The New International Commentary
on the
Old Testament

General Editors

E. J. Young
(1965–1968)

R. K. Harrison
(1968–1993)

Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.
(1994–   )

The Book of
PSALMS

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To:
William H. Bellinger, Jr.
Patrick D. Miller
J. J. M. Roberts
Our Teachers

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TEXT AND COMMENTARY

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General Editor's Preface

Long ago St. Paul wrote: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6 NRSV). He was right: ministry indeed requires a team effort — the collective labors of many skilled hands and minds. Someone digs up the dirt and drops in seed, while others water the ground to nourish seedlings to growth. The same team effort over time has brought this commentary series to its position of prominence today. Professor E. J. Young "planted" it nearly fifty years ago, enlisting its first contributors and himself writing its first published volumes. Professor R. K. Harrison "watered" it, signing on other scholars and wisely editing everyone's finished products. As General Editor, I now tend their planting, and, true to Paul's words, through four decades God has indeed graciously "[given] the growth."

Today the New International Commentary on the Old Testament enjoys a wide readership of scholars, priests, pastors, rabbis, and other serious Bible students. Thousands of readers across the religious spectrum and in countless countries consult its volumes in their ongoing preaching, teaching, and research. They warmly welcome the publication of each new volume and eagerly await its eventual transformation from an emerging "series" into a complete commentary "set." But as humanity experiences a new century of history, an era commonly called "postmodern," what kind of commentary series is NICOT? What distinguishes it from other similarly well-established series?

Its volumes aim to publish biblical scholarship of the highest quality. Each contributor writes as an expert, both in the biblical text itself and in the relevant scholarly literature, and each commentary conveys the results of wide reading and careful, mature reflection. Ultimately, its spirit is eclectic, each contributor gleaning interpretive insights from any useful source, whatever its religious or philosophical viewpoint, and integrating them into his or her interpretation of a biblical book. The series draws on recent methodological innovations in biblical scholarship, for example, canon criticism, the

so-called "new literary criticism," reader-response theories, and sensitivity to gender-based and ethnic readings. NICOT volumes also aim to be irenic in tone, summarizing and critiquing influential views with fairness while defending their own. Its list of contributors includes male and female scholars from a number of Christian faith-groups. The diversity of contributors and their freedom to draw on all relevant methodologies give the entire series an exciting and enriching variety.

What truly distinguishes this series, however, is that it speaks from within that interpretive tradition known as evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is an informal movement within Protestantism that cuts across traditional denominational lines. Its heart and soul is the conviction that the Bible is God's inspired Word, written by gifted human writers, through which God calls humanity to enjoy a loving personal relationship with its Creator and Savior. True to that tradition, NICOT volumes do not treat the Old Testament as just an ancient literary artifact on a par with the *Iliad* or *Gilgamesh.* They are not literary autopsies of ancient parchment cadavers but rigorous, reverent wrestlings with wonderfully human writings through which the living God speaks his powerful Word. NICOT delicately balances "criticism" (i.e., the use of standard critical methodologies) with humble respect, admiration, and even affection for the biblical text. As an evangelical commentary, it pays particular attention to the text's literary features, theological themes, and implications for the life of faith today.

Ultimately, NICOT aims to serve women and men of faith who desire to hear God's voice afresh through the Old Testament. With gratitude to God for two marvelous gifts — the Scriptures themselves and keen-minded scholars to explain their message — I welcome readers of all kinds to savor the good fruit of this series.

Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.

Acknowledgments

On a snowy night in 2001 at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Denver, Robert Hubbard and Allen Myers met with three relatively young psalm scholars to discuss the possibility of their authoring the NICOT commentary on the book of Psalms: Nancy deClaissé-Walford of the McAfee School of Theology; Rolf Jacobson, then of Augsburg College; and Beth LaNeel Tanner of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Commentary writing can be something of a rite of passage for those of us in biblical studies. What a relief to share the task with others: none of us would have to provide translation, notes, and commentary on all 150 psalms! The euphoria quickly wore off as we each embarked on our self-assigned portions of the Psalter. What an undertaking! Years in the accomplishing.

With gratitude, we each acknowledge those who have supported and provided space, who have undertaken research and proofing work, and who have simply "been there." A myriad of students and members of the Society of Biblical Literature Book of Psalms Section have patiently and supportively listened to our lectures and presentations on the book of Psalms. We are grateful to all of them. Their questions and lively minds forced us to new horizons of interpretation that we would never have explored on our own.

From Nancy deClaissé-Walford:

I wish to express a debt of gratitude to three groups. First, for support and space, to Mercer University and to the Dean of the McAfee School of Theology, R. Alan Culpepper. In an academic environment of shrinking budgets, sabbatical leaves are coveted commodities. A sabbatical leave in the spring of 2007 allowed me to complete my portion of the commentary. Second, to Will Abney and Ben Curry, student workers who contributed valuable research and editing work. Third, and perhaps, most importantly, to those who have simply "been there." My husband Steve has been a relentlessly constant

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From Beth Tanner:

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Years removed from that snowy night in Denver, Nancy, Rolf, Beth, not so young anymore, are still grateful for the opportunity to participate in this undertaking. To Allen Myers and Robert Hubbard — your patience is above and beyond the call of duty. To Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. — thank you for trusting such an important volume to the three of us. To the readers of this commentary — all biblical commentary is conversation; you are invited to add your voices.

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Principal Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary,* ed. David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*
ANE	Ancient Near East(ern)
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* ed. James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature.* 2nd ed. Chicago, 1979
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Oxford, 1907
BeO	Bibbia e Oriente
BHQ	*Biblia Hebraica Quinta*
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
Bib	*Biblica*
BRL2	*Biblisches Reallexikon,* 2nd ed. Ed. Kurt Galling. Tübingen, 1977
BRS	Biblical Resource Series
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago, 1956–
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CC	Continental Commentaries
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	*The Context of Scripture,* ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997-2003

CTA	*Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939,* ed. Andrée Herdner. Paris, 1963
DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible,* ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. 2nd ed. Leiden and Grand Rapids, 1999
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FBBS	Facet Books, Biblical Series
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* ed. Emil Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford, 1910
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* 5 vols. Leiden, 1994-2000
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KBL	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros.* 2nd ed., Leiden, 1958
KTU	*Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit,* ed. Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LW	Martin Luther, *Works*
LXX	Septuagint
MBS	Message of Biblical Spirituality

MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
Pesh	Peshiṭta
RB	*Revue biblique*
RelSRev	*Religious Studies Review*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
S	Superscription
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SK	*Skrif en kerk*
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
St.	Stanza
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
Syr	Syriac
Targ	Targum(im)
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. 17 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
THAT	*Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament,* ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. 2 vols. Stuttgart, 1971-76
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VD	*Verbum domini*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
Vulg	Vulgate
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament

WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WW	*Word and World*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Introduction

Martin Luther captured how central the psalms are to the life of faith, when he wrote that the Psalter

> might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.[1]

One of the reasons that the psalms are so beloved is that they express the full range of human emotions before God. The hymns of praise shout out the soaring joy of those who bear witness to God's faithfulness. The prayers for help give voice to the groaning pain of those who long for — but cannot find — a faithful God in their suffering. The poems of trust express the confident inner faith of those who trust, in spite of the quaking external realities all around. The songs of thanksgiving ring with the renewed song of those who have passed through a dark valley of crisis. The instructional psalms pass on the wisdom of those who have gone before to generations yet unborn. The imprecatory psalms cry out for justice against those who oppress. And the royal psalms bear witness to the mystery that God has chosen human beings as the agents through which God is at work in a broken world. Because the Psalter draws on the full range of human experiencing and emotions, William Brown has said that "the Psalter is . . . Scripture's most integrated corpus."[2]

This great diversity of emotion and perspective is the source of the

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1. "Preface to the Psalter," trans. C. M. Jacobs, rev. E. T. Bachman, in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), p. 254.
2. *Seeing the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), p. 1.

Psalter's richness for believers. Because the Psalter is a collection of poetry, it does not have a plot in the same way that the narrative books of the Bible do. Nor does it have a central argument in the same way that the epistles of the New Testament do. Nor does it have a unified vision or source, as many of the prophetic books of the Old Testament do. Comprised of 150 compositions from many different authors, the Psalter more resembles a great choir of witnesses than it does a story, or letter, or collection of visions. The Psalter gives voice to the faith struggles, theological insights, and liturgical witnesses of many different people. For this reason and others, even though more than two thousand years separate us from the days when they were first written, the psalms continue to be central to the life of faith for both Christians and Jews. Near the beginning of life, people of faith memorize them as children at their mothers' feet. They sing or chant them when they come together for weekly worship. In times of trouble they recall the psalms' words of promise and hope. And to mark the end of life, they utter them solemnly when they bury their fathers.

As John Goldingay has aptly put it, the "Psalms make it possible to say things that are otherwise unsayable."[3] At times the psalms give us words to express anguish that we cannot bring ourselves to express. At other times they allow us to express the joy we feel, but to do so in a theological register. And at still other times, we do not sing them because they say or feel what we already believe or feel, but because by speaking them we can come to believe what they say, feel what they feel, and trust where they trust.

