes with a petition that the speaker’s meditations (שִׁיחִי) be acceptable (יֵעָרֵב) to God; the verb עָרַב literally means “to be sweet or pleasant” and is used in reference to sacrifices which are acceptable to God (Jer 6:20; Hos 9:4). The verse parallels creation-Torah Ps 19:15, which likewise concludes with a request that the prayers and meditations of the psalmist—who speaks on behalf of the wider community—be acceptable to God.

Conclusion: Psalm 104 emphasizes the goodness of life in the created world and offers the hope of God’s continuing restorative power. In its exposition of the diverse elements of creation and their divine source, the psalm draws upon and adapts ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions in a Yahwistic context. Creation theology is another element of wisdom editing and composition within the structure of the Psalter—see my earlier expositions of Psalms 19 and 33—with Psalm 104 standing out as a centerpiece of wisdom and creation. As Psalm 104 concludes Book 4 with wisdom and creation, so Psalm 148 will provide an exposition of creation theology in the conclusion of the Psalter.

Wisdom Elements in Psalm 105

In the introductory chapter, I briefly discussed the didactic nature of “historical psalms” 78, 105, and 106 in my analysis of Sigmund Mowinckel’s “Learned Psalmography,” which he associates with wisdom poetry. These three psalms are included in his list; previously, I examined Psalm 78 in the context of its placement among the *Maskeil* psalms.³⁰ While psalms 105 and 106 are not specifically wisdom psalms, they do reflect the work of post-exilic wisdom editors who used recitals of Israel’s history for didactic purposes. Psalm 105 begins with a formula of thanksgiving, הודו (v.1), within an initial call to praise (vv. 1–6), followed by a brief summary of YHWH’s acts on behalf of Israel (vv. 7–11)—his judgments (משפטיו, v. 7), everlasting covenant (ברית עולם, v. 10 [8]), established by statute (קח, v. 10), and giving of the land (v. 11)—that provide the reasons for praise. This initial call to praise and summary of the reasons for praise contain some wisdom elements, particularly reference to keywords “judgments” (vv. 5, 7), and “statutes” (v. 10), and serve as a preparation for the historical recital that follows in vv. 12–41. The psalm concludes with another summary of reasons for praise (vv. 42–45) that forms an inclusion with vv. 7–11, and comes to a climax by associating YHWH’s deeds on Israel’s behalf as being meant to help them “keep his statutes, and observe his Torah” (ישמרו חקיו ותורתיו ינצרו), v. 45). By concluding with two Torah keywords as the climax of the recital the poem reveals its didactic purpose and adaptation of historical summaries for catechetical purposes; this points directly to the work of post-exilic wisdom teachers/editors.

The historical recital recalls Israel’s movement from Egypt to Canaan (vv. 12–23), with special mention of Joseph’s role as a wisdom teacher (v. 22): Joseph ruled over the Pharaoh’s household, and “taught his elders wisdom” (וּדְקַנְיוּ יְחֻכֵּם). Placing Joseph among Egyptian sages, renowned for their wisdom traditions, elevates the role of wisdom in Israel’s historical development.

³⁰ Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship II*, 111.

Verses 24–30 recount God’s sending of Moses and Aaron, followed in vv. 24–36 by a variant depiction of the plagues in Exodus: the psalm begins with the ninth plague, omits five and six, and inverts the third and fourth.³¹ Verses 37–41 recall the Exodus and wilderness journey under God’s protection, leading to the second summary of reasons for praise in vv. 42–45.³²

Because God “remembered his holy word” (כִּי־זָכַר אֶת־דְּבַר קִדְשׁוֹ, v. 42), Israel was brought forth to freedom and joy, inheriting the land (vv. 43–44). God’s word thus serves as the key to understanding the course of history. This historical, didactic teaching concludes in v. 45 by emphasizing key wisdom elements: God’s does these things on Israel’s behalf so that they keep his statutes (חֻקָּיו) and observe Torah (תּוֹרָתוֹ). By using history combined with key wisdom-Torah terms, as found in Psalm 119, the psalmist or final editors in essence adapt an historical hymn for wisdom teaching. While Psalm 105 provides a more positive evaluation of Israel’s history, Psalm 106 will observe history with a focus more on Israel’s in and its consequences.

Wisdom Elements in Psalm 106

After surveying God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel throughout history in Psalm 105, Psalm 106 directly focuses on the contrasting pattern of sin and disobedience on the part of the people, who repeatedly violate the covenant commitments and suffer accordingly. I propose that post-exilic wisdom teachers who edited the Psalter deliberately placed these two didactic historical psalms side-by-side to emphasize the contrast between God’s faithfulness and Israel’s infidelity. In the proposed post-exilic context of both psalms, these paired recitals would serve to emphasize God’s enduring faithfulness, the importance of living obediently according to Torah, and finally to starkly show the consequences of infidelity as outlined in past history. According to Cohen, “For the returned exiles it [the confession of past sins in the psalm] was a salutary theme, because it emphasized the thought that the welfare of the people would be determined by their obedience or

³¹ Cohen, *Psalms*, 348. Cohen recounts the Jewish tradition of Ibn Ezra that the ninth plague is listed first because it forced Pharaoh to consider releasing the Israelites.

³² This division is adapted from Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 56–57.

disobedience to God's will."³³ Allen adds that the "focal point" of the psalm is not the historical narrative but rather the praise in vv. 1 and 47b, which can only be brought about by God's reversal of current circumstances; the tension between praise and confession of guilt can only be resolved by God's forgiveness.³⁴ Creach proposes that Psalms 105 and 106 speak to the Israelites in exile, deliberately recalling Moses' leadership in the past as an intercessor for Israel in times of distress; together they serve to remind the exiles of the consequences of their ancestors' past sins, and God's deliverance through Moses' intercession. This recollection helps them to make sense of their current situation and also provides hope and assurance of eventual deliverance. The paired Psalms 105 and 106, then, forms a unit that completes Book 4 with Mosaic themes, just as it began with Moses in Psalm 90.³⁵ Though he locates both psalms in the exilic, rather than post-exilic period, Creach's proposal also highlights the didactic intent of these psalms.

Structure: Verses 1–5 provide an introductory praise and didactic prayer (v. 3); vv. 6–12 recall the events at the Sea of reeds, both Israel's sin and God's redemption (Exod 14, 15); vv. 13–15 recall Israel's grumbling in the wilderness (Exod 15, 16; Num 11); vv. 16–18 recount the rebellion of Korah and its consequences (Num 16); vv. 19–23, the Golden Calf episode (Exod 32); vv. 24–27 recall the rebellion of the Israelites after the report of the spies who examined the "good land" of Canaan (Num 14); vv. 28–31, the sin with Baal of Peor (Num 15); vv. 32–33, the murmuring of the Israelites at Meribah (Psalm 95; Num 20); vv. 34–39 the disobedience of Israel after entering Canaan (Judg 1:21, 27–36; Exod 23:33; Deut 7:2 ff.); vv. 40–43, recall the pattern of punishment, deliverance and sin as presented in the book of Judges; vv. 44–46 return to the major theme of Psalm 105, i.e., God's faithfulness to the Covenant, "according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (כַּרְבַּב חֶסֶד); 106:45, recalling Exod 34:6–7). Finally, verse 47 begins with a prayer for salvation, and a return to the initial praise of v.1, thus forming an inclusion. Verse 48 is the doxology that ends Book 4.³⁶

³³ Cohen, *The Psalms*, 351.

³⁴ Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 67.

³⁵ Jerome F. D. Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2008), 77–78.

³⁶ This structure is adapted from Cohen, *The Psalms*, 351–57.

Setting: In the concluding prayer for salvation in v. 47, the psalmist requests that God “gather us from among the nations” (וּקְבְּצֵנוּ מִן־הַגּוֹיִם) that they may once again praise God’s holy name; the reference to being gathered from among the nations provides evidence of the exilic or post-exilic provenance of the psalm.³⁷ H. J. Kraus notes the tension between confession of sin and praise within the psalm and proposes that the praise elements provide evidence of its use in an exilic or post-exilic liturgy of confession.³⁸ It seems plausible that an original lament psalm was adapted for liturgical use through the addition of praise sections, the opening and closing Hallelujahs, and the final doxology.³⁹ Verses 40–46 directly reflect on the covenant violations and its consequences in the manner of Deuteronomy and Judges (e.g., Deut 30:15–20; Judg 2:11–23), which may reveal the psalmist’s familiarity with the work of the Deuteronomistic history, finalized in the post-exilic period. In addition, Allen notes the use of two Aramaisms, מַלַּל (“to speak” v. 2) and שִׁבַּח (“to praise” v. 47), and the natural suitability of the penitential aspects of the psalm in a post-exilic context where hope for return and restoration was paramount.⁴⁰

Text notes: An important pair of keywords, “to remember” (זָכַר), and “to forget” (שָׁכַח), frame the psalm and serve to emphasize the contrast between God’s faithfulness and Israel’s disobedience. “Remember” forms an inclusion in references to God with a petition that God “remember me” and bring salvation (v. 4)—the individual representing the collective Israel—and in the conclusion where God “remembered” the covenant with Israel and redeems them (v.45). Within the body of the psalm, “forget” occurs in vv. 7, 13, and 21 in reference to Israel’s failure to remember God’s covenant love (לֹא זָכְרוּ אֶת־רַב חַסְדֵיךָ, v. 7), their forgetfulness of God’s works (שָׁכַחוּ אֱלֹהֵי מַעֲשָׂיו, v. 13), and God’s role as savior (שָׁכַחוּ אֱלֹהֵי מוֹשִׁיעֵם, v. 21). God remembers, but Israel too often forgets, as manifested in a history of sin and punishment. In a post-exilic (or

³⁷ John S. Kselman, S.S., and Michael L. Barre, S.S., “Psalms,” *NJBC* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Doubleday, 1990), 545.

³⁸ Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60—150* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 317.

³⁹ Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

exilic) wisdom context, this presentation would serve to emphasize the need of students to faithfully live by Torah.

Verse 6 uses three verbs in sequence to describe Israel's sinfulness throughout history: "we have sinned with our ancestors" (חטאנו עם־אבותינו), "we acted with iniquity" (העוינו), and (we have done wicked deeds" (הרשענו). Use of multiple terms to describe sinful behavior recalls the penitential aspects of Psalms 32 and 51, both of which use several words to describe sinful behavior as a means to emphasize the depth and gravity of sin. Previously, I examined Psalm 32 as a wisdom psalm in which the psalmist teaches the value of repentance, while Psalm 51 contains a wisdom interpolation that adapts the penitential poem for didactic use. The same intention seems operative here: the recital of past history, emphasizing sinfulness and its consequences, serves as a didactic tool used by wisdom teachers to inculcate obedience to Torah. Mays views v.6 as possible a "liturgical sentence for corporate penitence," noting similarities in style and vocabulary with 1 Kings 8:47; Dan 9:5, and Lam 3:42.⁴¹ Verses 7–8 parallel Ezek 20:7–9, in recalling Israel's sinfulness in Egypt and God's relenting in punishment for "his name's sake" (למען שמו), v. 8; Ezek 20:9, "for the sake of my name"). Since Ezekiel derives from an exilic context, this provides more evidence of the exilic or post-exilic nature of the psalm. Further, the use of vv. 47–48 in 1 Chr 16:35–36, following a quotation of Ps 105:1–15 in 1 Chr 16:8–22 and Psalm 96:1–13 in 1 Chr 16:23–33, all post-exilic texts, seems to reflect further adaptation of the psalm by those responsible for the Chronicler's History for use in cultic contexts⁴² This recalls our initial discussion, inspired by Mowinckel, of the connection between post-exilic wisdom schools, where I propose the final editing of the Psalter took place, and the temple.⁴³

Perhaps the most clearly exilic or post-exilic reference occurs in vv. 45–46, where the psalmist draws on several covenant keywords in describing how in "remembering" the covenant,

⁴¹ James L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 341.

⁴² Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 54, 68.

⁴³ See chapter 1 of this dissertation and the examination of Mowinckel's contributions; see also his *The Psalms in Israel's Worship II*, 85–103, especially 87.

God shows mercy and abundance of steadfast love (וַיַּחֲכַר לָהֶם בְּרִיתוֹ וַיַּחֲנֶם כְּרַב חַסְדּוֹ), and shows compassion (לְרַחֲמִים) to “all the captives” (כָּל־שׁוֹבֵי־הֶם). In addition to the obvious allusion to Exod 34:6, these verses show affinity with Joel 2:13, which repeats these same keywords (“steadfast love, mercy, compassion”) in the context of exhorting Israel to return to the Lord, with mourning, weeping and fasting. As with the parallels in 1 Chronicles (and Psalm 96) noted above, Joel, too, is clearly a post-exilic text, probably dating from the Persian period, the same period in which the Chronicler’s History was composed.⁴⁴ The numerous links to exilic and post-exilic texts and Psalm 106 noted here provide further evidence that at the very least its final editing and composition occurs in an exilic or post-exilic context by wisdom editors. While the historical recital draws upon older traditions, the framing of the psalm with praise, its contrast between God remembering and Israel’s forgetting, concluding references to covenant, exile, being gathered from among the nations (v. 47), and closing doxology for Book 4 (v. 48) all attest to its origin in a exilic or post-exilic setting.⁴⁵ These parallels to later texts, however, may arise from common source material or direct borrowing, but whether, for example, Joel or Chronicles borrowed from the Psalm cannot be determined. The key point is the overall milieu of these texts in the post-exilic period.

Conclusion: Book 4 of the Psalter exhibits strong wisdom influence, which is expected considering the general consensus that, along with Book 5, most of these psalms derive from the post-exilic period. It begins with the embrace of theodicy and wisdom in Psalm 90, the combination of wisdom elements and worship in Psalm 92, and lament and wisdom in Psalm 94. Psalm 101 combines royal elements and wisdom, while Psalm 104 combines creation theology and wisdom; Book 4 concludes with two historical recitals that reveal a didactic shaping and purpose in Psalms 105—106. Though utilizing in many cases older source material, it appears that these psalms have been reshaped and adapted in a post-exilic context by wisdom teachers associated with the temple for

⁴⁴ For a discussion of evidence for dating Joel in the Persian period, see Elias D. Mallon, “Joel” *NJBC*, 399–40.

⁴⁵ For a further concise analysis of the exilic or post-exilic provenance of the psalm, see Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 68.

didactic and liturgical use. Evidence of wisdom influence will carry over into Book 5, beginning with the conclusion of Psalm 107, and continuing in several Songs of Ascents, leading up to the conclusion of the Psalter, where Psalm 148, like Psalm 104, draws upon ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions in the final creation psalm of the Psalter.

Chapter Eight: Wisdom in Book Five

Psalm 107:33–43: Psalm 107 begins Book 5 of the Psalter with a lengthy thanksgiving hymn in vv. 1–32, followed by a wisdom-oriented hymn extolling God’s control over creation in vv. 33–43. Briefly, the initial thanksgiving hymn is composed of four illustrations in which people find themselves in situations of great distress, call out to God for help, are rescued and respond with formulaic praise (vv. 8, 15, 21, and 31): “Let them praise YHWH for his steadfast love, and for his wonderful works to humanity” (יִוְדוּ לַיהוָה חֲסֵדוֹ וְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו לְבְנֵי אָדָם). Several scholars speculate that the final wisdom section is a later addition that was added to the original psalm to adapt it for communal liturgical use.¹ I agree with this assessment, as v. 32 seems to conclude the hymn with a call to praise following the last formulaic thanksgiving for God’s steadfast love and wonders in v. 31: “Let them exalt him in the assembly of people, and praise him in the seat of elders.” Immediately following, v. 33 describes how God turns rivers into wilderness and springs into thirsty ground. If vv. 33–43 are a later addition, it seems part of the addition is missing, based on the abrupt description of God’s works in v. 33, which reads as if it follows a missing introductory section. While the psalm leaves few clues to its compositional process, I propose that post-exilic wisdom editors may have framed some originally older hymnic material—the four illustrations—with an introductory formula of praise of God’s חֲסֵד (v.1; see 106:1; 118:1; 136:1), for returnees from the exile (vv. 2–3) that describes how God has redeemed (גָּאֵל) and “gathered” (קִבְּצָם) the Israelites. To this they added a wisdom poem summarizing God’s control over life (vv. 33–43).

Structure: following the initial call to praise for the exiles (?) in vv. 1–3, the main body of the psalm includes the following four illustrations. (1) Verses 4–9 recount how YHWH saved those who wandered through deserts; it seems probable that the psalmist has the exodus experience in mind. (2) Verses 10–16 discuss people who rebelled against God and rejected the “counsel of the Most

¹ Allen notes that Kraus, Gunkel and Duhm all considered vv. 33–43 a later edition that adapts the original hymn for communal liturgical use by emphasizing God’s control; in this scenario vv. 2–3 are a postexilic addition adapting the psalm to the returnees (*Psalms 101–150*, 85).

