

LECTURE 19: PSALMS

“The God who rules”

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I. Orienting Data

- A. Canonical Placement:** Foundational statement on life in the covenant
- B. Focus:** How to worship the sovereign God—the nature of true worship in pleasure and pain, both individually and corporately
- C. Content:**
 - 1. The “hymnbook” of the 2nd temple period.
 - 2. 150 psalms of rich diversity (but Pss. 9–10 and 42–43 are each single psalms) grouped into five books, each with a concluding doxology.
 - 3. Most of these psalms are explicit human responses to God’s covenant initiating and sustaining grace; expressions of joy, lament, or thanksgiving that grow out of a knowledge of God springing from relationship with him.
- D. Date of composition:** The psalms themselves date from the time of Moses (Ps. 90) to after exile (Ps. 107) (ca. 1400–400 B.C.); the collection in its present form may be part of the reform movement reflected in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.
- E. Emphases:**
 - 1. Praise to Yahweh as king of the universe and the nations.
 - a. Israel’s king as Yahweh’s representative in Israel
 - b. Israel (and individual Israelites) as God’s covenant people
 - c. Zion (and its temple) as the special place of Yahweh’s presence on earth
 - 2. Trust in Yahweh and lament over wickedness and injustices.
 - 3. Thanksgiving to Yahweh for his goodness.

II. Psalm Titles and Historical Background:

- A. The Psalm titles historically accurate and inspired?**
 - 1. Ps. 18 is attributed to David—a fact confirmed by 2 Sam. 22:1.
 - 2. The Psalm titles are part of the earliest Hebrew manuscripts, and the fact that the LXX translators struggled over the technical terms proves that the titles themselves were established long before the Greek versions were begun.
 - 3. NT use of the Psalms appears to assume the reliability and inspiration of the Psalm titles:
 - a. In Matt. 22:41–46 (//), Jesus argues for his own divinity based on the fact that David wrote Psalm 110:1: “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.” Both the MT and LXX attribute this Psalm to David, and Jesus’ use confirms the viability of the title.
 - b. The citation of Ps. 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–29 attributes the words to David (= “for David says” [*Dauid gar legei*]), in alignment with the MT and LXX superscription.
 - c. In Acts 4:25–26, Ps 2:1–2 is cited, which has no superscription in either the MT or LXX. The NT introduction, however, asserts that God spoke “by our father through the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David, your servant” (*tou patros hēmōn dia pneumatos hagiou stomatos Dauid paidos sou*).
 - d. The use of Ps. 95:7–11 in Heb. 4:7 asserts that Ps. 95:7–11 came “through David” (*en Dauid*), which either is using David’s name as shorthand for the whole Psalter or is attributing Psalm 95 to David, as is made explicit in the LXX title alone (no

title being found in the MT). (NOTE: From the perspective of textual criticism, it makes more sense that a Greek translator would attribute more psalms to David rather than to remove titles; this explains why the LXX would include more “Davidic” psalms.)

4. Conclusions:

- a. At the very least, the psalm titles appear to be an early, historically reliable tradition concerning authorship and setting, and even if not attached by the original authors of each psalm, they were likely present as early as the final canonical version of the Psalter.
- b. While some question persists, there appears to be no legitimate reason not to believe they are inspired, were added by the original editors, and should influence one’s interpretation of the various psalms.

B. Makeup: While some psalm titles speak of events from which the psalms arose, the psalms themselves are almost always devoid of direct reference to specific historical situations.

1. This fact lets the voice of the psalmist be the words of every worshipper throughout time and in ever-changing contexts.
2. It also suggests that attempts to place the psalms too specifically into historical settings cut against the intention of the authors.

C. Canonical significance:

1. The portrait of David in the headings appears to draw on the book of Samuel, not Chronicles, and this links the Davidic psalms themselves more closely with the actual time of the monarchy and supports their historical veracity.
2. The higher frequency of Davidic psalms at the beginning and end of the Psalter puts a Davidic (or Messianic) stamp on the whole.
3. Most notably, the Davidic psalms at the end of the Psalter look forward, not backward, and their placement and function strongly suggests they are being used to recall the promises for a new David and to allow the whole Psalter to provide messianic music that hopes in the future Davidic kingdom on the other side of exile and initial restoration.

Fig. 18.1. Psalm Title Attribution

<i>Attribution</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Psalms</i>
Ethan the Ezrahite	1x	89
Moses	1x	90
Solomon	2x	72, 127
The Sons of Korah	11x	42(+43)–49, 84–85, 87–88; Heman the Ezrahite is also accredited Ps. 88
Asaph	12x	50, 73–83
Anonymous	48x	1–2, 33, 66–67, 71, 91–100, 102, 104–107, 111–121, 123, 125–126, 128–130, 132, 134–137, 146–150
David	73x	3–9(+10), 11–32, 34–41, 51–65, 68–70, 86, 101, 103, 108–110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138–145
Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie.		

Fig. 18.2. Psalm Title Attribution by Placement

	Ethan the Ezrahite	Heman the Ezrahite	Moses	Solomon	The Sons of Korah	Asaph	Anonymous	David
1							X	
2							X	
3								X
4								X
5								X
6								X
7								X
8								X
9								X
10							2	
11								X
12								X
13								X
14								X
15								X
16								X
17								X
18								X
19								X
20								X
21								X
22								X
23								X
24								X
25								X
26								X
27								X
28								X
29								X
30								X
31								X
32								X
33							X	
34								X
35								X
36								X
37								X
38								X
39								X
40								X
41								X
42					X			
43							2	
44					X			
45					X			
46					X			
47					X			
48					X			
49					X			
50						X		
51								X
52								X
53								X
54								X
55								X
56								X
57								X
58								X
59								X
60								X
61								X
62								X
63								X
64								X
65								X
66							X	
67							X	
68								X
69								X
70								X
71							X	
72				X				
73						X		
74						X		
75						X		

	Ethan the Ezrahite	Heman the Ezrahite	Moses	Solomon	The Sons of Korah	Asaph	Anonymous	David
76						X		
77						X		
78						X		
79						X		
80						X		
81						X		
82						X		
83						X		
84					X			
85					X			
86								X
87					X			
88		X			X			
89	X							
90			X					
91							X	
92							X	
93							X	
94							X	
95							X	
96							X	
97							X	
98							X	
99							X	
100							X	
101								X
102							X	
103								X
104							X	
105							X	
106							X	
107							X	
108								X
109								X
110								X
111							X	
112							X	
113							X	
114							X	
115							X	
116							X	
117							X	
118							X	
119							X	
120							X	
121							X	
122								X
123							X	
124								X
125							X	
126							X	
127				X				
128							X	
129							X	
130							X	
131								X
132							X	
133							X	
134							X	
135							X	
136							X	
137							X	
138								X
139								X
140								X
141								X
142								X
143								X
144								X
145								X
146							X	
147							X	
148							X	
149							X	
150							X	

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III. Literary Overview

A. Characteristics:

1. 5 books, perhaps recalling the 5 books of the Law
2. Each book ends in doxology, stressing that the goal of each portion is praise to God.
 - a. *Book 1*: Ps 41:13. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.
 - b. *Book 2*: Ps 72:18–19. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!
 - c. *Book 3*: Ps 89:52. Blessed be Yahweh forever! Amen and Amen.
 - d. *Book 4*: Ps 106:48. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, “Amen!” Praise Yah(weh)!
 - e. *Book 5*: Pss 146–150. Praise Yah(weh)! (Pss 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6)
3. The whole is framed by an introduction (Pss 1–2) and conclusion (Pss 146–150) that address the themes of wisdom, eschatology, and praise, or walking, waiting, and worshipping.
4. The text highlights that God’s supremacy and majesty is magnified in and through his anointed king, who represents his sovereignty and works his justice on earth. The Messiah perfectly embodies a life surrendered to God’s law and therefore represents the model human (Ps 1; cf. Deut 17:18–20). The Messiah oversees God’s world, demands allegiance from every global power, and alone provides rescue from divine wrath (Ps 2). The praise due Yahweh (Pss 146–150) is a praise enjoyed only on account of our connection with God’s earthly king.
5. The Psalms move from lament to praise and appear to follow an overarching pattern from kingdom crisis to kingdom restoration and hope, all of which finds clarity in the Messiah. The Psalter is fronted with Davidic psalms and ends with a concentration of Davidic psalms, which suggests the whole has been drafted as messianic music in order to stir hope in the promised future David.
6. That OT saints were reading at least some psalms as messianic music is seen in Zech 9:10, which applies Ps 72:9 to the eschatological hope of the royal deliverer.

B. Basic structure:

Book 1	Ps 1	<i>Walking with the Messiah</i> (Kingdom Wisdom)	Intro
	Ps 2	<i>Waiting in the Messiah</i> (Kingdom Eschatology)	
	Pss 3–41	Almost all Davidic [Doxology: 41:13] (Kingdom crisis)	Body
Book 2	Pss 42–72	Almost all Davidic [Doxology: 72:18–19] (Kingdom rise and establishment)	
Book 3	Pss 73–89	Almost no Davidic [Doxology: 89:52] (Kingdom division and rebellion)	
Book 4	Pss 90–106	Almost no Davidic [Doxology: 106:48] (Exile, separation, renewed focus)	
Book 5	Pss 107–145	Higher number of Davidic (Kingdom restoration and hope)	
	Pss 146–150	<i>Worshipping on account of the Messiah</i> (Kingdom Praise)	Concl

IV. Introduction: Psalms 1–2

A. Psalms 1–2 introduce the whole Psalter

1. Links:
 - a. Neither Psalm has a title.
 - b. Framed by a “blessed” formula (1:1; 2:12)
 - c. Catchwords: “blessed” (1:2; 2:12); “way” (1:1, 6; 2:12); “sit” (1:1; 2:4); “meditate/plot” (1:2; 2:1); “perish” (1:6; 2:12)
2. 6th century Greek Codex D (NT Greek ms) and some other witnesses introduce Paul’s citation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 with “as also it is written in the first psalm,” which indicates either that Psalms 1 and 2 were considered one psalm or that there was a Psalter that started with Psalm 2. Most likely, the lack of title, the framing “blessed” formula (1:1; 2:12), and the use of catchwords throughout suggest that at least some considered Psalms 1–2 a single psalm.
3. In light of the identification of the 1st person speech with God’s earthly king in 2:7, Psalms 1–2 together suggest that the Psalter as a whole is to be read as a *messianic* document, the voice of the king as representative of the people.

B. Psalm 1: Walking with the Messiah (Kingdom Wisdom)

1. Theme: The psalmist motivates individuals to pursue a life rooted in God’s Word by contrasting the blessed state of the righteous with the unblessed state of the wicked. Dependence on Yahweh by meditating on and heeding the direction of his law will bring the sustained satisfaction, life, and vindication of the righteous (cf. Pss. 19, 119).
2. Outline:
 - a. The blessed/satisfied state of the righteous man (1:1–3)
 - i. His *pattern* of life is not associated with rebellion (1:1)
 - ii. His *pleasure* in life is God’s law (1:2)
 - iii. His *placement* in life is nourishing (1:3)
 - iv. His *produce* in life is plentiful and permanent (1:3)
 - b. The unblessed/unsatisfied state of wicked people (1:4–6)
 - i. The basis of wicked people’s dismal future (1:4)
 - ii. The nature of wicked people’s dismal future (1:5–6)
 - (1) The declaration of their future judgment in the presence of the righteous (1:5)
 - (2) The reason for their future judgment (1:6):
 - (a) The way of the righteous is acknowledged by God;
 - (b) The way of the wicked will perish.
3. Overview:
 - a. In the pattern of biblical wisdom, the psalm distinguishes two “ways”: “the way of sinners/the wicked” vs. “the way of the righteous” (1:1, 6).
 - b. The “happy/blessed” man is the one “delighting” in God’s law (1:1–2) and the one Yahweh “knows” (1:6); he is among those called “righteous” (1:5–6). The wicked and the sinners and the scoffers are not truly “happy” (1:1) because their time is short (1:4) and they will ultimately “perish” (1:6).
 - c. The wicked and the sinners and the scoffers may “stand” today (1:1), but they will not “stand” in the judgment (1:6).
 - d. The man delighting in God’s law (1:2) is like a tree planted by streams of water (1:3). Humans that benefit from the life-giving streams of God’s Word are ever flourishing, green and yielding fruit, which means he prospers in his activities (1:3). God’s law likely points back to the Pentateuch and ahead to the ethical instruction bound up in the Psalter itself.

- e. Whereas the man devoted to God's Word is "like a flourishing tree" (1:3), the wicked are "like chaff that the wind drives away"—unrooted, lifeless, and fleeting (1:4).
- f. The one "standing" with sinners today (1:1) will be with them in the judgment tomorrow, but no longer standing (1:5).
- 4. Focus: on the individual "blessed man" (1:1) becoming part of the "congregation of the righteous" (1:5). In light of the close link between Psalms 1–2 and the 1st person address in the mouth of the king in Ps 2:7–9, the "man" of Psalm 1 may be a portrait of the king as the ideal Israelite, who daily surrenders to Yahweh by meditating on his Word (see Deut 17:18–20).
 - Deut. 17:18–20. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests.¹⁹ And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them,²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

C. Psalm 2: Waiting in the Messiah (Kingdom Eschatology)

1. Theme: The psalmist calls the nations to take refuge in God's royal Son in order to enjoy satisfaction. Dependence on Yahweh's provision and protection through his king and his counsel provides the refuge and satisfaction to the righteous in all situations.
2. Outline:
 - a. The basis of the call to the blessed state of refuge in God's royal Son (2:1–9)
 - i. The futility of rebellion (2:1–6)
 - ii. The certainty of submission (2:7–9)
 - b. The nature of the call to the blessed state of refuge in God's royal Son (2:10–12)
 - i. The call to take refuge in God's royal Son declared (2:10–12)
 - ii. The blessed state of taking refuge in God's royal Son asserted (2:12)
3. Overview and Implications:
 - a. While lexically not identical, the imagery of "taking counsel" against Yahweh and his anointed in 2:2 parallels the imagery of the wicked man's "counsel" in 1:1. To follow wicked counselors is to stand against Yahweh and his anointed, which will only result in ruin.
 - b. Yahweh's king deserves and will ultimately receive global recognition, and only those who take refuge in him will find help; he is the ultimate image of the man of Psalm 1.
 - c. However, he is also the giver of the law, for his warning in 2:10 is counsel that should be heeded—unlike the counsel of the wicked in 1:1. The king's charge, therefore, is equated here with Yahweh's law in 1:2, so heeding God's Word is the same as following the voice of the king, who himself is a man of the Word. Kissing the Son and finding refuge in him is manifest in a life surrendered to God through his Word, for the Son embodies the life of law.
 - d. Because the only commands in Pss 1–2 relate to finding refuge in the Son, the clearest way we do this is through submitting to God's Word, which is what guides the king (Deut 17:18–20, see above).
 - e. Psalm 137 speaks of the exile, whereas Ps 107 shows that the final editing of the Psalter happened after the initial return to the land, when there was no earthly king in Israel. As such, while the royal psalms like Ps 2 may have originally been sung in relation to Israel's earthly monarchs, their present placement in the hymnbook of the post-exilic community encourages readers/singers to anticipate the ultimate anointed one, who would be a true man of the Word and bring salvation to God's people.

