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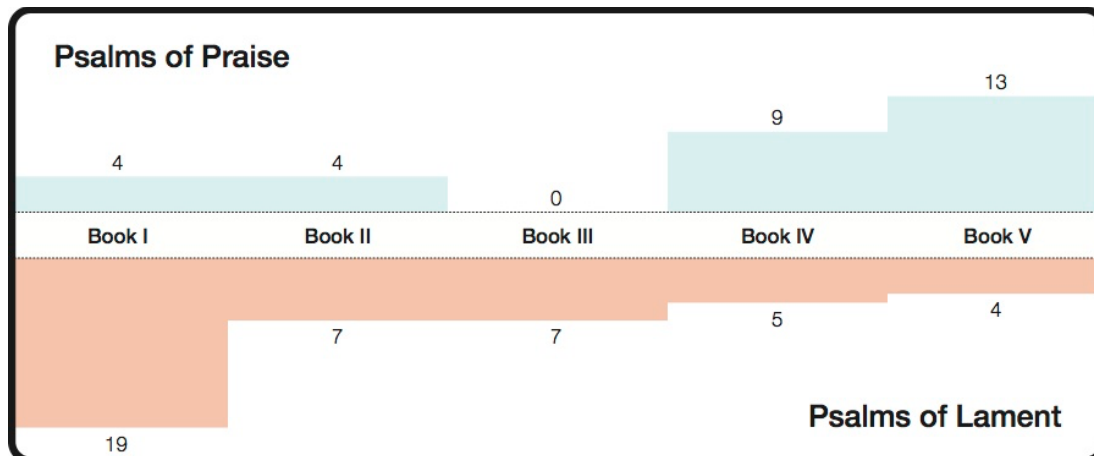
## **VI. The Canonical Approach**

### **A. General Features That All Interpreters Affirm**

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. Intriguingly, Ps 45:6[7] tags the anointed king "God," which invites the interpreter to read other occurrences of *Elohim* as a joint reference to Yahweh and his God-man king.

- (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. Many 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. He does not discuss all the “seam” psalms.
  - c. There are solid reasons to question his view that Yahweh’s kingship replaces the hopes of the Davidic covenant. I suggest that the end of the Psalter finds both Yahweh and his anointed reigning side-by-side just as Psalm 2 portrays.

**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, the superscript assumes David is already on the throne, running from Absalom. I wonder if a more general category of “kingdom in crisis” fits this section. Furthermore, Walton simply assumes that the body of the psalms provide *first* the prayers of the earthly Israelite king *for himself* rather than predictively of the Christ.
  - b. Book 2: David’s kingship (Pss. 42–72)
    - i. *Seam*: Psalm 72, a psalm of Solomon, is a blessing on the king, 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 that appear to be 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*: We could read Book 2 as a testament of David’s rise and enthronement that grows out of suffering. However, we can also read it as predictive of Christ’s triumph out of suffering, and both the OT prophets and NT read this section this way. It is noteworthy that the portrait of the king in Psalm 72 far exceeds either David or Solomon.

- 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 could suggest we should see Book 3 as focusing on the division, rebellion, and separation from the Davidic ideal. However, to focus only on the Assyrian crisis in the title seems too restricted. Furthermore, recently many scholars have identified not only how Ps 89 addresses the failure of the Davidic covenant but also emphasizes its hope.
- 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. Again, the sense of exile and need for Davidic covenant fulfillment fits well a period without a king on the throne. Intriguingly, David already placed these longings in the mouth of the king, who cried out to God for relief from the midst of exile (Ps 14:7; 1 Chr 16:35–36//Ps 106:47–48).
- 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 re-gathered the Israelites from the nations (107:1–3), potentially suggesting reflection from the period of initial restoration. 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. The period of initial restoration only pointed ahead to a

more ultimate restoration (reconciliation with God) associated with the coming of the Christ.

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 Walton does not address many psalms.
  - c. Walton highlight’s the main message of the Psalter to be Yahweh’s reign, faithfulness, and worth, which he accomplishes ultimately through his Davidic royal son. I propose the following tweaks to his “main message”:
    - i. God reigns supreme over Israel and the nations.
    - ii. God reigns through his earthly Davidic king, whose global reign and influence is established only through great suffering.
    - iii. God is both just and faithful to his Davidic king and to all finding refuge in him.
    - iv. God is worthy of praise and receptive to the petitions and laments of the royal righteous one and the righteous ones identified with him.

**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 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 focuses each section on God rather than on David or Israel, but he downplays 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 center 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*) and focusing on the blessed state of God's Son, the Christ, who walks in God's word and of all the righteous who find refuge in him. 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, but I question the idea that the canonizers intended us to read an overview of Israel's history in the whole. Rather, I think that the "story" focuses on the hope of the Davidic kingdom promises and the anointed one whose suffering would lead to his triumph and to the suffering and triumph of those finding refuge in him. Wilson and Walton's use of the "seam" psalms appears forced, but they are correct in seeing a redemptive historical trajectory in the whole. House's more general, Yahweh-focused approach is helpful, but it also fails to account for the messianic dimensions that are clear from the very beginning.