High” (ועצת עליון נאצו), v. 11); this seems to cohere with the pattern of rebellion, crying out, and salvation found in the Book of Judges. (3) Verses 17–22 discuss people who were sick due to their transgressions and iniquities; this has affinities with the descriptions of affliction and prayer in Job 33:19–26 (Elihu’s speech), while the description of their foolishness recalls Prov 1:7. (4) Verses 23–32 describe the plight of merchant sea travelers who, in their distress “all their wisdom was swallowed up” (וכל־חכמתם התבלע), v. 27), after which God calms the seas and leads them to a port of safety.² Notice references in this part of the psalm to wisdom keywords (“wisdom”; “counsel”), and books (Job; Proverbs), which may provide evidence that the entire hymn itself was composed in a post-exilic context using other texts from Israel’s history and wisdom traditions. James L. Mays describes the psalm as a liturgical and theological exaltation of God’s חסד, which frames the psalm (vv. 1, 43) and provides the key to explaining God’s wonders in the four illustrations (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). Salvation and redemption are manifestations of God’s covenant love.³

The Wisdom Hymn (vv. 33–43): The conclusion of the thanksgiving hymn in v. 32 prepares for the wisdom teaching that follows by referring to the “seat of the elders” (מושב זקנים), which implies a setting in a wisdom school where elders provide instruction. Beyerlin observes cultic elements in the call to praise and thanksgiving, and interprets the “seat of the elders” in v. 32 as referring to a wisdom school setting; following this, vv. 33–43 lack liturgical language. This leads to his proposal that the author is a wisdom teacher from the Levitical school connected with the temple.⁴ Similarly, Crüsemann views vv. 33–43 as produced in a non-cultic wisdom school setting

² Here I follow the common division of the illustrations, all of which conclude with the formula of praise. Robert G. Brachter and William D. Reayburn propose that the psalm was used by pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for one of the major festivals and call the wisdom section a “hymn or praise” (*A Handbook on Psalms* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1991], 920). While certainly a possible and likely use, I view the psalm as having a broader use, including wisdom schools, personal prayer, and various temple or synagogue services in post-exilic Israel.

³ James L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994), 346–47.

⁴ *Werden und Wesen in 107. Psalms* (BZAW 153; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), cited in Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 86. For the association of the elders with wisdom teachers, see Sir 6:34; 1 Chr 25:1–8 provides evidence of the association of Levitical wisdom teachers with the temple musicians.

and later added to the earlier cultic hymn in the post-exilic period.⁵ Reference to the seat of the elders in v. 32, however, connects both sections of the psalm and also raises the possibility that the psalm originated as a unity rather than a combination of separate texts.⁶ I favor the idea that the older traditions described in the four illustrations were adapted and combined by wisdom editors in such a way that in its final form the hymn represents a unity: illustrations of God’s steadfast love manifested in marvelous works of rescue in part 1, which leads naturally to a reflection on God’s control and the need to be wise in part 2.

Vv. 33–35 describe God’s power to reverse the course of nature: fruitful land becomes a “salt waste” (מלחח) for the wicked, while the wilderness is marked by pools of water (לאגם־מים) and dry land (ארץ ציה) becomes springs of water (למצאי מים). Similar images occur in Isa 35:5, 41:18, and 50:2, while the description of the salted land recalls the story of Sodom and Gomorrah; using these images of reversal, the psalmist presents a key theme of wisdom literature, that the wicked will ultimately be punished while the righteous will be rewarded. This becomes clear in vv. 36–37, where the hungry and homeless will find land to establish a city, and plant fruitful fields and vineyards. They receive God’s blessing, manifested in abundant livestock (v.38); though they may again suffer oppression and sorrow (v.39), ultimately God will “set the needy on high from affliction” (וישגב אביון מעוני) and increase their offspring (literally, “He [God] shall make their families like a flock” וישם כצאן משפחות; v.41). Abundant offspring reflect God’s covenant promises (e.g., Gen 12:1–3; Deut 30:1–5) and occur in other wisdom texts (e.g., Job 1;1–5; 42:10–17; Pss 113:9; 127–128), and here reveal the promise for those who remain faithful to God despite the hardships exemplified by the four illustrations in the thanksgiving hymn.

⁵ *Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel* (WMANT 32; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 73–74; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 85.

⁶ Likewise, Richard J. Clifford notes that the four illustrations of distress and rescue in part 1 are “incomplete” without the conclusion in vv. 33–43. In describing God’s control over the cosmos and human events, vv. 33–40 show how in times of affliction (v.39)—as in the previous four illustrations of part 1—God responds by overcoming Israel’s enemies (v. 40) and helping those in need (v.41). This leads to praise (v.42), and the wise (v. 43) will realize all this results from God’s steadfast love (*Psalms 73–150* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2003], 166–67).

Another clear example of borrowing from existing wisdom traditions occurs in v.40a, which quotes Job 12:21a: “He pours contempt upon princes”; line b quotes Job 12:24b: “and makes them wander in a wasteland with no way.”⁷ The wording in Psalm 107:40 is identical to Job in the Hebrew: “He pours contempt upon princes” (שִׁפְךָ בּוֹז עַל־נְדִיבִים), “and makes them wander in a wasteland with no way” (וַיִּתְעַם בְּתֵהוֹ לְאֲדָרֶךְ). Both Job and its quotation in Psalm 107 reflect how the issue of theodicy is approached in wisdom texts (e.g., Psalms 49; 73): the wicked will ultimately be upended, and the righteous receive reward for their faithfulness.

In light of God’s saving action on behalf of the righteous who endure suffering, the final verses (42–43) conclude this short wisdom instruction, and the psalm, with the appropriate response of praise and wisdom. The “upright” (יִשְׂרָיִם) see and rejoice while the iniquitous sinners are stopped (קִפְצָה; v.42). This leads to the final exhortation that the “wise” (חֲכָם) observe and “and consider” (וַיִּתְבּוֹנְנוּ) these things; the terms “wise” and “consider” come from the wisdom tradition and reveal the final wisdom orientation of the psalm.

Conclusion: As Book 4 concluded with wisdom-oriented didactic summaries of Israel’s historical experiences to illustrate God’s enduring חֶסֶד and the consequences for Israel for failing to live by Torah, Book 5 begins with further illustrations of God’s חֶסֶד (Ps 107:1–32) with wisdom teaching (vv.33–43). The hand of wisdom editors is evident in the seams between Books 4 and 5.

Psalm 127: Happy (אַשְׁרֵי) is the One Blessed by God

Psalms 127 and Psalm 128 (see below) form a pair of wisdom psalms within the collection “The Psalms of Ascent” (שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת; Psalms 120–134); both psalms use of the אַשְׁרֵי (“Happy is the one”) formula—an important feature of the wisdom literature (127:5 and 128:1).⁸ Psalm 127

⁷ Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 91.

⁸ See my discussion in the previous commentary in this dissertation on Psalms 1:1–2:12, 32:1–2, 33:12, 34:9, 40:5, 41:2, 94:12, 106:3, 112:1, and 119:1–2. For a technical discussion of the word אַשְׁרֵי and its connections to the wisdom literature and Egyptian parallels, see *TDOT* 1:445–448.

consists of two proverbs: vv.1–2 illustrate the vanity of merely human attempts to build or guard a city without divine protection, and vv. 3–5 emphasizes that sons represent a divine blessing that will afford protection for their father in legal proceedings at the city gates—a place of such transactions in ancient Israel. In the Hebrew, a wordplay exists between “builders” (בֹּנֵי) who *cannot* “build” (לֹא־יִבְנֶה בַּיֶּת, v. 1) and “sons” (בְּנֵים), the fruit of the womb and blessing from God, who *can* and do provide protection (v.3); this wordplay connects the two proverbs and unifies the psalm.⁹ Attribution to “Solomon” (לְשֹׁלֹמֹה), or a collection associated with him, probably derives from the mention of building a house in v.1, which recalls the prophecy of 2 Samuel 7 that Solomon will build the Temple. The Hebrew phrase “build a house” may also refer to the building of a family, and interpretation that further connects vv. 1–2 with the theme of vv. 3–5.¹⁰ In addition to אֱשֶׁר־י, the only specific wisdom term in the psalm, wisdom themes include its emphasis on the blessings of the righteous (and the implied failure of the wicked in vv. 1–2), proper conduct in daily living, and the vanity of merely human pursuits. Attribution to Solomon, the traditional patron of Israelite wisdom (1 Kgs 3, 5), further solidifies the wisdom character and intent of the psalm by its likely composers: wisdom teachers in post-exilic Israel.

Along with the אֱשֶׁר־י formula, Kuntz further identifies its use of a simile (v. 4) and a commendation formula (v. 5) as wisdom attributes.¹¹ Clifford connects the psalm to Prov 19:14 as “a clue to the meaning and rhetoric” of the Psalm, as both Proverbs and the psalm contrast temporal things (house; wealth) with gifts only God can give (a wife).¹² Proverbs 19:14 states, “House and wealth are an inheritance (נַחֲלָה) of the fathers, but an intelligent (מִשְׁכִּילָה) wife is from the Lord”;

⁹ For a survey of commentators who argue for the psalm as a unity, as I do here, or see it as a composite, see Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 237.

¹⁰ For the use of “house” as referring to both a building (temple) and a family, see Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 449; Clifford, *Psalms 73—150*, 239; and Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 236–37.

¹¹ J. Kenneth Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel—Their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimensions, in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler; Pittsburg: The Pickwick Press, 1974), 196–98, 208, 214 (note 70) and 215.

¹² *Psalms 73—150*, 238.

the keyword “inheritance” (נחלת) occurs in Ps 127:3 in reference to children as an “inheritance of the Lord.” Children given by God are a greater inheritance than a house and wealth; mention of a wife occurs in the companion Ps 128:3, where she is described as a “fruitful vine” (see below). In describing the “wise wife” as a gift from God, Proverbs uses the important wisdom root שכל, discussed earlier, and recalls the depiction of the Ideal Wife in Prov 31:10–31. Though not mentioned in Psalm 127, the fruitful or wise wife is implied as the mother of the children, who in effect are an “inheritance” from YHWH, like the wise and fruitful wife; this further connects Psalms 127, 128, and wisdom traditions from Proverbs.

Verses 1–2: consist of two conditional proverbs and an admonition.¹³ Verse 1 contains the conditional proverbs, in which parts A and B are inextricably linked: “If YHWH does not build the house (A), then the builders labor in vain (B); if YHWH does not guard the city (A), in vain does the watchman rise up early (B).” Verse 2 contains the admonition, which is linked to the conditional proverb by the keyword “vain” (שׁוּן), found twice in v.1 and once in v. 2: “It is vain for you to rise up early, and stay up late, eating the bread of toil; thus he gives his beloved in sleep.” Merely human efforts at building and guarding, despite their toil and effort, will be worthless if done without divine help. While the godless pursue their tasks, even eating in toil and vain, God provides for the faithful (“beloved” לִידִידוֹ) while they sleep, i.e. divine gifts are freely given. Anderson views the sleeping metaphor in v. 2 as a reference the growth of crops and flocks.¹⁴

Verses 3–5: This section begins with a synonymous proverb in v. 3, with complimentary statements in both lines about the blessings of having children; this is followed by a comparative proverb in v. 4, which likens sons who are able to defend their father in legal affairs to “arrows in the hand of a warrior.” The אֲשֶׁר formula in v. 5 serves as a conclusion.¹⁵ Verse 3 introduces the concept of children as a divine inheritance, the blessing of a good wife: “Behold, children are a

¹³ Leo J. Perdue, *Wisdom & Cult* (SBLDS 30; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 297–98.

¹⁴ A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 2:869–70; Anderson also classifies Psalm 127 as a wisdom psalm and views the two parts as a unity.

¹⁵ Perdue, *Wisdom & Cult*, 298.

heritage of YHWH; the fruit of the womb a reward.” Children represent one of the covenant blessings (e.g., Gen 12:2; 15:1–5; 17:5; 22:17; Deut 6:3; 30), and though the Hebrew term “sons” (בָּנִים) is used here, Cohen notes that in this context it includes both male and female offspring: while the reference to “arrows” in v. 4 clearly refers to sons, “fruit of the womb” in v. 3 “indicates that daughters are not excluded, since the phrase must mean ‘offspring.’”¹⁶ Verse 4 compares sons born when the father was young to arrows used to defend against enemies; when the father reaches old age, these sons will be grown up and thus able to protect him.¹⁷ The concluding verse proclaims “Happy is the man” (אַשְׁרֵי הַגֵּבֵר) with grown sons who will defend him at “the gate”—the place in the cities where legal proceedings occurred—and preserve his honor.

Conclusion: Psalm 127 embraces the important wisdom themes of the vanity of merely human pursuits (e.g., Ecclesiastes; Psalms 39; 49; 62; 73, discussed previously), proper conduct, the blessing of the righteous, and the promise of happiness (אַשְׁרֵי) for those who live according to Torah. Though “Torah” is not specifically mentioned, the description of the blessed person surrounded by children implies the righteous person who lives according to Torah.

Psalm 128: the Blessings of the One Who Feels the Lord

Building upon the theme of the blessings of family that concluded Psalm 127:5, Psalm 128:1 also begins with the אַשְׁרֵי beatitude: “Happy are all those who fear YHWH and walk in his ways”; combining the אַשְׁרֵי with “fear of YHWH” (יִרְאֵי הוֹדָה) and “walking in his ways” (בְּדַרְכָּיו), verse 1 clearly marks this as a wisdom psalm.¹⁸ Based on its usage in Prov 1:7, 9:10, Job

¹⁶ Abraham Cohen, *The Psalms*, 429.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Among other scholars identifying Psalm 128 as a wisdom psalm linked with Psalm 127 are Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 869, and J. K. Kuntz, “Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter” in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 159; likewise, he also identifies both as wisdom psalms based on thematic and linguistic traits in his earlier article, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel,” 210. Alter views the initial אַשְׁרֵי as marking “the affiliation of this psalm with the Wisdom literature” (*The Book of Psalms*, 451), and Allen also identifies it as a wisdom psalm related to Psalm 127 and post-exilic in provenance (*Psalms 101—150*, 242).

28:28, and Ps 111:10, “fear of YHWH” serves as a type of “thesis statement” of traditional wisdom literature; walking in the ways of God serves as a euphemism for living according to Torah (Pss 1:6; 119:1–2, 9, 14–15). Thematically, the psalm provides wisdom instruction in extolling fearing or revering the Lord and living according to Torah.¹⁹ Verses 1–4 extol the blessings of family life—food, well-being, a “fruitful” wife, and children—for the God-fearing man who lives according to Torah. Verses 5–6 move from family life to the national scene as YHWH offers a blessing from Zion, along with a wish that one will see his grandchildren and a peaceful Israel.²⁰

Movement from a general wisdom principle extolling the blessings for those who fear YHWH and live by Torah (“walk in his ways”) cast in the third person (vv. 1–2), to a second-person description of its specific effects using a simile comparing the wife to a vine and children to olive plants (v. 3), is rounded out by reinforcement of the original wisdom teaching extolling fear of YHWH (v. 4). In this scenario, “fear of YHWH” forms an inclusion in vv. 1–4; the blessing in vv. 5–6 concludes the wisdom teaching and connects with part 1 through its mention of blessing (vv. 4, 5) and children (vv. 3, 5).²¹ Some scholars question whether vv. 5–6 represents a later cultic addition to the original wisdom poem.²² As noted earlier in chapter 1, I disagree with the notion that wisdom poetry is usually or always “non-cultic,” and therefore view the psalm as a unity, used both in instructional and liturgical settings. As with Psalms 49 and 92, Psalm 128 serves as a liturgy with didactic elements. The thematic connections of “blessing” and “children,” noted above, along with the seemingly natural progression from the blessings of family life to the wellbeing and peace of greater Israel, support this view.

¹⁹ Allen observes these thematic wisdom elements (*Psalms 101–150*, 242, 244), as does Kuntz, who views Psalm 128 as a “sentence wisdom psalm,” along with 127 and 133, noting its use of a simile, the **אָזַיִן**, and use of a wisdom sentence to convey truth; in his view the three psalms could easily fit into the book of Proverbs, with their didactic intent that seeks to promote proper behavior (“Canonical Wisdom Psalms,” 198, 210–12, 217).

²⁰ Here I follow the division used by Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 242–43.

²¹ An observation made by Kuntz, who views the second third person statement as “an emphatic and reinforcing comment” (“Canonical Wisdom Psalms,” 217).

²² Allen provides a brief and useful summary of these views (*Psalms 101–150*, 242–43).

Verses 1—4: As noted above, the initial verse uses key wisdom terms, אֲשֶׁרִי, “happy is the one,” יִרְאֵ יְהוָה, “fear of YHWH” and הִלֵּךְ דְּרָכָיו, “walking in his ways”; these identify Psalm 128 as a wisdom psalm and connect it to Psalm 127 and other wisdom psalms (e.g., Pss 1; 111:10; 112:1; 119) and wisdom traditions (e.g., Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28 [fear of YHWH]; Prov 1:15; 2:20 [way; path]). Verse 2 describes the blessings accrued to those who revere God and live by Torah in terms of basic human sustenance (גִּיּוֹעַ, produce from labor), happiness (אֲשֶׁרִי), and prosperity (טוֹב): “You will eat the toil of your hands; you will be happy and have prosperity.”²³ Alter notes parallels themes from Deuteronomy 28, which contrasts the blessings or curses that will result according to whether the people live by Torah.²⁴ In Deuteronomy 28:1–14 those who keep the commandments receive promises of blessings, including “the fruit (פֶּרִי) of your womb, and the fruit (פֶּרִי) of your land” (v. 4); this parallels Psalm 128:2–3, which promise fruitful produce (“the labor of your hands” גִּיּוֹעַ, v. 2), and numerous children (בְּנֵיךָ) from a “fruitful” (פְּרִיָהָ, v. 3). The “labor of your hands” is synonymous with fruitful land in Deuteronomy, and both texts use the root פֶּרִי to describe the blessings of numerous offspring.²⁵ In contrast, those who fail to abide by Torah will be cursed (Deut 28:15–69).