4. Focus: on the international and communal—speaks of nations and their kings in relation to Yahweh’s anointed king (Messiah) at Zion.

D. Conclusion:

1. The anticipated royal son of Yahweh and greater David is the ultimate righteous one whose way is secure in God (1:6) because he is satisfied, saturated, and fruitful in Yahweh’s Word (1:1–3). He stands as the earthly expression of God’s rule, and in him alone will refuge be enjoyed for the nations (Ps 2).
2. Those happy in God are: (1) those who take refuge in God through his Messiah (2:12) and (2) those who follow in the way of the Messiah, delighting in, meditating on, and walking in Yahweh’s Law (1:1–2).
3. Worship is dependence on Yahweh by following his Law and seeking refuge through his King in all circumstances.

E. Excursus: The “Blessed/Happy/Satisfied” Life in the Psalms

In the Psalms we regularly hear of the satisfied/blessed life. Psalms 1–2 set us up for this by the literary device *inclusio*, which frames the whole: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked . . .” and “Blessed are all who take refuge in him [i.e., the royal Son of God].” Here is a list of all that is declared “happy/blessed/satisfied” in the Psalter:

1. Blessed are those whose inward disposition is directed toward Yahweh and whose outward actions align with his ways.
 - The man whose life’s delight is in Yahweh’s law and not in the counsel of the wicked (1:1)
 - The man in whom is no deceit (32:2)
 - The people who know how to celebrate God with the community and to walk in the light of Yahweh’s face (89:15)
 - Those who observe justice and do righteousness (106:3)
 - The man who fears Yahweh and delights in his commands (112:1; cf. 128:1)
 - Those whose way is blameless and walk in way of Yahweh (119:1; cf. 128:1)
 - Those who keep his testimonies and seek him with their whole heart (119:2)
 - Everyone who fears Yahweh and walks in his ways (128:1–2; cf. 112:1; 119:1)
 - The one who considers the poor (41:1)
2. Blessed are those who are dependent on Yahweh, looking to him for help.
 - Those who take refuge in God’s royal son (2:12; cf. 34:8)
 - The man who takes refuge in Yahweh (34:8; cf. 2:12)
 - The man who trusts Yahweh and not created things (40:4; cf. 84:12)
 - Those whose strength is in Yahweh and whose inclination is toward him (84:5)
 - The one who trusts in Yahweh (84:12; cf. 40:4)
 - The one whose help is the God of Jacob and whose hope is Yahweh his God (146:5)
3. Blessed are those who experience Yahweh’s favor, presence, discipline, justice, or covenant blessings—who stand elect and forgiven.
 - The one whose sin is forgiven and against whom God counts no iniquity (32:1, 2)
 - The nation whose God is Yahweh—namely, those chosen as his heritage (33:12; cf. 65:4; 144:15)
 - The one chosen of God to dwell in his presence (65:4; cf. 33:12)
 - Those who dwell in Yahweh’s house, singing his praise forever (84:4)
 - The man who is disciplined and taught the law by Yahweh (94:12)
 - The man who has many children (127:5)

- The one who repays Babylon for their wickedness against God's people (137:8–9)
- The people to whom covenant blessings come (144:15)
- The people whose God is Yahweh (144:15; cf. 33:12)

V. Approaching the Psalms through Genre

A. History of Interpretation:

1. It long been recognized that the psalmists used various literary forms as templates for communicating with God.
2. **Hermann Gunkel** (with J. Begrich), *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (1998; orig. German 1933): The first to classify a number of psalms and to posit a particular life setting (usually the cult) for each type of psalm. Among his disciples are H. Gressmann, H. Schmidt, J. Begrich, J. Hempel. While the concept of a single life setting behind each psalm type is no longer sustainable today, his form-critical categories (though now revised and augmented) continue to frame the discussion to this day.
3. **Clause Westermann**, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (1981): Argues that all psalms are “praises” to various degrees. He argues that Hebrew had no separate word for “to thank”—the word normally used in contexts where this is expected is “to bless”—and that the Hebrew *tôdâ* should be translated “praise” rather than “thanksgiving.” The normal distinction between psalms of praise and psalms of thanksgiving is thus misguided. We have instead “psalms of descriptive praise,” where the praises of God describe his attributes in general, universal terms, and “psalms of narrative or declarative praise,” where God's praises are recited in the form of specifics of what God has done for the nation or the individual. “Psalms of lament” are also viewed as psalms of praise given in the midst of a trial, in so far as they move toward praise in their concluding vows to trust.
4. **Erhard S. Gerstenberger**, *Psalms, Part I* (1988): While following Gunkel's classifications, attention is focused on the social settings of the psalms with particular attention to “in-group and out-group dynamics.” He argues that many psalms arose in the context of “the small, organic group of family, neighborhood, or community” (the out-groups), not in “the central temple or famous wisdom academics” (the in-groups). Contra Gunkel, then, many of the psalms were not liturgical or connected with the cult at all.
5. **Walter Brueggemann**, “Psalms and the Life of Faith,” in *The Message of the Psalms* (1984): Re-categorizes the psalm according to function. Building off the work of Paul Ricoeur, he posits three categories: (1) *psalms of orientation*: those characterized by the absence of tension, in which the world is ordered and goodness prevails (e.g., psalms of creation, wisdom, retribution, and blessing); (2) *psalms of disorientation*: psalms of lament; and (3) *psalms of reorientation*: those evidencing that the psalmist has gone through disorientation and now has progressed to a new place of orientation, which is more secure and mature than the original orientation (e.g., praise hymns and thanksgiving psalms [i.e., Westermann's psalms of descriptive and declarative praise]).
6. Also in this category, at a more popular level are Bernard W. Anderson's *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak to Us Today* (3rd ed., 2000) and D. Stuart's section on Psalms in *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (3rd ed., 2003).

B. 10 Basic Psalm (Poem) Types. The first three categories are classified by structure. The other categories are classified by content.

1. *Praise Psalms / Hymns* (SRS: Summons to praise > Reason > Summons repeated)—“Praise Yahweh, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name”: Declarative and descriptive praise, typically focusing upon who God is with regard to his attributes and relationship to Israel.
2. *Lament Psalms* (APTRAP: Address > Petition > Trouble > Rationale > Assurance > Praise)—“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”: Most numerous group of the Psalms; some sixty Psalms in this category. Both individual and corporate, and they dominate the front part of the Psalter.
3. *Thanksgiving Psalms* (IMART: Introduction > Misery > Appeal > Rescue > Testimony)—“I love Yahweh, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy”: Typically recounting one or more of the saving acts of God. Some 16 Psalms in this category.
4. *Trust Psalms* (subset of Lament)—“Yahweh is my Shepherd; I shall not want”: characterized by the expansion of the “announcement of trust” section of laments.
5. *Enthronement Psalms*: Characterized by content and not structure. The subject is typically a description of Yahweh’s appearing before his people. Key words: throne, reign, enthronement.
6. *Royal Psalms*: Characterized by thanking God for the king or things about the king. Almost all Royal Psalms are messianic.
7. *Zion Psalms*: Characterized by content, not structure. Characterized by a longing for Jerusalem and God’s presence.
8. *Wisdom Psalms* (x/y): The ability to make right choices. “Will you choose this or this?”
9. *Torah Psalms*: The subject matter is the expression and praise of God’s law (Torah).
10. *Historical Psalms*. Focus upon the review of the history of God’s saving works among his people, especially his deliverance of them from the bondage of Egypt and his creation of them as a people.

Fig. 18.3. Psalms by Genre Category

Genre	Psalm
Lament	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 (= 53), 17, 22, 26, 27, 28, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42/43, 44, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 94, 102, 106, 108, 109, 120, 123, 126, 130, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143 (Penitential Psalms = 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143; Imprecatory Psalms = 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137)
Praise	8, 29, 33, 46, 47, 48, 76, 84, 87, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105, 111, 113, 114, 117, 122, 134, 135, 136, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150 (Songs of Zion = 46, 48, 76, 84, 87; Enthronement of Yahweh Psalms = 47, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99)
Royal	2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144
Thanksgiving	30, 66, 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, 138
Trust	11, 16, 23, 91, 121, 125, 129, 131
Wisdom	1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128
Liturgy	15, 24 (cf. also 136)
Historical	78 (cf. also 105, 106, 107, 114)
Mixed	9/10, 19, 25, 31, 32, 34, 36, 40, 65, 89, 119
Unclear	50, 52, 62, 67, 68, 75, 81, 115, 133, 139

Prepared by John C. Crutchfield; found in DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About*, 342.

C. An Overview of Lament > Thanksgiving > Praise (adapted from Crutchfield, “Psalms,” in DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About*, 339–41)

1. Synthesis:
 - a. Lament: cry for help >
 - b. Thanksgiving: gratitude for deliverance >
 - c. Praise: celebration for who God is and what he has done
2. Psalms of Lament (APTRAP)
 - a. Address to God
 - b. Petitions, usually for being heard
 - c. Trouble described
 - d. Reason why God should answer
 - e. Assurance declared (confidence or trust)
 - f. Praise or promise of sacrifice

Psalm 6	Elements of Lament
¹ O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger....	Address to God
² Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.	Petitions and Reasons
⁴ Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.	Petition and Reason
⁶ I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears.... ⁷ My eye ... grows weak because of all my foes.	Trouble described
⁹ The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer. ¹⁰ All my enemies shall be ashamed....	Assurance declared
NOTE: The missing element here is “Praise or promise of sacrifice,” but this element can be easily seen at the end of the lament in Psalm 3:8.	

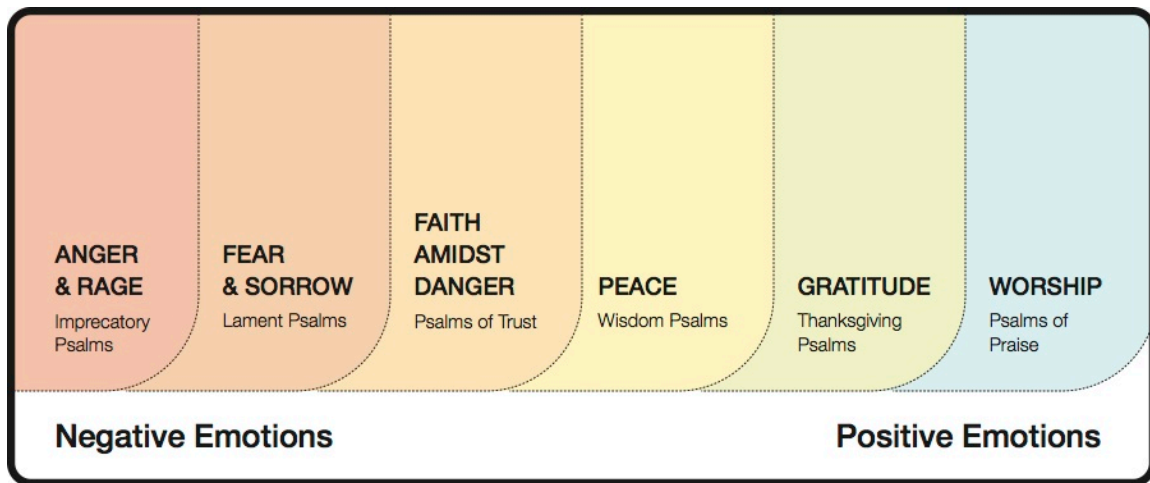
3. Psalms of Thanksgiving (IMART)
 - a. Introduction of praise, addressed to God
 - b. Misery or trouble reported
 - c. Appeal for others to praise God
 - d. Rescue announced
 - e. Testimony of vow or praise

Psalm 30	Elements of Thanksgiving
¹ I will extol you, O LORD,	Introduction of praise, addressed to God
for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me.	Misery reported
⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.	Appeal for others to praise God
¹¹ You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, ¹² that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.	Rescue announced
O LORD, I will give thanks to you forever!	Testimony of vow or praise

4. Psalms of Praise (SRS)
 - a. Summons to praise
 - b. Reason for praise
 - c. Summons to praise repeated

Psalm 117	Elements of Thanksgiving
¹ Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!	Summons to praise
² For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.	Reason for praise
Praise the LORD!	Summons to praise repeated

D. Interpreting Emotion in the Various Psalm Genres



1. Rage in the Psalms of Imprecation¹
 - a. At times in the Psalms (and elsewhere in the Bible—e.g. Num. 16:15; Jer. 18:23; Neh. 4:4–5; 13:29; 1 Chr. 12:17; 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8–9; 5:12), the psalmists declare or pray for a curse on enemies. Can Christians love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, and do good to those who hate us (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35), and still speak this way?
 - Ps 35:4. Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life!
 - Ps 55:15. Let death steal over them.
 - Ps 62:23. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually.
 - Ps 69:27. Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from you.
 - Ps 137:8–9. O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!
 - Ps 139:19–22. Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!²⁰ They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O Yahweh? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?²² I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.
 - See 5:10; 10:15; 28:4; 31:17–18; 35:4–6; 40:14–15; 55:15; 62:23; 69:22–28; 109:6–15; 137:8–9; 139:19–22; 140:9–10.
 - b. Things to remember:
 - i. These emotions are in response to real wrong and injustice and often rise after sustained acts of love have been rejected.
 - Ps 35:12–13. But I, when they were sick—I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest.¹⁴ I went about as though I grieved for my friend or brother; as one who laments his mother, I bowed down in mourning.
 - Ps 109:4–5. In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. 5 So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love.
 - ii. The hatred often seems related more with moral repugnance and less with personal vindication, and often the psalmist is explicitly concerned with God's right to worship.