- a. *Book 1* (Pss 1–41): At stake here is the kingdom in crisis or under threat. The focus is *not* on David's throne but on that of his future offspring, who would be regarded the Son of God. Nearly all the psalms are Davidic and therefore draw attention to the hope of this coming one, whose kingdom God would establish only through the suffering of his Anointed/Christ. David at times prays for this king (e.g., Pss 14, 20, 21) and other times predictively speaks his very words out of the midst of pain (e.g., Ps 22) or in light of deliverance (e.g., Ps 23).
  - b. *Book 2* (Pss 42–72): Within this section focus remains fixed on the kingship of the Christ in his journey through tribulation unto triumph. Almost all the psalms are Davidic, and they give added attention to Jerusalem and to the Anointed one's kingship.
  - c. *Book 3* (Pss 73–89): Psalms lament the disgraceful, broken state of the Davidic dynasty, while also reminding the reader of the Davidic kingdom promises. Almost no psalms are Davidic.
  - d. *Book 4* (Pss 90–106): These psalms address the devastation of exile, the need for covenant faithfulness (as echoed in the lives of Moses and David), the sovereign reign of Yahweh, and the hope his past forgiveness gives for the fulfillment of the kingdom promises. Again, almost no psalms are Davidic.
  - e. *Book 5* (Pss 107–150): The psalter ends with renewed focus on God's Word and worship in Jerusalem, on God's promises to David, and with great praise, all in light of God's sustained kingdom work. The increased number of Davidic psalms heighten hope for the fulfillment of the messianic promises.
3. The Psalter provides the prayers of the Christ and the songs of the saved. It overviews the anointed one's journey of suffering and exaltation, and it guides the laments, thanksgivings, and praises of all who find refuge in him. The Psalms give a Godward voice in periods of battling and doubting, succeeding and rejoicing, wavering and running, being disciplined and longing, being restored and praising.
  4. The conclusion at the end of Psalm 72 suggests that books one and two were a Psalter before the completion of the whole. The whole could have come about progressively as the Davidic kingdom hope rose and fell with Israel's own history. Some individual(s) in the post-exilic period, living without a king but in light of the kingdom promises, finalized the whole as a messianic song book.

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

<b>Book 1</b>	Pss 1	<b><i>Walking with the Messiah</i></b> (Kingdom Wisdom)	Introduction
	Pss 2	<b><i>Waiting in the Messiah</i></b> (Kingdom Eschatology)	
	Pss 3–41	Yahweh instructs, elects, and delivers his Christ and his people [Doxology: 41:13] (Kingdom crisis; almost all Davidic; many individual laments and most mention enemies)	Body
<b>Book 2</b>	Pss 42–72	Yahweh establishes his Christ 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)	
<b>Book 3</b>	Pss 73–89	Yahweh rebukes, disciplines, and gives kingdom-hope to his people [Doxology: 89:52] (Kingdom hope in the midst of loss and rebellion; almost no Davidic; Asaph and Sons of Korah collections; key psalm: 78)	
<b>Book 4</b>	Pss 90–106	Yahweh remembers his people and sustains the faithful [Doxology: 106:48] (Kingdom hope in the midst of initial restoration; almost no Davidic; praise collections: 95–100; key psalms: 90, 103–105)	

<b>Book 5</b>	Pss 107–145	Yahweh restores and renews by fulfilling his kingdom promises [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	<b>Worshipping on account of the Messiah</b> (Kingdom Praise)	Conclusion

## VII. The Portrait of the Anointed King (= Christ) in the Psalms

**A. An Overview:** Royal psalms display a portrait of an unparalleled coming deliverer (Pss 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144).<sup>5</sup> When taken together, the image the psalms display is far greater than any earthly king of the OT age. As such, I believe it best to read the royal psalms as *direct* (as opposed to typological) foretellings of the Messiah Jesus, some of which express his own words and some of which express the words of those finding refuge in him.

1. He is not simply God's "son" (89:27[H28]) but his "begotten" son (2:7), who belongs to YHWH (89:18[H19]) and remains ever devoted to him (18:20–24[H21–25]; 21:1, 7[H2, 8]; cf. 63:1–8, 11[H2–9, 12]); he is seated at God's right hand (110:1) and is himself tagged both "God" (45:6[H7]) and David's "Lord" (110:1); he will experience joy in God's presence forever (21:6[H7]; cf. 16:11).
2. He will receive YHWH's everlasting blessing (21:6[H7]; 45:2[H3]; cf. 72:17), fulfill the Davidic covenant promises (89:28–37[H29–38]; 132:11–12, 17–18), and be the heir of both the nations (2:8) and the Melchizedekian priesthood (110:1–4).
3. The nations and peoples of the earth stand against him (2:1–3; 110:2), but he will, through tribulation unto triumph (18:37–50[H38–51]; 20:1–9[H2–10]; 21:1, 4[H2, 5]; 144:7–8, 11), overcome all of them (45:3–5[H4–6]; 89:22–23[89:23–24]; 110:1, 5–7; 132:18), and declare God's praises among them (18:49[H50]).
4. By YHWH's act (2:6, 8; 18:31–36, 43, 46–50[H32–37, 44, 47–51]; 21:1–13[H2–14]; 110:1–2; 132:17–18), he will establish global rule (2:8–12; 45:17[H18]; 72:8–11; 89:25[H26]; 110:5–6; 132:18) based in Zion (2:6; 110:2; 132:13, 17).
5. He will reign forever (21:4[H5]; 45:6[H7]; 72:5) in peace (72:7) and fruitfulness (72:3, 16), and he will rule in righteousness and justice (45:4, 6–7[H5, 7–8]; 72:2–3; 101:1–8), which will include befriending the poor and defeating the oppressor (72:2, 4, 12–14).
6. Those finding refuge in him will be blessed (2:12; 72:17; 144:15), and under his rule, they will flourish (72:7) and enjoy abundance (72:3; 144:13–15), being both prosperous (72:3) and fruitful (72:16; 144:12).
7. He will possess an everlasting name (72:17), be preeminent among men (45:2, 7[H3, 8]), and stand as the object of unending thanks (72:15).
8. He is Yahweh's son (2:7; 89:27), seated at his right hand (110:1) and is himself divine (45:6).

### B. The Anointed One as All-Conquering King

1. Royal Psalms:
  - a. Psalm 2:
    - i. 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.

<sup>5</sup> Some of this synthesis is adapted from J. Alec Motyer, "Messiah[OT]," in NBD, 2:989.