The simile in v. 3 compares the wife to a fruitful vine, a symbol of prosperity, who dwells “in the inner recesses of your house” (בִּירְכֹתַי בֵּיתְךָ). The noun רִכְוָה refers to the “innermost” or the recesses of a house, implicitly stating that the man’s wife remains secluded from the public and protected.²⁶ A fruitful wife who provides blessings to her husband and family recalls the Ideal Wife

²³ The noun גִּיּוֹעַ here refers to the product of physical labor, in this case crops; Deut 28:33 uses the same word to describe how the produce of toil will be consumed by foreigners as a curse for failing to live by the Commandments. For the uses of גִּיּוֹעַ see *BDB*, 388.

²⁴ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 451.

²⁵ Mitchell Dahood, who also considers Psalms 127/128 as wisdom psalms, notes the use of an “archaic feminine participle” in the psalm that preserves the final yod (*Psalms III, 100—150* [AB 17A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1970], 222, 227–28).

²⁶ On this interpretation of the root, see *BDB*, 438; Alter proposes a “secluded corner of the house” (*The Book of Psalms*, 452). Cohen cites midrashic traditions describing the “modest” woman who keeps secluded in her home to reserve her beauty for her husband (*The Psalms*, 430).

of Prov 31:10–31, which further connects the psalm to other wisdom traditions. Similarly, the comparison of children to olive plants (בניך כשתלי זיתים) evokes fruitfulness in the cultural context, as the olive is a staple part of Israelite life.²⁷ Olive trees provided oil used for cooking, medicinal purposes, hospitality in the hot, dry climate (Ps 23:5), and anointing of priests (Exod 28; Ps 133:2) and kings (e.g., 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Sam 5:3; Pss 18:21; 132:17). This plant metaphor parallels similar positive metaphors using plants to describe the fruitfulness of the righteous in Pss 1:3; 52:10; 92:14, all of which exhibit wisdom influence; mention of children here recalls the blessing of children in Psalm 127 (above). Table imagery recalls the banquet of Ps 23:5 and Lady Wisdom’s banquet in Prov 9:1–6, which parallels Ps 128:1 in its call for the participants to “walk in the way of understanding” (בדרך בינה; v. 6).

Using the images of a wife “within” the innermost part of the home with children “around” (סביב) the table, the psalmist creates a picture of intimate family life within the security of the home.²⁸ Verse 4 forms an inclusion with v. 1 in its reference to fear of YHWH; in vv. 1 and 2 the term אשׁר׳ describes the blessed state of God-fearers who live by Torah, while v. 4 uses בֵּרַךְ (“he will be blessed”), which together emphasize complete and abundant blessings.

Verses 5–6: Rather than viewing this section as a later addition for liturgical purposes, I regard it as a unity that moves the focus from a domestic setting to the wider community of Israel in which the blessed man and his family reside. The verb יִבְרַכְךָ (“may he bless you”) connects vv. 4 and 5 and turns the confident assertion of v. 4 into a prayer. The blessings experienced by the righteous within the intimate family home are extended to “Zion/Jerusalem,” the holy city: “and see

²⁷ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 452.

²⁸ Daniel Grossberg, *Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures in Biblical Poetry* (SBLMS 39; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989), 44; Grossberg describes these two prepositional phrases as revealing “intimate encompassment of the *entire* domestic scene,” and adds that the noun רִכְבָּה in this context alludes “thighs, loins, generative organs (cf. Gen 46:26; Judg 30:8,” and therefore relates it to procreation.

the prosperity (וּרְאֵה טוֹב) of Jerusalem all the days of your life” (v.5).²⁹ Each individual Israelite’s welfare depends upon the welfare of the holy city.³⁰

Both national and domestic concerns conclude the psalm in v.6 with a prayer that the God-fearing man will see his grandchildren (וּרְאֵה בָּנִים לְבָנֶיךָ), “And see your children’s children” followed by a final prayer for the wellbeing of Israel (שְׁלוֹם עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל), “Peace upon Israel!” Mention of children in v.6 again connects the two parts of the psalm as it recalls the depiction of children in v.3; in addition to a healthy domestic situation, the psalmist prays that prosperity will extend to “all the days of your life.” This constitutes a long life in which the righteous person will be able to see his own grandchildren.³¹ שְׁלוֹם describes a condition of wholeness, peace, and welfare, in which Israel can thrive.³² In the post-exilic context of the psalm, the desire for peace and security becomes paramount. The promise of a long life, peace, and many children recalls the closing of the book of Job (42:12–17). In a wider, communal sense, represented by ongoing generations of children, the image of the fruitful womb of a fruitful wife (Pss 127:3; 128:3), assures continued growth and worship into the future.

Conclusion: Psalm 128 and Psalm 127 form a pair in their common themes of the blessing of family life, marked by children from a fruitful childbearing wife, and dependence upon God. Dependence on God is expressed in Ps 127:1–2 by emphasizing the vanity of merely human pursuits, and in Ps 128:1 with its focus on fearing the Lord and walking in God’s ways (living by Torah). The promise of “happiness,” using the אֲשֶׁר־י formula, further unites the two psalms and reveals their wisdom character. Psalm 128 upholds traditional wisdom theology in promising blessings upon

²⁹ I translate וּרְאֵה as an imperative (as it is pointed in the MT). Dahood translates וּרְאֵה טוֹב as “Enjoy the prosperity” of Jerusalem, claiming the idiom “means ‘to enjoy’” (*Psalms 101–150*, 227, 229). Either way, as “see” or “enjoy,” the meaning is the same: the blessed person will enjoy prosperity in family and national life.

³⁰ Cohen, *The Psalms*, 430.

³¹ Grossberg notes the phonetic association with “fear” (רָאָה) and “see” (רָאֵה) in vv. 1 and 6, respectively, as a link between the opening and closing lines. He also observes the assonance in the Hebrew of “table” (שֶׁל חֵנֶךָ v.3), “Jerusalem” (יְרוּשָׁלַם v.5) and “peace” (שְׁלוֹם v.6), in which the corresponding sounds link these important thematic terms (*Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures in Biblical Poetry*, 45–46).

³² Cohen, *The Psalms*, 423; BDB, 1022–23.

those who revere God and live by Torah, and combines domestic and national concerns by praying for familial and national prosperity. Similar emphasis on peace is found in companion Ascent Pss 122:6–9 and 125:5, neither of which qualifies as a wisdom psalm; the placement of Psalms 127/128 together, along with wisdom Psalm 133 (discussed below) provide examples of how the final editors of the Psalter placed wisdom psalms among various genres and collections.

Psalm 133: The Blessings of Harmonious Living

This short poem consists of proverbial sayings affirming the blessings of fraternal harmony. Two similes liken this harmony to anointing oil flowing upon the head and robe of a priest (v. 2) and the rich dew of Mount Hermon (v. 3). Though lacking specific wisdom vocabulary, Psalm 133 receives the classification of a wisdom psalm due primarily to its use of similes to communicate wisdom.³³ Thematically, by emphasizing the importance of fraternal relationships and the rewards promised for proper behavior, the psalm follows Psalms 127/128 in extolling the virtues of family life and the blessings promised to those who revere God and live in accordance with Torah. Kuntz notes that the introductory pronouncement, “Behold, how good and pleasant when brothers dwell as one” (v. 1) contains an implicit counterpart to the **אשר** formula used in wisdom literature, and the initial **הנה** serves to place emphasis on the virtue of harmonious living; like Psalms 127/128, the text of 133 provides instruction for living.³⁴ In addition to the common superscription “Song of Ascents,” the psalm shares common elements with this collection of psalms in its references to Zion (128:5; 132:13; 134:3) and blessing (128:5; 132:15; 134:3). I find the psalm’s use of liturgical imagery—anointing of priests, blessing from Zion—to teach the wisdom of fraternal harmony, a fine example of the melding of liturgical and wisdom elements in post-exilic Israel.

³³ Kuntz argues that Israel’s sages effectively used similes as a rhetorical device that had “a leading role to play in the poetic expressions of the wise,” in this case to uphold the blessing of living in harmony (“The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel,” 199; see also 191 and 210 on Ps 133). Among other commentators classifying Ps 133 as a wisdom psalm, see Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 2:885; and Dahood, *Psalms 101—150*, 251; see also the summary provided by Allen, *Psalms 101—150*, 277–78.

³⁴ “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel,” 210.

Verse 1: This emphatic opening statement sets forth the key wisdom teaching of the psalm: “Behold! How good and how pleasant, for brothers to dwell together (שִׁבְתוּ אִחִים) even as one” (גַּם־יִחַד); the origins of this statement may derive from Deut 25:5, which counsels that when brothers live together (כִּי־יֵשְׁבוּ אִחִים) and one dies, the other brother shall marry the widow so that she may bear offspring to perpetuate the family line of the deceased brother. Both texts use the same verb, the plural form of “brothers,” and “as one” (יִחַד), which raises the possibility that Deuteronomy may be a source for the psalmist’s instruction.³⁵ Deuteronomy 25:5 is a conditional statement (“When brothers live together”—they should do this), while the psalm makes an assertion based on presumed experience of this teaching put into practice: “how good and how pleasant” (מִדֶּ־טוֹב מִדֶּ־נַעִים) life is, because/since brothers dwell together as one.

Some view this as a wisdom statement alluding to grown and married brothers remaining on “the undivided patrimonial land” as seen, for example, in the Patriarchal stories (Gen 13:6, 8; 36:6–8), which the psalmist upholds as a good and ancient practice that should be preserved.³⁶ Another interpretation views this unity of the brothers as alluding to the ideal of unity between Israel and Judah, as v. 3 speaks of both Mt. Hermon in the north and Mt. Zion in the south.³⁷ This sets the stage for the similes in vv. 2–3 that further illustrate and emphasize the ideal.

Verse 2: Following the initial image of unity introduced by the allusion to Deut 25:5 in v.1, the psalmist uses two similes that progressively extend the meaning of the initial statement. From the good and pleasant experience of brothers living in unity within the family/clan, the psalmist moves to a cultic reference in v. 2 by referring to priestly anointing. The first simile describes the anointing of priests: “Like precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard—the beard of Aaron.” The image of precious oil (כֶּשֶׁמֶן הַטּוֹב) that flows down upon the priest’s robe (אֶהָרֵן יָרֵד עַל־הַזִּקָּן וְקָן) clearly parallels the ritual for anointing priests in Exod 29:7. The use of

³⁵ Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 279.

³⁶ Thijs Booij, “Psalm 133: ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant,’” *Bib* (83 (2002), 261.

³⁷ Cohen, *The Psalms*, 439.

anadiplosis serves to highlight the sacred image and provide a cultic context through the association of priests with liturgical functions. The last line extends the image of consecration: the anointing oil (Exod 30:23–25, 30) “which flows down (שִׁירַד) upon the collar of his robes” completes the first simile, which likens this unity among brothers to the sacred anointing of priests. Booiij observes how the simile evokes “solemnity as well as pleasure,” as fragrant anointing oil in the cultural context evokes joy, festivity, and cultic concerns.³⁸

Verse 2 shows a progression from domestic life (brothers dwelling together in unity) to wider, cultic concerns that involve all pious Israelites (temple worship, signified by anointed priests)—similar to the domestic-to-national progression we saw in Psalm 128 (above). For a pious Israelite, the images of priestly service, represented by Aaron, the prototype for priests, and fragrant oil of anointing symbolizing divine commission (e.g., Lev 8:12; Ps 89:21; 1 Sam 16:13; 2 Sam 2:4) and comfort (Ps 23:5), provide inspiration and hope. This prepares for the final simile in v. 3 that completes the progression from familial unity to divine blessing.

Verse 3: This final simile moves from a cultic context based on priestly images in v. 2 to a national blessing, in which the rich dew that falls on Mount Hermon, in the North, symbolically “comes down” (שִׁירַד) upon Mount Zion, in the South, the site of Jerusalem and the Temple. For the third time the psalmist uses the verb ירַד, “to come down,” which links the similes in vv. 2 and 3: “Like the dew of Hermon (בַּמַּלְחָרְמוֹן), that comes down (שִׁירַד) upon the mountains of Zion” (v. 3a). Just as the image of precious anointing oil coming down upon the priest’s head and vestments symbolizes sacred commissioning and blessing, so the image of rich dew coming down upon the holy place of Mt. Zion symbolizes its sacred character. Alter emends צִיּוֹן to צִיָּה, “parched land,” and translates “on the parched mountains.”³⁹ This emendation is both unnecessary and unlikely when one interprets the dew from Hermon coming upon Zion as metaphorical. The apparent incongruity of dew from Mt. Hermon, about 200 miles north, coming down upon Mt.

³⁸ “Psalm 133,” 265.

³⁹ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 463.

Zion, is easily resolved by reading the verse as a metaphor: just as Mt. Hermon was known for its abundant dew, which fructifies the soil, so the blessings of Israelites living in unity and worshipping in Jerusalem is like this rich dew that fructifies the soil and brings forth blessing.⁴⁰

Just as rich, moist soil provides good growth for plants in the hot, dry environment of Palestine, so unity among Israelites worshipping in Jerusalem bears fruit and brings forth divine blessing. This is made clear by the final statement, which completes the progression: “For there the Lord commanded a blessing (כִּי שָׁם צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרִכָּה), life everlasting.” Harmonious living within the family (v. 1), and engaging in sacred worship (v. 2), fulfills God’s command (צִוָּה; v. 3) to live by Torah in all aspects of family and national life. This, in turn, assures divine blessing, represented by the dew.⁴¹ If the original context of the psalm is in the post-exilic period as I propose, “life everlasting” in v.3 does not refer to life after death; development of belief in the resurrection occurs later, in Maccabean times (Dan 12:1–3). To live a long life and have many children to maintain one’s family line represents covenant blessings (Deut 30:19–20). Another interpretation applies the word “everlasting” to the temple, the dwelling place of God for eternity from which blessings emanate.⁴² The progression in the psalm from familial unity, to worship, to blessing accords well with its placement in the Songs of Ascents; together with Psalms 127/128, Psalm 133 provides a strong wisdom character to this pilgrimage collection. Booij proposes that the psalm is intended for religious festivals in Jerusalem in accord with the injunctions of Deuteronomy 16.⁴³ This seems plausible, as its inclusion in the Songs of Ascents reflects didactic and liturgical uses in connection with pilgrim festivals; in addition, I propose that wisdom psalms served multiple purposes—both in liturgical contexts, instruction in wisdom schools, and personal or family prayer.

⁴⁰ Cohen notes the distance and traditions about Hermon’s rich dew and explains the metaphor: “The intention is that, if heavy dew, such as that which falls on Mount Hermon, falls on the mountains of Zion, it will be a blessing for the land” (*The Psalms*, 439). The snow cover on the western slopes of Mt. Hermon results in over 40 inches per year of precipitation, which supplies the Jordan and Litani rivers; in addition, the moist western slopes have vineyards and orchards, and in biblical times were heavily forested (Denis Baly, “Hermon,” *HBD*, 384–85).

⁴¹ Booij, “Psalm 133,” 265–66.

⁴² Cohen, *The Psalms*, 439.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 266.

Conclusion: Psalm 133 uses proverbial sayings and similes to uphold proper conduct according to Torah—familial harmony and worship—in a progressive structure, moving from the family to blessings upon the nation. It shares with Psalms 127/128 the importance of family life as a sign of blessing, combined with moral exhortation for proper behavior. Together, Psalms 127, 128, and 133 add an important wisdom element to the Songs of Ascents and within Book 5 of the Psalter. All three psalms most probably were used in both cultic and instructional contexts.

Royalty and Wisdom in Psalm 144

Most scholars classify Psalm 144 as a Royal Psalm, based on its close relationship in vv. 1–10 with royal Psalm 18—compare v.1 with 18:3, 35, 47; v.2 with 18:3, 48; v. 5 with 18:10; v.6 with 18:15; v.7 with 18:17, 45, and v.10 with 18:51. If Psalm 144 comes from an exilic or post-exilic context, as I propose, the speaker of Ps 144 reshapes the material and changes the “royal thanksgiving” of Psalm 18 to a “royal lament” in 144:1–11.⁴⁴ The prayer for deliverance in battle in part I culminates in a confident assertion that God saves (תְּשׁוּעָה לְמַלְכִים) and rescues (הַפּוֹצֵה) David and his successors (v. 10), which leads to the psalmist’s final plea for deliverance (v.11). Part 2, vv. 12–15, describes the prosperity that God’s protection will bring upon pious Israelites after God enables them to defeat their enemies. The psalm utilizes an anthological style by freely borrowing verses from other psalms.⁴⁵ Thematically, the second part reflects royal Psalm 72 in describing the blessings and happy state of those who live under the leadership of a just king. Attribution to David, along with the use of metaphors from Psalm 18 to describe God in vv. 1–2, provide further evidence of its royal context. Linguistically, the use of Aramaic (פָּצַדָּה, “to redeem,” vv. 7, 11), and examples of later forms of Hebrew (זָוִיָּה, “corner pillars” v. 12; כֵּן, “kind” v. 13; the relative pronoun -שׁ in v. 15), and the anthological style noted above, argue for dating the psalm in the postexilic period.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 361.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *The Psalms*, 464–66.