¹ Some of these points are adapted from John Crutchfield, "Psalms," in *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About*, 343–44; John Piper, "Do I Not Hate Those Who Hate You, O Lord? The Verses We Skipped," *Taste and See*, Oct 3, 2000.

- Ps 139:19–22. Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! ²⁰ They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O Yahweh? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? ²² I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.
- iii. Sometimes the psalmist requests that God punish his enemies *so that* their hearts may be turned toward him.
 - Ps 83:16–18. Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O LORD. ¹⁷ Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace, ¹⁸ that they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.
- iv. Remember that these emotions are expressed in prayer, not in a call to arms or to an angry mob. Nevertheless, these prayers were often communally sung, suggesting that there are indeed times for public denouncement. Hardness and rebellion can extend so far that sin becomes beyond forgiveness (Matt 12:32), should not be prayed for (1 John 5:16), and demands the calling down of a curse, even in public (1 Cor 16:22).
 - 1 Cor 16:22. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.
- v. Psalm 69 is an imprecatory psalm that guided Jesus' own perspective on his ministry. Jesus holds the right to pronounce and bring judgment on his enemies.
 - Ps 69:4, 9, 21–24, 27[5, 10, 22–25, 28]. More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies.... ⁹ For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.... ²¹ They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. ²² Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap. ²³ Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually. ²⁴ Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them.... ²⁷ Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from you.
 - John 15:25. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: "They hated me without a cause." (Ps 69:4[5])
 - John 2:17. His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." (Ps 69:9[10])
 - Matt. 27:34. They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. (Ps 69:21[22])
- c. Should Christian's use imprecatory psalms today?
 - i. Introductory comments:
 - (1) In Rom 11:9–10, Paul treats Ps 69:22–23[24–25] as having Scriptural authority and as having fulfillment in the redemptive-historical hardening of Israel. This suggests that the imprecatory psalms are not by themselves sinful.
 - Rom 11:9–10. And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; ¹⁰ let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."
 - (2) Paul cites Ps 69:9 in Rom 15:3, identifying the psalmist's words as the words of Christ, who never sinned (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5) and was right to pronounce and bring judgment on his enemies.
 - Rom 15:3. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."
 - (3) With this and points like those mentioned above in mind, Pastor John has asserted that Christians would do best to leave imprecations to the Messiah ("Do I Not Hate Those Who Hate You, O Lord? The Verses We Skipped," *Taste and See*, Oct 3, 2000): "We will grant to the

psalmist (usually David), who speaks, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the foreshadowed Messiah and Judge, the right to call down judgment on the enemies of God. This is not personal vindictiveness. It is a prophetic execution of what will happen at the last day when God casts all his enemies into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). We would do well to leave such final assessments to God, and realize our own corrupt inability to hate as we ought. While there is unforgivable sin for which we are not to pray, we are told to love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute us, and return good for evil (as David did). This is our vocation by faith. Let us tremble and trust God, lest we fail, and find ourselves on the other side of the curse.”

- (4) While I affirm with Pastor John that Christians must be cautious in their use of imprecations, it seems to beg the question to say that only inspired authors can speak this way.
- ii. While the psalmists voices may typologically become the voice of the Messiah, the imprecatory psalms themselves suggest that they grew up out of real, personal struggles with enemies—struggles that people like you and me have in rare situations. The statement in Psalm 137:8–9 is explicitly made against Babylon, whose unjust atrocities were noteworthy: “O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” This is righteous anger against real evil, and the prayer is for God’s justice. I suggest the voice of Jesus in imprecation is the voice of his human side, by which he can “sympathize with our weakness, . . . yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Not only the psalmists, but Jeremiah, Nehemiah, and Paul all call for God’s curse to be brought on individuals, suggesting that, while not an every-day occurrence, believers in general can be placed in situations where imprecations are called for.
- iii. With this, directly after Paul’s citation of Ps 69:9 in Rom 15:3, he asserts that all Scripture was given (1) to give us encouragement and to recreate enduring in hope in a God who will judge our enemies and (2) to make us better lovers of one another (Rom 15:4–6). The cross proves that God takes sin seriously, and therefore we can rest confident that God will judge sin and our enemies. This gives us encouragement and hope.
 - Rom 15:3–6. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul says elsewhere, trusting God to bring justice tomorrow enables us to love our enemies today.
 - Rom 12:18–19. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”
- iv. The disciplinary step of ex-communication in 1 Corinthians 5 is noteworthy in this regard, for here Paul says the church should “deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, *so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 5:5). This disposition aligns with the sentiments of the psalmist in Psalm 83, when he prays that God would either humble his

enemies through changing their hearts or destroying them: “Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O Yahweh. Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace, that they may know that you alone, whose name is Yahweh, are the Most High over all the earth.”

- v. Just as God is able to be wrathful and loving at the same time (John 3:16, 36), it seems Christians too must be able with the grace of God to maintain righteous anger in the context of love. I suggest that this is the context for imprecations, and that they still have their place in the church today.
 - vi. John N. Day came to a similar conclusion in his article, “The Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics,” *BibSac* 159 (2002): 166–86. Here he argues (1) that the background of imprecations is the promise of divine vengeance in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1–43), the principle of divine justice outlined in the *lex talionis* (Exod. 21:23–24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21), and the assurance of divine cursing as well as blessing in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:2–3) and (2) that the theology of imprecation is carried unchanged through the Scripture to the end of the Old Testament (Rev. 15:2–4; 18:20).
2. Confidence in the Psalms of Trust: Laments focus on the problem, psalms of trust focus on the answer, but both are cries from the midst of pain.

Psalm 23	
¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.	<i>Certainty and rest in God's provision</i>
⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	<i>Certainty and rest in God's protection</i>
Psalm 62	
¹ For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. ² He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.	<i>Confidence in God's goodness, provision, and protection</i>
³ How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? ⁴ They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. <i>Selah</i>	<i>The reality of opposition from outside</i>
⁵ For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.	<i>Confidence in God's goodness, provision, and protection</i>

3. Internal dialogue in the Psalms
- a. *Self-talk in lament.* Ps 13:2. How long must I take counsel in my soul?
 - b. *Self-talk in lament.* Ps 42:5–6. Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation⁶ and my God.
 - c. *Self-talk in thanksgiving.* Ps 116:7. Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
 - d. *Self-talk in praise.* Ps 103:1–2. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

"Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself.... Now this man's treatment [in Ps 42:5, 11] was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts to talking to himself. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: 'Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you.'"

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

E. Evaluation of Genre Analysis:

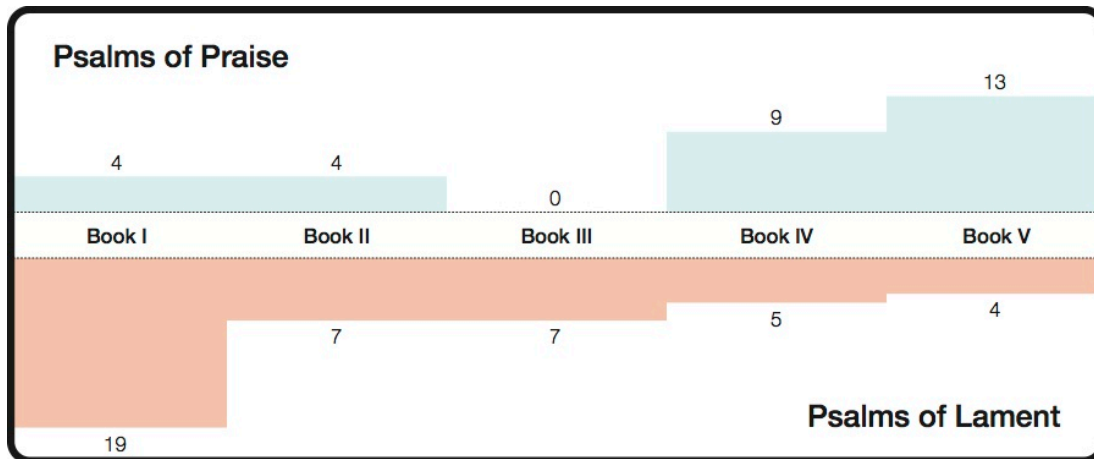
1. Scholars offer various genre categories. An awareness of the various genres and their various literary structures will help the reader understand and appreciate the authors' message.
2. However, one must not overemphasize the genres. Sometimes a writer will mix features of various psalm genres, making it difficult to categorize a given psalm. Heart-felt words to God are so often a combination of praise and petition, thanksgiving and plea, that we must be careful not to force a given psalm into a preconceived mold. A case in point is Psalm 40, which opens like a typical Psalm of Thanksgiving (vv. 1–10) but suddenly shifts to Lament in verse 11 (vv. 11–17). We cannot treat Psalm 40 strictly as a Thanksgiving Psalm or a Lament Psalm.
3. Paul House identifies the following positive and negative factors that have emerged from the form-critical or genre-based analysis of the Psalms (*Old Testament Theology*, 404):
 - a. Positive:
 - i. Form analysis has effectively recognized common patterns that exist between similar types of psalms.
 - ii. Form analysis has helped identify the psalms can be used in numerous contexts of worship within the community of faith.
 - b. Negative:
 - i. Form analysis isolates the psalms from one another, losing any sense of canonical continuity within the Psalter as a whole.
 - ii. Form analysis often rejects the validity of psalm titles and historical statements in the psalms, which cuts the psalms themselves off from any historical bearing.
4. In 1 Chronicles 16:4, we are told that David appointed Levitical ministers (1) for the ark of Yahweh and (2) for the acts of causing remembrance, causing thanks, and rendering praise Yahweh, the God of Israel. One wonders if the most biblical genre approach would distinguish psalms of memorial, thanks, and praise, recognizing that all at times overlap.

VI. The Canonical Approach

A. General features affirmed by all.

1. The Five “Books” (mirroring the Pentateuch) each with a concluding doxology:
 - a. Book 1: Pss. 1–41, doxology Ps. 41:13
 - b. Book 2: Pss. 42–72, doxology Ps. 72:18–19
 - c. Book 3: Pss. 73–89, doxology Ps. 89:52
 - d. Book 4: Pss. 90–106, doxology Ps. 106:48
 - e. Book 5: Pss. 107–150, doxology Pss. 146–150
2. The Psalms do witness intentional groupings.
 - a. Grouping due to attribution:
 - i. Book 1 is almost fully attributed to David, and most of Book 2 is as well; the final statement in 72:20 about the prayers of David being ended suggests that Books 1–2 may have been the first psalter. In the course of canonization, however, non-Davidic psalms were inserted into this group and other Davidic psalms were added later (e.g., Pss. 138–145).
 - ii. Psalms attributed to the “sons of Korah” (Pss. 42–49) who served in the musical service of the temple.
 - iii. Psalms attributed to Asaph (Pss. 50, 73–83), who served the Lord with music abilities during the time of David (1 Chr. 15:17; 25:1–9).
 - b. Groupings due to content, catchword-theme, or cultic function:
 - i. Pss. 42–83 (Book 2 + Songs of Asaph), often called the “Elohistic Psalter,” show a much higher frequency of Elohim over Yahweh, in contrast to the rest of Psalms.
 - (1) Features:
 - (a) Pss. 1–41; 84–150:
 - (i) Yahweh (650x); Elohim (120x)
 - (ii) Yahweh in a-line; Elohim in b-line
 - (b) Pss 42–83:
 - (i) Yahweh (45x); Elohim (245x)
 - (ii) Elohim in a-line; Yahweh in b-line
 - (2) Explanations:
 - (a) All or part of this may have been a distinct collection that shows intentional editorial shaping and a preference for Elohim over Yahweh.
 - (b) Some suggest this unit is part of the chronological development of the divisions mirrors the increasing avoidance of God’s name, but this is questionable.
 - ii. Pss. 93–100 (“Yahweh reigns” 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1)
 - iii. Pss. 111–118 (“Hallelujah”)
 - iv. Pss. 120–134: The “Songs of Ascent”, most likely pilgrimage psalms.
 - v. Pss. 146–150 (“Hallelujah”)
 - vi. Other samples of possible catchword-thematic arrangement: Pss. 23–24; 94–95
 - c. While Lament Psalms outnumber any other psalm genre, there is a noticeable shift from a predominance of laments at the beginning to a predominance of Psalms of Praise / Hymns at the end.

Fig. 18.4. Movement from Lament to Praise in the Psalter



Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie and John C. Crutchfield; adapted from C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 125, 139.