- ii. Most likely, therefore, Psalm 2 appears to speak in a direct prophetic way about the ultimate, earthly, royal deliver through whom Yahweh would establish global justice and peace.
  - iii. 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 by emphasizing his victory and clarifying the means by which he will attain it—great persecution and suffering.
- b. As noted above, the royal psalms like 2, 45, 72, 110 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." <sup>8</sup> 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; <sup>7</sup> 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! . . . <sup>7</sup> In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more! <sup>8</sup> May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! . . . <sup>11</sup> May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him! . . . <sup>17</sup> 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." . . . <sup>4</sup> The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."
- c. David was a prophet, who wrote about the Christ.
- i. In Acts 2:30–31, Peter declared, "Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, [David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption." Later he asserted that "*all* the prophets" foretold that God's "Christ would suffer" followed by days of salvation (Acts 3:18, 23; cf. 10:43).
  - ii. 2 Samuel 23 points in this same direction when it records "the last words of David" (23:1), directly following 2 Sam 22, v. 50 of which is cited in Rom 15:9 and applied to Christ.
    - (1) The ESV of 2 Sam 23:1 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." The phrase "the oracle of the man" occurs in only two other places in the OT, both of which introduce messianic oracles: (a) Balaam's oracle about the future king who would strike Gog (Agag) and whose kingdom would be exalted (Num 24:3) and (b) Agur's oracle regarding the one who is the source of all wisdom and who has a special, all-wise "son" (Prov 30:1, 4).
    - (2) Where the ESV/Hebrew MT read 2 Sam 23:1 as "the oracle of the man who *was raised on high, the anointed* of the God of Jacob," the LXX reads differently. Where the Hebrew text has "on high," the LXX has *epi* "concerning," which follows an equally valid reading of the Hebrew text without any change to the consonants (though with different vowel

points). 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.” If we read the LXX this way, the translator is viewing David’s 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.

- (3) Regardless of the reading of 23:1, the oracle in David’s “last words” clearly points forward beyond David himself to an expected deliverer whom God foretold in the covenant he made with David (v. 5). This one would rule justly over men in the fear of God and bring with him the dawn of new creation (vv. 3b–4). He would overcome the one of worthlessness who brings with him those who are cursed, and he would do so with a spear of iron (vv. 6–7; cf. Ps 2:9). David’s hope is in this one, whose identity grows out of the covenant God made with him (v. 5). The images of light and the sprouting of new creation (v. 4) and the destruction of thorns (v. 6) with a rod of iron (v. 7) are all associated elsewhere with the promised royal deliverer (Gen 3:15, 18; Num 24:6–7, 17; Ps 2:8–9; Rev 19:15; 22:1–2, 16).
- d. The biblical song writers were “prophets.”
  - i. Jesus associates “kings” with the prophets who longed to see Jesus’ day. Peter also explicitly declared that David was a “prophet” who understood that he was predicting truths about the Christ that were not true of himself. Because Peter stresses how David’s body did see corruption, he is clearly not reading 16:10–11 typologically (double-fulfillment) but is rather reading it as *direct* prophecy of Christ’s resurrection.
    - Matt 13:17. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.
    - Luke 10:24. For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.
    - Acts 2:30–31. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on this throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.
  - ii. Peter and Paul affirmed that *all* the prophets foresaw the Christ’s suffering and the glories that would follow.
    - Acts 3:18. But what God foretold by the mouth of *all* the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.
    - Acts 3:22–24. Moses said, “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.”<sup>23</sup> And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.”<sup>24</sup> And *all* the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.
    - Acts 10:43. To him *all* the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.
    - 1 Pet 1:10–12. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully,<sup>11</sup> inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.<sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those

who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

- iii. The Psalms are part of the Scripture that predicted Christ's coming.
  - Luke 24:44–47. 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.”<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
- iv. The other song writers of the Psalter were “seers” whose “prophesied” words became the praises of Israel.
  - (1) 1 Chr 25:1–5. David and the chiefs of the service also set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, *who prophesied* with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals. The list of those who did the work and of their duties was:<sup>2</sup> Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah, sons of Asaph, under the direction of Asaph, *who prophesied* under the direction of the king.<sup>3</sup> Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the direction of their father Jeduthun, *who prophesied* with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the LORD.<sup>4</sup> Of Heman, the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel and Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, and Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, Mahazioth.<sup>5</sup> All these were the sons of Heman *the king's seer*, according to the promise of God to exalt him, for God had given Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.
  - (2) 2 Chr 29:30. And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph *the seer*. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped.
  - (3) 2 Chr 35:15. The singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their place according to the command of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun *the king's seer*; and the gatekeepers were at each gate. They did not need to depart from their service, for their brothers the Levites prepared for them.
- e. Later biblical authors interpret the royal psalms messianically.
  - i. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah all read the Psalms as anticipating the anointed eschatological ruler/deliverer.
    - (1) Isa 55:3 may draw on Ps 89:28[29] when stressing how God will keep his faithfulness to David.
      - Ps 89:28[29]. My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.
      - Isa 55:3. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, *my steadfast, sure love for David*.
    - (2) Jer 33:20–21 affirms Ps 89:35–37[36–38] in stressing that the royal offspring's eternal throne is as certain the sun.
      - Ps 89:35–37[36–38]. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.<sup>36</sup> His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.<sup>37</sup> Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.” *Selah*
      - Jer 33:20–22. Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time,<sup>21</sup> then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers.<sup>22</sup> As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.
    - (3) Most explicit is Zechariah, who—while writing in an age without any Israelite king—applied a messianic reading to Ps 72:8, viewing it as anticipating a future ruler.