I. TITLE, TEXT, AND TRANSLATION

The English terms "Psalm" and "Psalter" are related to the Greek words *psalmoi* and *psaltērion.* The term *psalmos* is in turn a translation of Hebrew *mizmōr.* Both of these terms mean "song." The plural Greek form *psalmoi* occurs in the ancient manuscript Codex Vaticanus as the title for the book. Codex Alexendrinus employs *psaltērion,* which refers to a stringed instrument. The two terms accurately describe the contents of the book of Psalms — a set of songs that were at some point used in the worship life of ancient Israel or Judah. The Masoretic title of the collection is *t^ehillîm,* literally, "praises," but more accurately "praise" (an abstract plural). This title does not occur in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nor does the term, if construed narrowly, accurately describe the contents of the book, which include laments, liturgies, and instructional psalms. The redactional note at the end of Psalm 72 — *The prayers (t^epillôt) of*

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3. *Psalms 1–41* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 22.

David, the son of Jesse, are ended — as well as the title that stands at the head of each of the Psalms from 120–34 — *The Songs of the Ascents (šîr hamma⁽ᵃ⁾lôt)* — suggest that other Hebrew titles for collections of psalms were once used. But the term *praises (tᵉhillîm)* does accurately caption the *telos* toward which both individual songs and the collection as a whole move — toward praise of the Lord. As James Limburg has written, "The two names preserved in Hebrew tradition, 'prayers' *(tᵉpillôt)* and 'songs of praise' *(tᵉhillîm),* may be taken as representing two fundamental types of psalms: prayers in time of need, or laments, and songs of praise, or hymns."[4]

The quality of the Hebrew text of the psalms varies from psalm to psalm; some poems evidence little disturbance, while others show significant disturbance. Overall, the quality of the text may be said to be "fair."[5] The translation and commentary in this volume are based on the critical edition of the Hebrew text of the psalms in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). BHS* is based on the version of the Masoretic Text (MT) found in Codex Leningradensis (B19A or L), which is the oldest, complete extant manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. The codex is dated to about 1008 c.e., and the text claims that it was copied in Cairo from the manuscripts of the Ben Asher family of Masoretic scribes. Neither the planned Psalms volume in the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ)* nor the new critical edition of the Hebrew Bible being prepared at the Hebrew University and to be based on the slightly older Codex Aleppo (which lacks Pss. 15:1–25:2) were yet available for our work.

It is often stated that the Masoretic Text of the Psalter contains 150 psalms — and, in fact, the Psalter presented in *BHS* does present a 150-poem lay-out. But recent research by William Yarchin has shown the matter is not so clear.[6] Yarchin has shown that both Codex Aleppo and Codex Leningrad divide the verses of the Psalter into 149 psalms. They do this by conjoining Psalms 114 and 115 into a single psalm. Yarchin has examined roughly 400 Psalter manuscripts from the medieval period — dating from Codex Aleppo (ca. 930 c.e.) to the First Rabbinic Bible (1517). Yarchin has discovered at what he calls the level of "the semantic content" — of individual words and sentences — the texts of these roughly 400 MT Psalters are stable; they share

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4. James Limburg, "Psalms, Book of," *ABD* 5:523.

5. So P. Kyle McCarter, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (GBS; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), p. 92.

6. William Yarchin, "Is There an Authoritative Shape for the Book of Psalms? Profiling the Manuscripts of the Hebrew Psalter," paper presented at the 16th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, July 2013. "Why Were the Psalms the First Bible Chapters to Be Numbered?" paper presented at the 21st Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in Munich, Germany, August 2013. "Was 11Q5 a True Psalter?" paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 2013.

essentially the same words. But at the level of dividing the words and sentences into different psalms, these MT Psalters show great diversity. Only 84 of the Psalters (about 21 percent) divide the psalms into the configuration that is presented in *BHS*. The other 79 percent of manuscripts divide the verses of the Psalter into anywhere from 143 poems to 154 poems.[7] It is clear that from ancient days, scribes recognized that there are many different poems in the Psalter: the various superscriptions at the head of many psalms, the reference in Acts 13:33 to "the second psalm," and the line spaces between psalms in the Dead Sea psalm scrolls all indicate that ancient scribes differentiated between various psalms in the Psalter. But the delineation of the Psalter into the 150 as we have become accustomed to dividing them did not become standard until the invention of the movable-type printing press and the publication of the First and Second Rabbinic Bibles. The movable-type printing press provided the technology that stabilized the arrangement of the Psalter. The results of Yarchin's important research will have to be considered carefully by psalm scholarship — especially for those scholars who investigate the meaning and authority of the canonical "shape and shaping" of the Psalter. In this commentary, we have chosen to honor the traditional 150-psalm division, because this configuration has provided the shape of the psalter that has been standard for the last 500 years. But Yarchin's warning about assuming the authority of this division is worth pondering: "the assumption of the [now traditional 150-poem shape of the] *sefer tehillim* as the authoritative or standard shape of the Hebrew Psalter is not supported by the body of Hebrew manuscript evidence. It is rather a product of the efforts by early modern editors to create a standard text. Inasmuch as critical biblical scholarship does not restrict itself to the [now traditional shape of the Psalter], the manuscript evidence invites scholars to bring their exegetical skills to bear on psalm compositions well-attested in the manuscripts but eclipsed by the [now traditional Psalter]."[8]

Interpretation and text criticism of the MT are greatly enhanced by the discoveries that were made in the Judean Desert (known as the Dead Sea Scrolls) as well as by ancient translations of the psalms, especially the Greek translation that is popularly known as the Septuagint (but more properly called the Old Greek edition). Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, "at least thirty-nine . . . are Psalms scrolls or manuscripts containing Psalms; thirty-six were discovered at Qumran, two at Masada; and one at Nahal Ḥever."[9]

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7. Yarchin notes that 33 of these MT Psalters present 150 psalms, but delineate those 150 differently than the way that we have become accustomed to dividing them. These 33 manuscripts in turn have 23 different configurations of the 150 psalms.

8. Yarchin, "Is There an Authoritative Shape for the Book of Psalms?" p. 14.

9. Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (STDJ 17; Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 2.

In addition, there are other occasional witnesses to the psalms among the Dead Sea Scrolls, among the various sectarian manuscripts, *florilegia, pesherim,* etc. Although all of these psalms scrolls are significantly damaged and many are fragmentary, the scrolls yield a significant quantity of verses. The most significant scrolls, in descending order of importance, are 11QPs[a], 4QPs[a], 5/6Ḥev-Se4 Ps, 4QPs[b], 4QPs[c], and 4QPs[e]. The critical editions of these manuscripts (particularly the *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert,* volumes IV and XI) as well as the careful cataloging work by Peter Flint are invaluable resources for interpretation, text criticism, and translation of the psalms. The critical edition of the Septuagint version of the Psalter prepared at the University of Göttingen is also invaluable.[10] The Greek version is particularly helpful because the ancient translators' preference for literal, nonidiomatic Greek makes the task of retroverting which Hebrew text the translators were reading more manageable.

Since the publication of the Second Rabbinic Bible in 1524-25, the so-called Masoretic Text as presented in *BHS* has been the standard text of the Psalter that communities of faith have read, or it has been the text upon which the vernacular translations that communities of faith have read are based.[11] For that reason, the approach to text criticism in this commentary is not to try to establish the illusive "original" text of each psalm as it came from the pen of an original scribe. Rather, the text-critical task as understood here is to establish the text of each psalm as it may have been at the beginning of the Masoretic tradition. While it is clear that for many, if not most, of the psalms the texts evolved between the time when the texts originated and the start of the Masoretic tradition, we have chosen not to reconstruct the hypothetical original texts, since those texts have not been the canonical texts of the communities of faith. As Brevard Childs wrote, at the textual level, the concern is "to describe the literature in terms of relation to the historic Jewish community rather than . . . [seeking a] reconstruction of the most original form of the book, or the most pristine form of the textual tradition."[12] For the purposes of this commentary, this Jewish community is conceived broadly as the international Yahwistic community that centered its life toward Jerusalem between the late Persian/early Hellenistic period and the start of the Christian era. In terms of establishing the texts as they may have existed at the start of the Masoretic tradition, Bruce Waltke's venerable description of

10. *Septuaginta: Psalmi cum Odis,* ed. Alfred Rahlfs (2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967).

11. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), pp. 22-25.

12. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 96-97.

the text-critical task in relation to the Old Testament is helpful, at least heuristically.[13] As Waltke wrote, "The text critic's aim will vary according to the nature of the [biblical] book. If a book had but one author, then the critic will aim to restore his original composition; if it be an edited text then he will seek to recover the final, canonical text."[14] It should be noted, however, that the task is more than merely a matter of reading Codex Leningradensis. It is clear that a certain amount of textual development has occurred since the start of the Masoretic tradition and that some of the readings and texts preserved in Codex Leningradensis are corrupt. For this reason, the effort to compare readings and to attempt textual recovery is necessary. The textual critic engages in this effort knowing that the work will never be perfect, but trusting that it is both unavoidable and, one hopes, edifying to at least some degree.

Throughout the long history of the psalms, the way the psalms have been numbered has varied. As noted earlier, Yarchin has discovered that prior to 1517 the poems of the Hebrew Psalter were configured in many different ways — from as few as 143 different psalms to as many as 154. Yarchin is currently investigating medieval Greek and Latin psalms manuscripts to learn if a similar diversity of psalm arrangement exists in those manuscript traditions. But the "standard" arrangement of the LXX Psalter numbers the psalms slightly differently than in *BHS:*

MT in *BHS*	LXX
1–8	1–8
9–10	9
11–113	10–112
114–15	113
116:1-9	114
116:10-19	115
117–46	116–45
147:1-11	146
147:12-20	147
148–50	148–50

In addition, the LXX includes Psalm 151, whose superscription introduces it as a "genuine psalm of David" *(idiographos eis dayid),* but one that is "outside the number" *(exōthen tou arithmou).* The latter phrase indicates that by the time of the Psalter's translation into Greek (most likely at least a century

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13. "Aims of OT Textual Criticism," *WTJ* 51 (1989) 93-108. In terms of Waltke's five "aims" of textual critics, our approach falls closest to his fourth option, restoring the accepted text.