⁴⁶ On the evidence of later biblical Hebrew in vv. 12–15, see Shalom E. Holtz, “The Thematic Unity of Psalm cxliv in Light of Mesopotamian Royal Ideology” *VT* 58 (2008): 371. Allen considers vv. 1–11 as

Wisdom elements interspersed within the Psalm, finally, reveal the work of later wisdom editors in reworking earlier material in a post-exilic context.

Wisdom elements: The reference to teaching (המלמד) in v. 1 reveals a didactic purpose underlying this outwardly royal psalm. God trains the speaker’s hands for war and fingers for battle; both synonymous lines (“war”; “battle”) are governed by the verb, “to teach” (למד). The initial statement teaches that any abilities or success in war (and life) occur through God’s help. In v. 3, the psalmist’s reflection on human insignificance before the all-powerful, omniscient God parallels statements in Ps 8:5 and Job 7:17 (תדעהו “you take note of him”). All three texts begin with the phrase, “what is man?” (מה־אנושׁ, in Ps 8:5 and Job 7:17; מה־אדם here), again contrasting the finite, contingent nature of human beings with an all-powerful, omniscient God. The text from Job asks, “What is man that you exalt him (תגדלנו)?” This occurs in the context of Job’s response to his friends in which he claims his life is nothing but “breath” (הבל; v. 16), which parallels the similar statement in Psalm 144:3–4; verse 4 likewise describes the human person as הבל. While Psalm 8:5 also speaks of the finite nature of humans before God it goes on to describe the human person as possessing an exalted status among creation. Psalm 144:3–4, therefore, shares more affinity with the wisdom teaching of Job 7:16–17.

Verse 4 contains thematic and linguistic parallels to Eccl 6:12, Job 7:6, 8:9, and wisdom Pss 39:6, 7, and 12, 62:10, and 90:9–10 with the psalmist’s reflection on the transitory nature of human life (הבל), likened to a “passing shadow” (ימיו כצל עובר; “his days [are] like a passing shadow”). Of these parallels, the closest linguistically occur in Job 8:9 and Psalm 39, both of which contain “shadow” (צל), while Psalm 39 also uses הבל in all three verses cited. Thematically and linguistically, Ps 144:3 embraces the combination of theodicy with wisdom teaching—as examined

from the late pre-exilic period, and vv. 12–15a postexilic; he argues that the content of vv. 1–11 was “reemployed in the postexilic period” (*Psalms 101–150*, 362).

earlier in Pss 39, 49, and 73—in its reflection on the transitory nature of human life in which we remain totally dependent on God.

Verses 5–7 call upon YHWH to “bend the heavens and come down,” in a theophany upon the mountains reminiscent of Sinai in Exodus 19 and Ps 18:14; with smoke, lightning, and “arrows” (חֲצִיץ), God scatters and confounds (וְתַהַמֵּם) the enemies. The psalmist calls upon YHWH to “send forth your hands from on high” to rescue and deliver him from “many waters”; this contrasts God’s surpassing and transcendent power with the ephemeral nature of humans as described in the preceding verses.⁴⁷ In this sense the psalm brings forth the wisdom themes of creation and human finitude.

In v. 9 the psalmist borrows from wisdom-creation Ps 33:2–3 in the reference to “a new song” (שִׁיר חָדָשׁ) sung upon the ten-string harp (נָבֵל עֶשׂוֹר). Psalms 144:3 and 33:2–3 both use the verbs “to sing” (שָׁר) and “chant praise” (זָמַר). If Psalm 144:1–11 is from the late pre-exilic period, it seems likely that later editors added the parallel from Psalm 33 during the post-exilic editing of the Psalter. In other texts from the Exilic to post-exilic era, mention of a “new song” celebrates God’s creation and care for Israel (Pss 96:1; 98:1; 149:1; Isa 42:10); in Ps 144:9 it celebrates God’s rescue and salvation for Israel (v. 10).⁴⁸

Verse 12 parallels Psalm 128:3 in describing sons as plants (בְּנֵינוּ כַּנְטָעִים). Both psalms present children as fulfillment of God’s covenant promises and blessings for pious Israelites, echoing Deuteronomy 28:1–6. Psalm 144 expands the description of blessings by describing daughters “like corner pillars” (בְּזוּיֹתַי) fashioned for the palace (v.12b), full garnerers (מְזוּיְנוּ מִלְּאִים, v. 13)—symbolizing fruitful crops that fill storage buildings—and abundant livestock (vv. 13–14). As in Psalms 128 and 133, in vv. 12–15 the psalmist uses similes to convey the blessings of peace and prosperity that God bestows upon the just person. Some scholars assume this to be the king, while

⁴⁷ The use of the first person personal pronominal suffix on the verbs here (“me”) is best understood in a collective sense, as the psalmist’s request reflects that of the king who in turn represents the nation.

⁴⁸ Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 299.

others view these blessings as accorded to faithful Israel in general.⁴⁹ Use of the third person plural (“our”) supports the view that collectively Israel receives these blessings. In its post exilic context, the psalm responds to the humiliation and dislocation experienced by the exiles in light of the failed monarchy. In this context, I view the psalm as more directed towards supporting and encouraging the returning/returned exiles as they seek to rebuild their lives and homeland. Describing sons as grown plants and daughters as corner pillars of a palace recalls Ps 127:3–5, in which grown sons support their father in his old age, and Ps 128:3 where children are likened to a prosperous olive tree. Similes use illustrations based on observation of the natural environment to provide pedagogical tools to teach wisdom, making clear the rewards for the just (Pss 1:3; 127:4; 128:3; 133), punishment for the wicked (Pss 1:4; 32:9; 37:2, 20; 49:13/21, 15), or the ephemeral nature of life (Ps 144:4).⁵⁰

Assurance of peaceful living under God’s protective care is implied by the three statements in v. 14: (1) “Our oxen are pregnant” (מסבלים); (2), “There is no breach (אין פרי), and no going forth,” and (3) “and there is no outcry in our streets” (ואין צוהה ברחבתינו). The first two statements refer to abundant cattle that remain safely within their pens, while the final statement refers to the absence of cries of anguish and violence as they now live in peace.⁵¹ Collectively, these blessings of children, provisions, cattle, and peace recall the epilogue and prologue of Job (Job 1:1–3; 42:12–16), where his previous losses of land, livestock, and children are restored. I propose a similar theological outlook in Psalm 144 and the *conclusion* of Job: those who trust in YHWH will ultimately prevail over adversity and receive abundant blessings. This provides a further connection between the conclusion section of the psalm and the wisdom tradition.

⁴⁹ Among those who hold that the subject is the king are Clifford, who interprets these verses as “The king protects the land from invaders and blesses its prosperity” (*Psalms 73–150*, 297–300), and Dahood, who calls vv. 12–15 “the king’s prayer for the prosperity of his people” (*Psalms 101–150*, 328). Cohen views the intended speaker as David describing the happy and blessed state of his people after defeating the enemy (*The Psalms*, 466), while Alter argues for the unity of vv. 1–11 and 12–15; he notes that peace and prosperity naturally follow a military triumph, as implied in part 1 (*The Book of Psalms*, 498).

⁵⁰ For the use of similes in wisdom literature see Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms,” 198–200.

⁵¹ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 498–99.

The use of the term אֲשֶׁר twice in v.15 closes the psalm with wisdom element that echoes Psalm 33:12. After being rescued by God, who bestows blessings of children, full garner, livestock, and peace (“no outcry in our streets” v.14b), the psalmist pronounces, “Happy the people for whom it is thus” (אֲשֶׁר עִם שְׂכָכָה לֵה, v. 15a), i.e. those who receive the divine blessings; this reflects traditional wisdom theology’s promise that the just who revere God will be blessed (e.g., Pss 1; 112; the antithetical statements in Prov 10–15). The concluding statement makes this clear: “Happy the people whose God is YHWH” (15b).

Praise and Wisdom in Psalm 146

Psalms 146—150 form a group that concludes the Psalter with hymns of praise, culminating in the doxology of Psalm 150; each psalm in this group begins and ends with הַלְלֵי יְיָ, “praise the Lord,” and focuses on Israel’s covenant relationship, God as creator, and divine blessing upon the faithful. In this group, Psalm 146 can be viewed as responding to the promise to “praise the Lord” that concluded Psalm 145:21, as it opens with the speaker declaring he will praise YHWH at all times (146:1).⁵² Psalm 146 emphasizes praise of YHWH (vv. 1–2), followed by a wisdom-oriented teaching contrasting the vanity of human rulers with the happiness (אֲשֶׁר) promised to those who trust in YHWH (vv. 3–5), the source of all creation and provider of benevolent care for the righteous (vv. 6–9b), who ultimately destroys the way of the wicked (דֶּרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים יֵעוֹת; v. 9b). The psalm culminates with a final acclamation of YHWH’s eternal reign, the reason for praise (v. 10). Wisdom elements include the psalmist’s teaching in vv. 3–5 that those who trust in YHWH find happiness and hope—in contrast to the vanity of trusting in finite, human leaders. Emphasis on God as creator (v.

⁵² Gerald Henry Wilson views the Psalms 146—150 as dependent upon 145:21, with the speaker of Psalm 146 representing “David,” i.e., those who receive the promises of the Davidic covenant. In Wilson’s view, Book 5 is a response to the needs of the post-exilic community, teaching that they must trust in Yahweh alone (107:12–13, 19, 28), according to the example of David (Pss 108–110; 138–145), and promises divine blessing and protection. In this scenario, Psalm 119 emphasizes the central role of Torah in guiding pious Israelites. Psalm 146, then, represents “David” bowing to the eternal kingship of YHWH, in contrast to the temporal human rulers (*The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* [SBLDS 76; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985], 225–28).

6) reflects wisdom-creation theology, seen previously in Psalms 33 and 104, and the contrasting fates of the righteous and needy who receive divine care, and the wicked who perish uphold the theology of retribution (vv. 7–9; see previous discussion on Ps 1:6). Wisdom elements found here, and in Psalms 145 (discussed earlier), 147 and 148 (below), reveal the influence and role of wisdom editors and teaching in the culmination of the Psalter.⁵³

Just as the final wisdom editors began the Psalter with a wisdom teaching (Psalm 1), so now they conclude it by joining praise and wisdom elements. This provides a new perspective in light of the Exile experience and subsequent renewal of emphasis on divine, rather than temporal, kingship. In an expansion of his earlier thesis, G. H. Wilson views psalms 107:42–43 and 145 as forming a “wisdom frame” around Book 5, which consists of Psalms 107—145, with 146—150 forming a final “hallel” of “resounding praise” to close the Psalter; Psalm 1 and this closing praise section “provide hermeneutical perspective” in a final editorial process.⁵⁴ Kselman effectively argues for a late, post-exilic date for the psalm based on its use of Aramaisms (עשתנתיו, v. 4; וקר, v. 8), and its anthological style, in which it contains partial quotes and echoes of other psalms—an indication of a later date. Important examples occur in v. 4, which alludes to Gen 3:19; Ps 104:29; Job 34:14–15; Eccl 3:20; 12:7. All of these parallels refer to human life as “dust”; v. 4b shows echoes of Ps 94:11, in its reference to the perishing of human thoughts.⁵⁵ These and other quotes and echoes will be noted in the textual analysis below.

⁵³ John S. Kselman analyzes Psalm 146 by text, date, form, rhetorical criticism, and canonical context and recognizes wisdom elements in vv. 3–4, and 8c–10, the אֲשֶׁר־ (citing J. Reindl), creation theology as reflective of wisdom influence in v. 6, and “its similarity to acrostic poems in its 22 or 23 cola,” a so-called “non-alphabetic acrostic”; as seen earlier, acrostic structures reflect the influence of wisdom traditions (“Psalm 146 in Its Context,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 590–91.

⁵⁴ G. H. Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 72–82, quote, 74; see 78–80 on the “wisdom frame.” Erich Zenger proposes that Psalms 107 and 145 form a “frame” for Book 5, noting how 106:1 and 107:1 are identical in praising God’s דָּוִד; thus, Book 5 “is a commentary summarizing the preceding four books of psalms” as Ps 107 begins Book 5 by emphasizing the manifestation of God’s דָּוִד in divine power and care. Psalm 145 emphasizes YHWH as King of the universe, showing mercy—with, I note, דָּוִד as a central theme (v.8)—care for the needy, and a universal view of God’s דָּוִד, to all creatures (vv. 16, 21[flesh]). In this schema, Psalms 146—150 form a finale (“The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107—145” *JSOT* 80 (1998): 77–102, see 88–89 on Pss 107 and 145 as a “frame.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 589.

Verses 1—5: Following the initial praise (v. 1) and commitment of the psalmist to praise God throughout his or her life (v. 2), wisdom teaching occurs in vv. 3–4 with admonitions to avoid trusting in powerful rulers (נְדִיבִים, “princes”) or humans in general (בְּנֵי־אָדָם), for such mortals ultimately have no power to save (לֹא תִשׁוּעָה). Their life breath returns to the “earth,” while their plans or “thoughts” perish (אֲבָדוּ עֲשֵׂתָנְתָיו; שָׁב לְאֲדָמָתוֹ). Human mortality is signified by the concept of returning to the “earth/dust” from which they were fashioned (Gen 2:6–7; 3:19), and is echoed throughout the wisdom literature, for example in Pss 90:3; 104:29; Job 34:14–16; and Eccl 3:20; 12:7. Failure of human plans recalls Psalms 33:10 and 94:11 and Prov 19:21; only God’s plans endure and flourish (Ps 33:11). The word translated “plans” עֲשֵׂתָנְתָיו occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, and is related to the verbal root עָשָׂה, Aramaic for “to think” (Dan 6:4)—further evidence for the late dating of the psalm.⁵⁶

Appropriately, this first wisdom teaching concludes in v.5 with an אֲשֶׁר־י, pronouncing “happy” those who have God as their helper (בְּעֶזְרִי) and hope in YHWH. This parallels the basic wisdom thesis that those who fear/revere the YHWH have wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:8; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10) and because they act according to Torah have assurance of divine blessings (אֲשֶׁר־י, Pss 1; 2:11; 32:1; 33:12; 34:9; 40:5; 41:2; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1; 144:15). This verse combines an ancient title for God, “The God of Jacob,” with a later word for hope, שָׁבַר, another Aramaism that further reflects how the late wisdom editors utilized and adapted traditional materials.⁵⁷

Verses 6—9: Following the contrast between human frailty and divine permanence in vv. 1–5, in this section the psalmist focuses on God’s actions and attributes: God *makes* (עָשָׂה) “heaven

⁵⁶ Cohen, *The Psalms*, 470; BDB, 799, 1108. In Jonah 1:6 the verbal form occurs in this phrase, “perhaps God will *think* of us” (אִילָּן יִתְעַשֶׂה הָאֵל הַיָּם לָנוּ), while the noun form occurs in the Hebrew of deuterocanonical Sir 3:24, a late wisdom book; in Sirach the word is used in an illustration against the conceited: “and their wrong *opinion* has impaired their judgement” (NRSV).

⁵⁷ Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, II: 942. Anderson also divides the psalm at v.5, viewing 5–9 as “A didactic glorification of Yahweh” (942).

and earth and all that fills them” (v.6; paralleled in Pss 24:1–2; 121:2; 124:8) and, in contrast to frail and finite humans, God remains *faithful forever* (דַּשְׁמַר אֱמֶת לְעוֹלָם). God establishes and maintains justice for the poor and needy, frees prisoners (v. 7; Pss 68:7; 103:6), restores sight to the blind, and raises those bowed down (v.8; Ps 145:14)—because God “loves the righteous” (אָהַב צְדִיקִים).

The verb זָקַף, “raises up,” used here and in Psalm 145:14 with כַּפּוּפִים (“those bowed down”), reflects a later form of Hebrew and occurs in the Aramaic section of Ezra (6:11).⁵⁸ Verses 7–8 also echo Ps 107:9–14, which similarly recounts God providing food for the hungry and delivering people from bondage and darkness.⁵⁹ Both psalms probably use these illustrations to reflect the collective experience of Israel in the exile and return. Verse 9 echoes the injunction of Torah to care for the stranger, orphan, and widow (Deut 14:28–30; 24:14, 17–18; 26:12)—itself a reflection of God’s care for them (Deut 10:18)—who represent the disenfranchised and deserve special protection.⁶⁰

Following this exhortation to proper behavior, the psalmist concludes by asserting an important principle of wisdom teaching, that the way of the wicked leads to ruin: “but the way of the wicked he will make crooked” (וּדְרֹךְ רְשָׁעִים יַעֲוֶה). This parallels Psalms 1:4–6; 37:20, 38; 112:10; 145:20, and Prov 15:9; the verb עָוָה meaning, “to make crooked,” emphasizes how God will frustrate the plans and actions of the wicked.⁶¹ Again, this teaching parallels the thought-world of Proverbs (e.g., Prov 10:1–32) and Psalm 1 in asserting the promise of divine blessings and care for the righteous and destruction for the wicked.