- Ps 72:8. May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!
  - Zech 9:9–10. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; *his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*
- ii. Paul and the author of Hebrews applied Psalm 2 to Christ.
- Acts 4:24–28. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’—<sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.
  - 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. <sup>9</sup> “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: “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “*The son of David.*” He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET”’? “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” 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, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.’” 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; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 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, who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested *of Him*, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.” For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (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. And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath (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’”); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

## 2. 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. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. 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: ‘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. 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. . . .<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.” <sup>13</sup> For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: <sup>14</sup> “This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. <sup>15</sup> I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread. <sup>16</sup> Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy. <sup>17</sup> There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. <sup>18</sup> His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine.”

## 3. 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.

### C. The Anointed One as Suffering Servant

1. The Psalms present us two distinct portraits of the Davidic Anointed One, the first as *all-conquering king* (see above) and the second as *innocent sufferer*. Significantly, the royal psalms identify that the path to the Messiah's triumph is tribulation (e.g., 18:37–50[H38–51]; 20:1–9[H2–10]; 21:1, 4[H2, 5]; 144:7–8, 11), and because most of the laments portrays the anointed king in the midst of deep suffering, one can legitimately assume that the king of the laments is the *same* king of the royal psalms—that is, he is the one greater than David who would rule all the world. From this perspective, we may legitimately read the *whole* Psalter as a direct prophetic expression of the Messiah's suffering and sovereignty portrayed through both his words and the words of those finding refuge in him.
  - 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 problems 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 still address similar troubles, wherein a righteous man appeals for help to gain respite from enemies. Some 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 17:1–7: "Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit! From your presence let my vindication come! Let your eyes behold the right! You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words. Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.
    - 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]).

- Psalm 26:1–12: “Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trust in the LORD without wavering. Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness. I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O LORD, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds. O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.”
- 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 directly 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 blessed man of Psalm 1 is none other than the royal Son, against whom the nations rage: “Blessed is the man ... [and] blessed are those who find refuge in him” (Pss 1:1; 2:12). The introduction to the Psalter, therefore, calls us to read the two portraits of the royal Son in relation to one another. Significantly, the NT views the hostility of the nations and peoples against God (Ps. 2:1–2) as climaxing at Christ’s death on the cross (Acts 4:25–28), and it views the moment when God’s royal Son becomes “begotten” (Ps. 2:7) as the moment of his resurrection (Acts 13:32–33).
  3. Because the Psalm titles make 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]), the editors appear to be 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 messianically, pointing to the more ultimate David—Jesus Christ (e.g., Pss 3, 7, 9, 13, 18).
  4. When the portrait of the innocent sufferer is read as direct prophetic prediction pointing to the Messiah, we gain more pillars (along with texts like Isaiah 53) that clarify the NT’s teaching that the Son of David only inherits his kingdom by walking a 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.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 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: 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.
  5. The juxtaposition of the exalted Christ in Psalm 2 with the persecuted Christ in Psalms 3 and beyond can easily be seen to teach that the Christ 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.

### D. Some Sample Journey's into Reading the Psalms as Direct Messianic Prophecy

1. Psalm 110 as direct prophecy of Jesus Christ's exaltation, with its implications.
  - a. NT authors regularly identify Jesus Christ as the "Lord" of Psalm 110, which opens, "A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" The way the NT authors use this text identifies it as *direct* prophecy rather than typological.
  - b. Of this text, Jesus queried, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son?"<sup>42</sup> For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,<sup>43</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.'<sup>44</sup> David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?" (Luke 20:41–44; cf. Matt 22:42–45; Mark 12:35–37). Here Jesus identifies the psalmist as David but notes that he speaks of another who is his superior and who would sit at the right hand of Yahweh. Jesus identifies that *he* is this figure.
  - c. Similarly, after noting that David himself died and that his body was buried and deteriorated, Peter highlights that David also did *not* ascend to God's right hand but that Jesus did: "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.'<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:34–36). Peter thus identifies the "Lord" of Psalm 110 as directly referring to Jesus.
  - d. Multiple times the author of Hebrews also cites this psalm and applies it directly to Christ.
    - Heb 1:13. And 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 7:21. But this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" (Cf. 5:6; 7:17.)
  - e. Significantly, Psalm 109 is a "psalm of David" that includes many statements that appear to prepare us for the exaltation of David's "Lord" in Psalm 110.
    - i. For example:
      - Ps 109:3. They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. *Note*: Jesus cites this text to clarify that those standing against him were merely "fulfilling" what the Scripture predicted (John 15:25).
      - Ps 109:6–8. Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.<sup>7</sup> When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin!<sup>8</sup> May his days be few; may another take his office! *Note*: The disciples cite this text as a ground for replacing Judas as apostle after his betrayal of Jesus (Acts 1:20).
      - Ps 109:24–25. My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt, with no fat.<sup>25</sup> I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads. *Note*: Matthew alludes to this text (and Ps 22:7[8]) when he refers to those mocking Christ at his crucifixion (Matt 27:39).
    - ii. Read canonically, Ps 109 ends by echoing Ps 16 and 22 and by setting us up for the exaltation in Psalm 110. The suffering "servant," who is shamed and wounded, will ultimately be glad (Ps 109:28; cf. Ps 16:11; 21:6; Isa 53:11). He will give thanks to God among a throng (Ps 109:30; cf. 22:22, 27[23, 28]), "for he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death" (Ps 109:31). As in Ps 22 where death gave birth to rescue and then praise among the brothers, here death is faced with confidence and hope in future joy, and is followed in Psalm 110 by the suffering servant's exaltation to the right hand of God with full supremacy.