14. Waltke, "Aims of OT Textual Criticism," p. 107.

before the Common Era) the internal order and division of the psalms were still fluid. Within the Hebrew textual traditions, the various psalms manuscripts discovered at Qumran support the conclusion that the internal order and even the content of the Psalter were not fixed at the turn of the eras. This fluidity is especially apparent towards the end of the Psalter, indicating that the Psalter generally evolved from the front toward back, with the first part of the Psalter stabilizing earlier. Peter Flint has observed that for Psalms 1–89, no deviations in content and only two deviations in arrangement have been discovered at Qumran. "But for Psalms 90 and beyond disagreements with the Received Text are far more extensive, both in terms of the ordering of material and the presence of compositions not found in the MT-150 Psalter."[15] In this commentary, as noted above, we follow the *BHS* contents and order (although in some cases, such as Psalm 9/10, we find the LXX division persuasive and helpful).

In terms of verse numbering, for those psalms that have a superscription, the MT numbers the superscription as v. 1. In the dominant English-language tradition, since the KJV the dominant system of verse numbering has been *not* to number the superscriptions. This has created minor confusion when referring to verse numbers. In this commentary, we follow the traditional English versification, including when Hebrew forms are cited.

In keeping with the format of the NICOT series, for each psalm the commentary provides a new translation with critical notes. To the extent possible, the translations offer as literal a translation of the poetry as possible. We have preferred inclusive language for humanity where it was possible to do so without disrupting the poetry of the psalms too greatly. For the sake of gender inclusivity, some English translations (such as the NRSV) have chosen to change singular, masculine nouns and their associated pronouns into plural nouns and pronouns — thus, the "man" *('îš)* and "he" of Psalm 1 are changed into "those." In order to retain the poetic sense of the singular pronouns, we have opted for more generic terms such as "the one" — thus, *Happy is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked* (1:1). For the proper name of God, YHWH, we have used "The Lord," following the centuries-long model for most English translations.

One peculiarity of this commentary is that we have opted not to translate the Hebrew term *ḥesed,* but simply to transliterate *hesed* and treat it as a loanword from Hebrew to English — similar to "shalom" (from Hebrew), "aloha" (from Hawaiian), "aria" (from Italian), or "el Nino" (from Spanish). Loanwords enter a culture when there is no term or pair of terms in the borrowing language that can adequately render the meaning of an important term from the source language. That is undoubtedly the case with the He-

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15. *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms,* p. 141.

brew theological term *hesed.* Traditionally, a wide range of English terms have been employed in the attempt to capture the meaning of *hesed:* "mercy," "loving-kindness," "steadfast love," "faithfulness," "covenantal love," "loving faithfulness," and the like. We find that none of these words or phrases satisfactorily express the range and depth of *hesed.* While this is true of many words in many languages, we believe that for the word *hesed,* the difference in degree amounts to a difference in kind. *Hesed* includes elements of love, mercy, fidelity, and kindness. *Hesed* is a relational term that describes both the *internal character* as well as the *external actions* that are required to maintain a life-sustaining relationship. While the term is used of both humans and God, in the Psalter it is above all a theological term that describes God's essential character as well as God's characteristic ways of acting — especially God's characteristic ways of acting in electing, delivering, and sustaining the people of Israel. *Hesed* is both who the Lord is and what the Lord does. *Hesed* is an ancient term that defined for Israel who its God is. The centrality and ancient nature of the term is witnessed in the ancient, creedal fragment in Exodus 34, where the Lord passes in front of Moses and proclaims,

> The Lord, the Lord,
> a God merciful and gracious,
> slow to anger,
> and abounding in steadfast love *(hesed)* and faithfulness. (v. 6)

The centrality of the term in the Psalter is made apparent by the fact that of the 255 times the term *hesed* occurs in the Old Testament, 130 of those occurrences are in the Psalter. Gerhard von Rad wrote that the term "designates an attitude required by fellowship and includes a disposition and an attitude of solidarity . . . so it expresses . . . beneficent personal disposition plus the actions that follow."[16] The *relational nature of the term* cannot be overemphasized. It describes the duties, benefits, and commitments that one party bears to another party as a result of the relationship between them. The Lord's *hesed* is the basis on which the psalmist dares to ask for deliverance and forgiveness. The Lord's *hesed* describes how and why the Lord created and sustains the good creation. The Lord's *hesed* is that to which the hymns of praise and songs of thanksgiving bear witness. The Lord's *hesed* is what the wisdom psalms teach. And *hesed* is the most important characteristic that God desires to see embodied both in individuals and in the communities that pray the psalms.

In the text of our commentary, to serve the aims of inclusive language, we have alternated between referring to the psalmist as "he" and as "she." This alternation was done on either a paragraph-by-paragraph or section-

16. *Old Testament Theology,* trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:372 n. 6.

by-section basis. While it is likely that most of the ancient psalmists were men, we allow for the possibility that at least one of the psalmists may have been a woman.[17] In addition, this convention is consistent with the fact that throughout the centuries, both women and men have borrowed the language of the psalms to pray as their own prayers.

II. AUTHORSHIP, SUPERSCRIPTIONS, AND DATE

A. AUTHORSHIP

"The Psalms conceal their origins. It is thus an odd fact that study of the Psalms in both the premodern and modern periods paid considerable attention to their authorship and historical background."[18] John Goldingay's ironic insight is true not only for the psalms, but for much of the biblical corpus. Most of the books of the Bible are anonymous, and most originally lacked titles. But humans seem both to love a good mystery and to have a need to put a name on an anonymous work. This is true both of the Psalter in general, as well as the individual psalms.

Beginning in antiquity, communities of faith began to associate the Psalter with King David. This association most likely began because of the link between the tradition of David as a musician (1 Sam. 16:14ff.) and the nature of the psalms as songs. In the Talmud, it is stated that "David wrote the Book of Psalms, including in it the work of the elders, namely, Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, Heman, Yeduthun, Asaph, and the three sons of Korah" (*b. Bava Batra* 14b-15a). In this tradition of interpretation of Davidic authorship, the superscriptions (particularly the superscription *l^{e}dāwiḏ*) are taken as expressing authorship (more on this issue momentarily). Throughout premodern interpretation of the psalms, David was assumed to be the author of those psalms that began with the superscription *l^{e}dāwiḏ,* and often was taken as the author of many of the psalms that lacked this superscription. The New Testament also associates David with the psalms (e.g., Mark 12:35-37; Acts 2:33-35). The Septuagint, Syriac, and Qumran Psalters indicate that this tradition was expanding very early — they include the Davidic superscription before psalms that lack it in the MT (e.g., Psalm 95).

We decided to translate the superscriptions in which a *lamedh* is prefixed to a personal name by attaching an *-ic* or *-ite* suffix to the name: thus, "Davidic," "Mosaic," "Solomonic," "Asaphite," and "Korahite." We believe

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17. See Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), ch. 6.
18. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41,* p. 25.

that this solution more accurately communicates the ranges of interpretive options. We believe that it is likely that the superscription *lᵉḏāwiḏ* did not originally indicate authorship — particularly, it did not originally indicate authorship by King David. There are several reasons for this conclusion. The primary reason is the many anachronisms in the psalms that preclude the idea of Davidic authorship. The most obvious of these anachronisms are the frequent references to the temple (Pss. 23:6; 27:4; 36:8), which was built after David's time. In addition, there are many other theological, historical, and cultic anachronisms. At the most basic linguistic level, the superscription *lᵉḏāwiḏ* need not imply Davidic authorship. In Old Testament Hebrew, the name David itself does not always refer to the founder of the Judean dynasty, but can refer to the Judean people (Isa. 55:3), the Davidic dynasty (Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 37:25), or the expected future ideal Davidic king (Jer. 30:9; Hos. 3:5). The Hebrew phrase *lᵉḏāwiḏ* is translated most literally "to David" (the preposition *lamed* in its most generic sense means "to"). If the *lamed* is understood as indicating possession ("belonging to"), it is plausible to interpret it as indicating authorship. But a more likely construal of the *lamed* of possession would be as indicating that the psalm in question belonged to a group of psalms that belonged to the royal temple in Jerusalem: "belonging to the Davidic temple." For the temple as a royal possession, cf. Amos 7:13, where Amaziah asserts that the temple in Bethel was a royal possession. The use of the *lamed* in 1 Kgs. 14:11, "anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city" *(hammēṯ lᵉyārāḇᵉʿām bāʿîr),* as well as the common superscription found at the heads of Psalms 44–47, 49, 84–85 (*lamnaṣṣēaḥ liḇnê qōrâḥ,* "belonging to the sons of Korah") support the interpretation.[19] Alternatively, the preposition may indicate that a psalm was composed "in honor of," "dedicated to," or "inspired by" the king. In the MT, thirteen psalms of David include what scholars refer to as "historical superscriptions" — brief narratives that associate a psalm with a specific incident in David's life (although to which incident is not always clear, or else the psalms are referring to a tradition about David that was not preserved in the Bible). These are Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142. These superscriptions should not be understood as indicating the occasion on which the psalms in question were composed, but rather as a clue to the early interpretation of them.[20] The

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19. For a defense of the traditional interpretation that the *lamed* implies authorship, see Bruce Waltke, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both," *JBL* 110 (1991) 583-96. Waltke cites Isa. 38:9 and Hab. 3:1 and quotes with approval the conclusion J. F. A. Sawyer ("An Analysis of the Context and Meaning of the Psalm-Headings," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 22 [1970] 26): "it can scarcely be doubted that the meaning of *ldwd* was 'by David.' . . ."