3. Synthesis and prospect:

- a. Tremper Longman III asserts that the features like those noted above are all one can say regarding the canonical shape of the Psalter (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 255):
 - i. Regarding the division of the whole into five books, he states: “It is impossible to determine why the books were divided where they were. Certain psalms are grouped together on the basis of similarity in authorship, content, or function. Nonetheless, these groups are occasional, and no overall structure to the book may be observed.”
 - ii. With this conclusion, he further asserts: “Most psalms do not have a normal literary context. Except under rare circumstances, it is inappropriate to exegete a psalm in the literary context of the psalms that precede and follow it.” He also affirms the need to focus on genre analysis, noting, “*The primary literary context for the study of a psalm ... is not the psalms that border it, but the psalms that are generically similar to it.*”
- b. In response to Longman, a number of points are noteworthy:
 - i. Longman identifies the intentional placement of Psalm 1 as introductory, and he also recognizes an apparent intentionality in the placement of more Praise Psalms (Hymns) at the end of the Psalter. He nevertheless still concludes that “no overall organizational structure of the book may be observed” and that “it is impossible to determine why the books were divided where they were” (*Old Testament Introduction*, 255).
 - ii. Longman’s affirmation of intentionality in the structure of the whole begs the question whether he has been too quick to single out genre analysis as the only way to approach the Psalter. A number of contemporary scholars have provided provocative theses that indeed the entire Psalter shows intentional structuring and that individual psalms must be read within their canonical placement within their given books.

B. Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985) (cf. *Psalms 1* [NIVAC, Zondervan, 2002])

1. Overview of the approach: The Psalter is focused on the Davidic covenant, as is highlighted by most “seam” psalms, which help shape the message of the whole.

- a. Book 1: Psalm 2 at the front of Book 1 alludes to 2 Samuel 7 and points to the announcement of the Davidic covenant; Psalm 41 at the end provides a statement of confidence in the Davidic covenant.
 - b. Book 2: The final Psalm 72 is an enthronement psalm of Solomon and portrays the covenant promises passed on from David to his son.
 - c. Book 3: The concluding Psalm 89 speaks of the failure of the Davidic covenant.
 - d. Book 4 as a whole provides answer to the dilemma of a failed covenant wherein Yahweh is portrayed as king and a refuge to his people. Yahweh, not the earthly king, is central to Israel's existence.
 - e. Book 5 is an answer to the pleas for help from exiles and exalts Yahweh over all.
 - 2. Initial Evaluation:
 - a. Wilson's proposed "narrative" uses only selective psalms to support his theory.
 - b. Not all the "seam" psalms are discussed.
 - c. One may legitimately question whether Yahweh's kingship truly replaces the hopes of the Davidic covenant.
- C. John Walton**, "Psalms: A Cantata About the Davidic Covenant," *JETS* 34 (1991): 21–31; *The Old Testament Today* (2004), 355–361.
- 1. Overview of the approach:
 - a. Builds off the work of Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985).
 - b. Psalms 1–2 introduce the book, Psalms 146–150 conclude the book, and the superscriptions group specific psalms together for specific purpose.
 - c. Psalms 41, 72, 89, and 106 are seam psalms, each with a concluding doxology of Yahweh. The "seams" advance the themes of the introduction through the book and provide the lens for reading each "book."
 - d. The psalms were editorially arranged to reflect on the history of the Davidic covenant—much like songs in a cantata.
 - 2. Summary of the "content agenda":
 - a. Introduction (Pss. 1–2)
 - i. Ps. 1: Ultimate vindication of the righteous
 - ii. Ps. 2: God's choice and defense of Israelite king
 - b. Book 1: David's conflict with Saul (Pss. 3–41)
 - c. Book 2: David's kingship (Pss. 42–72)
 - d. Book 3: Eighth century Assyrian crisis (Pss. 73–89)
 - e. Book 4: Introspection about destruction of the temple and exile (Pss. 90–106)
 - f. Book 5: Praise/reflection on return from exile and beginning a new era (Pss. 107–145)
 - g. Conclusion (Pss. 146–150): Climactic praise to God
 - 3. Support for this proposal:
 - a. Book 1: David's conflict with Saul (Pss. 3–41)
 - i. *Seam*: Psalm 41 provides an application of Psalm 1 in David's conflict with Saul, capturing the psalmist's faith in the midst of confusion and the unresolved nature of his circumstances.
 - ii. *Support*: Psalms 3–40 show a significant emphasis on the theme of trouble at the hands of enemies; the Book is full of cries for protection and guidance and affirmations of God's strength and ability to deliver.
 - iii. *Initial Evaluation*: Saul is not the only "enemy" in Book 1. Indeed, Psalm 3, the first attributed psalm, assumes David is already on the throne, running

from Absalom. One wonders if a more general category of “kingdom in crisis” fits this section.

- b. Book 2: David’s kingship (Pss. 42–72)
 - i. *Seam*: Psalm 72 is a blessing on the king (Solomon), wishing for him the very assurance Psalm 2 offered. The final comment that the prayers of David are ended may suggest Books 1–2 are designed to express two stages in David’s life (Book 1: David’s life in exile as enemy of Saul; Book 2: David’s reign on the throne of Israel).
 - ii. *Support*: Psalms 42–71 has a high number of psalms devoted directly to events of David’s reign: David came to the throne with the nation in chaos, which may be pointed to in the national lament of Psalm 44. Psalm 45 indicates a secure throne, and Psalms 46–47 may be hymns commemorating David’s victories. Psalm 48 focuses on Jerusalem, David’s new capital, and Psalm 51 provides penitential reflection on David’s sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 53 repeats Psalm 14, suggesting a return to the “enemies” motif and perhaps reflecting Absalom’s hostilities against David.
 - iii. *Initial Evaluation*: David’s rise and enthronement is clearly celebrated in this unit, a rise that grows out of suffering. Walton’s proposals work well in Book 2.
- c. Book 3: Eighth century Assyrian crisis (Pss. 73–89)
 - i. *Seam*: Psalm 89 recounts the Davidic covenant in the context of crisis, suggesting that Book 3 reflects on a period of jeopardy to the covenant and monarchy (whether the division of the kingdom, threat of Assyrians, or destruction by the Babylonians).
 - ii. *Support*: Psalms 73–88 takes a distinctly corporate turn, reflecting on the national struggles of Israel and God’s preeminence over the nations. Psalm 79 speaks of invasion and defilement of the temple; Psalm 80 seeks restoration; and Psalm 84 finds security and comfort in the temple.
 - iii. *Initial Evaluation*: There is only one Davidic psalm in this unit—a lament (Ps 86), and there are no psalms of praise (on certain counts, but see the “Songs of Zion” in Pss 76, 84, 87). This definitely tempers the book to be read as a period of division, rebellion, and separation from the Davidic ideal. Yet to focus only on the Assyrian crisis in the title seems too restricted.
- d. Book 4: Introspection about destruction of the temple and exile (Pss. 90–106)
 - i. *Seam*: Psalm 106 is a retrospective look at Israel’s history, with a focus on Israel’s failures and God’s grace; it ends with a petition for re-gathering from the nations and therefore may be read as offering thoughts from exile.
 - ii. *Support*: Psalm 90 opens with a psalm of Moses stressing Yahweh as the ultimate dwelling place of Israel. Psalms 90–105 note God’s anger and call on him to relent; they look to God to bring vengeance and forgiveness.
 - iii. *Initial Evaluation*: Following the rebellion of Book 3, Book 4 does appear to witness a refocusing of the people of God back toward faithfulness and realized need. It provides the foundation for the celebration of redemption seen in Book 5.
- e. Book 5: Praise/reflection on return from exile and beginning a new era (Pss. 107–145)
 - i. *Seam*: Psalm 145 praises the kingship of Yahweh, capturing both the individual and corporate themes introduced in Psalms 1–2 and elevating God’s kingship as a higher priority than the kinship of the Davidic dynasty;

its focus could be the post-exilic period where there was no Davidic king and where Yahweh's kingship alone was at the fore.

- ii. *Support*: Psalm 107 begins with praise that God has regathered the Israelites from the nations (107:1–3), suggesting reflection of the post-exilic period. Psalm 110 anticipates the return of an ideal Davidic king, and Psalm 119 addresses a renewed commitment to the Law. Psalms 120–134 are all songs for pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem for the great festivals, and all would have had an increased poignancy in the context of return from exile.
 - iii. *Evaluation*: While Yahweh's kingship is exalted, it appears to be a kingship that will be manifest through his earthly king. With the heightened use of Davidic psalms and psalms of praise, Book 5 celebrates Yahweh's restoration of his people and the future fulfillment of all his promises regarding the Davidic dynasty.
4. Main message:
 - a. God reigns supreme over Israel and the nations.
 - b. God is both just and faithful.
 - c. God is worthy of praise and receptive to the petitions and laments of the righteous.
 5. Initial evaluation:
 - a. Walton does a much better job than Wilson highlighting the structuring function of the seams and showing how the content of each "book" can be read to support the proposed theme.
 - b. While seeing a general focus on the Davidic covenant is likely justified, the specific details of the narrative at times seem pressed, and many psalms are not addressed.
 - c. Walton highlights the main message of the Psalter to be Yahweh's reign, faithfulness, and worth, which he accomplishes ultimately through his Davidic royal son.

D. Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (405–407)

1. Overview of the approach:
 - a. Utilize the five books, highlighting main theological emphases.
 - b. Interpret the psalms according to their literary genres.
 - c. Following Kraus, stress is given to the book's confession about God and only secondarily to what it says about the people or enemies of God.
2. The Structure:
 - a. Book 1 (Pss. 1–41): The God who instructs, elects, and delivers
 - b. Book 2 (Pss. 42–72): The God who establishes and delivers
 - c. Book 3 (Pss. 73–89): The God who rebukes and rejects
 - d. Book 4 (Pss. 90–106): The God who remembers and sustains
 - e. Book 5 (Pss. 107–150): The God who restores and renews
3. Support for this proposal:
 - a. *Book 1* (Pss. 1–41): *The God who instructs, elects, and delivers*. The first three psalms introduce the themes of instruction, election, and deliverance; all but four of the psalms are attributed to David, so the canon makes his life the focal point; high frequency of psalms of lament focus on Yahweh as deliver from trouble; Psalm 19 anchors the nation in God's Word.
 - b. *Book 2* (Pss. 42–72): *The God who establishes and delivers*. Israel's history stops with temple worship [Pss. 66, 68]; a high-frequency of Davidic psalms continue with focus on God's deliverance; the last psalm's ascription to Solomon suggest he is on the throne; the promises given to David have begun to materialize.

- c. *Book 3* (Pss. 73–89): *The God who rebukes and rejects*. Worship continues in Jerusalem/Zion (Pss. 84, 87); only one psalm is attributed to David and the Davidic promise is not highlighted except in Ps. 89 in the context of Jerusalem’s destruction; focus is given to Israel’s growth in wickedness, with Psalm 78 summarizing Israel covenant failures since the exodus.
 - d. *Book 4* (Pss. 90–106): *The God who remembers and sustains*. Mostly anonymous psalms, with attribution given only to Moses (Ps. 90) and David (Pss. 101, 103), perhaps to highlight how God sustains the faithful; Psalms 90–100 highlight God’s power, especially as Creator, and Psalms 105–106 offer a historical summary that ends with prayers for return from exile; no Zion psalms appear.
 - e. *Book 5* (Pss. 107–150): *The God who restores and renews*. Post-exilic celebration of God’s steadfast love (107:1; 108:1; 117:2; 118:1) with focus on worshippers returning to Jerusalem for worship (Pss. 120–134); ends with five psalms of unrestrained praise for God who rules the earth and blesses Israel; Israel’s praise suggests it has moved from exodus to new exodus, and Psalm 119 anchors this new community in God’s Word.
4. Major themes:
 - a. Yahweh’s sovereignty over Israel and the rest of creation.
 - b. There is not a psalm that does not in some way reflect Yahweh’s supremacy over all and the way his rule encounters the opposition of nations and rulers and people whose gods and power and autonomy are denied by God’s reign (following Mayes).
 - c. “Monotheism in the psalms is grounded in daily life by constant confessions that God lives, speaks, acts, helps, sees, hears, answers and saves. No other god does any of these things in the Psalms. Thus whatever name is given God (e.g., Elohim or Yahweh) in Psalms, there is only one God, and this God rules creation” (407).
 5. Initial evaluation:
 - a. House helpfully puts the focus of each section on God rather than on David or Israel, but he may downplay too much the Davidic/messianic hope suggested in the Psalter’s structure.
 - b. House does not focus as intently on the “seam” psalms and therefore offers a more balanced approach that highlights an apparent thematic grouping of the psalms while not requiring the narrative precision of Walton’s approach.

E. Evaluation of Canonical Approaches

1. The Psalms are intentionally crafted with five “books,” each with a concluding doxology, thus focusing due attention on Yahweh as the primary focus of the whole. Psalms 1–2 appear to stand as the introduction to the whole Psalter, drawing attention to both wisdom (*walking*) and eschatology (*waiting*), the vindication of the righteous who live according to the Word and the lasting hope in Yahweh’s supremacy through his anointed king (the Messiah). Psalms 146–150 provide an apt Yahweh-exalting conclusion (*worship*). While lament psalms are the highest frequency genre, psalms of praise appear intentionally concentrated at the end.
2. With these features, there does appear to be themes that are distinct to each book, which, when placed side-by-side, appear to be identified with major periods in Israel’s history. While Wilson and Walton’s use of the “seam” psalms appears somewhat forced, they are correct in seeing a redemptive historical flow to the whole. House’s more general, Yahweh-focused approach, is most helpful in this regard:

- a. *Book 1*: Psalms begin with attention on David, identifying earthly challenges to the Davidic throne; nearly all the psalms are Davidic. At stake here is the kingdom in crisis or under threat.
 - b. *Book 2*: Within this section the monarchy is firmly established, worship is centered in Jerusalem, and the focus becomes the Davidic covenant; again, almost all the psalms are Davidic.
 - c. *Book 3*: Highlight shifts to the division and increased wickedness of the nation, including the lack of alignment with Davidic covenant; almost no psalms are Davidic.
 - d. *Book 4*: From here, the psalms address the devastation of exile, the need for covenant faithfulness (as echoed in the lives of Moses and David), and the power of God; again, almost no psalms are Davidic.
 - e. *Book 5*: The psalter ends with renewed focus on God's Word and worship in Jerusalem and with great praise, all in light of God's restoring and renewing work in the post-exilic period; the increased number of Davidic psalms suggest a rising anticipation for the fulfillment of the messianic promises.
3. These features in no way require that all psalms in the given books explicitly address these themes; they only necessitate that all the psalms in the given unit provide adequate voice to those living in each period—all of which together typologically make up the recurring cycle of mankind. The psalms, therefore, not only individually but collectively provide voice for all God's people through the ages who find themselves at various points in their walk with God—battling and doubting, succeeding and rejoicing, wavering and running, being disciplined and longing, being restored and praising.
 4. The five-book structure of the Psalter could have come about progressively as each period in Israel's history unfolded; however, some individual(s) in the time of Ezra or beyond finalized the whole and marked it with a messianic stamp. For more on this, see below.