- iii. As Paul would later say, “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:8–9). Or as Yahweh declared through Isaiah, “Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted....<sup>12</sup> I will divide him a portion in the many, and he shall divide as spoil the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 52:13; 53:12).
  - 2. Peter’s conviction that Psalm 16 speaks of Christ’s resurrection, with its implications.
    - a. We have already highlighted Peter’s use of Psalm 110 in Acts 2. But before he speaks of Christ’s ascension, he cites Psalm 16 in order to stress Christ’s resurrection. In Acts 2:22–31, Peter cites Ps 16:8–11 in order to supply biblical grounding for Christ’s resurrection. He notes first “David says *concerning him*” (Acts 2:24), and then cites word-for-word from the LXX of Ps 16:8–11 (= 15:8–11 LXX), but omitting the last line of the psalm (“pleasures at your right hand forever”): “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope.<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence” (Acts 2:25–28). At this, Peter stresses how David’s body was buried and remains in the tomb, which identifies that Ps 16 was *not* talking about David’s body. Instead, “Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne,<sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:30–31).
    - b. Of this text, Marshall writes, “Ps. 16 seems to be understood as a statement by this descendent [of David] that is voiced by David. Since David could not be talking about himself in these verses (because he himself died and suffered corruption), he must have been speaking prophetically in the first person on behalf of someone else” (*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old*, 538). Against those who claim David is speaking through typological rather than direct prophecy, Marshall queries, “Is it appropriate to use the term ‘typological’ of a statement that was not true of the ‘type’ himself?” (538).
  - 3. David’s prayers for a future anointed king in Pss 20–21, with their implications.
    - a. In Psalm 110, we saw David speaking of another tagged his “Lord.” In Psalms 20–21, both “Psalms of David,” David the psalmist does something similar. In Psalm 20 he has the psalmist expressing his longing that God save *a different king* out of great calamity: “May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! ...<sup>6</sup> Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand....<sup>9</sup> O LORD, save the king!” (Ps 20:1, 6, 9[2, 7, 10]).
    - b. Psalm 21 then celebrates that God did deliver. Specifically, with an apparent echo of Ps 16:10–11, Ps 21:4–7[5–8] praises God for delivering *another king* from death: “He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever.<sup>5</sup> His glory is great through your salvation; splendor and majesty you bestow on him.<sup>6</sup> For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence.<sup>7</sup> For the king trust in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.”

- c. If Psalm 16 was direct prophecy about Jesus Christ's resurrection (see above), and if Psalms 20–21 anticipate this same deliverance, then there is good grounds for reading David speaking here about his superior Lord (as in Psalm 110), pleading first to God for this future king's deliverance and then celebrating the foreseen salvation he will experience. With statements like "*we* trust in the name of the LORD *our* God" (Ps 20:7[8]), "May he answer *us* when *we* call" (20:9[10]), and "*We* will sing and praise your power" (21:13[14]), we see David and others joining this king in rejoicing. The greater king's context of praise becomes the saints context for praise.
  - d. In light of the above, a canonical reading would suggest that Psalm 22 then has this greater-Davidic king telling of his sufferings and victories (in first person speech), and then Psalm 23 has him testifying to God provision and protection and to his future hope.
  - e. As you read through the psalter, once you identify the Anointed one who is in focus, whether as sufferer or as sovereign, you have identified the prophetic vision of the Christ.
4. Paul's use of Pss 14 and 53 that identify David's words as those of another.
- a. In Rom 3:10–18, Paul includes a series of OT quotations, many of them from the Psalms, in order to highlight the utter sinfulness of *all* humanity outside Christ. He opens with a citation from Ps 14:1–3 and 53:1–3: "None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understand; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Rom 3:10–12). Paul leaves no room for thinking that some may actually be good. Instead, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). Thus he stresses the need for all—Jew and Gentile alike—to find justification in Christ alone.
  - b. Back in Psalm 14, a psalm "of David," the psalmist declares of "the children of Adam" that "they have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one" (Ps 14:3). Interpreters who see David himself as the primary mouthpiece must see him distinguishing himself from these rebels of humanity when he writes, "Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread" (14:4). However, Paul's reading would not allow David to separate himself from the guilty, for Paul's point is that *all* have sinned.
  - c. Ps 14:5–6 give us a clue that David the psalmist is here, once again, speaking through the lens of direct prophecy, with his words actually being the words of the perfect Christ. There are some who stand opposite of the wicked in this psalm, but it is only because they are part of the generation of "the righteous one": "There they [i.e., the evildoers of this world] are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous one. <sup>6</sup> You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge." Throughout the Psalter, there is only one true "righteous one," the anointed of God, and others tagged "righteous" are only so because of their identification with him. As I write elsewhere (*How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 77–78):

From beginning to end, the Psalter focuses heavily on the hostility of mankind against YHWH and his anointed and on YHWH's final triumph through his righteous king for all finding refuge in him. The general perspective of the righteous and the wicked is laid out in Book 1, where there is only one true "righteous one," the anointed of God (e.g., Pss. 5:12[H13]; 7:9[H10]; 14:5; 34:19, 21[H20, 22]; 37:12, 16, 25, 32). He is the "blessed man" (1:1), against

whom stand various enemies both near and far (e.g., 2:1–2; 3:1; 5:8[H9]; 6:8[H9]; 7:1, 6, 9[H2, 7, 10]). Others are tagged as “blessed” and “righteous” (e.g., 1:5–6; 32:11; 33:1; 34:15[H17]; 37:17, 29, 39), but they are only so because they find refuge in the righteous *one* (2:12). Apart from this anointed king, “there is none who does good, not even one” (14:3; 53:3[H4]; cf. Rom. 3:12). In the end, “affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous *one* will be condemned” (Ps 34:21[H22]). YHWH’s royal Son (2:7) will “break them with a rod of iron” (2:9). Therefore, evildoers “are in great terror,” knowing that “God is with the generation of the righteous one,” who himself finds refuge in the Lord (14:5–6). A proper reading of the Psalms requires that we keep in mind the progressive movement through tribulation unto triumph and that we seek to find deeper refuge in the king, whom we now know today as Jesus.