20. For more on this issue, see James D. Nogalski, "Reading David in the Psalter," *HBT* 23 (2001) 168-91; Melody D. Knowles, "The Flexible Rhetoric of Retelling: The Choice

approach taken in this commentary is that, for practical purposes, all of the psalms are anonymous. They are interpreted as generic poem-prayers that have been transmitted from generation to generation, so that people of *a generation yet unborn* may pray and sing them.

B. SUPERSCRIPTIONS

The issue of Davidic authorship and the meaning of *l^{e}dāwiḏ* raises the more general issue of the interpretation of the psalm superscriptions. Of the 150 poems in the Psalter, only 34 lack a superscription. In the LXX, which is generally expansionistic in the superscriptions, only 17 psalms lack a superscription.[21] As already suggested, the superscriptions are not part of the texts of the psalms per se, but are later editorial additions. The superscriptions have been much debated.[22] The hymn that closes the book of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:2-19) has both an introduction ("a prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to the Shigionoth") and a conclusion ("to the leader: with stringed instruments") and so gives some clues about the meaning and history of the superscripts. It may indicate that part or all of the various psalm superscriptions originally were postscripts rather than superscripts. Thus, the phrase "to the leader: according to the lilies" *(lamnaṣṣēaḥ ʿal šōšannîm)* in the Hebrew text of Psalm 45 may originally have been a concluding postscript to Psalm 44. And the following words — "of the Korahites. A Maskil. A love song" *(liḇnê qōraḥ maśkîl šîr y^{e}ḏîḏōt)* — may originally have been an introductory superscript for Psalm 45. The concluding editorial note to Psalm 72, "the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended," as well as the concluding doxologies following Psalms 41, 72, 89, and 106 further support the idea that — at least originally — parts or all of the superscriptions were actually postscripts. But, that said, the superscriptions have come down to us in the final canonical form of the Psalter at the head of the various psalms, and that is where they appear in this translation and commentary.

It is further important to note that many of the terms in the superscriptions are either partially or wholly obscure. Most of the words used can be categorized as indicating (1) the subcollection to which the psalm belongs, (2) directions for the liturgical/musical performance of the psalm, (3) the psalm's genre, and (4) historical information.

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of David in the Text of the Psalms," *CBQ* 67 (2005) 235-49; Rolf Rendtorff, "The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms,* ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (VTSup 99; Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 53-66.

21. For a discussion of the superscriptions in the LXX, see Albert Pietersma, "Septuagintal Exegesis and the Superscriptions of the Greek Psalter," in Flint and Miller, *The Book of Psalms,* pp. 443-75.

22. See Waltke, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both," and bibliography there.

1. Subcollection Identification (Authorship?). The most frequent type of superscription refers to the person or persons with whom a particular psalm is to be associated. As argued above, we believe that these superscriptions indicate with which subcollection of the Psalter a psalm should be associated, but many interpreters believe that this category indicates authorship. The terms that indicate the various subcollections are: *leḏāwiḏ (of David* or *Davidic;* 73 Psalms), *liḇnê qōraḥ (of the sons of Korah* or *Korahitic;* Psalms 42, 44–49, 84–85, 87–88), *lišlōmōh (of Solomon* or *Solomonic;* Psalms 72, 127), *leʾāsāp (of Asaph* or *Asaphite;* Psalms 50, 73–83), *leʾêṯān hāʾezrāḥî (of Ethan the Ezrahite;* Psalm 89), *lehêmān hāʾezrāḥî (of Heman the Ezrahite;* Psalm 88, according to the MT, is also marked as belonging to the collection of the *sons of Korah,* so it might be that the Ezraites were a group of priest musicians related to the Korahites), *lemōšeh (of Moses* or *Mosaic;* Psalm 90), *šîr hammaʿalôṯ (a song of ascending;* it is clearly a subcollection of psalms, but one that was apparently assembled from psalms that originally belonged to other collections, such as *Davidic* [122] and *Solomonic* [127]).

2. Directions for Liturgical/Musical Performance. Many superscriptions include terms that are not fully understood, but which probably referred in some way to the performance of the psalm in worship. The term *lamnaṣṣēaḥ (for the leader;* see note on Ps. 4:1) occurs at the head of fifty-five psalms. It may indicate a subcollection of psalms, but more likely is a reference or direction for some liturgical leader. Waltke follows Sawyer in defining the term as "to be recited by the official in charge."[23] The phrase *for the servant of the* Lord appears to modify the term in Psalm 18. Some terms may indicate the type of music or musical instruments that should accompany a psalm. For the most part, the precise meaning of the terms is unknown, so we have often opted to transliterate them. If we have used a translation, that translation is given in the parentheses: *biḡînôṯ/biḡinaṯ/ʿal neḡînaṯ (with stringed instruments;* Psalms 4, 6, 54–55, 61, 67, 76; cf. 69:13 and 77:7); *ʿalmûṯ labbēn* (Psalm 9); *ʿal ʿalāmôṯ* (Psalm 46); *ʿal haššemînîṯ* (Psalms 6, 12); *ʾel hannehîlôṯ (upon the flutes;* Psalm 5); *ʿal hāggittîṯ* (Psalms 8, 81, 84); *ʿal ʾayyeleṯ haššaḥar* (Psalm 22); *ʿal šōšannîm* (Psalms 45 and 69); *ʿal māḥalaṯ* (Psalms 53 and 88); *ʿal šûšan ʿēḏûṯ/ʿal šōšannîm ʿēḏûṯ* (Psalms 60 and 80); *ʿal yônaṯ ʾēlem reḥōqim* (Psalm 56); *šiggāyôn* (Psalm 7; the term might refer to the genre of the poem); and *lîḏûṯûn/ʿal yeḏûṯûn* (Psalms 39, 62, and 77). Other terms seem to indicate a particular occasion for a psalm to be used: *ḥanukkaṯ habbayiṯ (for the dedication of the temple —* perhaps an early reference to commemorating Hanukkah; Psalm 30); *leyôm haššabāṯ (for the day*

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23. Waltke, "Postscripts, Superscripts, or Both," p. 586.

of the Sabbath; Psalm 92); *leṯôḏâ (for thanksgiving;* Psalm 100); and *A prayer for an afflicted person, when faint and pouring out one's plea before the Lord* (Psalm 102). In addition, the phrase *'al tāšḥēṯ,* literally "do not destroy" and presumed to be a direction regarding the preservation of the psalm, may in fact be a liturgical direction (Psalms 57–59, 75).

3. Indication of Genre. Some terms in the superscriptions seem to indicate the poem's genre — although it should be noted that these terms do not always seem to match perfectly with the form of the following psalm (at least in terms of what modern form critics might expect). These terms include: *mizmôr (psalm;* the term appears at the head of 57 psalms, including psalms of many genres; thus it may be a generic term for a prayer-poem); *šîr (song;* the term appears at the head of 31 songs and is likely a referent to a song of praise); *tepillâ (prayer;* Psalms 17, 86, 90, 102, 142 — a term that seems to refer to a prayer for help); *tehillâ (praise;* Psalm 145); *maśkîl* (Psalms 32, 42, 44–45, 52–55, 74, 78, 88–89, 142; the meaning of the term is unknown); *miḵtām* (the term may refer to a liturgical direction or to the nature of the text — an "engraving" — rather than to a genre, but its meaning is unknown; Psalms 16, 56–60).

4. Historical Superscriptions. As noted above, thirteen psalms bear so-called historical superscriptions that relate the poems in some way to the life of David. These are Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142.

III. FORM CRITICISM AND HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATION

During the past century, interpretation of the Psalter has been dominated by an interpretive approach known as form criticism. As Patrick Miller noted some years ago: "Form-critical study of the psalms has dominated, if not controlled, the way in which this part of Scripture has been handled during this century — a fact that is as evident in popular treatments of the psalms and commentaries as it is in the scholarly literature."[24] In this approach, the first task of interpretation is to understand the genre (or "form") of a poem. Once a poem is properly categorized, interpretation of its actual words flows from this categorization. The dominance of this approach can be seen in the reality that many introductory textbooks are predominantly organized around the genres of the psalms.[25]

24. *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), p. 3.
25. E.g., Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms;* J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction*

Form-critical approaches have many strengths. The psalms are highly conventional, with many of the poems following predictable (or at least recognizable) patterns. Based on these patterns, it is possible to group the psalms into broad categories, such as hymns of praise, songs of thanksgiving, or prayers for help and the like (see below). Form-critical interpretation pays attention to the common patterns that emerge from comparing the psalms and interprets each psalm as an example of a known type of psalm. This commentary is dependent on the insights of form criticism, but also recognizes the limits of the approach. For example, by grouping psalms into categories, form-critical approaches often pay more attention to the forest (for example, the category of "praise") than they do to the individual tree (for example, the artistry and witness of a given praise psalm). In addition, a great many of the psalms contain elements of more than one of the identified forms. Form-critical approaches have at times been confused about how to deal with these psalms. At times form critics have solved this dilemma by labeling such psalms as "mixtures" or "mixed-type psalms."[26] At other times, form critics have resorted to the unhappy alternative of simply dividing a psalm in half. Artur Weiser, for example, wrote separate commentaries on Psalms "19A" and "19B." Frustrated by the mixture of genres in one psalm, he wrote: "Why these . . . dissimilar psalms were united in one single psalm cannot any longer be established with any degree of certainty."[27] The problems of these two solutions should be obvious. Any interpretive approach that leads either to bifurcating a poem that at least at one point in history made sense to someone or to creating a "catch-all" genre such as "mixed-type" is an interpretive approach with obvious limitations.