Verse 10: After beginning with a commitment to praise God “while I live,” followed by reasons for that praise, the psalmist concludes with a confident proclamation of YHWH’s eternal rule. In contrast to the temporal human rulers (v. 3) who fail, the psalmist proclaims: “YHWH will reign forever” (יִמְלֹךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם); this proclamation of the permanence of God’s kingdom and rule

⁵⁸ Kselman, “Psalm 146 in its Context,” 590. The verb is used to describe the punishment of anyone who violates the Decree of Darius: “and he will be lifted up and impaled (וּזְקִיף יִתְמַחֵהוּ) on it [a beam]” (Ezra 6:11).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 595; BDB, 1091.

⁶⁰ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 504.

⁶¹ Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, II: 943.

echoes of the conclusion of the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:18: יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעַלְמֵי וָעַד), a theme also found in Ps 145:13. As discussed earlier, books 4 and 5 of the Psalter place a renewed emphasis on God as king in light of the failure of the monarchy and the Exile. Verse 2b concludes this statement by speaking directly to “Zion,” Jerusalem, the seat of God’s kingship: “Your God, O Zion, unto all generations” (see Pss 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1–2).⁶²

Conclusion: Psalm 146 introduces a series of praise psalms that close the Psalter by combining previous themes: God’s eternal kingship, God’s role as creator who shows compassion and care for the righteous and the needy, and the classic wisdom theology that the wicked will be thwarted while the righteous ultimately will be blessed and “happy” (אַשְׁרֵי). God loves the righteous, and those in need of help (the stranger, orphan, and widow); despite the temporal power of the wicked, God’s eternal reign promises happiness for the righteous.

Wisdom Elements in Psalm 147: Creation and Commandments

This post-exilic psalm praises YHWH for restoring the exiles and rebuilding Jerusalem (vv. 2, 13–14), healing and sustaining the humble (vv. 3, 6, 14b), and making and sustaining creation with wisdom and power (vv. 4–5, 8–9, 16–18); YHWH does this by sending forth his commandments, word, precepts and ordinances (vv. 15, 18–20), exclusively for Israel (v. 20). The psalm divides into three strophes, vv. 1–6, 7–11, and 12–20 and borrows extensively from other texts (especially Isaiah 40–66; Psalms 33, 104; Job 37–39, and Deuteronomy 4); each strophe begins with a call to praise (וּמְרָא אֱלֹהֵינוּ, v. 1; עֲנוּ יְהוָה, v. 7; שִׁבְחֵי, v. 12).⁶³ Along with recurring motifs of creation (vv. 4–5, 15–18), covenant (vv. 2–4, 6, 13–14, 19–20), and Israel (vv. 2, 12, 19–20), the psalm features wisdom elements in its description of God’s infinite wisdom (v. 5), upholding of the humble and those who fear YHWH (vv. 6, 11), while punishing the wicked (v. 6b) and sending forth his word.⁶⁴

⁶² On Zion as the seat of Divine kingship, see Cohen, *The Psalms*, 471.

⁶³ For the unity of Psalm 147 and the interrelationships between the three strophes, see Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 383–85, and Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 306–307.

⁶⁴ In the LXX vv. 1–11 form Psalm 146, and vv. 12–20 Psalm 147; both have an added superscription, “Hallelujah, of Haggai and Zechariah” (also added to Psalm 146 (145 in LXX). Most probably

Verses 1—6: Following the initial Hallelujah, the emphatic particle כִּי (“indeed”) begins v. 1, which describes the importance of praise using synonymous parallelism: “Indeed it is good to praise (וְזָמַר) God; indeed, it is pleasant to adorn (נִאֲוָר) with praise.”⁶⁵ This sets the stage for the descriptions of why praise is warranted in vv. 2–20, concluding with the final Hallelujah. Reference to the Lord’s rebuilding Jerusalem and gathering “the banished” (נִדְחִים) in v. 2 clearly situates the psalm in the post-exilic period, after these events have occurred. The reference in v. 13 to the Lord “strengthening the bars of your gates” likewise refers to the rebuilding and provides a linguistic connection between strophes 1 and 3—one of many links that argue for the unity of the psalm. In another reference to the exile, YHWH “heals the brokenhearted” and “binds” up their wounds (v. 3), i.e. God heals mental (“heart”) and physical anguish and suffering. In an allusion to Genesis 15:5 and Isaiah 40:26, the psalmist declares what only God can do: “Counts the number of stars and calls them by name” (v. 5); whereas Gen 15:5 states that counting the number of stars (or grains of sand) is beyond humans’ ability, God the creator can count and give them names. The innumerable and distant stars are controlled by God, who names them and are part of his cosmic dwelling (e.g., see Isa 6:1–6).⁶⁶

God’s greatness manifested in creation and in healing and restoring Israel leads the psalmist to proclaim God’s infinite wisdom: “His wisdom is beyond number” (לְתַבּוּנָתוֹ אֵין מִסְפֵּר; v.5b). This verse upholds creation as reflective of divine wisdom, an important element of the wisdom literature (as discussed earlier in Pss 19; 33; 104; also Prov 8; Job 28; 38–41; Sir 45). The word תַּבּוּנָה is related to the verb בִּינָה, “to be wise,” and here, as in Pss 49:4 and 136:5, refers to God’s

this link with Haggai and Zechariah derives from the concern of both prophets to rebuild the temple following the exile.

⁶⁵ Here I follow Alter’s translation of נִאֲוָר as a piel infinitive construct, “to adorn,” which provides a nice parallel to “to praise” in the first stanza (*The Book of Psalms*, 505).

⁶⁶ James Kugel discusses the ancient Israelite belief that the “seraphim” (“burning ones”) in Isaiah’s vision represent the stars of the night sky, who lit up the sky and served Yahweh as his “angelic attendants” (*How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* [New York: Free Press, 2007], 541.)

surpassing knowledge.⁶⁷ In Psalm 136:5 the term is used to describe how God “made the heavens with wisdom”; this reference to God’s wisdom in creation, along with the stars in v.4, link Psalms 147 and 136; Ps 136 is an historical psalm used for post-exilic worship and instruction.⁶⁸ The LXX uses the word *σοφία*, which elsewhere is used to translate *משכיל* in psalm titles; if the underlying Hebrew text for the LXX had the word *תבונה* as in the MT, the translators may have viewed it as synonymous with the important wisdom root word, *שכל* (“to be wise/intelligent”).⁶⁹ This connection between God’s work in creation and God’s wisdom evinces the work and theology of wisdom writers. According to both traditional wisdom theology (e.g., Psalms 34:7; 145:14; 146:8; Prov 22:22–23) and Deuteronomy (e.g., 15:5–7; 26) God commands a preferential option for the poor, while punishing the wicked (Ps 1:6), as attested in v. 6: “YHWH upholds the humble (*עניים*), but fells the wicked to the ground” (*משפיל רשעים עדי־אריץ*).

Verses 7—11: Following the second call to praise (v. 7) the psalmist describes how God provides rain which fructifies the soil, causing grass to cover the mountains (e.g., Ps 72:16), giving sustenance to beast (*בהמה*) and “young ravens” (*לבני ערב*) when they call (vv. 8–9). This presentation of God’s mastery over creation, moving from heavens to the earth, recalls Psalm 104 and emphasizes God’s compassionate care for all things (Pss 104:11; 145:15).⁷⁰ Verses 10–11 recall Psalm 33:17 in citing the false hope of a horse or human strength: God is unimpressed by such temporal examples of power, but rather finds “pleasure in those who *fear him*” (v.11, emphasis added). “Fear of the Lord,” of course, is a principle thesis of wisdom literature (Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10) that upholds God’s sovereign power as creator and source of life; those who fear

⁶⁷ BDB, 108.

⁶⁸ Though Psalm 136 contains some wisdom elements, I do not include it for in-depth analysis as a wisdom-oriented psalm due to its more clearly liturgical use, as evidenced by the recurring refrain, “His steadfast love endures forever”; on the other hand, it certainly exhibits the work of the same post-exilic wisdom editors of the Psalter.

⁶⁹ For the use of the Greek verb *σοφιστος* in Pss 49, 136, and 147 see E. Hatch and H. A. Redpath, *HRC3* (3 vols. in 2; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983) 2:1314.

⁷⁰ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 506.

YHWH hope for God’s covenant love (הַמִּיחֵלִים לַחֶסֶד; v. 11; Ps 33:18). Read in the context of the Exile, vv. 7–11 present new hope following devastation and loss: God will once again fructify the earth to provide nourishment; God’s provision of food for beasts and birds (v. 9) will also apply to humans (v. 14). Those who maintain faith in the covenant (אֵת־הַמִּיחֵלִים לַחֶסֶד, “those who hope in his steadfast love”; v. 11) please God and receive blessings.⁷¹ With this reverence and hope, the psalmist moves to praise God who rebuilds Jerusalem and sends forth his word, statutes, and judgments to guide a renewed Israel.

Verses 12–20: Beginning with the third and final call to praise in v. 12, this last section provides a more in-depth description of how God rebuilds Jerusalem (v. 2) and provides sustenance (vv. 8–9). In vv. 12–14 the psalmist describes how God “strengthened the bars of your [Jerusalem] gates” to fortify the city against any invaders, and “has blessed your children within you”—security in a renewed Jerusalem will be marked by safety and security for prospering families (Pss 127:3–4; 128:3). This renewal of God’s חֶסֶד includes peace within Jerusalem’s borders (Ps 128:6), and rich food: “he satisfies you with the finest wheat” (חֶלֶב חֲטִיִּם יִשְׂבִיעֶךָ). These gifts come forth when God “sends his *promise* upon earth” (הַשְּׁלַח אִמְרָתוֹ אֶרֶץ), by which “his *word* (דְּבַר) will run swiftly” (v. 15). Here both “promise” in line A and “word” in line B are synonymous and serve to emphasize the creative power of God’s Word (Gen 1–2; Ps 33:9); creation itself reveals God’s word (Ps 19:3). This emphasis on God’s word as the active agent in creation and life reveals the interests of wisdom teachers.

Manifestations of God’s creative activity from the heavens, in the form of snow, frost, ice, cold, and wind (vv. 16–17) occur through God’s commandment and creative word: “He [God] sends forth his *word*” (דְּבַר), causing the ice to melt, his wind/breath/spirit to return (רוּחַ) and waters flow (v. 18). Both commandment (v. 15) and word are synonymous; vv. 15–20 use *seven* terms

⁷¹ Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 308–09.

relating to God's word ("promise"; "word" [x3]; "statutes," v. 19; and "ordinances," vv. 19, 20). Through this repetition the psalmist recalls the word of God first given in the Sinai covenant and now renewed in the post-exilic period of restoration.⁷² God declares דברו ("his word") to "Jacob," and his "statutes and ordinances" (חקיו ומשפטיו) to Israel (v. 19), but not to any other nation (לכל-גוי). This emphasizes how divine wisdom—knowledge of God, God's laws, creation, and morality—resides exclusively with God's chosen people, the covenant partners.

Conclusion: Psalm 147 commands praise for the post-exilic community as it rebuilds and reestablishes its religious life following the Exile; observation of the created order and divine assistance in rebuilding Jerusalem reveal God as the divine source. By concluding the psalm with repeated terms for God's Word—all of which are synonymous with Torah, as in Psalm 119—the psalmist brings the poem to a climax that emphasizes God's Word of wisdom as given exclusively to Israel and the guiding force of all life.

Divine Wisdom Revealed in Creation: Psalm 148

Between its initial and closing "Hallelujahs," Psalm 148 consists of an imperative call for all of personified creation to praise YHWH, beginning with the heavenly bodies (vv. 1–4) and moving to include the chorus from earth (vv. 7–12), with both the earthly and heavenly choruses concluding with praise of "the name of YHWH" (יהללו את-שם יהוה), "Let them praise the name of YHWH"; vv. 5, 13). Like Psalm 104, Psalm 148 presents creation as a diverse unity of component parts, with humans—both kings, princes, and men and women, young and old—as one of the essential parts, with no hint of dominion. With its detailed listing of all these component parts of creation, both heavenly and earthly, Psalm 148 is similar to Job 38, where YHWH mentions the diverse aspects of

⁷² Clifford observes the repetition of these terms and specifically identifies vv. 19–20 as referring to the renewal of God's Word first given at Sinai, which made Israel "distinctive" (Deut 4:5–8) then, as it does now (147:20), and notes "Concern with the word of the Lord was a feature of Second Temple Judaism" (*Psalms* 73–150, 309).

creation while questioning Job, and Egyptian wisdom traditions in the *Onomasticon of Amenope*.⁷³ By framing both main sections with praise of the God's personal name, the psalmist reveals a central thesis: that all of God's creation in its diversity and beauty must praise the creator. Parallel to the Priestly creation story in Genesis 1, and creation-wisdom Ps 33:9, Psalm 148 depicts God speaking to create: "For he commanded, and they were created" (v. 5), through an eternal decree (קִיָּנָה, v. 6). In light of this, various meteorological phenomena—fire, hail, snow, vapor, and stormy wind—"fulfill" God's "word" (עֲשֵׂה דְבָרִי, v. 8). The verb "commanded" (צִוָּה), and the nouns "decree" (קִיָּנָה) and word (דְּבָרִי) in vv. 5, 6, and 8 center the poem and connect it to the wisdom tradition; קִיָּנָה and דְּבָרִי are two of the Torah keywords found in Psalms 19 and 119. The verb נִבְרָאוּ, "they were created," always refers to divine activity; here it describes the result of God's command, and connects the psalm to the Priestly creation story in Genesis (1:1, 27; 2:3, 4), and post-exilic Isaiah (40:26, 28; 42:5; 45:12, 18; 65:17).⁷⁴ The theme of creation runs throughout the Psalter, as seen particularly in Psalms 8, 19A, 33, and 104, and fittingly occurs as part of its conclusion as an expression of God's commands and Torah. Along with other evidence for the post-exilic nature of the psalm, this points to its composition and redaction within post-exilic wisdom circles.

Creation and Wisdom: Occurring at the conclusion of the Psalter, Psalm 148 summarizes the creation theology previously expressed in the other creation-oriented psalms, as all elements of the cosmos—from the heavenly realm to creatures of earth and sea—form a chorus of praise to YHWH. If the date of composition of Ps 148 is later than 19, 33, and 104, as seems plausible based on its location at the conclusion of the Psalter, it raises the question whether the author knew or perhaps had a hand in the composition of the earlier psalms. This also raises the possibility that among the wisdom circles, differing "schools of emphasis" or thought existed, with Psalms 19, 33, 104 and 148,

⁷³ Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, II:949. For an alternative view, see Delbert R. Hillers, "A Study of Psalm 148" *CBQ* 40 (1978): 323–34. After examining parallels, Hillers concludes that the roots of Psalm 148 are found not in encyclopedic lists but in hymnic traditions from "pre-Israelite Mesopotamia and Egypt" (334).

⁷⁴ *BDB*, 135.

reflective of sages who emphasize the importance of creation in understanding God.⁷⁵ As Roland E. Murphy notes, creation and wisdom stand together as essential elements of Israel's faith that express how they encountered God in their observation and experience of the created world.⁷⁶ Creation provides an ongoing experience of invisible causal power, i.e. the divine source underlying the cosmos. Through reflection and observation of creation, one gains knowledge and awareness of its source (e.g., Ps 19:1–7). Murphy describes this experience as a “dialogue with creation” and part of the “wisdom experience” as the human being lives with and reacts to creation; further, this experience of creation in effect relates to faith as creation expresses and reveals God.⁷⁷

Verses 1—6: Praise first issues from God's heavenly court in the heavens, “the heights” (בְּמַרְוָמִים; v.1), and the “angels” and “hosts” located there. The LXX adds a superscription, “Alleluia, of Haggai and Zechariah,” which clearly reflects a post-exilic context as both Haggai and Zechariah are concerned with the rebuilding of the temple. In light of linguistic evidence, Hillers assigns the psalm an early fourth-century date.⁷⁸

Praise comes from the heights (v. 1), the divine beings (angels; v. 2), the celestial realm of sun, moon and stars (v. 3), and the primeval waters; this leads to the reason for praise in vv. 5–6: God has commanded creation through his decrees and word. In contrast to religions that viewed the luminaries as gods, the psalmist views all elements of creation as subservient to their one, divine source. In emphasizing the goodness of creation as reflective of its one divine source, the psalm

⁷⁵ This issue will be addressed more fully in the conclusion of this dissertation (below). In essence, I hold that rather than having a monolithic, one-track view of wisdom, a diversity of thought is found within post-exilic wisdom circles. By looking at the various types of wisdom in the Psalter—from the traditional retribution theology of Pss 1-2, the focus on issues of theodicy and unjust suffering in Pss 49 and 73, the vanity of life in 39, 62, and 90, and creation in 19, 33, 104, and 148—we have evidence of the work of sages who, while clearly steeped in ANE wisdom ideology and traditions, held different views of how to express “wisdom.”