5. *Extra Note:* 2 Sam 1:18–27 records a song possibly termed “the Bow” (see ESV text note at 1:18) that David penned in lament of Saul and Jonathan’s death. Unlike 2 Sam 22, which also appears as Ps 18:2–50, or 1 Chr 16:8–34 and 35–36, which also appear as Ps 105:1–15, 96:1–13, and 106:47–48, this song is *not* found in the Psalter. One reason may be that it so specifically relates to David’s historical situation that it did not fit into the Psalter—specifically, it focuses on the battle between Israel and the Philistines at Mount Gilboa (2 Sam 1:19–21), and it identifies Jonathan (1:22–23, 26) and Saul (1:21–24) numerous times. While the explicit messianic prophecies found in both Hannah’s prayer (1 Sam 2:1–10) and David’s final words (2 Sam 23:1–7) are also not fully present in the Psalter (though parts may be alluded to), the specific historical details found in 2 Sam 1:18–27 are unparalleled in the Psalms and likely explains why the song would not fit there. Stated differently, David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1:18–27 is unlike the laments of the Psalter, bearing a level of historical grounding in his day that is not clear in the Psalms. Were the rest of the psalm bodies (not the headings) so grounded in David’s time, recasting his *own* stories, one would have expected them to look more like what we find in 2 Sam 1:18–27.

#### E. What about “I’m a Sinner” Psalms?

1. A natural question the proposed reading of the Psalter is, “What about the numerous times the psalmist himself claims to be a sinner?” Psalm 51, for example, opens, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps 51:1–4[3–6]).
2. The normal pattern for preachers today is to qualify every statement of the psalmist’s innocence before God with statements like, “He is actually not declaring his perfect obedience or righteousness before God but only his innocence as it relates to this matter.” These same preachers, however, then affirm *without qualifying comment* the psalmist’s affirmations of his own sinfulness (e.g., Ps 51). I propose the reverse may be more justified, especially in light of how the NT authors unreservedly apply both the sinless sufferer and “I’m a sinner” psalms to Christ Jesus. That is, while the NT authors affirmed that Jesus *was* perfectly sinless (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5) and fully righteous (Rom 5:18–19; 1 John 2:1), they did not hesitate to link Christ with psalms that identify the speaker as having sinned. I suggest that the NT authors may have been reading the “I’m a sinner” psalms through the lens of substitution and imputation. The Christ becomes so identified with his people that he takes on their identity, becoming sin in their place and receiving on himself the just wrath of God:

- a. 2 Cor 5:21. For our sake [God] made [Christ] to *be sin* who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
  - b. Gal 3:13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by *becoming a curse* for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”
  - c. 1 Pet 2:24. He himself *bore our sins in his body* on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.
3. An overview:
- a. **Psalm 6**
    - i. Pss 5–6 are *filled* with allusions to Pss 1–2. The voice we hear in Ps 6 is thus the voice of the Anointed of Ps 2, and though he is receiving the anger God promises to pour out on the nations (Ps 2:5; 6:1[2]), the thrust of his cry is, “I am *not* your enemy, yet you seem to be treating me like I am.” In light of this he notes, “The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer” (6:9[10]), whereas all his enemies “shall be ashamed and greatly troubled” (6:10[11]).
    - ii. Psalm 6 is a psalm of lament, and the NT cites the psalm in two different contexts. Just after the triumphal entry, Jesus pleads for God to deliver him from his encroaching death (John 12:27) using the language of Ps 6:3–4[4–5]. Then in Matt 7:23 and Luke 13:27, using the king’s charge in Ps 6:8[9], Jesus promises to force all workers of evil to depart on the day people enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is the innocent sufferer of Psalm 6, who views the oppression of enemies as a manifestation of God’s wrath against him.
    - iii. This is what John the Baptist meant when he said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). And it captures well Paul’s words, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Out of this context, the psalmist cries, “Turn, O LORD, deliver my life” (Ps 6:4[5]). Just as Psalm 2 is about the (capital A) Anointed One, Psalm 6, which alludes to Ps 2, is also about *him*, not David. The pattern set forth here should color our reading of the declarations of innocence and sinfulness that follow.
  - b. **Psalm 22**
    - i. The NT authors cite no psalm more frequently in relation to Christ’s passion than Psalm 22: See Ps. 22:7[H8] in Matt. 27:39; Ps. 22:8[H9] in Matt. 27:43; Ps. 22:15[H16] in John 19:28; Ps. 22:16[H17] in Luke 24:40 with John 20:25; Ps. 22:18[H19] in John 19:24 and Matt. 27:35; Ps. 22:22[H23] in Heb. 2:12 and Matt. 28:10; John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Ps. 22:24[H25] in Heb. 5:7. It is a psalm of David, yet the words are so explicitly predictive that we must read them as pointing to someone other than David himself.
      - (1) Mankind scorned the psalmist, his people despised him (22:6[7]; cf. 2:1). Those scorned him wagged their heads at him (22:7[8]; cf. Matt 27:39), and they mocked his claim to God’s favor (Ps 22:8[9]; cf. Matt 27:43).
      - (2) With a dry mouth, the psalmist’s tongue stuck to his jaws (Ps 22:15[16]; cf. John 19:28), and he felt God was laying him in the dust of death (Ps 22:15[16]; cf. Isa 53:10). His accusers pierced his hands and feet (Ps 22:16; cf. Luke 24:39–40 with John 20:25). They also cast lots for his clothing (Ps 22:18[19]; cf. Matt 27:35).
      - (3) Nevertheless, God rescued him from the grip of death (Ps 22:21[22]), and he vowed to proclaim God’s greatness to his “brothers,” who have

become a “congregation” (22:22[23]; cf. Matt 28:10). He also declared, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, that “the ends of the earth” and “all the families of the nations” would remember his sacrifice and victory and worship (Ps 22:27[28]; cf. Matt 28:18–20). This victorious one is the “Lord,” and a coming generation would proclaim “his righteousness” (Ps 22:30–31[31–32]).