Two broad approaches to form-critical interpretation of the Psalter have existed. In the first, the "forms" of the psalms were studied in order to "get behind" the texts of the psalms to the "life settings" that produced the forms. The pioneer of form criticism was Hermann Gunkel.[28] Gunkel believed that liturgical forms emerge from settings — that particular occasions in life

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to the Book of Psalms (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980); Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (3rd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). Exceptions to this approach are Nancy deClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms: A Song from Ancient Israel* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004); and Alastair G. Hunter, *An Introduction to the Psalms* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008).

26. See, e.g., Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel,* completed by Joachim Begrich, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), pp. 306-10.

27. *The Psalms: A Commentary,* trans. Herbert Hartwell (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), p. 197.

28. See his *Introduction to Psalms.*

exist that include particular needs, and that liturgical "forms" evolve to meet the needs of those moments. To use a modern example, bestowing a public award such as an Oscar is a life setting that has required the evolution of the "form" of the "public, thank-you speech." If the award ceremony did not exist, the genre of the public, thank-you speech would not have developed. Regarding the psalms, Gunkel wrote, "we may dare to presume that [the Psalms] arose in the cult of Israel originally."[29] For Gunkel, a genre or "form" implies a specific life setting out of which it evolved and from which it could not be abstracted. In Gunkel's view, in order to properly understand a liturgical text, one has to imagine the cultic life setting that created it and to interpret it in that life setting. It is important to note, however, that Gunkel also believed the majority of psalms in the Psalter were not genuine literary artifacts that had been used in ancient worship; rather, they were literary creations — imitations of the "forms" that had developed in the cultic life setting. At any rate, one can see that for Gunkel, by imagining the settings that produced the ancient forms, the scholar could penetrate the mists of history and recover earlier, preliterary stages of the poems of the Psalter.

Sigmund Mowinckel developed and diverged from Gunkel's form-critical approach to the psalms. Mowinckel disagreed with Gunkel's argument that many or most of the psalms were imitations of actual worship texts. Mowinckel argued for an approach that set each of the psalms "in relation to the definite cultic act . . . to which it belonged."[30] Mowinckel identified many of the psalms within an annual New Year's "Enthronement of YHWH Festival."[31] Mowinckel's approach has been called the "cult-functional method." His views were quite persuasive for a time and spawned a series of imitators. Weiser, for example, placed many of the psalms in an annual covenant-renewal festival: "the cult of the covenant festival is to be assumed as the [life setting] of the vast majority of the individual Psalms and their categories."[32] Other similar proposals were developed.[33] Mowinckel's proposals, especially regarding the New Year's Festival, have largely lost their appeal.[34] But Mowinckel's reassertion that the texts of the psalms are actual

29. Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms,* p. 7.

30. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship,* trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (BRS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Livonia: Dove, 2004), 1:23.

31. *Psalmenstudien II: Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie,* (Kristiania: Dybwald, 1922). He placed Pss. 47, 93, 95–100, 8, 15, 24, 29, 33, 46, 48, 50, 66A, 75, 76, 81, 82, 84, 87, 118, 132, 149, 120–34, 65, 67, and 85 in this hypothetical setting.

32. Weiser, *The Psalms,* p. 18.

33. See, e.g., the work of Aubrey Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979).

34. Although see J. J. M. Roberts's positive reassessment of Mowinckel's proposal in "Mowinckel's Enthronement Festival: A Review," in Flint and Miller, *The Book of Psalms,*

prayer-poems and not imitations of prior cultic forms has been a contribution that is often overlooked.

Erhard Gerstenberger has been another important figure in the form-critical approach that sought to study the forms to get behind the texts to the life settings that produced the forms. Gerstenberger argued that "psalmic texts and psalmody served the needs of a religious community."[35] And further: "Form-critical work must not content itself with an analysis of linguistic patterns. . . . it must take into account customary life situations and their distinctive speech forms."[36] But unlike Mowinckel, Kraus, Johnson, and others, Gerstenberger placed most of the psalms (at least in their final forms) in postexilic, familially-based worship: in "the small, organic group of family, neighborhood, or community" and "Israel's secondary organizations" during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.[37] As for the poetic language of the Psalter, Gerstenberger maintained that this evocative, poetic language could not be abstracted "from its concrete life situations."[38] Further, "while the linguistic, poetic, and literary devices must be taken into account in form-critical analysis, they have to be evaluated in their interrelation with life situations and social settings."[39]

A second form-critical approach to the psalms did not focus on the forms as a way to get behind the poems to an original life situation that produced the forms, but rather focused more directly on the forms themselves. In this second approach, the forms assisted the interpreter to focus on the actual texts of the poem-prayers of the Psalter. Claus Westermann is representative of this broad school of thought. Westermann essentially boiled down the categories of the psalms to two broad forms: "praise and petition," which he understood as *theological* categories rather than cultic categories.[40] Westermann challenged the direction of the cult-functional approach. Focusing more on the texts of the psalms than on the cult that presumably gave birth to their forms, he asserted:

> It is high time finally to ask soberly what is regarded as cult in the Old Testament and what the Old Testament says about cult. It will then be

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pp. 97-115. See also Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Worship in Israel,* trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), for a less favorable assessment.

35. *Psalms: Part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 5.

36. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1,* p. 33.

37. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1,* p. 33.

38. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1,* p. 34.

39. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1,* p. 35.

40. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms,* trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), p. 35.

impossible to avoid the fact that in the Old Testament there is no absolute, timeless entity called "cult," but that worship in Israel, in its indissolvable connection with the history of God's dealings with his people, developed gradually in all its various relationships . . . and that therefore the categories of the Psalms can be seen only in connection with this history.[41]

Following this line of investigation, Westermann concluded that "the life situation of the Psalms as the cult cannot really be right. For that which really, in the last analysis, occurs in the Psalms is prayer."[42] Westermann criticized Gunkel's idea that the hymn grew out of worship. Noting that two of the examples of the oldest hymns are those of Miriam (Exodus 15) and Deborah (Judges 5), Westermann concluded that these cannot "be called cultic in the strict sense" because they occur in daily life.[43] "The Song of Miriam and the Song of Deborah . . . show, rather, with unmistakable clarity what the Sitz-im-Leben of the hymn is: the experience of God's intervention in history. God has acted; he has helped his people. Now praise *must* be sung to him."[44] Similarly, Westermann maintained that "lamentation is a phenomenon characterized by three determinant elements: the one who laments, God, and the others, i.e., that circle of people among whom or against whom the one who laments stands with a complaint."[45] Westermann understood the form-critical task as paying attention to the actual texts of the psalms: what they say and to whom. For him, then, form "is primarily neither a literary nor a cultic concept. It is both of these, but only secondarily."[46] Primarily, form is a theological category.

Walter Brueggemann is another representative of this second approach to form criticism. Building both on form criticism and also on the work of Paul Ricoeur, Brueggemann understood the psalms in terms of "the life of faith": "the sequence of *orientation-disorientation-reorientation*."[47] As should be obvious, this is a thoroughly *theological* framework. By paying attention primarily to the texts of various psalms — to what they say and to whom — Brueggemann imagined three types of theological situations in which the "forms" fit:

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41. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms,* p. 20.

42. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms,* p. 24.

43. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms,* p. 22. For a similar argument, see Rolf Jacobson, "The Costly Loss of Praise," *Theology Today* 57 (2000) 375-85.

44. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms,* p. 22.

45. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms,* p. 169.

46. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms,* p. 35.

47. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith,* ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), pp. 3-32, quoting p. 9 (emphasis in original). See also his *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

1. Orientation: "The mind-set and worldview of those who enjoy a serene location of their lives. . . ."[48]
2. Disorientation: "A new distressful situation in which the old orientation has collapsed."[49]
3. Reorientation: "A quite new circumstance that speaks of newness (it is not the old revived); surprise (there was no ground in the disorientation to anticipate it); and gift (it is not done by the lamenter)."[50]

Discussion of Brueggemann's typology has often characterized him as replacing the form-critical categories. But he actually proposed his approach as "a helpful way to understand the use and function of the Psalms."[51] That is, Brueggemann's typology is an example of the second form-critical approach — one that pays primary attention to the actual texts and their forms.[52]

This second form-critical approach to the psalms also has its weakness. In spite of the attention to the actual text of the psalms, this approach tends to reduce each psalm to an example of its "type." Rather than focus on the actual cry of an individual prayer for help, for example, the approach tends to treat each prayer for help as an example of lament. Or each hymn as an example of praise. Another weakness of this second approach to form criticism (one that it shares with the first) is the basically unquestioned assumption that form and function cohere with each other. That is, it is assumed that praise language is always used to praise or that petition language is always used to petition. The example of a hymn of praise on the lips of Jonah in the second chapter of Jonah, where the prophet is in the belly of the great fish, shows that form and function need not cohere. Similarly, in the prophetic corpus of the Old Testament, the oracles of judgment against the nations take the form of announcements of punishment. But if one takes into consideration the likely difference between the fictive audience of these oracles (such as the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14) and the literal historical audience (which one might assume to be the king or people of Jerusalem), then one can again see that form and function do not automatically cohere.