⁷⁶ “Wisdom and Creation” *JBL* 104 (1985): 5–6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁸ Hillers claims the MT of Psalm 148 reveals a later form of Hebrew: the hiphil of “to establish/make stand” (וַיַּעֲמִידֵם; v.6) in reference to what God commands (וַיִּצְוֶה; v.5) reflect later texts (Joel 2:11; Ps 103:20; Esth 5:5; 2 Chr 34:31); further, the use of the verb עָבַר with regard to a decree or law becoming invalid (v. 6, וְלֹא יֵעָבֹר) reflects similar usage in Esth 1:19, 9:27 (Persian period), which he claims mimics the Aramaic of Dan 6:9, 13. His observations seem plausible and seem to situate the text in the Persian period (“A Study of Psalm 148,” 328–29).

parallels Genesis 1. Parallels from Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts occur in the Mesopotamian myth *Enki and the Ordering of the World* (ca. 2000 BCE), which describes how Enki, “summoned the two winds (and) the water of heaven”—an idea found in v. 4 of the psalm in which the heavens and waters above are summoned to praise.⁷⁹ Reference to the “highest heavens” (שמי השמים) is a superlative way of describing the divine realm (Deut 10:14; 1 Kgs 8:27), while the “waters above the heavens” refer to the waters above the firmament in ancient Hebrew cosmology and connect the psalm to the Genesis creation and flood stories (Gen 1:7; 7:11; 8:2).

The Egyptian *Hymn to Amun*, refers to Khepri, the sun god, “who spoke the word and the gods came into being” after which follows praise of the gods and lists of aspects of creation; this focus on God’s creative command occurs in Pss 33:6, 9 and 148:5 (and Gen 1).⁸⁰ While parallels to other, earlier Ancient Near Eastern texts do not prove that the psalmists borrowed directly, it does reveal that the Israelite poets may have had knowledge of these texts; the milieu of ANE literature had an influence in shaping the cosmology of Israelite wisdom teachers.

In v. 5, the command of YHWH, expressed in the verbal form צוה is the same creative word which “God spoke, and it was” in the Creation stories and Psalm 33:6, 9. The LXX of Psalm 148:5 adds an extra colon by quoting both colons of Psalm 33:9; thus, before the MT “he commanded and they were created” (5b), the LXX adds, “for he spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created.”⁸¹ This raises the question as to whether in the underlying Hebrew text of the LXX the author of Psalm 148 quotes a presumably earlier Ps 33 (32) or if both psalms utilize common source material. The MT of Psalm 33:9, “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood (ויעמד)” also differs from the LXX “and they were created” (ἐκτίσθησαν); as noted above, 148:5 uses ונבראו, “and they were created,” to emphasize the divine nature of this creation.

⁷⁹ For the text and English translation, see Walter Beyerlin, ed. *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 78–80.

⁸⁰ See Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 12–16. The *Hymn of Mer-Sekhmet* also depicts Amun-Re-Atum-Harakhti (the sun god), “who spoke with his mouth and there came into being men, gods, cattle great and small, everything that flies and alights, all of them” (26).

⁸¹ Both Psalms 33:9 and 148:5 use the exact same wording in the LXX.

Despite the differences, in both MT and LXX God's word transcends the idea of written or oral communication and in itself is life-giving. In claiming that the God's decree shall never be transgressed (v. 6), the psalmist in effect provides an ancient understanding of the laws of nature as divine commands.⁸²

Verses 7—12: The psalmist's proclamation of God's creative and enduring command and decree in vv. 5–6 centers the psalm with an emphasis on God as the conductor of both the heavenly (vv. 1–5a) and earthly (vv. 7–12) choruses. No dichotomy exists between the earthly and heavenly realms as both join harmoniously to praise YHWH. All class distinctions—between young and old, women and men, kings and common folk (vv. 11–12)—become irrelevant as all groups join together to praise YHWH. This picture of harmony within the cosmos, both on earth and in heaven, recalls the similar equality and unity expressed in Psalm 104. Beginning from the earth, in v. 7 the psalmist calls upon personified “sea monsters and the deep” (תַּנִּינִים כָּל־תְּהוֹמוֹתָ) to praise YHWH; these elements recall the Priestly creation story, where the “deep” (Gen 1:2) represents primeval chaos, which will soon be brought into order by God's command (see also Ps 104:6), and God creates the “sea monster” (Gen 1:21) on the fifth day. In Psalm 74:13 the threatening תַּנִּינִים is shattered by God; in the wisdom poem of Job 28, the personified deep (תְּהוֹמוֹת) has no access to wisdom (v. 14), which can only be found in God (v. 28). Now, these formerly foreboding elements have been harnessed and tamed and now join the choir of praise.

Fire and hail in v. 8 recall the theophany of Psalm 18:13, where these elements reveal divine power; here they join “snow and vapor” (שֶׁלֶג וְקִיטוֹר) and “stormy wind” (רוּחַ סַעֲרָה) in fulfilling God's command (דַּבְּרָה). As in Psalm 147:15–18, meteorological phenomena serve as agents of God's word. In Psalm 104:4, both fire and wind serve as “ministers” in carrying out God's creative commands, just as the storm wind carries out God's command (יֹאמֵר) in Psalm 107:25;

⁸² Cohen, *The Psalms*, 475. Alter, in contrast, argues that חָסֵם can also mean “border” or “limit,” and in this context is better translated as “border”: “He set them a border that could not be crossed”; he sees this as a monotheistic adaptation of the Canaanite myth of the sea god (*The Book of Psalms*, 510).

both psalms were previously examined for their wisdom elements and further reflect the creation theology used here by the psalmist (148:8). Through observation of the cosmos, these wisdom teachers discerned God’s creative command and word as the source of invisible causal power. Viewed from this perspective, such otherwise threatening phenomena as extremes of weather, the deep, and fire and sea monsters become tame and part of the larger mystery and order of God’s creation.

Mountains and “all” hills along with the fruit tree and cedar (v.9)—images based on Gen 1:11 (fruit-bearing trees), Ps 104:8 (mountains), and 16 (cedar trees)—join wild beasts (רִיחַ), “all” domestic cattle (כָּל־בְּהֵמָה), “creeping things” (רֶמֶשׂ) and winged birds (וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף, v. 10) in the personified “creation chorus” (Gen 1:21). Collectively, up to this point the psalmist draws upon elements of the Priestly creation story, using parallel terminology, to reveal how all facets of God’s “good” creation (Gen 1:25) exult in their source. This survey of the created world draws upon Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions from Egypt and Mesopotamia, and other biblical texts as noted above, and recalls descriptions of Solomon’s wisdom in 1 Kgs 5:9–12.⁸³

Among ANE parallels, the Akkadian creation epic, *Enuma Elish* (ca. 1100 B.C.E.), which likely influenced the Priestly creation story (Gen 1:1–2:4a), may have been known to the author of Psalm 148. Parallels abound: in Tablet 5 the god Marduk creates the stars and moon and meteorological phenomena (clouds, water, vapor, wind), in Tablet 6 he creates humans as servants of the gods, and in Tablet 7 speaks of “his command and unchangeable word”—all important elements of Psalm 148 that may have influenced the psalmist. If so, these ideas have been adapted for a monotheistic context.⁸⁴ Following the pattern of Genesis 1, the psalmist places humans last in this sequence (vv. 11–12), which implies their exalted status among earthly creation. The order of kings, “all peoples”—the subjects of the king—princes, judges, young men and women, along with elders

⁸³ For a comprehensive overview of Egyptian and Mesopotamian parallels, see Hillers, “A Study of Psalm 148,” 329–34. As noted above, Hillers favors pre-Israelite Mesopotamian and Egyptian hymnic traditions as primary antecedents for Psalm 148.

⁸⁴ English text of the *Enuma Elish* from Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts*, 80–84.

and children together praise YHWH, along with all previously listed elements of creation. The listing of “all peoples” (כל־לְאֻמִּים) immediately following mention of “all kings” in v. 11 seems to imply that, despite levels of social hierarchy in daily life, before YHWH such distinctions become subordinated to the unified act of offering praise.

This aspect of equality in creation Psalms 104 and 148 in which humans, and even royalty, share common roles in fulfilling God’s commands while living in harmony with creation most likely reflects the post-exilic wisdom context of the latter part of the Psalter in Books 4 and 5. Having experienced the failure of the monarchy, dislocation, the process of rebuilding nation and religious structures under foreign (in this case, Persian) rule, the outlook of wisdom teaching shifts from a royal perspective, represented by Solomon’s court, to a more independent, “Yahwistic” focus.⁸⁵ In light of the failed monarchy, this teaching emphasizes YHWH’s rule, and also the goodness and unity of creation. Perhaps in response to the experience of destruction and loss, Israelite wisdom teachers placed a new emphasis on harmony and unity within creation, recalling the original unity and harmony of Genesis.⁸⁶

Verse 13: Once again the psalmist praises of YHWH’s name, as in v. 5, but expands upon it. Whereas in v. 5 the call to praise the divine name was followed by recollection of creation by God’s command and word, in v. 13, following the explication of how God’s creation harmoniously joins in praise of the creator, the psalmist moves toward a conclusion by emphasizing the singular status of YHWH: “For his name alone is exalted” (כִּי־נִשְׁגַּב שְׁמוֹ לְבַדּוֹ). Like v. 5, this exaltation of the divine name may be an Israelite adaptation of texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia that exalt the

⁸⁵ Walter Brueggemann, however, places “creation faith” within the context of the so-called “Jerusalem establishment” of the monarchial period and views it as “royal propaganda,” in which the king and his court depict themselves as guarantors of social and cosmic order. In this view, creation faith places questions of order over questions of justice (*The Prophetic Imagination* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978], 39–40). While this seems plausible as applied to the J creation story in Gen 2, which may itself have been commissioned for the royal court, in the context of the creation-wisdom psalms examined in this dissertation, and Job 38–41, the contexts seem removed from royal interests and more focused on YHWH as creator and guarantor of justice and order.

⁸⁶ With earlier commentators, I presume the dating of the Priestly source to be post-exilic, which means the post-exilic wisdom writers and editors may have in some cases working at the same time or within similar circles as the P school. We can at least attest to their use of the P materials, as in Psalm 148.

names of gods while describing creation. The Egyptian *Hymn of a Thousand Strophes* describes the god Amun as “Lord of Lords, who has created himself,” and embodies the essence of divine power.⁸⁷ All creation stands in awe of Amun, and the other gods rely upon Amun; in this context, the text proclaims, “Your name is high, powerful and strong”—a theme paralleled in Ps 148:13.⁸⁸ In a Sumerian prayer to the moon god, *Nanna-Suen (Sin)*, “who is exalted in heaven and on earth” as “hero of the gods,” the text describes his work as creator, which in turns evokes praise of “all creatures” and affirms: “You alone are exalted!”⁸⁹ Though surrounded by polytheistic cultures, post-exilic Israel embraces monotheism; therefore, only one God, YHWH, shall be exalted in contrast to the lifeless idols of Canaan (see Pss 115:3–8; 135:3, 15–18). As the source of creation, YHWH’s majesty (יְהוָה) is exalted over earth and heaven: every aspect of the cosmos exists only through YHWH’s command and, therefore, all elements of creation must glorify their source.

Verse 14: Proceeding from the call to praise and exaltation of the divine name in v. 13, the psalmist concludes in v. 14 by describing what YHWH does for “his holy ones” (חַסִּידָיו), the children of Israel “who are near to him” (קָרְבָּו). Recall that in Psalm 73 the psalmist concludes that “nearness of God” (קָרְבָּו) is the greatest good; the pious Israelites who “praise the name of YHWH” in Psalm 148 embrace this wisdom.⁹⁰ First, YHWH has “lifted up a horn for his people”; the horn (קָרְנִי) symbolizes strength and dignity in this context, where it applies to people (1 Sam 2:1, 10; Pss 75:11; 89:18, 25; 92:11; 112:9). God rewards the faithful ones by restoring their dignity after the exile as symbolized by the raised horn and in the second colon by “praise for all his faithful ones”

⁸⁷ English translation in Beyerlin *Near Eastern Religious Texts*, 20–25; quote from Strophe 9. Similar to Ps 148, the text lists all aspects of creation, showing their awe of Amun and dependence upon his beneficent care.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 (Strophe 6).

⁸⁹ English translation in Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts*, 104–106, quotes from lines 2, 21, 24. Both of these texts quoted here as examples of possible ANE influence upon the psalmist (s) creation theology predate the canonical Ps 148.

⁹⁰ As noted previously, Jerome F. Creach argues that nearness to God is the “destiny of the righteous,” quoting Ps 73:28 as a key to his interpretation (*The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*, 52).

(תהלה לַכֹּל־חַסִּידַיִן).⁹¹ Throughout the psalm all creation joined the chorus of praise to YHWH ; now at its conclusion YHWH returns the favor by providing restoration, blessing and, thus, praise for Israel. Specifically, the focus is on the children of Israel (לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) who are “near to him” (קָרִיבִים), i.e., intimately attached to YHWH through obedience to Torah and faithful praise.

Conclusion: Placed at the conclusion of the Psalter in its final doxology of praise, Psalm 148 summarizes the essence the preceding creation psalms (Pss 19A; 33; 104) and upholds the ideals of wisdom teachers in presenting a unified, harmonious chorus of creation giving praise to YHWH. Book 5 began with wisdom teaching in Ps 107:33–43, describing God’s control over created elements and how the wise person should both keep and consider this knowledge; as part of the concluding praise of Book 5, Ps 148 presents creation as manifesting cosmic praise and harmony. Wisdom teaching that describes creation as manifesting God’s work thus brackets Book 5. Within this frame, I have examined wisdom psalms relating to all aspects of life, domestic, communal, and cosmic. Psalm 148, with its presentation of unity within the cosmos—and no hint of human domination—may reflect the aspirations and observations of post-exilic wisdom teachers who encourage trust in divine rule, rather than the failed monarchy, and the ideals of original harmony as presented in the Priestly creation story (Gen 1). Having experienced destruction and loss, and rebuilding under foreign domination, the sages conclude the Psalter with praise that focuses on the only sure and permanent aspect of Israel’s experience: YHWH as creator and sustainer.

From the introductory ideals set forth in Psalm 1, the Psalter presents a journey through the travails, joys, and hopes of Israel. This journey embraces suffering, issues of theodicy, the failed monarchy and, in the final two books, a focus on divine kingship, with YHWH as the only sure and true source of life and sustenance. I see a development in thought from the simple retribution theology of Psalm 1, and its royal-wisdom counterpart, Psalm 2; following this introduction, the wisdom material in the Psalter embraces the variety of experiences and emotions noted above, finally

⁹¹ On the horn as symbolic of strength and dignity, see *BDB*, 901–02. Cohen interprets this verse as referring to God’s restoration of Israel’s honor following the Exile (*The Psalms*, 476).

concluding in Book 5 with a strong emphasis on creation theology and divine kingship. In light of humiliation and loss experienced in the failed monarchy and Exile, the sages present a more mature and developed understanding of wisdom that recognizes the limitations of human leadership. The reality of foreign domination during the Persian period, the most likely context for the editing and formation of the Psalter, must have impacted the teaching of sages to focus more on YHWH as the manifestation of truth and salvation. The presentation of unity and equality in Pss 104 and 148 is remarkable, and reveals the interests of post-exilic wisdom writers on the revelation of divine power in creation and the need for harmony among humans in relation to each other and the cosmos. Each psalm examined for wisdom content in Book 5 exhibits a strong focus on YHWH as the source of help, salvation, truth and thus demanding praise and reverence from humanity. Perhaps the historical experience of failed kings—save David, Hezekiah and Josiah—and the humiliation and loss during and after the Exile, shifted the focus of wisdom schools and teachers from service to the establishment of king and court, which ultimately failed, to focus on YHWH, creation and unity within the cosmos.

Conclusion: Wisdom in the Canonical Psalter and its Implications

In this study I seek to reveal the pervasive influence of post-exilic wisdom circles in the final editing and shaping of the Psalter.¹ In seeking to illustrate wisdom influence throughout the structure of the canonical Psalter, I expand upon previous research in the area of wisdom psalms. Through my analysis, I propose that the category of “wisdom psalms” is broader than the narrow, limited classifications in previous studies. I find wisdom elements—vocabulary, thematic, rhetorical, and parallels with other ANE wisdom material—throughout the Psalter, encompassing a variety of psalm genres. I examine several psalms normally classified as hymns (Pss 19; 33; 92; 104; 111; 107; 148), historical psalms (Pss 78, 105, 106), laments (Pss 39; 51; 64; 90), and other mixed genres (Pss 2; 25; 36; 62; 107; 146; 147), acrostic structures (Pss 111, 112, 119, and 145), together with more commonly classified wisdom psalms (Pss 1; 14/53; 34; 37; 49; 73; 112; 119; 127; 128; 133), and the term *Mas̄kîl*, to provide an in-depth look at the pervasive hand of wisdom editors, writers and teachers in the formation of the Psalter. This dissertation takes a “maximalist” view of wisdom influence in the Psalter, beyond the more “minimalist” interpretation of wisdom in the Psalter as seen in many of the earlier analyses of the topic (as I examine in chapter 1).