Fig. 18.3. The Structure of the Psalter: A Cantata of Yahweh's Reign through His Messiah

Book 1	Pss 1	<i>Walking with the Messiah</i> (Kingdom Wisdom)	Intro
	Pss 2	<i>Waiting in the Messiah</i> (Kingdom Eschatology)	
	Pss 3–41	Yahweh, the God who instructs, elects, and delivers his king and people [Doxology: 41:13] (Kingdom crisis; almost all Davidic; many individual laments and most mention enemies)	Body
Book 2	Pss 42–72	Yahweh, the God who establishes his king and delivers [Doxology: 72:18–19] (Kingdom rise and establishment; almost all Davidic; mostly laments and “enemy” psalms; keys psalms: 45, 48, 51, 54–65)	
Book 3	Pss 73–89	Yahweh, the God who rebukes and disciplines his people [Doxology: 89:52] (Kingdom division and rebellion; almost no Davidic; Asaph and Sons of Korah collections; key psalm: 78)	
Book 4	Pss 90–106	Yahweh, the God who remembers his people and sustains the faithful [Doxology: 106:48] (Exile, separation, renewed focus; almost no Davidic; praise collections: 95–100; key psalms: 90, 103–105)	
Book 5	Pss 107–145	Yahweh, the God who restores and renews, in the anticipation of his kingdom fulfillment [Doxology: Pss 146–150] (Kingdom restoration and hope; increased number of Davidic; Hallelujah collection: 111–117; Songs of Ascent: 120–134; Davidic reprise: 138–145; keys psalms: 107, 110, 119)	
	Pss 146–150	<i>Worshipping on account of the Messiah</i> (Kingdom Praise)	Concl

VII. The Portrait of the Messiah in the Psalms (Some of this material is adapted from a lecture by Gordon Wenham, “Reading the Psalms Messianically,” J. B. Gay lectures, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/lectures/jb-gay/reading-the-psalms-messianically/>.)

A. The Messiah as All-Conquering King

1. Psalm 2:
 - a. The imagery of God’s Son bearing global rule and demanding global homage portrays a kingdom far more vast than anything experienced by Israel’s monarchs, even David.
 - b. Most likely, therefore, Psalm 2 appears to speak prophetically about the ultimate, earthly, royal deliver through whom Yahweh would establish global justice and peace.
 - c. The very introduction of the Psalter calls readers to anticipate the global, curse-overcoming work of the Messiah. The rest of the psalter supports this conclusion.
2. Royal Psalms:
 - a. The royal psalms like 2, 45, 72, 110 appear to portray a king and reign far greater than anything experienced in Israel’s monarchy. The earthly king can be called “God” (45:7[8]), the “Son” of God (2:7), and the “Lord” of David (110:1), whose reign is both global (2:8; 72:8, 11) and eternal (45:6[7]; 72:5, 7, 17; 110:4).
 - Ps 2:7–8. I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.”⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”
 - Ps. 45:6–7[7–8]. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;⁷ you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.
 - Ps 72:5, 7–8, 11, 17. May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations! . . .⁷ In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more! ⁸ May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! . . .¹¹ May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him! . . .¹⁷ May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!
 - Ps 110:1, 4. The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” . . .⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”
 - b. Royal psalms are clearly interpreted by later biblical authors as messianic.
 - i. Even within the OT itself, Zechariah, writing in an age without any Israelite king, applied a messianic reading to Ps 72:8, viewing it as anticipating a future ruler: “His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech 9:10).
 - ii. Paul and the author of Hebrews applied Psalm 2 to Christ.
 - Acts 13:33. God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, “YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.”
 - Heb 1:5. For to which of the angels did He ever say, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”? And again, “I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME”?
 - Heb 5:5. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”
 - iii. Hebrews applies Psalm 45 to Christ.
 - Heb 1:8–9. But of the Son *He says*, “YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.”⁹ “YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS;

THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.”

iv. Jesus, his opponents, Peter, and the author of Hebrews applied a messianic reading to Psalm 110:1:

- Matt 22:41–46. Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴² “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “*The son of David*.” ⁴³ He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ⁴⁴ ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, ‘SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET’”? ⁴⁵ “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question. (Cf. Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44.)
- Acts 2:34–36. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: “THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, ‘SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,’ ³⁵ UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.”” ³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified.
- Heb 1:13. But to which of the angels has He ever said, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET”?”
- Heb 10:11–13. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹² but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, ¹³ waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

v. The author of Hebrews applied Ps 110:4 to Christ.

- Heb 5:5–6. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”; just as He says also in another *passage*, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”
- Heb 7:15–22. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is attested *of Him*, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.” ¹⁸ For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. ²⁰ And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath ²¹ (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, “THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, ‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER’”); ²² so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

3. The Davidic covenant

- a. Ps 89:35–37[36–38] stresses the eternality of the Davidic covenant, even though the following verses highlight how the kingdom’s division, rebellion, and, perhaps, even exile, makes it appear that God has revoked his promise.
 - Ps 89:35–37[36–38]. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. ³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. ³⁷ Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.
- b. Beginning with Psalm 90, Book 4 looks back to the Mosaic era and highlights how God forgave in the past, thus giving hope that he could do so again. Paralleling this theme is the highlighting of Yahweh’s reign over all. Then Book 5, includes a heightened number of Davidic psalms and praises in order to give hope that God’s kingdom promises through his Messiah will indeed come to pass.
- c. In Book 5, Psalm 110:4 couches in an oath the declaration that David’s “Lord” is “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” If God has promised to keep his otherwise unknown oath regarding the priesthood of Melchizedek, certainly he

will keep his explicit oath regarding the Davidic throne. Psalm 89 highlighted this oath three times:

- Ps 89:3–4[4–5]. You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ⁴ ‘I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.’”
- Ps 89:35–36[36–37]. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. ³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.
- Ps 89:49[50]. Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

- d. In this context, Ps 132 of Book 5 reaffirms God’s promises to the Davidic house. The conditional nature of the promise clarifies the interruption in the Davidic dynasty (i.e., the exile and period of initial restoration), but the promises of God to the Davidic house still stand. The dynasty will not be extinguished, and the editors of the Psalter appear to have real hope in the revival of the Davidic house.

- Ps 132:1, 11–18. Remember, O LORD, in David’s favor, all the hardships he endured. . . . ¹¹ The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. ¹² If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.” ¹³ For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place. ¹⁴ “This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. ¹⁵ I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread. ¹⁶ Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy. ¹⁷ There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. ¹⁸ His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine.”

4. Conclusions:

- a. The editors of the Psalter appear to read as prophetic all royal psalms and psalms addressing the Davidic covenant. Though darkness had fallen over the Davidic dynasty, they believed Yahweh’s kingdom promises to David still stood, and they anticipated a day when a new royal deliverer would rise, this time to establish a global kingdom that would never end.
- b. After the conclusion of Book 2 in Ps 72:20, which reads, “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended,” Books 3 and 4 portray the downfall and loss of the Davidic kingdom and call into question the future of the Davidic covenant. Yet Book 5 sees the initial restoration to the land, and with it comes anticipation that the full kingdom promises would be consummated. The high concentration of Davidic psalms matched with the clear testimony of Psalms 110 and 132 suggests hope in the Davidic king, the ultimate Son of God who himself could be called both David’s Lord and God.

5. Alec Motyer has summarized the Psalter’s expectation of the coming King as follows (“Messiah [OT]” in *IBD*, 2.989):

- a. He will meet world opposition (2:1–3; 110:1–7).
 - i. Over it he would be victorious (45:3–5; 89:22–23).
 - ii. By Yahweh’s act (2:6, 8; 21:1–13; 110:1–2), he would establish world rule (2:8–12; 45:17; 72:8–11; 89:25; 110:5–6) based on Zion (2:6) and marked by a primary concern for the righteous (45:4, 6–7; 72:2–3; 101:1–8).
- b. He will rule forever (21:4; 45:6; 72:5) in peace (72:7), prosperity (72:16), and undeviating reverence for Yahweh (72:5).
- c. He will be preeminent among men (45:2, 7).
- d. He will be a friend of the poor and the enemy of the oppressor (72:2–4, 12–14).
- e. Under his rule the righteous will flourish (72:7).
- f. He will possess an everlasting name (72:17).
- g. He will be the object of unending thanks (72:15).

- h. He will be the recipient of Yahweh's everlasting blessing (45:2) and be the heir of both David's covenant (89:28–37; 132:11–12) and of the Melchizedekian priesthood (110:1–4).
- i. He belongs to Yahweh (89:18) and is devoted to him (21:1, 7; 63:1–8, 11).
- j. He is Yahweh's son (2:7; 89:27), seated at his right hand (110:1) and is himself divine (45:6).

A. The Messiah as Suffering Servant

1. The Psalms present us two distinct portraits of David, the first as *all-conquering king* (see above) and the second as *innocent sufferer*.
 - a. As the anointed Son of God, the Davidic king is the one to whom all the nations of the world will bow. As already highlighted, this all-conquering deliverer is depicted as someone far greater than any Israelite king, and therefore the image prophetically anticipates the greater Son of David. The second portrait of the Davidic king is that of innocent sufferer, who only survives because of divine intervention (as seen in the laments and thanksgivings).
 - b. Of the 73 psalms that include "David" in the heading, 13 have titles that give clarity about their context of composition. These historical notes almost all point to problem areas in David's life that are specifically referred to in 1–2 Samuel (in contrast to Chronicles). Many other "Davidic" psalms that do not include a specific context address similar troubles, wherein a righteous man appeals for help to gain respite from enemies. Two examples:
 - Psalm 7: "O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers" (v. 1[2]); "Arise, O LORD, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies" (v. 6[7]); "The LORD judges the peoples; judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me" (v. 8[9]).
 - Psalm 18: "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (v. 1[3]); "He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me. The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me" (vv. 19–20[20–21]); "I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt. So the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight" (vv. 23–24[24–25]).
 - c. In light of the fact that first the portrait of David (i.e., conquering king) is clearly viewed messianically both within and outside the Psalter, should we view the portrayal of the innocent sufferer also as prophetic?
2. The conviction that Yahweh will vindicate the righteous and judge the wicked is the key theme of Psalm 1, and in light of its intentional link with Psalm 2, the righteous one is first and foremost the royal Son, against whom the nations rage. The introduction to the Psalter, therefore, calls us to read the two portraits of David in relation to one another.
3. Because from the titles it is clear that the editors knew the accounts of David's life in 1–2 Samuel, we are encouraged to compare the psalmist's voice with the portrait of David in this earlier narrative material. When we read the psalmist's claims that there is no wrong in his hands (Ps 7:3[4]) or that Yahweh dealt with him according to his righteousness (18:20[21]), one wonders if the editors are calling us to see that the historical David did not line up with such claims and that therefore we need to read the innocent sufferer psalms (e.g., Pss 3, 7, 9, 13, 18) messianically.
4. Support for this view is found in 2 Samuel 23, which records "the last words of David" (23:1), directly following 2 Sam 22, which is a lament psalm reproduced in Psalm 18. We are told in both texts that this preceding song arose "when Yahweh delivered

[David] from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul” (2 Sam 22:1 // Ps 18:1).

- a. What is important to note is how the LXX rendered 2 Sam 23:1. The ESV follows the Hebrew MT, which reads: “The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who *was raised on high, the anointed* of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel.” Where the Hebrew text reads “on high,” however, the LXX has *epi* “concerning,” which follows an equally valid reading of the Hebrew text without any change to the consonants. When read this way, a Messianic rendering rises to the surface: “The declaration of David, son of Jesse, and the declaration of the mighty man raised up—concerning the Messiah of the God of Jacob and the Delightful One of the songs of Israel.” The LXX reading suggests that David viewed his own songs/psalms as pointing prophetically ahead to the Messiah. The Hebrew Masoretes, working after the rise of Christianity, may have added the vowels in a way to counter this highly messianic but originally intended reading.
- b. Further support for this messianic interpretation can be found in v. 5, though the syntax of the Hebrew allows for a number of possible readings. Verses 3–4 clearly point to the glory of one who rules God’s kingdom justly. Then in v. 5, what the ESV renders as a question (“For does not my house stand so with God?”) is probably better rendered as a mere statement: “*Surely not so* is my house with God, but he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.” The “*surely not so*” gives clarity to the reader of the truth that is already apparent from the history of David’s kingship laid out in the book—namely, he is not the one to whom the people should look. But God has made an eternal covenant with him that a son will rise whose throne will last forever.
- c. In 2 Sam 22:21, David writes, “The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.” Does such a statement *require* a messianic reading?
 - i. It is not impossible that a redeemed sinner like David could say such a statement in relation to himself.
 - (1) First, the whole book is driven by a principle highlighted in 2 Sam 22:26–27: “With the faithful you show yourself faithful; with the blameless you show yourself blameless; ²⁷ with the purified you deal purely; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.” Earlier, Hannah had said something similar: “He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail” (1 Sam 2:9). And again, Yahweh declared to Eli through the man of God, “Those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (2:30). These texts are saying no more than Peter says elsewhere: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5; cf. James 4:6). The texts stress that the “righteousness” that is being celebrated is an alignment with God’s definition of right order, wherein Yahweh is supreme and humanity is dependent and humble. The righteousness is *not* a self-exalting obedience but a thanks-be-to-God obedience. This is made clear elsewhere in 2 Sam 22:28, 31, 33, where David asserts: “You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down. . . . He is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. . . . This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless.”