The approach taken in this commentary shares more with the second form-critical approach than the first. But we try to move beyond the temp-

48. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," p. 10.
49. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," p, 11.
50. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," p, 14.
51. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," p, 9.
52. Other scholars who approach the Psalms theologically include J. L. Mays ("The Lord Reigns," in *The Lord Reigns* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994]); Brown *(Seeing the Psalms);* McCann *(A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms);* and Jerome Creach *(Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* [JSOTSup 217; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996]).

tation to reduce each lament to an example of the broader form and seek to interpret each psalm as a unique and particular prayer. In addition, as outlined in the section that follows, we try to be sensitive to the canonical story of the Psalter and to the evocative poetic language of each poem.

A final peculiarity to be noted about form-critical approaches to the Psalter is that when categorizing the psalms, interpreters consider both common "literary forms" of the psalms as well as the "thematic form" of each. Thus, on the one hand, among the Psalter's forms there are psalms that share common literary forms: prayers for help (also called laments), hymns of praise, songs of thanksgiving, trust psalms, entrance psalms and instructional psalms (sometimes called wisdom psalms). On the other hand, there are also psalms that share common thematic aspects, but which might differ in literary form: royal psalms, creation psalms, pilgrimage psalms, and historical psalms. This leads to the further oddity that some psalms are classified under more than one form. Psalm 2, for example, is a royal liturgy; Psalm 18, a royal song of thanksgiving; Psalm 8, a creation hymn; and Psalm 139, a creation song of thanksgiving (or sometimes a creation prayer for help). The literary forms of the Psalter include:

Prayer for Help (both of Individuals and of the Community)
The individual prayers for help are spoken by an "I," whereas the communal prayers are spoken by a "we." These psalms assume a situation of crisis, and the mode of speech is petition. The common formal traits of these poems are:
- Address to God
- Complaint, which often comes in three forms: the "I complaint" about the psalmist's self, the "You complaint" about God, and the "They complaint" about the psalmist's oppressors
- Petition, in which the psalmist requests relief and deliverance but also offers supporting reasons in order to urge God to answer
- Expressions of confidence and trust
- Promise to praise the Lord in the future

One subcategory of these prayers is the *imprecatory psalm,* in which the psalmist prays for the destruction of the oppressors. These psalms assume that the crisis was mainly caused by the oppressors. A second subcategory of the prayer for help is the *penitential psalm,* in which the psalmist prays for forgiveness. These psalms assume that the crisis was mainly caused by the psalmist him- or herself.

Psalm of Trust
These psalms also assume a situation of crisis, but the mode of speech is trust. The common formal traits of these poems are:

- A description of the crisis, usually in metaphorical terms
- Expressions of confidence and hope

Hymn of Praise
These psalms testify to the Lord by praising his character and his deeds. The common formal traits of these poems are:
- A call to praise *(Praise the Lord)*
- Reasons to praise, usually introduced by the Hebrew *kî,* "for" or "because."

Four subcategories of the hymn of praise are: the *historical psalm,* which praises the Lord's actions on Israel's behalf in history; the *creation psalm,* which praises the Lord's work of creation; and the *enthronement psalm,* which praises the Lord as the King with the phrase *The Lord reigns (YHWH mālak);* and the *songs of Zion,* which praise the Lord for choosing to dwell in the temple on Zion and for choosing the Davidic dynasty to be God's instruments on earth.

Song of Thanksgiving (both of the individual and the community)
The song of thanksgiving assumes that a crisis has passed and the individual or community praises God in fulfillment of an earlier promise to praise (see above, the Prayer for Help). The common formal traits of these psalms include:
- Call to praise
- Recollection of the past crisis
- Recollection of the past prayer for help
- Renewed call to praise, including the appeal for the community to join the psalmist in praising the Lord

Instructional Psalm
These psalms often include a dualistic comparison between the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the fool, or God's way and the world's way. Some formal traits that occur in these psalms are *happy are . . .* phrases (*'ašrê;* perhaps better translated as "fortunate are . . .") and a tone of instruction. One subcategory of the instructional psalm is the *Torah psalm,* which expressly instructs regarding the Lord's Torah.

Royal Psalm
These psalms, as indicated above, are thematically related rather than related according to formal similarities. They are poems that were composed for specific events in the king's life or for other reasons related to the monarchy. The events may have included the king's coronation, marriage, or an impending military campaign. Other possibilities are

prayers for the king to pray himself or to be prayed on his behalf. These psalms were retained in the canon following the end of Israel's and Judah's monarchies, and they became part of the seedbed of messanic hope — Israel's hope that one day the Lord would send the ideal Davidic king, the Messiah.

Liturgies

These psalms were composed for various liturgical purposes. They share the obvious formal characteristic that certain parts may have been spoken by a given person or persons (such as a priest, the congregation, or the king). They also share the trait that liturgical actions can be intuited. Subcategories of these psalms include: the *entrance liturgy,* in which a person or party enters the temple; the *festival psalm,* which was used at one of Israel's three great festivals (Passover, Weeks, and Booths); and the pilgrimage psalm, which may have been used by the faithful as part of their pilgrimage to the temple for one of the festivals.

A final caveat about the categorization of the forms. Many of the psalms do not perfectly fit into one of the "forms" of form criticism. The ancients were apparently not as anxious about the forms as some modern interpreters. For this reason, categorizing a psalm according to form is always a preliminary, penultimate act of interpretation. Interpreters will disagree about the form of a psalm. And they will change their minds. Labeling a psalm with one of the forms is meant as a way *into* the interpretation and understanding of a psalm. It is not meant to shut down discussion or close off interpretation.

IV. THE CANONICAL SHAPE OF THE PSALTER

Scholars have traditionally approached the book of Psalms as a collection, an anthology, of laments and hymns of ancient Israel, preserved in a somewhat random order. We pick out and use psalms — like Psalm 23 or Psalm 42 or Psalm 145 — with little or no thought to the psalms surrounding them. And why not? After all, each psalm is a self-contained unit, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. We do not need to read Psalm 22 to understand Psalm 23, or Psalm 146 to understand Psalm 145. Each psalm has an individual message.

But the canonical method of studying the biblical text has encouraged readers to reexamine the shape of the Psalter and ask questions about the possibility of a deliberate, rather than random, ordering of the psalms within the book. J. Clinton McCann, Jr., in a 1993 collection of essays titled *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter,* states that scholars are increasingly aware that the

purposeful placement of psalms within the collection seems to have given the final form of the whole Psalter a function and message greater than the sum of its parts.[53] Clues about the ordering of the psalms are evident throughout the Psalter in what may be called footprints — footprints left by the community of faith that shaped the book of Psalms into the form in which we now have it preserved in the Old Testament.

From the time of the Enlightenment to the mid-twentieth century, scholars who studied the biblical text gave the majority of their time to the disciplines of textual, source, form, and redactional criticism. As noted above, Hermann Gunkel and his student Sigmund Mowinckel devoted most of their careers to the critical study of the book of Psalms. Gunkel applied the form-critical method to the psalms, categorizing each by its *Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben*.[54] Sigmund Mowinckel built on the work of Gunkel and tried to discover where each psalm in the Psalter would have been used in the cultic worship of ancient Israel.[55] Gunkel and Mowinckel understood the psalms as individual compositions, and they wrote nothing about the shape of the Psalter as a book or a story.

The canonical approach to the text of the Old Testament was championed in the mid-twentieth century by Brevard S. Childs. In a 1976 essay titled "Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms," and in his 1979 *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture,* Childs encouraged scholars to move away from dissecting the text of the Old Testament and move toward examining the text in the form in which it was preserved for us, i.e., as a whole.[56] Childs maintained, in fact, that it was useless to attempt to understand the underlying layers of traditions which make up the biblical text. The reason is that the editors who compiled and transmitted it deliberately obscured the layers in a process Childs calls "actualization" to keep the text from "being moored in the past."[57] The only way to study and interpret the text is in the form in which we have it. The book of Psalms, therefore, should not be approached as an artifact, as the "cultic hymnbook" of ancient Israel. Childs writes:

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53. J. Clinton McCann, Jr., ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), p. 7.

54. Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction,* trans. Thomas M. Horner (FBBS 19; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

55. Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship,* trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (2 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962; repr. BRS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Livonia: Dove, 2004).

56. Brevard S. Childs, "Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God,* ed. Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and G. Ernest Wright (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 377-88; and *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

57. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture,* p. 79.

The psalms are transmitted as the sacred psalms of David, but they testify to all the common troubles and joys of ordinary human life in which all persons participate. . . . Through the mouth of David, the man, they become a personal word from God in each individual situation.[58]

James A. Sanders shared Childs's interest in studying the final form of the text of the Old Testament.[59] But he disagreed with Childs's assertion that it is useless to try to understand the underlying layers of traditions that make up a text. Sanders maintained that biblical texts are grounded in historical settings, that those settings can be discovered, and that they are important for understanding the canonical shape of the texts. But he believed that scholars have looked in the wrong places for those historical settings. Gunkel looked at the individual oral settings of the psalms, Mowinckel at the cultic settings, and Sanders at communities of faith.