I emphasize the experience of Exile and displacement, the failure of the Davidic monarchy and experience of foreign domination, as key influences upon Israel’s self-understanding. These historical events had a profound effect on Israel’s relationship with their personal God, YHWH, in

¹ André Lemaire argues that during the First Temple period the Jerusalem temple served as the locus of wisdom teaching; schools from the Deuteronomistic tradition (D) were connected to the royal court, while Priestly (P) schools were connected to the Temple. In the Second Temple period, however, “when there was no king and no royal school,” these two school traditions merged, as seen in the role of Ezra, the priest scribe (Ezra 7:6), who studies and teaches Torah. In Lemaire’s view, the wisdom psalms—he includes 1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, and 127 (and also mentions the other acrostics, 9-10, 25, 111)—are didactic, focused on teaching, and probably produced by these temple schools (“The Sage in School and Temple” *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* [ed. John G. Gammie and Leo J. Perdue Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 176–81, quote 180).

post-exilic times, when the canon of the Hebrew Bible began to take shape.² In this context, Torah serves as a resource to maintain communal identity while the community endures exile and displacement; wisdom teachers shape the Psalter to emphasize how YHWH continues to abide with Israel despite foreign domination.³ In chapter 2, the term *Mas'kil* is examined; I propose that its use in the Psalter and at Qumran provides evidence for the influence of wisdom writers/editors in the formation of the Psalter. I argue that this important wisdom term serves as a “marker” in psalm titles—and sometimes within a Psalm (Pss 14:2; 47:7; 53:3)—for the work of sages who adapted various psalms for didactic use.

In chapter 3 I examine the placement of Torah Psalms 1, 19B, and Torah-acrostic Psalm 119 that emphasize the primacy of Torah in the Psalter; combined with Psalms 19A, acrostics 111, 112, and 145 this collection of Torah/acrostic psalms provides an initial framework for the development of the Psalter. Anthony Ceresko notes how “much of psalmic wisdom reflects the postexilic situation in which wisdom had become closely tied to torah”; in this scenario, Psalms 1 and 119 stand as prime examples of this combination of wisdom and Torah. Wisdom and Torah provide a source of “order” and stability for the exiles.⁴ I include acrostic Psalm 145 in this group, which completes the framework of “Torah psalms and acrostics.” Emphasis on Torah and the use of acrostic structures reflect the work and interests of wisdom teachers.

² The final canonical form of the Hebrew Bible is dated in the first century C.E.; in the Greek Prologue to Sirach (written ca. 132 B.C.E.), however, Ben Sira’s grandson describes his grandfather as devoted to “reading of the law, prophets, and the other writings of our fathers” (καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πατριῶν βιβλίων), which seems to imply that the Writings, presumably including the Psalms, had begun to take shape during Ben Sira’s time (ca. 190).

³ Walter Brueggemann describes the use of Torah in the exilic/post-exilic period as “a normative resource, rooted in the authority of Moses, for the sustenance of a peculiar community of faith and life that is displaced and without other resources” (*An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003], 22). Torah becomes a resource to maintain identity and “imagination” in various periods of foreign domination, and particularly for the youth who had no or limited memory of Israel’s past glory and would be more susceptible to embracing the dominant culture of the empire (24–25). It seems logical that young men who attended wisdom schools for training, then, would be important recipients of this teaching.

⁴ Anthony Ceresko, “The Sage in the Psalms,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, 224.

After experiencing destruction and displacement in the Exile, the community needed to reinterpret its self-understanding and its understanding of YHWH's covenant promises. Through the study of Torah, the exiles experienced the abiding presence of YHWH, despite the loss of the temple and its sacrificial system; this in turn led to an emphasis on Torah as a source of divine wisdom and guidance in daily life. These experiences shaped the post-exilic prophets, the Deuteronomistic writers, the Chronicler's History, Priestly editors of the Pentateuch, and the post-exilic wisdom schools and teachers. The dilemma of the speaker of Psalm 137, who could no longer sing the Lord's song in a foreign land, provides a concise summary of the context that led to these developments.

Originally, wisdom instruction was most probably connected to royal temple and court, but in the post-exilic period, in light of the failed monarchy and under foreign domination, wisdom teaching comes to the fore in its own right: an emphasis on Torah as a guide for life, and a renewed emphasis on YHWH as king take precedence over an earthly monarchy. Though wisdom schools associated with the temple most probably continued to exist in the post-exilic period, their emphasis seems to have shifted from royal ideologies to a "practical wisdom" for proper living. In post-exilic contexts creation theology, an emphasis on divine, rather than secular kingship, the embrace of skeptical elements akin to Job and Ecclesiastes, and a less anthropocentric theology are evident in the diverse wisdom material found in the Psalter.

In a recent survey, Leo Perdue provides a concise summary of the development of wisdom schools.⁵ Sages associated with the royal court in the pre-exilic period served as archivists, redactors, composers of both legal and sapiential texts, narratives, and as instructor for youth training for scribal or administrative roles. Temple sages kept records of sacrifices and offerings, collected and distributed resources, and maintained texts used in worship. They may have been involved in codification and interpretation of the Deuteronomistic and Priestly Codes. Following the failure of

⁵ *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

the monarchy, Perdue posits that these sages came under the control of the Zadokite priesthood. Baruch and Ezra the “priest-scribe” represent this development. Eventually, these sages taught in the developing synagogue system as interpreters of Torah and thus became the precursors to rabbinic Judaism.⁶ Purdue’s reconstruction seems plausible, though all such reconstructions are speculative since we have limited detailed evidence of scribal activity from the period. The prominent roles of the priest sage Ezra and the scribe Baruch in the biblical canon and non-canonical texts, however, lend further support to his theory. In my analysis of the term *Maskeil* in chapter two of this dissertation I also examine the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls as a source of information about the development of the canon in the post-exilic period. I propose that in the use of the term *Maskeil* in Qumran and canonical psalms provided evidence of the activity of sages in this period.⁷

The Psalter in its final form represents the pervasive influence of wisdom editors and teachers, who adapted, edited, composed and arranged the various psalms into a collection that provides a source for prayer, worship, and study. If, as I propose, the Psalter took on its final shape in the post-exilic period, these adaptations would reflect upon and interpret Israel’s varied historical experiences—from the hope and promise of the Davidic monarchy to the experience of dislocation, destruction, and foreign domination. The variety of materials that I propose reveal this wisdom influence leads me to conclude also that these wisdom editors and teachers themselves represented diverse groups and theologies. The role of sages in teaching and passing on wisdom evolved in response to changing historical events with the resulting religious and social impacts. In addition, in post-exilic times Israelite sages were exposed to diverse social, cultural and literary traditions that further influenced wisdom teaching.⁸ These varied experiences and influences help to explain the

⁶ Ibid., 327–29.

⁷ The importance attached to the figures of Ezra and Baruch in the later non-canonical texts I & II Esdras, and 2, 3, and 4 Baruch (see Jacob M. Myers, *I & II Esdras: A New Translation and Commentary* [AB 42; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974]; on 2, 3, and 4 Baruch see James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985]).

⁸ See Perdue’s comments on these cross-cultural influences, Ibid., 325–26.

diverse and often contrasting wisdom traditions within the Psalter. Contrast the retribution theology of Psalm 1, which appropriately opens the Psalter, with the more skeptical views of Psalms 39 and 90; or the rejection of anthropocentric thinking in the creation psalms in favor of unity within God's creation as seen in creation psalms 104 and 148. Clearly "wisdom" in post-exilic Israel was in itself diverse, and this too is reflected in the Psalter. The Psalter embraces the traditional wisdom theology of Proverbs, the skepticism of Ecclesiastes and Job, along with creation theology adapted from ANE sources for a monotheistic faith in YHWH, and expresses the experience of suffering, dislocation and renewal in its movement from Book 1 to Book 5.

I set the stage for this dissertation by examining the parameters of previous wisdom psalm research. Next, I analyzed the term *Maskil* (משכיל). I hypothesize that its use provides clues to the use of various psalms for didactic purposes; the importance of *Maskil* in the Dead Sea Scrolls may also reflect its deeper meaning and importance in post-exilic texts. Previous research has largely viewed *Maskil* as simply a technical/musical term in psalm headings. My analysis of the structural use of Torah-focused psalms and acrostics in chapter 3 proposes that these psalms provide a framework for the Psalter and perhaps an earlier version of the Psalter. Torah remains central to the psalmist's theology, as it was for the Deuteronomic writers. In the remaining chapters, I analyze each of the five "books" of the Psalter apart from the משכיל and Torah/Acrostics; I examine the broad influence of wisdom within psalms of various genres spanning the entire Psalter. In my analysis, wisdom elements are found in a variety of psalm genres. For example, though normally identified as a lament, my examination of Psalm 39 reveals parallels with the classical wisdom books of Ecclesiastes and Job. The creation psalms (19A; 33; 104; 148) reflect another element of ANE wisdom traditions; though these psalms are hymns, they also exhibit wisdom influence as they meditate upon the order, diversity and beauty of God's creation. I find wisdom elements within the covenant lawsuit of Psalm 50, wisdom interpolations in the classical lament, Psalm 51, and reflections of Job and Ecclesiastes in Psalm 90's meditation on the frail and temporal nature of human life

before the eternity of God. In sum, the influence of Israelite wisdom is pervasive throughout the Psalter.

Implications

Diversity of Wisdom: In examining the pervasive presence of wisdom elements throughout the Psalter, it becomes clear to me that “wisdom” in post-exilic Israel is a diverse and complex phenomenon represented by a variety of views and emphases. I find numerous parallels between material in the Psalter and that of wisdom traditions from the surrounding ANE cultural matrix. The idea of wisdom schools associated with Temple and court seems especially plausible in the post-exilic period, when a renewed emphasis was placed upon Torah as central to Israel’s existence and relationship to YHWH, their personal God. Among these schools, however, there must have been diverse groups of wisdom teachers with particular worldviews and emphases. My examination of Psalms 1 and 49, for example, reveals two complete wisdom psalms that, however, contain very different worldviews; while Psalm 1 upholds traditional “retribution theology,” Psalm 49 speaks to situation in which the promise of Psalm 1 has apparently failed. After Psalm 1 opens the Psalter with the traditional wisdom theology that YHWH favors the “way of the righteous, while the way of the wicked perishes” (1:6), several other wisdom psalms offer a different perspective. For the speakers of Psalms 49 and 73, who endure unjust suffering, traditional wisdom theology must be modified to reflect their (and the community’s) experiences. Only after honestly reflecting upon the seemingly unfair situation in which the wicked prosper while the righteous psalmists suffer do the speakers of Psalms 49 and 73 come to a “new orientation” that reaffirms their faith in divine justice. In both psalms, God will “take” (לָקַח; 49:16; 73:24) the speakers and lead them to redemption and blessing.

The Suffering of the Righteous: In a recently-published book, Jerome Creach focuses on the role of the righteous (צַדִּיקִים) as a key to interpreting the Psalms. Creach contrasts the false sense of autonomy displayed by the wicked with the total dependence upon God displayed by the righteous;

the righteous recognize their sinfulness and pray for deliverance. Recognizing God as creator and sustainer of all life, the righteous humbly submit to God and work for a peaceful and just community, in contrast to the selfishness of the wicked.⁹ Creach's study provides useful insights into an issue discussed throughout this dissertation: the contrast between the righteous and the wicked as an important aspect of wisdom literature.

Though the Psalter opens with a confident proclamation that the righteous will prosper while the wicked will be punished (Psalm 1), the rest of Books 1—3 present a significant number of psalms in which the righteous cry out for deliverance from the wicked, a theme we saw as primary in wisdom psalms 37, 49, and 73. For the righteous, the promise of Psalm 1 is manifested in “nearness to God” (Ps 73:28). Using Psalms 37 and 73 as prime examples, Creach interprets this dilemma by examining the faith of the righteous as the answer to this problem: “Although the righteous wait for God’s justice and for the downfall of the wicked, that future hope is most important for the way it informs life in the present.”¹⁰ Their most important value is “nearness to God”—the concluding statement of Psalm 73—which provides hope and sustenance despite the injustices in life. Rather than viewing faith as a means to success, according to Creach, the righteous in the Psalter view faith as providing “nearness to God,” and this provides meaning in the face of suffering and persecution. I reach a similar conclusion in my analysis of these psalms. Just as Job becomes silent and eventually repents as he stands before YHWH speaking from the whirlwind (e.g., Job 40:4–5; 42:1–6), the righteous ultimately find meaning by embracing faith in YHWH as the “answer” to the mystery of why they suffer. Belief in God’s ultimate justice requires acceptance of the mystery of God’s transcendent will—something beyond human comprehension.

In observing the Psalter as a whole, it becomes clear that the first three books have a larger portion of laments, while in the final two books praise-oriented psalms come to the fore along with

⁹ Jerome F. D. Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2008), 29, 41

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

those emphasizing the kingship of YHWH in place of his earthly surrogate. Following Brueggemann and Wilson, I conjecture that this reflects Israel's reevaluation of kingship in light of the monarchy's failure and the Exile. Evidence for this transition occurs in the second half of Psalm 89, a *Masikl*, where the psalmist casts doubt upon God's faithfulness to the righteous, represented by the Davidic king, and asks, "Lord, where is your steadfast love (חַסְדֶּךָ) from early times, that you swore to David in your faithfulness (בְּאַמּוֹנָתְךָ; v.50)?" Creach describes this movement as a "tragic drama": the promises of Psalms 1–2, assuring the righteous of prosperity and protection, are tested in real life by enemy oppression (Psalm 3), suffering despite fidelity (Pss 44:9; 74:1), and apparent rejection by God (Ps 89:39–51).¹¹

Wisdom editors arranged the five books of the Psalter in a linear manner, moving from Davidic psalms in books 1–3 to a focus on Divine Kingship in books 4–5. The wisdom material in Books Four and Five include an emphasis on God's providence and human fate (Psalm 90), and traditional wisdom themes mixed with cult and lament (Pss 92; 94; 101; 127; 128; 133), historical surveys as a source of wisdom and understanding (Pss 105–107), Torah (119), and creation (Pss 104; 146–148). In addition, I examine wisdom elements in other psalms (144; 145). Again, this diversity of material in the Psalter reflects adaptations to wisdom teaching and theology in light of changing circumstances.

Cult and Wisdom: Following Leo Perdue and Andre Lemaire, I also argue that wisdom and cult are not antithetic: wisdom teachers and temple personnel apparently worked in close proximity and, while cultic matters were more the concern of priestly circles, participation in cultic worship was an essential aspect of life for the pious Israelite.¹² Wisdom instruction supplemented cultic activities

¹¹ Ibid., 68–69.

¹² See Leo J. Perdue, *Wisdom & Cult* (SBLDS 30; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), particularly his discussion on wisdom psalms (261–323). More recently, Perdue states, "It seems clear from a careful reading and analysis of the Psalter that the sages wrote a number of sapiential psalms for use in praise and instruction"; he singles out Pss 19 and 104 in particular as wisdom psalms used to praise God as creator

and wisdom and cult are often combined; for example, my examination of Psalm 92, a Sabbath song, reveals strong wisdom flavoring in a psalm specifically designated for cultic use.

Creation Theology: Another category of psalms that I view as falling within the wisdom tradition are those focusing on creation theology; in this dissertation I examine Psalms 19A, 33, 104 and 148 as texts marked by creation theology. I observe the importance of creation in several ANE parallel texts, in addition to its importance in Proverbs, Job, and Sirach. While Sirach is a later wisdom text, it derives from the period when the canonical Hebrew Bible began to take shape; the important role of creation theology in Sirach reveals the importance of creation as a subject for post-exilic sages teaching in wisdom schools. The location of these creation psalms at both ends of the Psalter (Books 1 and 4/5), along with creation elements in other psalms, reveals the importance of creation theology in the final form of the Psalter.

ANE Influences: In depicting Solomon as the premier source of wisdom and patron of the temple (1 Kings 3–8), and in his attributive authorship of wisdom books (Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Songs), the biblical authors draw upon ANE wisdom traditions. This attests to the *milieu* in which other ANE wisdom materials from Egypt and Mesopotamia circulated and influenced the writers and editors of the Bible. A perfect example of this *milieu* is the direct influence of the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemopet* in Proverbs 22:19, in which the writer mentions by name his Egyptian source material. In this context, acknowledging the influence of ANE wisdom traditions in the milieu in which the biblical texts were produced, the connection between creation theology and wisdom in the Hebrew Bible finds support in the depiction of Solomon in 1 Kings 5:9–14. As the patron of wisdom, among other attributes—he surpasses Egyptian sages and various Israelite wise men in wisdom, composed proverbs and songs—Solomon is also depicted as having in-depth knowledge of the natural world, including plant and animal species. In other words, among the

(*Wisdom Literature*, 152). For a similar evaluation of the relationship between wisdom and cult, see Lemaire, “The Sage in the School and Temple,” 178–79.

attributes of wisdom was knowledge and appreciation of creation.¹³ I examine plausible ANE influences in the psalms studied as an example of this cross-cultural fertilization of Israelite wisdom traditions.

Summary: Earlier analysis of the category of wisdom psalms reveals a great diversity of viewpoints on which particular psalms fit into the category “wisdom psalm.” One problem with these earlier attempts to delineate a specific category of wisdom psalms was the attempt to isolate wisdom psalms as a separate genre. I attempt to show that a variety of psalm genres contain strong wisdom elements and thus qualify as types of “wisdom psalms”—these include hymns and laments, historical psalms, and those that grapple with the issues of theodicy, in addition to psalms that are more specifically didactic.