- (2) Second, similar declarations of innocence were made by Job (see ch. 31), whom both the narrator and Yahweh declared to be blameless and upright (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Job's integrity was genuine and his suffering was, in God's words, "without [human] reason" (2:3). His problem later in the book does not appear to have been the inaccuracy of his own claim to innocence but the fact that "he justified himself rather than God" (32:2), asserting that God was somehow unjust to inflict the righteous.
 - (3) Third, the statement asserts divine judgment *according to* works and not *on the basis of* them, which is exactly what Paul says God will do at the final judgment: "Who will render to each person according to his deeds."
- ii. Nevertheless, even though the declaration is reasonable, the Messiah could declare it in a way that David never could. His hands, while washed, had been dirty, whereas the Messiah's hands were never dirty (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Thus one can see how David could write psalms referring first to himself but also prophetically pointing beyond himself to the Messiah.
5. When the portrait of the innocent sufferer is read prophetically as pointing to the Messiah, we gain another pillar (along with texts like Isaiah 53) that clarify the NT's teaching that the Son of David only inherits his kingdom on the path of suffering.
 - Luke 24:44–46. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."
 - Acts 26:22–23. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.
6. The juxtaposition of the exalted David in Psalm 2 with the persecuted David in Psalms 3 and beyond can easily be seen to teach that the Messiah will only triumph through tribulation. The editors of the Psalter appear to have been reading the psalms this way, and 2 Sam 23:1 can easily be read as suggesting that David actually intended this from the beginning.

II. The Portrait of Yahweh in the Psalms

A. Yahweh stands in focus through the doxologies concluding each "book":

1. *Book 1: Ps. 41:13*. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.
2. *Book 2: Ps. 72:18–19*. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!
3. *Book 3: Ps. 89:52*. Blessed be Yahweh forever! Amen and Amen.
4. *Book 4: Ps. 106:48*. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise Yah(weh)!
5. *Book 5: Pss. 146–150*. Praise Yah(weh)! (Pss. 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6)
 - Ps. 148: 5, 13. Let them praise the name of Yahweh! For he commanded and they were created.... Let them praise the name of Yahweh, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.

B. Overview of usage of the name and titles of God:

1. “The LORD” = *Yahweh* (695x); *Yah* (43x)
2. “God” = *Elohim* (365x); *El* (77x); *Eloah* (1x)
3. “Lord, Sovereign” = *Adonai* (67x)
4. “Most High” = *Elyon* (22x); *Shaddai* (2x)
5. “LORD Almighty/of hosts” = *Yahweh Sabaoth* (13x)
6. “My king and my God” = First title other than Yahweh or Elohim (Ps. 52; cf. 2:4; see also “Yahweh reigns” in Pss. 24; 29; 47; 93; 96; 97; 98; 99)

Fig. 18.4. Some Names or Titles of God in the Old Testament

Name/Title	Significance
<i>Elohim</i> “God”	Names the transcendent Creator of all that exists (Gen. 1:1)
<i>El-Elyon</i> “God Most High”	Indicates God’s superior position above all the other gods of the nations (Gen. 14:18–20)
<i>Yahweh</i> “the LORD”	Personal name of God; names the ever existent, creator & sustainer of all things (Exod. 3:14–15)
<i>Adonai</i> “Lord, Master, Sovereign”	Reveals God as owner and master of all creation (Gen. 15:2; Josh. 3:11)
<i>El-Shaddai</i> “God Almighty”	Recalls God’s power in creating & sustaining life (Gen. 17:1)
<i>El-Olam</i> “God Everlasting”	Emphasizes God’s immensity and eternity (Gen. 21:33)
<i>El-Roeh</i> “God, the One Who Sees”	Reveals God’s beneficent omniscience, the God who sees the needs of his people & cares enough to respond with help & deliverance (Gen. 16:13)
<i>El Elohe Israel</i> “God, the God of Israel”	Attests God’s sovereignty & providential watch and care over Israel as his elect people (Gen. 33:19–20)
<i>Yahweh-Yireh</i> “the LORD Our Provision”	Witnesses to God’s ability to sustain the faithful in trial and testing (Gen. 22:13–14)
<i>Yahweh-Sabaoth</i> “the LORD of Hosts”	Designates God as the creator & leader of the angelic armies of heaven (1 Sam. 1:11; 17:45)

Adapted from John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill, *Old Testament Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 73.

C. Yahweh in the Introduction:

1. Ps. 1. Yahweh, the good **Guide**, **Satisfier**, and **Judge**, who preserves and flourishes those faithful to his Law but who allows the wicked to perish.
2. Ps. 2. Yahweh, the great **Sovereign** over all and **Treasure** of all who take refuge in him—the One who deserves worldwide homage and who promises the destruction of his enemies and worldwide dominion to his earthly king.

D. Yahweh in the Conclusion:

1. Ps. 146. Yahweh, the great **Creator** of all and **Keeper** of the downtrodden—the constant one, who brings to ruin the way of the wicked and who will reign supreme forever.
2. Ps. 147. Yahweh, the great **Architect**, **Overseer**, and **Provider** of the universe—*our* God, who takes special care of those to whom he reveals his will and who look to him for help.
3. Ps. 148. Yahweh, the **Supreme One**, whose *name* is worthy of praise in all creation because through him all things were created and because he is exalted over all.
4. Ps. 149. Yahweh, the **great King**, who saved a humble people for his own pleasure and their good!
5. Ps. 150. Yahweh, **God over all** (in heaven and on earth, 150:1), whose actions and person (150:2) are worthy of praise from everything that has breath!

E. Yahweh in the Body—An Overview:

1. The majesty of God's *name* is seen in the way he's made the skies and humanity.
 - Ps. 8:1, 3, 5. O **Yahweh**, our **Lord**, how majestic is your **name** in all the earth... your heavens, the work of your fingers... You...crowned [man] with glory and honor.
2. God's glorious deeds of steadfast love, faithfulness, and power demand that remnant and rebel alike praise his *name*.
 - Ps. 9:1–2. I will give thanks to **Yahweh** with my whole heart; I will recount all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your **name**, O **Most High**.
 - Ps. 66:1–4. Shout for joy to **God**, all the earth; sing the glory of his **name**; give to him glorious praise! Say to **God**, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your **name**."
 - Ps. 92:1–2, 4–5. It is good to give thanks to **Yahweh**, to sing praises to your **name**, O **Most High**; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night... For you, O **Yahweh**, have made me glad by your work... How great are your works, O **Yahweh**!
3. God's *name* is to be praised, for he is the deliver of the righteous and hears the cries of the needy.
 - Ps. 9:9–10. **Yahweh** is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your **name** put their trust in you, for you, O **Yahweh**, have not forsaken those who seek you.
 - Ps. 68:1, 3–4, 32, 34. **God** shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered... But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before **God**... Sing to **God**, sing praises to his **name**... his **name** is **Yahweh**; exult before him!... O kingdoms of the earth, sing to **God**; sing praises to the **Lord**... Ascribe power to **God**, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies.
 - Ps. 69:19, 29–30, 32–36. You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you... let your salvation, O **God**, set me on high! I will praise the **name** of **God** with a song... When the humble see [my salvation] they will be glad; you who seek **God**, let your hearts revive. For **Yahweh** hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners. Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them. For **God** will save Zion...and those who love his name shall dwell in it.
4. God's name deserves sustained, eternal praise, for he is God and King, incomparable in his perfections and working amazing reversals.
 - Ps. 113. Praise **Yahweh**!...praise the **name** of **Yahweh**! Blessed be the **name** of **Yahweh** from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting, the **name** of **Yahweh** is to be praised! **Yahweh** is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like **Yahweh** our **God**, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust...to make them sit with princes... He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise **Yahweh**!
 - Ps. 145. I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your **name** forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your **name** forever and ever. Great is **Yahweh**, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts... **Yahweh** is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. **Yahweh** is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made... Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom...[**Yahweh** is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.] **Yahweh** upholds all who are falling... **Yahweh** is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. **Yahweh** is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth... **Yahweh** preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of **Yahweh**, and let all flesh bless his holy **name** forever and ever.

F. Summary:

1. *The Truth*. In the Psalms, Yahweh reigns supreme over all creation, from the placement of galaxies (Pss. 8:3; 19:1) to the growth of grass (104:14), from sea breezes (148:8) to the flight of birds (78:28), from the establishment of nations (22:28) to the last breath of individuals (104:29). Yahweh is always faithful and just (89:8, 14), guides through his instruction (1, 19, 119), responds to the pleas and laments of the righteous (6:9; 66:19), and will faithfully vindicate those who seek refuge in him under the rule of his Messiah (2:2, 12; 28:8). His Sovereignty over all demands praise, for he is the Guide, Satisfier,

Judge, Sovereign, Treasure, Creator, Keeper, Architect, Overseer, Provider, Supreme One, Great King, and God over all.

2. *The Conflict.* In the Psalms, Yahweh alone is God, and his Word provides the only path for life. Nevertheless, the sustained voice through the Psalms witness that in this world God's supremacy is constantly in dispute. Mays noted (*Psalms*, 34):

Because it is the reign of God whose way in the world is being worked out through one people and one presence and one king and a particular kind of human conduct, the rule encounters the opposition of nations and rulers and people whose gods and power and autonomy are denied by the reign of the Lord. There is not a psalm that does not in some way or other reflect some dimension of this fundamental conflict.

3. *The Hope.*
 - a. While the presence and promises of God are constantly called into question in life, the Psalms testify to the truth that there is one God and that he is for all who take refuge in him through his Messiah (2:12). Whether from an individual or a community, whether through lament, thanksgiving, or joyous song, the daily-life confessions of the psalmists declare that Yahweh "lives, speaks, acts, helps, sees, hears, answers and saves" (House, *Old Testament Theology*, 407). No other god does any of the things in the Psalms; therefore, Yahweh alone is shown to be God who rules over his creation, ultimately through his Messianic king.
 - b. We must ever remember that such gracious activities from God for his own are just and good only because of the wondrous substitutionary, sacrificial work of Jesus on our behalf (Rom. 3:23–26). May our hearts be moved to great praise, for God is for us in Christ; he listens, and he will save. Praise the LORD!

III. Guided Reading for the Psalms: NOTE: As you read through the "key Psalms," meditate on the goodness of God and allow yourself to be refreshed by him. Seek his face, and he will be found.

A. Key Psalms: 1–2, 8, 19, 22–24, 42–43, 51, 89, 95–99, 119, 136, 145

B. Questions:

1. What role did the Psalter serve in the worship of the second temple and synagogues and how many "books" make up the Psalter?
2. Along with Psalm 1:2, we find the challenge to "meditate on the law day and night" only at one other place in the Bible. Using the cross-references, identify this place and answer why the placement of these two injunctions is significant within the three-part structure of the Hebrew Bible.
3. Viewed by many interpreters as one psalm, Psalms 1–2 stand as the introduction to the whole Psalter, which itself operates as the introduction to the Writings, focused on "life in the covenant." In Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–8 we are told that Israel's life in the covenant will be sustained and their witness to the world will be realized as they carry out the Law of God, which is the focus of Psalm 1. In this light, what is significant about the response of the nations in Psalm 2, and what does it tell us about the effectiveness of Israel's witness?
4. In one sentence, summarize the message of Psalm 19 in your own words.
5. Which of the "key psalms" aptly fitted the circumstances at Jesus' crucifixion and was quoted on Christ's lips during his execution (see Matt 27:46 // Mark 15:34)?
6. Which of the "key psalms" appears to be a meditation on Genesis 1, focusing on the glory of God in his world and the purpose of humanity to reflect God's supremacy in all things?
7. Which of the "key psalms" celebrates God's covenant with David?

8. Which of the “key psalms” is clearly a psalm of “thanksgiving” to Yahweh, whose “steadfast love endures forever”?
9. Which two of the “key psalms” (likely one psalm originally) do we find the psalmist preaching to himself with the following words? “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” This same refrain shows up in the last verse of each psalm.
10. Perhaps the most beloved of all the psalms, Psalm 23 ends with the psalmist’s testimony that he plans to dwell in the house of Yahweh forever (Ps 23:6). Keeping in mind that the placement of the specific psalms in the Psalter appears to be quite intentional, which of the “key psalms” clarifies the type of person who can do such a thing? That is, what psalm answers, “Who shall ascend the hill of Yahweh” and enjoy the presence of the returning “King of glory”? Once you know the psalm, detail the psalmist’s answer to his own question.
11. “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.” In what psalms are these words found?
12. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.” In what psalm are these words found? In what context does the psalm title suggest these words arose?
13. “The rules of Yahweh are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings from the honeycomb.” In what psalms are these words found?
14. “Oh sing to Yahweh a new song; sing to Yahweh, all the earth! Sing to Yahweh, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the people! For great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared about all gods.” In what psalm are these words found?
15. Which of the “key psalms” presents itself as meditation on the name of God and so recalls numerous characteristics of Yahweh revealed to mankind through his deeds?

IV. A Sample Study of Psalm 121 with a Sermon²

A. Historical Context

1. The Superscription: “A Song of Ascents”: The Mishnah links the fifteen “Songs of Ascents” (Psalms 120–134) with the fifteen steps up to temple precinct (*Middoth* 2.5), but most scholars believe they were sung during the festival processions during the three annual feasts (Feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles), as the pilgrims ascended through the hills to Jerusalem (cf. Exod 23:14–17; Deut 16:16). Clearly, however, the songs need not have been composed originally for this purpose.
2. Internal Evidence: The text itself offers no special clues regarding the date or context of composition. The assertion that Yahweh is the psalmist’s helper may grow out of a sense of anxiety within the poet, but the details of his distress are only hinted at. On the one hand, the statements regarding the “hills,” the need for sure footing, and the confidence in protection by day and night from all forms of evil could simply be the expression of a shepherd who goes to work in the morning and comes home late at night. But they could also be easily seen as the expressions of a traveler, journeying through Canaan’s central or southern hill country, perhaps up to or away from Jerusalem. It is easy to see how Ps 121 came to be associated with pilgrimage feasts to Mount Zion for worship of Israel’s God, who made heaven and earth.