Each psalm may have been composed by an individual, perhaps in an oral setting. And each psalm may have been used in ancient Israel's worship experience. But each psalm in the Psalter was remembered, valued, repeated, and passed on within the ancient Israelite community of faith. Communities found value in the texts which comprise the Old Testament, or those texts would not have been preserved. Sanders writes:

The text cannot be attributed to any discreet genius, such as author or editor or redactor, in the past. It can only be attributed to the ancient communities which continued to find value in the received traditions and scriptures, generation after generation, passing them on for the value they had found in them.[60]

Sanders goes on to clarify that communities find value in texts when those texts provide answers to two basic existential questions: "Who are we?" and "What are we to do?"[61] The ancient Israelites repeatedly asked these questions of, and found answers to them in, their traditions — the stories and texts which they passed on orally from generation to generation. The stories and texts were authoritative for the life of the people.

At some point in the history of ancient Israel, the authoritative traditions were written down in a particular form and order and were passed from generation to generation unchanged. The Torah — Genesis, Exodus,

58. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture,* p. 521.
59. James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (GBS; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); and *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).
60. Sanders, *Canon and Community,* p. 29.
61. James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), p. xv.

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy — was probably the first portion of the Old Testament to be placed in a fixed format. Next came the Prophets — Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve — and then the Writings, which includes the book of Psalms. We know little about the process by which the traditions of ancient Israel moved from a fluid to a fixed method of transmission, but we do know that the process of fixing the text of the Old Testament was completed sometime after the turn of the Common Era.[62]

The book of Psalms appears to be one of the latest books of the Old Testament to achieve such final form. The Dead Sea discoveries and the Septuagint indicate that a number of "editions" of psalm collections circulated in the life of ancient Israel. More than thirty fragments of psalms scrolls have been discovered among the Dead Sea documents, among them two significant finds in Cave 4 and Cave 11. The fragment from Cave 4 contains portions of Psalms 6–69, which are, for the most part, in the same order as in the Old Testament book of Psalms. The fragment from Cave 11 contains thirty-nine canonical psalms with other poetry mixed in. The order of the psalms on this scroll is: 101–3, 109, 118, 104, 147, 105, 146, 148, 121–32, 119, 135–36, 145, 154 (attested elsewhere only in the Syriac Bible); a prayer for deliverance, 139, 137, 138, Sir. 51:13-30, an apostrophe to Zion, 93, 141, 133, 144, 155 (also only in the Syriac Bible), 142, 143, 149–50, a hymn to the creator, 2 Sam 23:7, a prose statement about David's compositions, 140, 134, and 151.[63]

In the Septuagint the psalms are in the same order as they are in our Old Testament, but Psalms 9 and 10 are grouped as a single psalm, as are Psalms 114 and 115. An additional psalm appears at the end of the book, and the superscriptions are longer and occur on more psalms than in the Masoretic Text.

The process by which the Psalter achieved the form in which we have it is lost in the pages of history. The superscriptions of the psalms give the reader some clues about their composition. As noted earlier, seventy-four of the psalms in our Psalter are ascribed to David; two are ascribed to Solomon; twenty-five to Korah, Asaph, Ethan, and Heman, described in 1 Chr. 15:16-19 and 2 Chr. 20:19 as musicians in David's and Solomon's courts; and one to Moses. Psalms 120–34 are identified in their superscriptions as "Songs of the Ascents," and thirty-six psalms have no superscription at all. Some psalms apparently come from early in the life of ancient Israel, such as Psalms 3 and 48, and some seem clearly to be from Israel's later life, such as Psalms 1 and 137.

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62. For a full discussion of the process, see Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), pp. 105-18.

63. See James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 172-76.

But why these 150 psalms, and why in this particular order? Why is Psalm 1 the first psalm in the Psalter; why is Psalm 72 placed seventy-second; and why does Psalm 150 close the Psalter? What factors influenced the ancient Israelite community to shape the book of Psalms into its final form and to order the psalms as they did? We are not the first to ask the question. The Midrash on Psalm 3 states:

> As to the exact order of David's Psalms, Scripture says elsewhere: *Man knoweth not the order thereof* (Job 28:13). R. Eleazar taught: The sections of Scripture are not arranged in their proper order. For if they were arranged in their proper order, and any man so read them, he would be able to resurrect the dead and perform other miracles. For this reason the proper order of the sections of Scripture is hidden from mortals and is known only to the Holy One, blessed be He, who said, *"Who, as I, can read and declare it, and set it in order?"* (Isa. 44:7).
>
> When R. Joshua ben Levi sought to arrange the Psalms in their proper order, a heavenly voice came forth and commanded: "Do not rouse that which slumbers!"[64]

As noted earlier, the book of Psalms preserved in the MT consists of 150 psalms, many of which appear to have been part of smaller, already-existing collections. Some of the collections that are identified within the Psalter include:

the Davidic Collections	Pss. 3–14, 51–72, 108–10, 138–45
the Korahite Collections	Pss. 42–49, 84–85, 87–88
the Elohistic Collection	Pss. 42–83
the Asaphite Collection	Pss. 73–83
the Enthronement Psalms	Pss. 93, 95–99
the Songs of the Ascents	Pss. 120–34
the Hallelujah Psalms	Pss. 111–18, 146–50

In addition to the collections of psalms within the Psalter, the Psalter itself provides some clues to its prior "shaping" process. The Psalter is divided into five books: Pss. 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–50, each of which concludes with a doxology:

> Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
>   from everlasting to everlasting,
> Amen and amen. (41:13)

64. William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (Yale Judaica Series 13; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:49-50.

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
 who alone does wondrous deeds.
Blessed be his glorious name forever;
 may his glory fill all the earth.
Amen and amen. (72:18-19)

Blessed be the LORD forever.
Amen and amen. (89:52)

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
 from everlasting to everlasting.
And let all the people say, "Amen."
 Praise the LORD. (106:48)

Let every breathing thing praise the LORD!
 Hallelujah! (150:6)

The similarities among the doxologies — especially the first four — and the fact that the word "amen" occurs only in the doxologies strongly suggest that they were purposefully shaped and added to the Psalter at about the same time, although we have no indication of when this may have been.

The five-book division of the Psalter is an early tradition. The psalms scrolls found near the Dead Sea are divided into five books, even though the individual psalms included within each book differ from those in the Old Testament book of Psalms.[65] The LXX also divides its Psalter into five books. The *Midrash Tehillim,* which contains materials that date to as early as the first century B.C.E., states in its commentary on Psalm 1:

> As Moses gave five books of laws to Israel, so David gave five Books of Psalms to Israel, the Book of Psalms entitled *Blessed is the man* (Ps. 1:1), the Book entitled *For the leader: Maschil* (Ps. 41:1), the Book, *A Psalm of Asaph* (Ps. 73:1), the Book, *A Prayer of Moses* (Ps. 90:1), and the Book, *Let the redeemed of the Lord say* (Ps. 107:2). Finally, as Moses blessed Israel with the words *Blessed art thou, O Israel* (Deut. 33:29), so David blessed Israel with the words *Blessed is the man.*[66]

Psalm types and superscriptions within the Psalter also provide clues to the present shape of the book. First, with regard to psalm types, scholars have noted a "movement" from lament psalms in the first portion of the Psalter to

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65. For more information on the Dead Sea Psalm Scrolls, see James A. Sanders, ed., *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); and Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms.*

66. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms,* p. 5.

hymnic psalms in the later portion.[67] The Psalter begins with lament. After the introductory Psalms 1 and 2, the reader encounters a string of eleven laments, broken only by the creation psalm, Psalm 8. The end of the Psalter contains the magnificent praise hymns 146–50, and in between the distribution is as follows:

- In Book One, twenty-four of the forty-one psalms (59 percent) are laments, while eight (20 percent) are hymns.
- In Book Two, twenty of the thirty-one psalms (65 percent) are laments, while six (19 percent) are hymns.
- In Book Three, eight of the seventeen psalms (47 percent) are laments, and six (35 percent) are hymns.
- In Book Four, only four of the seventeen psalms (24 percent) are laments, while five (29 percent) are hymns.
- And in Book Five, ten of the forty-four psalms (23 percent) are laments, and twenty-three (52 percent) are hymns.

Second, the superscriptions of the psalms may help us understand its shape and shaping in two ways. The number of psalms with superscriptions is significantly higher in the first three books of the Psalter than in the last two books:

- In Book One, thirty-nine of the forty-one psalms have superscriptions (95 percent).
- In Book Two, thirty of the thirty-one psalms have superscriptions (97 percent).
- In Book Three, all seventeen psalms have superscriptions (100 percent).
- In Book Four, only six of the seventeen psalms have superscriptions (35 percent).
- And in Book Five, twenty-six of the forty-four psalms have superscriptions (59 percent).

Psalms attributed to David are much greater in number in Books One, Two, and Five than in Books Three and Four.