By understanding the complex elements that make up the Psalter, its varied contexts and theologies, we come to a greater appreciation of its value in reflecting on the experiences and self-understanding of Ancient Israel. The variety of psalms express the collective and varied experiences of God in Ancient Israel, and they continue to hold relevance for subsequent generations of Jews and Christians who find in them meaning for daily life and a resource to express themselves to God. This poetry is used for individual and communal prayer, worship, and reflection; the psalms express all human emotions and experiences. The wisdom writers and editors who finalized the Psalter were teachers who produced an enduring resource. In this study I seek a deeper understanding of the canonical structure and complexities of the Psalter that led to its final shaping as a didactic tool for worship and teaching by these wisdom editors and teachers. In its final form, the Psalter provides a didactic tool for prayer, study and worship; its contents reflect historical and theological development and diversity.

¹³ Personally, I take a conservative view that there was an historical “Solomon” and “David,” but embrace the insights of modern biblical scholarship in viewing their depiction as somewhat embellished and theologized in the final form of the Bible. Even if one takes the “minimalist” view, however, the fact that *Solomon is depicted* in the Bible as a great patron of wisdom, who also was influenced by his foreign wives (e.g., 1 Kings 11), reveals the existence and influence of wisdom traditions within the cultural world that produced the Hebrew Bible.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Leslie C. *Psalms 101—150*. Rev. ed. Anchor Bible 21; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2002.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York, N.Y.: Basic, 1985.
- _____. *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*. New York, N.Y.: Norton, 2007.
- Anderson, A. A. *The Book of Psalms*. 2 vols. New Century Bible. London: Oliphants, 1972.
- Ballard, Wayne H. and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr. *An Introduction to Wisdom Literature and Psalms*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2000.
- Baly, Denis. "Hermon." Pages 384–85 in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Edited by Paul J. Achtemeier. San Francisco, Calif.: Harper, 1985.
- Bergant, Diane. *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1997.
- Beyerlin, Walter, ed. *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1978.
- Bratcher, Robert G. and William D. Reybun. *A Handbook on Psalms*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1991.
- Brown, Raymond E., et al. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1984.
- _____. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Edited by Patrick D. Miller. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995.
- _____. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2003.
- Charlesworth, James H., ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 Vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985.
- Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.
- Clifford, Richard J. *Psalms 1—72*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.
- _____. *Psalms 73—150*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.

- Cohen, Abraham. *The Psalms: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*. Soncino Books of the Bible. Edited by A. Cohen. London: Soncino, 1947–1971.
- _____. *The Psalms: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*. Soncino Books of the Bible. Edited by A. Cohen. Rev. ed. By Rabbi E. Oratz and Rav Shalom Shahar. London/New York: Soncino, 1992.
- Cole, Robert L. *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73–89)*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 307. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2000.
- Craigie, Peter C. and Marvin E. Tate. *Psalms 1—50* Word Biblical Commentary 19. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2004.
- Creach, Jerome F. D. *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*. St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2008.
- Crenshaw, James L. *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. Revised Edition. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- Dahood, Mitchell. *Psalms 1—50*. The Anchor Bible Volume 16. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965–66.
- _____. *Psalms 51—100*. The Anchor Bible Volume 17. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968, 1983.
- _____. *Psalms 101—150*. The Anchor Bible 17A. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970, 1983.
- Davies, Philip R. *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures*. London, SPCK, 1998.
- Day, John, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson, eds. *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Firth, David and Philip S. Johnston, eds. *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2005.
- Flint, Peter W. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Psalms*. Studies on the Texts of the Judean Desert of Judah XVII. Edited by F. Garcia Martinez and A. S. Van der Woude. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Freedman, David Noel. *Psalms 119: The Exaltation of Torah*. Vol. 6 of *Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego*. Edited by William Henry Propp. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999.
- Gamie, John G. and Leo J. Perdue, eds. *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Winona Lake, Minn.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- Gerstenberger, Erhard S. *Psalms; Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. The Forms of Old Testament Literature Volume XIV. Edited by Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988.

- Glass, Jonathan T. "Some Observations on Psalm 19." Pages 147–59 in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.* Edited by Kenneth G. Hoglund, et al. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 58. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987.
- Goldingay, John. *Psalms: Volume 1: Psalms 1—41*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Edited by Tremper Longmann III. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Grossberg, Daniel. *Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures in Biblical Poetry*. Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 39. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989.
- Gunkel, Herman. *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*. Completed by Joachim Begrich. Translated by James D. Nogalski. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998.
- Harrington, Daniel, S.J. *Wisdom Texts From Qumran*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Holladay, William L. *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayer Book of a Cloud of Witnesses*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Theology of the Psalms*. Translated by Keith Crim. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.
- _____. *Psalms 60—150*. Translated by Hilton C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989.
- Kselman, John S. "Psalm 36." Pages 3–17 in *Wisdom, You Are My Sister*. Edited by Michael L. Barré, S.S. The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 29. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of American, 1997.
- Kugel, James L. *The Great Poems of the Bible*. New York: The Free Press, 1999.
- _____. *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*. New York: Free Press, 2007.
- Kuntz, Kenneth J. "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel—Their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimensions." Pages 186–222 in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*. Edited by Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler. Pittsburg, Pa.: The Pickwick Press, 1974.
- _____. "Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter." Pages 144–60 in *For A Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*. Edited by Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow, and Rodney A. White. Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000.
- Lemaire, André. "The Sage in the School and Temple." Pages 165–81 in *The Sage in Israel and The Ancient Near East*. Edited by John G. Gamie and Leo J. Purdue. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- Levenson, Jon. "The Sources of Torah: Psalm 119 and the Modes of Revelation in Second

Temple Judaism.” Pages 559–74 in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*. Edited by Patrick D. Miller, et al. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987.

Lohfink, Norbert, and Erich Zenger. *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah And the Psalms*. Translated by Everett R. Kalin. Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000.

Luyten, J. “Psalm 73 and Wisdom.” in *La sagesse de L’Ancien Testament: Journées Bibliques de Louvain 1978*. 59–81. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 51. Edited by Maurice Gilbert. Leuven: University Press/Peeters, 1990.

Mays, James L. *Psalms*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994.

_____. “The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation.” Pages 14–20 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Edited by J. Clinton McCann. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series 159. Sheffield, U.K.: JSOT, 1993.

McCann, J. Clinton, ed. *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 159. Sheffield: JSOT, 1993.

_____. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1993.

_____. “Psalm 73: A Microcosm of Old Testament Theology.” Pages 247–57 in *The Listening Heart: Essays in the Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.* Edited by Kenneth G. Hoglund et al. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 58. Sheffield: JSOT, 1987.

Mowinckel, Sigmund. *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*. 2 Volumes. Translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas. New York: Abingdon, 1962.

_____. “Psalms and Wisdom.” In *Wisdom in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum. Volume III. Leiden: Brill, 1955. 205–224.

Murphy, Roland E. *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996.

_____. “Reflections on Contextual Interpretations of the Psalms.” Pages 21–28 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Edited by J. Clinton McCann. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 159. Sheffield: JSOT, 1993.

_____. *The Psalms, Job*. Proclamation Commentaries. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1977.

_____. “Psalms.” Pages 569–602 in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Murphy, Roland E. “Introduction to Wisdom Literature.” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*.

Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990. 447–461.

_____. “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms.’” Pages 157–62 in *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 9. Leiden: Brill, 1962.

Myers, Jacob M. *I & II Esdras: A New Translation and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 42. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974.

Newsom, Carol A. “The Sage in the Literature of Qumran: The Functions of the *MAŠKIL*.” Pages 373–82 in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Edited by John G. Gammie and Leo J. Perdue. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

_____. “Sectually Explicit Literature from Qumran.” Pages 167–87 in *The Hebrew Bible and its Interpreters*. Edited by William H. Propp, et al. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

O’Connor, Kathleen M. *The Wisdom Literature*. Message of Biblical Spirituality 5. Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1988.

Perdue, Leo G. *Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literatures of Israel and the Ancient Near East*. SBLDS 30. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977.

_____. *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature*. Nashville: Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994.

_____. *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2007.

_____. *Proverbs*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 2000.

Peterson, David L. and Kent Harold Richards. *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*. Guides to Biblical Scholarship, ed. Gene M. Tucker. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992.

Pleins, J. David. *The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope, and Justice*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993.

Pope, Marvin H. *Job*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973.

Ross, James F. “Psalm 73.” Pages 161–75 in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*. Edited by John G. Gammie, et al. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978.

Sabourin, Leopold. *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning*. New York: Alba House, 1977.

Sanders, James. *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11 QPsa)*. Discoveries in the Judean Desert 4. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965.

Sarna, Nahum. *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel*. New York: Schocken, 1993.

- Schaefer, Konrad. *Psalms: Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry*. Edited by David W. Cotter. Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001.
- Schams, Christine. *Jewish Scribes in the Second Temple Period*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 291. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998.
- Scott, R. B. Y. *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament*. New York: Macmillan, 1971.
- Swanson, Dwight D. "Qumran and the Psalms." Pages 247–61 in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*. Edited by David Firth and Philip S. Johnston. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2005.
- Tate, Marvin. *Psalms 51—100*. Word Biblical Commentary 20. Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990.
- _____. "Psalms." Pages 41–196 in *Wisdom Writings*. Vol. 3 of *Mercer Commentary on the Bible*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001.
- Terrien, Samuel. *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Ulrich, Eugene. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999.
- VanderKam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Van der Toorn, Karel. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Westermann, Claus. *The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message*. Translated by Ralph D. Gehrke. Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1980.
- _____. *The Living Psalms*. Translated by J. R. Porter. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989.
- _____. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Translated by Keith R. Crim and Richard Soulen. Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1981.
- Whybray, Norman. *Reading the Psalms as a Book*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 222. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996.
- _____. "The Wisdom Psalms." Pages 152–60 in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton*. Edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- _____. *Proverbs*. New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994.
- _____. "Psalm 119—Profile of a Psalmist." Pages 31–43 in *Wisdom, You Are My Sister*. Edited by Michael L. Barré, S.S. The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 29. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of American, 1997.

Wilson, Gerald. *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*. SBLDS. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985.

_____. "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms." Pages 72–82 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Edited by J. Clinton McCann. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 159. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.

Wyatt, Nick. *Religious Texts From Ugarit*. 2d ed. London: Sheffield Academic, 2002.

Articles

Allegro, John M. "Further Light on the History of the Qumran Sect." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956): 94–95.

Allen, Leslie C. "Psalm 73: An Analysis." *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 93–118.

Auffret, Pierre. "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume xxxii." *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 257–285.

Bennett, Robert A. "Wisdom Motifs in Psalm 14=53—*nābāl* and *'eṣāh*." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 220 (1975):15–21.

Boadt, Lawrence. "The Use of 'Panels' in the Structure of Psalms 73—80." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66:4 (2004): 533–50.

Booij, Thijs. "Psalm 133: 'Behold, how good and how pleasant.'" *Biblica* 83 (2002): 258–267.

_____. "Psalm 119, 89-91." *Biblica* 79 (1998): 539–41.

Brownlee, William H. "Psalms 1—2 as a Coronation Liturgy." *Biblica* 52 (1971), 321–36.

Brueggemann, Walter and Patrick D. Miller. "Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. 72 (1996): 45–56.

Brueggemann, Walter. "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 50 (1991): 63–92.

_____. "A Neglected Sapiential Word Pair." *Zeitschrift für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 234–58.

Buss, Martin J. "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 382–92.

Ceresko, Anthony R. "The ABCs of Wisdom in Psalm XXXIV." *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 99–104.

Corley, James. "Rhyme in the Hebrew Prophets and Wisdom Poetry." *Biblische Notizen* 132 (2007): 55–69.

- Couroyer, Bertrand. "Ideal sapientiel en Egypte et en Israel: A propos du psaume XXXIV, 13." *Revue Biblique* 57 (1950): 176–79.
- Crenshaw, James L. "God Dust or Nuggets? A Brief Response to J. Kenneth Kuntz." *Currents in Biblical Research* 1.2 (2003): 155–58.
- Dell, Katharine J. "'I will Solve My Riddle to the Music of the Lyre' (Psalm 49:4 [5]): A Cultic Setting for Wisdom Psalms?" *Vetus Testamentum* 54 (2004): 445–58.
- De Pinto, Basil. "The Torah and the Psalms." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86/2 (1967): 154–174.
- Flint, Peter W. "The Book of Psalms in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls." *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 453–72.
- Gosse, Bernard. "Le Rôle du Livre des Proverbes dans la Constitution du Psautier, en Relation avec Divers Textes Bibliques." *Revue Biblique* 114 (2007): 403–15.
- Hillers, Delbert R. "A Study of Psalm 148." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. 40 (1978): 323–334.
- Holtz, Shalom E. "The Thematic Unity of Psalm cxliv in Light of Mesopotamian Royal Ideology." *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 367–80.
- Howard, David M. "Psalm 94 among the Kingship-of-Yhwh Psalms." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. 61 (1999): 667–685.
- Hurowitz, Victor Avigdor. "Additional Elements of Alphabetical Thinking in Psalm XXXIV." *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002): 326–33.
- Hurvitz, Avi. "Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of 'Wisdom Psalms.'" *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 41–51.
- Irvine, Stuart A. "A Note on Psalm 14:4." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 463–66.
- Jassen, Alex. "The Presentation of Ancient Prophets as Lawgivers at Qumran." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 307–37.
- Jensen, Joseph E. "Psalm 75: Its Poetic Context and Structure." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63 (2001): 416–29.
- Kenik, Helen Ann. "Code of Conduct for a King: Psalm 101." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 391–403.
- Kimelman, Reuven. "Psalm 145: Theme, Structure, and Impact." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 37–58.
- Kselman, John S. "Psalm 146 in its Context." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 587–99.
- Kuntz, J. Kenneth. "The Retribution Motif in Psalmic Wisdom." *Zeitschrift für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 223–33.

- _____. "Reclaiming Biblical Wisdom Psalms: A Response to Crenshaw." *Currents in Biblical Research* 1.2 (2003): 145–54.
- _____. "Affirming Less as More: Scholarly Engagements with Aphoristic Rhetoric." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29.2 (2004): 205–42.
- Leonard, Jeffrey M. "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 241–65.
- Mays, James Luther. "The Place of the Torah Psalms in the Psalter." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106:1 (1987): 3–12.
- McCann, J. Clinton. "The Psalms as Instruction," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* (April 1992): 117–28.
- Mitchell, David G. "Lord, Remember David: G. H. Wilson and the Message of the Psalter." *Vetus Testamentum* LVI/4 (2006): 526–548.
- Murphy, Roland E. "Wisdom and Creation." *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 104 (1985): 3–11.
- Oesch, Josef M. "Zur Übersetzung und Auslegung von Psalm 19." *Biblische Notizen* 26 (1985): 71–89.
- Perdue, Leo G. "The Riddles of Psalm 49." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 533–42.
- Pleins, J. David. "Death and Endurance: Reassessing the Literary Structure and Theology Of Psalm 49." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 69 (1996): 19–27.
- Reindl, J. "Psalm 1 und der 'Sitz im Leben' des Psalters." *Theologische Jahrbuch* (1979): 39–50.
- Reynolds, Kent Aaron. "The Answer of Psalm cxix 9." *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 265–69.
- Sarna, Nahum. "The Psalm for the Sabbath Day (Ps 92)." *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 81 (1962): 155–68.
- Skiba, Richard. "Sitting Down, He Taught Them: Teaching as Priestly Ministry in The Sacred Scriptures." *Emmanuel* 115 (2009): 102–16.
- Soll, William. "The Question of Psalm 119:9." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 687–88.
- Ulrich, Eugene. "The Non-attestation of a Tripartite Canon in 4QMMT." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65 (2003): 202–214.
- _____, Peter W. Flint and Patrick W. Skehan. "A Scroll Containing 'Biblical' and 'Apocryphal' Psalms: A Preliminary Edition of 4QPSF (4Q88)." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1998): 267–82.
- Vawter, Bruce. "Post-exilic Prayer and Hope." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975): 460–70.
- Weber, Beat. "Psalm 78 als 'Mitte' des Psalters? –ein Versuch." *Biblica* 88 (2007): 305–25.

Wilson, Gerald H. "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* (April 1992): 129–42.

Zenger, Erich. "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107—145." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 80 (1998): 77–102.

Primary Sources

Aland, Kurt, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren eds. *The Greek New Testament*. United Bible Societies. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998.

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990.

Brenton, Sir Lancelot. *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001.

Botterwick, G. J. and H. Ringgren, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1974—

Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001.

Charlesworth, James H., and Henry W. L. Reitz, eds. *Pseudepigraphic and Non-Masoretic Psalms and Prayers* Vol. 4A of *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1997.

Charlesworth, James H. and Carol A. Newsom, eds. *Angelic Liturgy: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. Vol. 4B of *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1999.

Charlesworth, James H. ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 Vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983.

Garcia-Martinez, Florentino and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

Hatch, Edwin and Henry A. Redpath, eds. *A Greek Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*. 3 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1897; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983.

Wise, Michael, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. San Francisco, Calif.: Harper, 1996.