B. Biblical Context

1. The placement of Ps 121 in the OT: The hymn book of Psalms is found in the Writings, the third major section of the OT. The Writings are devoted to showing God’s people how the remnant made it through Israel’s rough history. The Psalms opens the Writings and explains how to worship in all of life’s circumstances, at points of desperation and exhilaration, both individually throughout the week and corporately when the community of believers gather together. Psalms 1 and 2 provide the grid through which to read all the other psalms by stressing that dependence on Yahweh by keeping his Torah and by trusting him as King provides refuge and direction throughout one’s life.
2. The Placement of Ps 121 in the Book of Psalms:
 - a. I called the Psalms a hymn book, because that is exactly what it was for God’s people after exile. And like a modern hymn book, there are songs that derived out of all kinds of experiences and over hundreds of years in the lives of God’s people. Also like a hymnbook, there are different sections and groupings that carry certain themes. Scholars more and more are seeing a very purposeful strategy in the ordering of the books within the Psalter (see esp. Gerald Wilson, John Walton, Paul House).
 - b. Psalm 121 occurs in the fifth part of the Psalms (Ps 107–150), a section that appears to offer reflections on the return to the land after exile and that presents God as one who restores and renews his people. Psalm 107:1–3 begins part five by praising God for answering the prayer for return from exile offered in Ps 106:47. Then the remaining parts of the psalm, along with Ps 108–109 emphasize Yahweh’s unrelenting affection for all who trust him (cf. Ps 107:33–43; 108:11). Psalm 110 stresses that the Davidic covenant has not been set aside, and Pss 111–118 stress that the God who works on behalf of his people deserves wholehearted worship and loyalty at all times and in all circumstances. Such a call necessitates the centrality of both God’s Word (Ps 119) and Jerusalem in Israel’s life. It is this latter focus that drives the Songs of Ascent in Pss 120–134. The longest of these

² Some of the following notes are adapted from Daniel I. Block, “Studies in the Psalms: Diagrams and Notes” (classroom lecture notes, 20220—*Introduction to the Old Testament, pt. 2: Poetic and Prophetic Literature*, Spring 2003, photocopy).

songs, Ps 132 emphasizes the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to David that he would have a king on the throne of Jerusalem forever. Psalms 135–138 summarize God's work through creation and providence on behalf of his people, which leads to a series of requests for help in both spiritual and temporal matters (Pss 139–143). The Book ends with a bold proclamation of trust and praise to God from the redeemed remnant (Pss 145–150).

C. Two Interpretive Challenges

1. How are we to understand the switch from first person ("I, my") in vv. 1–2 to second person ("you, your") in vv. 3–8? This change could suggest that the poet raises the issue regarding the source of his aid in vv. 1–2, and then someone else affirms and expositis his answer in vv. 3–8. In the context of temple worship, antiphonal singing with solo and choir and/or congregation could have also played a part. Another option is that the psalmist is employing some form of dialogue, either exhorting an audience from the assurance he has in God (e.g., a priest challenging pilgrims en route back home; so Kraus, Allen) or reminding himself (i.e., internal dialogue) of God's promises of presence and protection (cf. e.g., Ps 27:14; Pss 42–43; so VanGemeren).
2. Does v. 1 really contain a question, or is the whole verse a declarative statement or plea?
 - a. Options:
 - i. *Question*: "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?"
Result: Positive view of the mountains as symbol of God's presence *or* Negative view of the mountains as agents of possible destruction.
 - ii. *Statement*: "I will lift my eyes to the hills, from where comes my help."
Result: Positive view of the mountains as symbol of God's presence.
 - iii. *Plea*: "May lift my eyes to the hills from where comes my help." Result: Positive view of the mountains as symbol of God's presence.
 - b. In the first option, the hills/mountains could be the very agents of anxiety, perhaps because mobs destined to hurt travelers could easily be hiding in the crags (cf. Luke 10:30). With this possibility, the look at the mountains creates fear and calls the poet to recall God's presence and power with him (so Kraus, Weiser, Anderson, Mowinkle, Gunkel).
 - c. It is also possible, and it seems more likely, that "the hills/mountains" are images of hope.
 - i. Mountains appear as a figurative way of referring to the deity who resides on the mountains, as in Baal at Mount Zaphon and Yahweh at Mount Zion (cf. Ps 48:1–3; 87:1–3; so Volz, Eissfeldt, Dahood, Briggs, Habel, Block). The psalmist's posture toward the hills is one of trust in Yahweh, his Guardian, whom the psalmist is confident will deliver.
 - ii. Further support is found in the immediate context. In Ps 123:1, the lifting of eyes is directly related to looking to Yahweh: "To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!" Similarly, in Ps 125:1–2, the hills/mountains are directly related to the abode of Yahweh: "Those who trust in Yahweh are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore."
 - d. It is difficult to determine whether v. 1 is part of the "Interior Lament (v. 1a) / Petition (v. 1b)" (option 1) or the "Vow to Praise" (option 2). It may also be an inner plea, for when the form of the verb translated "I lift up" is in first position, it often is rendered modally—thus, "may I lift up my eyes." In this way, the psalmist

would be in the act of preaching to himself, much like we find in Psalms 42–43 (see above).

- e. However, because v. 2's main units merely repeat those of v. 1b in reverse order, it seems v. 2 is likely answering a question raised in v. 1b. While the psalm's overall interpretation is not seriously affected either way, the rest of this study will progress on the assumption that the ESV has handled the text correctly.

D. Literary Observations

1. Switch from 1st person to 2nd person between vv. 2–3: (see above)
2. Repetition:
 - a. Key Words Occurring More than Once:
 - i. *‘ezrî* (“my help”): vv. 1b, 2a
 - ii. *šāmar* (“to keep, protect, guard”) 6x: vv. 3b, 4b, 5a, 7a, 7b, 8a
 - iii. The psalmist begins by expressing his need for help and confidence in the Yahweh as his helper. The repetition of the verb “to keep, protect, guard” suggests that the primary help the poet needs is protection, shone in keeping his feet sure as he travels (v. 3), sheltering him from the heat of the sun by day and the cool of the moon by night (v. 6), and guarding him from all forms of “evil” (v. 7).
 - iv. *ʾal- / ʾlō -yānûm* (“he does/will not slumber”): vv. 3b, 4a
 - b. Inclusio:
 - i. “come” (v. 1b) with “coming” (v. 8a)
 - ii. preposition “from” used twice in vv. 1–2 and twice in vv. 7–8
 - c. Chiasm: The Synthetic Parallelism by means of a Question–Answer between vv. 1b–2a also form an elliptical semantic chiasm.

From where	does my help	come?
A	B	C
B'	–	A'
My help	<i>comes</i>	from the LORD

While the verb is left out of the second line (as noted by the word *comes* in italics), the ABB'A' is clearly evident.

- d. References to God:
 - i. Yahweh is a name that grows out of God's special covenant relationship with his people (cf. Exod 3:13–15). His very name is a reminder of his active presence and power with them on their behalf. Yahweh is named 5 times in the psalm, and the first is in the poet's assertive response to his own question as to where his help would come from (v. 2a). This reference to Yahweh is immediately followed by a descriptive participle clause that describes God as the “Maker” of all things (v. 2b), a fact that naturally suggests that the psalmist's God is indeed able to meet his need. The remaining four instances of Yahweh's name are at the head of definitive proclamations of trust in God's protection (vv. 5a, 5b, 7a, 7b), proclamations that help detail who God is for the psalmist.
 - ii. The final two-thirds of the psalm provide an exposition of God's character as a “protector” of his people. The first three instances of the word *šāmar* (“to keep”) employ a participle form almost like it was a noun, standing as a title for God (i.e., he is my “Keeper”) (vv. 3b, 4b, 5a). The movement is from

particular to general to specific—i.e., Yahweh is “your Keeper” > Yahweh is the “Keeper of Israel” > Yahweh is “your Keeper.” The final three uses of *šāmar* are in the active imperfect verb form, “he will keep.” God’s identity as Creator in v. 2 thus leads to an exposition of God as protector in vv. 3–8.

- e. Complementary Word Pairs:
 - i. “heaven and earth” (v. 2b)
 - ii. “sun . . . and moon” (v. 6)
 - iii. “by day nor . . . by night” (v. 6)
 - iv. “your going out and your coming in” (v. 8a)
 - v. “from this time forth and forevermore” (v. 8b)
- f. Synonyms: “he will not slumber and he will not sleep” (v. 4)
- 3. Figures of Speech:
 - a. “The hills/mountains” (v. 1a): As noted, this phrase could represent an expression of hope, referring metaphorically to the deity who resides on the mountains, or it could actually stand as the source of the psalmist’s anxiety from which he needs help.
 - b. “Your shade” (v. 5b): a figure of protection from heat and/or cold
 - c. “To smite” (v. 6a): as the predicate for “sun” and “moon”
- 4. Ellipsis:
 - a. “Will not smite you” (v. 6b)
 - b. “The LORD” (v. 7b)

E. Type of Psalm. While difficult to define, Ps 121 seems to align best with the individual psalm of trust:

<i>Declaration of Trust</i>	v. 2a “My help comes from the LORD.”
<i>Invitation to Trust</i>	vv. 3–8 “He will not allow your foot to slip . . . [Therefore, trust him!]. He who keeps you will not slumber . . . [Therefore, trust him!]. . . .”
<i>Basis for Trust</i>	v. 2b “the LORD, who made heaven and earth”; v. 5 “The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade at your right hand.”
<i>Petition</i>	v. 1b(?) “From where does my help come?”
<i>Vow to Praise</i>	v. 1a(?) “I will lift my eyes to the mountains, from where my help comes.”
<i>Interior Lament</i>	v. 1(?), vv. 3–8

F. Synopsis with Exegetical Outline

1. The psalmist expresses his confidence in Yahweh as his helper and builds his confidence in God’s protection by rehearsing to himself the qualities of God’s faithfulness that he has grown to know are true. In its present context, the psalm links a conviction that the God he is going to worship with the community in Jerusalem is both willing and able to meet him in every one of life’s distresses, both now and forever more.

2. **Big Idea:** The psalmist wants his hearers to confidently celebrate Yahweh's guardianship of their lives.

<p>121.1 A song of ascents. b I will lift my eyes to the hills from where my help comes. 2 My help is from Yahweh, Maker of heaven and earth.</p> <p>3 He will not make to slip your foot; b Your Guardian will not slumber. 4 Look, he will not sleep, b And the Guardian of Israel will not slumber.</p> <p>5 Yahweh is your Guardian. b Yahweh is your shade on your right hand. 6 Day by day the sun will never smite you, nor the moon in the night.</p> <p>7 Yahweh will guard you from all evil; b He will guard your soul. 8 Yahweh will guard your going and your coming from now and unto eternity.</p>	<p>I. The Personal Celebration of Yahweh's Guardianship (vv. 1–2) A. The Posture of the Guarded (v. 1) B. The Confidence of the Guarded (v. 2)</p> <p>II. The Assurance to Others of Yahweh's Guardianship (vv. 3–8) A. The Nature of Yahweh's Guardianship Declared (vv. 3–4) 1. The Ensurer of Our Perseverance (v. 3a) 2. The Constant Watcher of His Own (vv. 3b–4) B. The Nature of Yahweh's Guardianship Expounded (vv. 5–8) 1. His Identity: The Ever-Present Defender (vv. 5–6) 2. His Actions: a. The Life-Preserver (v. 7) b. The Lasting Protector (v. 8)</p>
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G. Theological Context

1. In contrast to the gods of the ancient world that slept and were thus not always available to help individuals in need (cf. "Prayer to the God's of the Night" and 1 Kgs 18:27), Yahweh is always awake, always aware, and always watching out for his children (cf. Gen 26:3; Josh 1:5; Isa 43:2; Ps 91:11–12; Matt 28:20).
2. In contrast to the pagans of the ancient world who served gods that neither revealed their will nor promised their help at any hour of need, Yahweh has done both for his people (cf. Deut 4:5–8).
3. The God who created the heavens and the earth has, on his own accord and out of his own love and faithfulness, become Israel's God, promising lasting provision and protection for all who will trust in him (cf. Deut 4:31–40; 28:1–14). Indeed, all comings and goings will know God's blessing (cf. Deut 28:6).
4. These theological truths help ground the psalmist confidence in Yahweh as his Guardian. But they must be balanced with the clear teaching of the Scriptures that bad things do happen to God's people, who still need to be refined; suffering is to be expected to test and develop faith (Gen 22:1; Exod 20:20; Deut 8:2; Rom 5:3–5; Jas 1:2–4). The comfort in such trials comes in knowing that God is present and working out a plan in which we are a part.

H. Theological and Practical Lessons

1. The help for God's people comes not from Baal on Mount Zaphon but from Yahweh, who dwells in Zion.
2. Yahweh is the protector of his people and is both able and willing to meet them when they look to him for help.
3. There are no limitations to the confidence one should / may have in God because:
 - a. He is the Creator of heaven and earth.
 - b. He never sleeps but is always intent on protecting his children.
 - c. He is there day and night.

- d. He protects from “all danger / disaster.”
 - e. He guards all the activities of his children.
 - f. He will be present from now until forever.
4. In view of the above, we can approach life’s journey in general and communal worship in particular with confidence, trust, and peace.

YAHWEH OUR GUARDIAN, OUR HELP: A SERMON ON PSALM 121

Rev. Dr. Jason S. DeRouchie
BCS Chapel, September 29, 2011

Introduction

Like an ever-replenished bottle of water in a dry desert are the promises of God to a parched soul. With the psalmist in Ps. 119:50, we declare, “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.” This world we live in is full of beauty, but it is also twisted, frustrated, and broken. As the Preacher said in Ecclesiastes 7:13, “Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked.”