- ii. Following the MT, the ESV reads Ps 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” However, the LXX reads the last part of the phrase differently: “Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of *my transgression*?” The NT authors commonly cite the LXX of Psalm 22 and were therefore likely aware that the psalmist claims himself sinful. Yet the NT authors recognize fully that only of the Christ can it be said that God rescued (Ps 22:21[22]) him who noted, “They have pierced my hands and feet” (22:16[17]). David seems to be predicting the one whom Isaiah would declare, “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5).
- c. **Psalm 25**
- i. The NT does not cite Psalm 25, but what we find here is comparable to what we will see in Psalm 41, of which the NT does quote.
  - ii. David here proclaims two apparently competing realities. First, he is a sinner: “Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.... For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt for it is great.... Consider my affliction and my trouble and forgive all my sins” (vv. 7–8, 11, 18). Second, he is a covenant keeper and man of integrity: “He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.... Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you” (vv. 9–10, 20–21).
  - iii. Either forgiven sinners are here recognized as true covenant keepers and people of integrity (so Piper, *Faith in Future Grace*), or the text is speaking about (1) imputed guilt and real righteousness within the Messiah or (2) real guilt and imputed righteousness to the original King David.
- d. **Psalm 31**
- i. In Ps 31:10[11] the psalmist asserts, “For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of *my iniquity*, and my bones waste away.”
  - ii. Yet the psalmist also tags himself the “righteous” one (31:18[19]), and Jesus identifies this psalmist with himself by citing Ps 31:5[6] on the cross: “Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last” (Luke 23:46).
  - iii. Psalm 32 distinguishes between the one and the many—the righteous *one* who represents before God the sins of all righteous *ones* who would be declared righteous through him.

- (1) Paul cites Ps 32:1 in Rom 4:6–7 as portraying the doctrine of imputation—as identifying “the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works”: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Ps 32:1–2).
- (2) At this, the psalmist echoes the voice of the “righteous *one*” from the previous psalm: “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps 32:5). He later asserts, “Steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD” (Ps 32:10), and then he speaks to the righteous *ones*: “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous *ones*, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Ps 32:11; cf. 33:1). Clearly the psalmist’s experience has direct import for others.

e. **Psalm 38**

- i. Psalm 38 is “a Psalm of David,” and here the psalmist is feeling the weight of Yahweh’s discipline: “Your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me” (38:1[2]). Why is he experiencing this trauma?
- ii. In 38:3–4[4–5] the psalmist says, “There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of *my sin*. For *my iniquities* have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.” Then in 38:18[19] he cries, “I confess *my iniquity*; I am sorry for *my sin*.”
- iii. In the midst of his affliction, he notes, “My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kind stand far off [ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔστησαν]” (38:11[LXX37:12]). All the gospel writers appear to echo this verse when describing the placement of Jesus’ closest followers at the time of his crucifixion, “And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance [Εἰστήκεισαν ... ἀπὸ μακρόθεν] watching these things” (Luke 23:49; cf. Matt 27:55; Mark 15:40).
- iv. Significantly, the psalmist notes that his foes “hate me wrongfully” and then affirms that “those who render me evil for good accuse me because I follow after good” (Ps 38:19–20[20–21]). The psalmist here appears to identify that he is both a pursuer of good who does good and one who recognizes himself to be a sinner. Does this not adequately describe Jesus in his identification with us?

f. **Psalm 39**

- i. Psalm 39 is another “Psalm of David.” It opens with the psalmist declaring, “I said, ‘I will guard my ways, that I may *not sin* with my tongue” (Ps 39:1[2]). Later, however, we read in 39:7–8, 10–11[8–9, 11–12], “And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.<sup>8</sup> Deliver me from all *my transgressions*. Do not make me the scorn of the fool! ...<sup>10</sup> Remove your stroke from me; I am spent by the hostility of your hand.<sup>11</sup> When you discipline a man with rebukes *for sin*, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely all mankind is a mere breath!”
- ii. The NT does not cite, allude to, or echo this psalm, but it does speak of one who endured the disciplining hand of God for sin. Furthermore, Psalm 39 is framed by two psalms that the NT does cite by applying them to Christ. As such, by reading Psalm 39 in context, we may justly interpret it messianically.

g. **Psalm 40**

- i. Ps 40:12[13] reads, “For evils have encompassed me beyond number; *my iniquities* have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.”
- ii. The author of Hebrews cites Ps 40:6–8[7–9] and applies them directly to Christ (Heb 10:5–10): “Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’ He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”
- iii. The “scroll of the book” likely refers to the Pentateuch, and we know that Jesus stressed that Moses “wrote of me” (John 5:46). The psalmist is the hoped-for deliverer, yet he identifies himself as a sinner. I suggest this is possible only because of the great exchange—our sins applied to him and his righteousness applied to us. He has so fully identified with us in our rebellion that he carries it in himself.

h. **Psalm 41**

- i. Ps 41:4[5] asserts, “As for me, I said, ‘O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for *I have sinned* against you!’” The psalmist then grieves that a close friend has betrayed him, saying, “Even my close friend in whom I trust, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me” (41:9[10]).
- ii. Within the same psalm, David declares, “But you have upheld me *because of my integrity*, and set me in your presence forever” (41:12[13]). Only in Christ do we find perfect integrity that secures God’s eternal presence matched by a declaration of sinning against God [via the imputation of our sinfulness] (cf. Psalm 25).
- iii. Jesus quotes this psalm on the night of his last supper: “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who at my bread has lifted his heel against me’” (John 13:18).

i. **Psalm 65**

- i. In 65:2–4[3–5] we read, “O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come. <sup>3</sup> When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions. <sup>4</sup> Blessed in the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!”
- ii. Verse 3 literally reads, “Words of iniquity prevail against me; as for our transgressions, you atone them.” Note first the switch between first person singular and third person plural. Note also that some are casting “words of iniquity” on the psalmist, which may suggest imputation of guilt, regardless of whether it is actual.