For many of you, the start of this school year has already witnessed mouthfuls of the curse. Cancer finally takes away the body but is unable to destroy the soul of a 14 year old brother and friend; an unexpected joyous pregnancy is tempered by the questions about the future and the guilt such questions create; sustained discouragement continues to rob your sense of satisfaction in God and his Word; the inability to find a long-term job; Moms and Dads with marital strife; friends attempting suicide; drug and sexual addictions; miscarriage; the lack of knowledge in how to care for your lonely wife; struggles to know where you fit in this school; unfulfilled longings for a partner with whom you could spend your life and service—all this plus assignments, ministry obligations, job interviews, roommate conflicts, relational tensions, and the list goes on. By day and by night we are loaded with burdens. We come and we go, yet they stay with us. We sit here today with something in our soul that longs for release, for comfort, for help.

In Psalm 121, the psalmist opens with this expression of trust: “Let me lift my eyes to the hills from where my help comes.” He calls himself, he challenges himself to look up to the mountains. To look up means one thing.... He is down. But his relief, his comfort, his help is to be found upward ... where the Maker of heaven and earth resides.

As many of you know, this last year was full of trial in the DeRouchie home, as we pursued one boy for adoption only to have his case fail and then were matched with another boy only to have his case come under extended investigation. Perhaps in no greater way have I ever tasted the depth of the curse on this world—so much paperwork and injustice; so many sleepless nights, filled with prayer and tears; so much identification of my own fleshliness; so much waiting and longing; so many phone calls and unanswered pleas. As the weeks of unknown turned to months, and as every bit of my own strength became increasingly inadequate, God proved himself faithful and strong and sustaining. When I feared such pressure might break the faith of my wife and children, God proved his worth and trustworthiness. I grasped hard to God’s words of command and promise, pleading for help and timely grace. One of the gifts of this period was poetry, and to set the context for our meditation on Psalm 121, I want to read some for you today. You should know that on January 7 of this year, God let us bring home our three year old son from Ethiopia. The name Ezra is short for Azariah, which means, “Yahweh is my help.

“Mercies at Dawn”

How bright the light we once remember,
The desire of a new day.
How confident the gates of splendor
Will come for those who wait.

Dark is the night when trust is tried;
Long hours of heightened desire
Will culminate in glorious sight
Of him we call our treasure.

Aching hearts to bring home our boy;
Our love grows ever deeper.
Through this sea, all for our joy,
The reunion will be the sweeter.

“Yahweh, my helper”—this his name,
Our God faithful will be.
He, our rock, never to shame
Those he died to redeem.

Not by sight but by faith,
Through this valley of pain.
But God is present and keeps us safe,
His Word, more than bread, sustains.

Awakened in darkness amidst the night,
From our heart comes a song.
Our faith is fueled, our God is praised,
And more mercies come at dawn.

—Jason S. DeRouchie (11/24/2010)

“For Those Who Wait”

Nothing can hinder Yahweh’s saving;
He acts for those who wait.
No purpose thwarted, his counsel stands;
His timing never late.

What comfort is the bigness of God,
Who holds man’s hearts in hand.
Our future secure, every promise “Yes”;
In Christ alone we stand.

His children come asking for bread,
 He never gives a snake.
 In our weakness, his strength is fed.
 He acts for those who wait.

Our God who knows the stars by name,
 Helps our hearts believe
 He clothes the lily and feeds the sparrow,
 And will meet our every need.

Christ is near, a present help
 For all he died to save.
 What tomorrow requires is ever secure
 In light of what he paid.

We rest today without all answers,
 As God removes the dross—
 Identifying with Christ in suffering,
 Upheld while under a cross.

He will complete the work begun;
 We wait for the Faithful and True,
 Who now gives glimpses in the Son
 Of the day when all will be new.

— Jason S. DeRouchie (11/26/2010)

With these words of testimony and hope, let us now turn to Psalm 121. It is the second of 15 psalms tagged the “Songs of Ascent” (Pss. 120–134), which likely were sung during the festival processions of the three annual feasts (Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles), as the pilgrims ascended the southern and central hill country to Jerusalem (cf. Exod. 23:14–17; Deut. 16:16). Balancing the focus in Psalm 119 on God’s Word as a key to life, these psalms address the hope of God’s reigning presence amidst adversity.

Psalm 121 is broken into two sections. Verses 1–2 mark “The Personal Celebration of Yahweh’s Guardianship,” whereas vv. 3–8 provide “The Assurance to Others of Yahweh’s Guardianship.” The psalmist wants his hearers to confidently celebrate with him the keeping role of God.

The Personal Celebration of Yahweh’s Guardianship (vv. 1–2)

The Posture of the Guarded (v. 1)

Verse 1 speaks of the necessary posture of those who enjoy Yahweh’s guardianship—they look up to their source of help. The reading of the ESV could lead one to see the hills as the cause of the psalmist’s travail. As he steps out on his journey, any number of dangers could be lurking around the corners of the paths ahead of him. I believe a more favorable interpretation, however, is that the hills represent the place of Yahweh’s abode, where he reigns over all things on behalf of his people. Look with me at Psalm 123:1: “To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens.” And in Psalm 125:1–2: “Those who trust in Yahweh are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides

forever. As the mountains (i.e., *hills*) surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.” In Psalm 121, the believer calls himself to look up to his source of help—“Let me lift my eyes to the hills from where my help comes.” This is the proper posture of all who enjoy Yahweh’s guardianship—look upward today...past the pain, past the trial, through the lingering shadows to the One who remains seated on the throne of grace, untainted by sin and its results and unswerving in his commitment to bestow mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16)!

The Confidence of the Guarded (v. 2)

Whereas verse 1 addresses “the posture of the guarded,” verse 2 focuses on “his confidence.” There is no sense of self-reliance in this text. Instead, the psalmist is radically God-dependent.

References to God dominate this psalm. In verse 2, he is “the Maker” of all things visible and invisible—thrones and dominions, rulers and authorities—all things created through him and for him (cf. Col. 1:16). Because he is the Maker, we can be confident that he is able to preserve, provide, and protect us. In verses 3–5, he is “the Guardian” or in the ESV “your Keeper,” “Israel’s Keeper,” and “your Keeper”—ever present, always watching, constantly for us and never against us (cf. Rom. 8:31–32). Then five times he is given his proper name Yahweh (the LORD in the ESV), the form of which is related to the causative verb of being and therefore stands as an eternal memorial to the fact that God is the One writing our story, the author and perfecter of our faith—Yahweh, the causer of all, who is therefore unthwarted by the darkness reeking havoc on your soul (Exod. 3:14). As David proclaimed, “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you” (Ps. 139:11–12).

Verse 2 points to the great confidence known by all who are guarded by God. Regardless of your own challenge or sea of pain, I call you to declare with the psalmist—even now, preach it to yourself: “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (cf. Ps. 124:8).

The Assurance to Others of Yahweh’s Guardianship (vv. 3–8)

In vv. 3–8, a shift takes place from a declaration that Yahweh is the psalmist’s help to a hopeful pledge of his Guardianship of others. Personal celebration gives rise to statement of assurance: “My help is from Yahweh... He will not let *your* foot be moved; he who keeps *you* will not slumber.” In the context of temple worship, we could have had antiphonal singing, where the psalmist spoke on his own behalf in vv. 1–2 and a choir/congregation affirmed or expounded on his statements in vv. 3–8. It is also possible that here, as in Psalms 42–43, the psalmist in vv. 3–8 is talking to himself. “Why are you cast down, O my soul? ... Hope in God” (Ps. 42:5). And here: “Self, Yahweh is your Guardian; Yahweh is your shade.”

While possible, within the context of these psalms of ascent, it seems most likely that the psalmist himself recalls the Lord’s faithfulness to him in times of trouble and then assures another who may soon experience adversity that God is indeed a great Provider and Protector. The images of looking up to the hills, the need for sure footing, exposure to the elements by day and night, coming and going may all point to a father exhorting a son prior to their pilgrimage or to a shepherd who has made his way to Jerusalem and is now exhorting a fellow pilgrim en route back home.

Regardless, the psalmist’s confidence in God is sure. The Maker of heaven and earth “will not let your foot be moved; your Guardian will not slumber” (v. 3).

The Nature of Yahweh's Guardianship Declared (vv. 3–4)

Under the heading “The Assurance to Others of Yahweh’s Guardianship” in verses 3–8, verses 3–4 “Declare the Nature of Yahweh’s Guardianship.” I was surprised to find that the word combination that depicts the stumbling step in verse 3 is never used in Scripture of physical falling; rather all four of its other occurrences use it figuratively for someone who is or anticipated being overcome by divine judgment (Deut. 32:35), personal sin or weakness (Ps. 38:16[17]), or enemy oppression (66:9; 94:18). When the psalmist declared, therefore, “He will not allow your foot to slip,” he was most likely speaking of the perseverance of the saints. He is not promising the absence of pain or even failure. But he is promising that, amidst seas of adversity, the elect will remain upheld, not because of their own doing but because of the preserving hand of God. As Jesus declared in John 10:27–28, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Or in Paul’s words from Romans 8:33–34: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

Do not put your hope today in yourself, for were it not for God, you would surely slip. But because of his mercy, our faith will remain. As asserted in Psalm 94:16–18: “Who stands up for me against evil doers? If Yahweh had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence. When I thought, ‘My foot slips,’ your steadfast love, O Yahweh, held me up.” It is the steadfast love of Yahweh that sustains. It never ceases but is ever fresh morning by morning (Lam. 3:22–23). The sure confidence we have today that we will remain with God tomorrow is God himself. Thank him. Remain dependent on him, and plead for his sustaining grace.

Not only does Yahweh’s Guardianship mean he is the one who ensures our perseverance (v. 3a), but it also means he is constantly watching over our souls (vv. 3b–4). The Hebrew of verse 4 suggests a development from what precedes. Whereas verse 3 suggests “your Guardian” will not slumber now, verse 4 stresses “Israel’s Guardian” will *never* slumber or sleep. Psalm 127:2 tells us that God “gives to his beloved sleep,” and we are able to rest only because we know God never does. “Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary” (Isa. 40:28). Remember how the prophets of Elijah’s day could not arouse Baal to act on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:27; cf. “Prayer to the God’s of the Night”). Not so with Yahweh. He is always awake, always aware, and always watching over his children, including the adopted ones.

As Jesus declared in John 10:16, 28: “I have other sheep that are not of this fold.... They will never perish.” Or God spoke through Isaiah: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am Yahweh your God” (Isa. 43:2–3). Though you die, yet shall you live (John 11:25). “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.... And lo, I am with you always to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Whether your sleepless nights are filled with tears and prayers, diaper changing, or paper writing, God is with you with all the energy and grace you need. Don’t forget him. Look to him at any hour—in the light or in the night. Yahweh’s Guardianship means that he ensures our perseverance and that he constantly watches over his own.

The Nature of Yahweh's Guardianship Expounded (vv. 5–8)

In verses 5–8 “the nature of Yahweh’s Guardianship is expounded.” Verses 5–6 speak of his identity, and verses 7–8 address his activity.

First, his identity. God is “the ever-present defender of his own.” Verse 5 begins with the declaration, “Yahweh is your keeper, your Guardian.” Just as God is “the Maker of heaven and earth” and can therefore care for you (v. 2), so too he is “Israel’s Guardian” (v. 4), and with that, “your Guardian” (v. 5). The psalmist then unpacks this watchful role (vv. 5b–6): “Yahweh is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.” Hear this: the Lord is at your side, and come what may in the light or in the night, he is your protector, your shade. This cannot be viewed as a promise for a trial-free life. Indeed, the psalmist has proclaimed his need for a Helper. But he knows that his God is for him, a true Guardian ensuring his perseverance and not allowing him to be overcome. “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8–9). “The LORD is your shade on your right hand” (Ps. 121:6); don’t fear!

As for God’s actions, he *guards* his own perfectly. In verse 7 he is a life-preserver and in verse 8, a lasting protector. “Yahweh will keep you from all evil; he will keep your soul” (v. 7). We pray, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13). Jesus prays, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). So Paul promises, “the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (2 Thess. 3:3). He may assault. Indeed, you may enter into direct combat, wrestling “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12). But as you take up the full armor of God, you rest knowing the One for you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4; cf. Rom. 8:31) and that Christ our Redeemer is now seated at the Father’s right hand, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:21). As God’s own, you rest secure, for even if you die, yet shall you live (John 11:25).

Along with being a life-preserver, our Guardian is our “lasting protector” (v. 8). Through all life’s journey, in your coming and your going, both now and unto an eternity of tomorrows, Yahweh will keep you. “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39). “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from Yahweh, and my right is disregarded by my God’? Have you not known? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength” (Isa. 40:27–29). “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (41:10).

“Remember my affliction and my wanderings...! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of Yahweh never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘Yahweh is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him’” (Lam. 3:19–24). “My help comes from Yahweh, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:2).

Take heart today. Proclaim to yourself what is true: the LORD is with you, a present and faithful Guardian. Like an ever-replenished bottle of water in a dry desert are the promises of God to a parched soul.

In closing, toward the end of my family’s journey of waiting and wondering, I wrote these words.

“Basking in the Rising of the Son”

The sun breaks and beauty appears,
A daily reminder that all our fears
Of dread are passed, though pain persists—
The toil, the sorrow, a persistent mist
That will be burned away in course of time,
A hopeful rest when full glow shines.

The light of dawn is only agreeable
Because the light of noon is foreseeable.
If no hope existed for a brighter light,
Sustained shadows would be lingering night.
Yet darkness is passing; the true light glows—
A brightening sky overcoming sorrows.

The dawn of immortality is the life we tread,
A life of grace because Christ bled
Taking wrath we all deserve—
A gift of love to preserve
A people for himself into the age to come—
The curse abolished in the rise of the Son.

—Jason S. DeRouchie (3/3/2011)