- iii. In some way, the psalmist appears to view himself representing a larger group, so that as he bears iniquity, all people's sins are atoned. God's chosen *one* is blessed, and in his blessing, he and all identified with him ("we") are satisfied with God's goodness.
- j. **Psalm 69**
  - i. Ps 69:5[6] declares, "O God, you know *my folly; the wrongs I have done* are not hidden from you." This is then followed in vv. 7–9[8–10] by, "For it is *for your sake* that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me." On the one hand the psalmist claims sin, yet he also asserts that he is receiving God's wrath *for God's sake*.
  - ii. After Jesus cleansed the temple, John 2:17 tells us that the disciples identified his act with the psalmist's words in Ps 69:9[10]. Even more, Paul identifies Jesus with the psalmist of Ps 69:9[10], when he says, "For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me'" (Rom 15:3). Later, Ps 69:21[22] reads, "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink," and this is referred to in Christ's crucifixion at Matt 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23; Luke 23:36; John 19:28–29. Here the John text is particularly interesting: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'" This latter text does not appear to be a quote but a synthesis of fulfillment on 69:21[22]. Finally, we read in Ps 69:25[26], "May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents," which is then cited with regard to Judas in Acts 1:20.
- 4. The innocence of the Christ
  - a. All of the above texts show that the NT authors had no problem applying the words of the psalmist to Christ, even when the context of those words mentioned the psalmist's sinfulness. The common pattern is for NT authors to expect readers to know the context when they cite single verses. As such, I believe the best way to understand the NT use of the Psalms is that the NT authors saw the Christ as fully identifying himself with his people in their sin, while also fully recognizing his own innocence and praying to God in light of this. "By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13).
  - b. 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." Furthermore, at the end of the psalm, in response to Yahweh's great deliverance, he writes, "For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name. Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever" (2 Sam 22:49–50). Paul cites this latter text in Rom 15:8–9, when he declares: "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.'" Paul identifies the figure in 2 Sam 22 (= Ps 18) as the Christ. He is the one who stands before the Lord blameless.

- c. Earlier in the book, Hannah declares, “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. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed” (1 Sam 2:9–10). Later the character of this anointed one is then unpacked: “And I will raise up *a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind*. And I will build him a sure house, and it shall go in and out before my anointed forever” (2:35). Clearly, the book of Samuel expects the anointed deliver to be one faithful to God, and the story of David’s rise and fall pushes the reader to look ahead to someone other than David who would sing God’s praises to the nations. This person is the Christ.<sup>6</sup>

### VIII. 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. Cf. 1 Pet 1:3; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3.
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)<sup>7</sup>
3. “Lord, Sovereign” = *Adonai* (67x)
4. “Most High” = *Elyon* (22x); *Shaddai* (2x)

<sup>6</sup> The psalmist in 2 Samuel 22 asserts that God has judged him *according to* and not *on the basis of* his righteousness (2 Sam 22:21), which is exactly how Paul says God will assess at the final judgment (Rom 2:6). The psalmist sets forth the principle of God’s action as follows: “With the faithful you show yourself faithful; with the blameless you show yourself blameless; with the purified you deal purely; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous” (22:26–27). 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). The psalmist in 2 Samuel 22 notes that the righteousness according to which God judges is not a self-exalting one but a God-exalting and God-dependent one: “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 Sam 22:28, 31, 33). Figures like Noah (Gen 6:9) and Job (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3) are tagged “righteous,” and Job asserts his integrity before God (ch. 31; cf. 2:3). With this, the fact that Peter stresses, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5) highlights that true humility before God is possible. Nevertheless, the whole context of Samuel and the Psalter suggests we are referring to a level of integrity that no human other than Christ enjoyed. David’s hands, while washed, had been dirty, whereas the Christ’s hands were never dirty (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

<sup>7</sup> In light of the employment of *Elohim* for the Anointed King in Ps 45:6–7 (cf. Heb 1:8–9), the title *Elohim* may be intentionally blurry (at least within the Sons of Korah psalms in Pss 42–49), allowing for a dual referent—both Yahweh and his anointed royal Son.

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 (Pss 1–2):

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 (Pss 146–150):

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!

**IX. 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” did Jesus quote 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 in general and the Christ in particular 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?

## X. **Update: A Sample Study of Psalm 121 with a Sermon**<sup>8</sup>

### 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

<sup>8</sup> 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 expounds 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 1<sup>st</sup> person to 2<sup>nd</sup> person between vv. 2–3: (see above)
2. Repetition:
  - a. Key Words Occurring More than Once:
    - i. *>ezr<sup>a</sup>* (“my help”): vv. 1b, 2a
    - ii. *jāmar* (“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. *<al- / <lø -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 *jāmar* (“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 *jāmar* 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><b>I. The Personal Celebration of Yahweh's Guardianship</b> (vv. 1–2)  A. The Posture of the Guarded (v. 1)  B. The Confidence of the Guarded (v. 2)</p> <p><b>II. The Assurance to Others of Yahweh's Guardianship</b> (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.

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## **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)