- In Book One, thirty-nine of the forty-one psalms are attributed to David (95 percent).[68]

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67. Claus Westermann was the first to write about this movement. See *Praise and Lament in the Psalms.*

68. Psalm 10 does not have a superscription, but is firmly linked to Psalm 9. See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59,* trans. Hilton C. Oswald (CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988),

- In Book Two, eighteen of the thirty-one psalms are attributed to David (58 percent).
- In Book Three, only one of the seventeen psalms is attributed to David (6 percent).
- In Book Four, two of the seventeen psalms are attributed to David (12 percent).
- And in Book Five, fourteen of the forty-four psalms are attributed to David (32 percent).

Each of these phenomena contribute to our understanding of how the communities of faith heard, preserved, and handed on the songs of ancient Israel and eventually shaped them into the book of Psalms.

A brief history of the circumstances surrounding the shaping of the Old Testament in general and the Psalter in particular may be helpful at this point. In 597 B.C.E., the army of the Babylonian Empire carried Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, and many of his subjects into exile (2 Kings 25). A decade later, the army sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The nation of Israel, ruled by a succession of Davidic kings, was at an end. In 539, Babylon fell to the Persian Empire led by Cyrus II. In the following year, Cyrus issued an edict which allowed all of the people held captive by the Babylonians to return to their homelands.[69] Sometime after 538, a number of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem and began the process of rebuilding the city and the temple. By 515, the temple was standing once again and functioning as the Jewish cult center (Ezra 6:15-16).

The Persian government allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple and resume their religious practices, so long as those practices did not conflict with the Persian laws. Temple and cult were restored, but the nation-state of Israel with a king of the Davidic line at its head was not. Except for a brief time of independence during the rule of the Hasmoneans (141-63 B.C.E.), the people lived continuously as vassals, first to the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans. Under the same circumstances, most of the nation-states of the ancient Near East simply disappeared from history. But ancient Israel did not. The postexilic community found a way to view their identity and to structure their existence that went beyond traditional concepts of nationhood. King and court could no longer be the focal point of national life;

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pp. 188-89; and William Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 77. Psalm 33 has solid linguistic links to Psalm 32. See Gerald H. Wilson's treatment in *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico: Scholars, 1985), pp. 174-75.

69. For the text of the so-called Cyrus Cylinder, see James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 316. The book of Ezra (1:2-4 and 6:3-5) includes two portions of the restoration policy.

temple and worship took center stage. And Yahweh, not a king of the Davidic line, reigned as sovereign over the new "religious nation" of Israel.

Postexilic Israel redefined nationhood and found a way to remain a separate and identifiable entity among the vast empires of which it found itself a part. A part of the process of redefinition involved the shaping of the Hebrew Scriptures. The people looked to their traditional and cultic literature for answers to the existential questions "Who are we?" and "What are we to do?" and then shaped the literature into a document that provided answers to the questions.

The Hebrew Bible in general and the Hebrew Psalter in particular, then, offer the hermeneutical rationale for the survival for the postexilic community. According to the Psalter, what is that hermeneutical rationale?

The Psalter begins with the story of the reign of King David in Book One, moves to the reign of Solomon in Book Two, and on to the divided kingdom and destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians and the southern kingdom by the Babylonians in Book Three; Book Four recounts the struggle of the exiles in Babylon to find identity and meaning, and Book Five celebrates the return to Jerusalem and the establishment of a new Israel with God as sovereign.

The Psalter opens in Book One with words encouraging torah piety:

Happy is the one . . .
(whose) delight is in the instruction of the Lord,
    who meditates on his instruction day and night. (1:1-2)

It continues with words of warning to the nations and their rulers to recognize the God of Israel as king over all:

So now, O kings, be wise!
    Be warned, O rulers of the earth!
Serve the Lord in fear!
    In trembling kiss his feet! (2:10-11)

Readers enter the Psalter with two admonitions: diligently study and delight in the Torah and acknowledge God as sovereign.

Book One continues with thirty-nine psalms "of David." The psalms provide insight into every facet of David's life — the king, the human being, the warrior, the parent, the servant of the Lord. Most of the psalms in Book One are laments (59 percent), calling on God to act on behalf of the psalmist against enemies and oppressors. David's life was fraught with conflict and oppression, from within and without the nation-state he founded — the Philistines, Saul, David's own family (see 1 Sam. 19:11; 29:1; 31:1; 2 Sam. 3:1; 5:22; 15:6, 10; 20:1; 1 Kgs. 1:24-25).

Psalm 41, classified as an individual hymn of thanksgiving, begins with the wisdom word "content" *('ašrê),* the same word with which Psalm 1 begins and Psalm 2 ends:

> Happy *('ašrê)* are they who consider the helpless;
>> in the day of trouble, the LORD will rescue them.
> The LORD will keep them and preserve them;
>> they shall be called happy *('ašrê)* in the land. (41:1-2)

Book One tells the story of the reign of David, and its *'ašre* ending reminds the reader/hearer of the dual message of the introduction to the Psalter — torah piety (Psalm 1) and God as king (Psalm 2).

Book Two of the Psalter, like Book One, also contains many laments, but not all of them are placed on David's lips. The Korahites who were, according to the book of Chronicles, temple singers during the reigns of David and Solomon, mix their voices with David in singing the laments of Book Two (Psalms 42–49).[70] Fifteen psalms of David appear in the middle of Book Two (51–65). Fourteen are laments, and eight of them are connected, in their superscriptions, to particular events in the life of David. These psalms remind readers once again that David's life was one of turmoil and strife, but they also depict a person who loved the Lord and strove to serve the Lord with fervor.

The only untitled psalm in Book Two is Psalm 71, an individual lament, which is read as the supplication of an aged person for God not to forget or forsake.[71] Verses 6 and 9 read:

> Upon you I have leaned from birth;
>> from the womb of my mother you have been my protector.
> To you, my praise is constant.
> . . .
> Do not cast me off in old age;
>> when my strength is finished, do not forsake me.

In its position in Book Two, one might read Psalm 71 as the words of an aged David at the end of his reign.[72]

Psalm 72 is one of only two psalms in the Psalter ascribed to Solomon.[73]

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70. For a full discussion of the Korahites, see the Introduction to Book Two.

71. Many English translations of the Psalter give "titles," unrelated to the superscriptions, to psalms. Psalm 71 is titled "A Prayer for Old Age" in the King James Authorized Version and "The Prayer of an Old Man for Deliverance" in the American Standard Version (1901).

72. See 1 Kgs. 1:1–2:11.

73. The other is one of the Songs of the Ascents, Psalm 127.

Hans-Joachim Kraus describes Psalm 72 as a collection of wishes and prayers for the well-being of the king, likely used at an enthronement ceremony for a king in Jerusalem.[74] Brevard Childs suggests that the canonical placement of Psalm 72 indicates that the psalm "is 'for' Solomon, offered by David."[75]

> O God, your justice give to the king,
>> and your righteousness to the son of the king.
> May he judge your people with righteousness,
>> and your poor with justice. . . .
> May there be abundance of grain in the land,
>> to the mountains.
>> May his fruit thrive like the foliage of Lebanon;
> and they blossom from the cities as grass of the field. (72:1-2, 16)

The psalm ends with the words "The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are completed" (72:20).

Book Three opens with "A Psalm of Asaph" (Psalm 73). Like the sons of Korah, Asaph was, according to the book of Chronicles, a temple singer during the reigns of David and Solomon.[76] Fifteen of the seventeen psalms in Book Three are attributed to Asaph and the sons of Korah. Only one psalm, Psalm 86, is attributed to David. With the close of Book Two, David moves to the background. The focus is now on David's descendants, who will determine the future of ancient Israel.

Psalm 73 is, like Psalm 1, classified as a wisdom psalm. In Psalm 73, the psalm-singer looks at the world around and sees the wicked *(rᵉšāʿîm)* prospering while the righteous *(ṣaddîqîm)* suffer and questions whether conventional theology and mores still hold true in life.[77] There seemed to be no reasoned connection between righteousness and reward, wickedness and punishment. The psalmist muses:

74. H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150,* trans. Hilton C. Oswald (CC; Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1989), pp. 76-77.

75. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture,* p. 516.

76. 1 Chr. 6:39 and 25:1, 2 and 2 Chr. 5:12 state that Asaph was a descendant of Levi, part of one of the great families or guilds of musicians and singers in preexilic Israel. See Harry P. Nasuti, *Tradition History and Psalms of Asaph* (SBLDS 88; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).

77. Humankind in the ancient Near East believed in a basic moral governance of the world. Act and consequence were connected. Thus, the good prospered and the wicked perished. Sages and wisdom teachers taught that there was a fundamental order in the world which could be discerned by experience, that the gods had established the order, and that all of humanity was bound by the rules governing that order. For a detailed treatment, see *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East,* ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

But as for me, my feet have almost stumbled;
    my steps nearly slipped.
Because I was jealous of the boastful
    as I saw the well-being of the wicked;
Because there are no struggles in death,
    and their bodies are fat.
The difficulties of humanity do not exist for them;
    and with the human condition, they are not struck . . .
They scoff and speak with malice;
    the ones in high station speak of extortion.
They set their mouths in the heavens;
    as their tongues walk in the earth. (73:2-5, 8-9)

In despair, the psalm-singer enters the sanctuary of the Lord and there finds
order in the seeming chaos of life.

Behold! Those who are far from you perish;
    You put an end to all those who are unfaithful to you.
But as for me, it is good to be near God;
    I have made the Lord God my refuge;
    I will tell of all your works. (73:27-28)

Psalm 73 opens a new chapter in the Psalter's story of the life of ancient
Israel. It signals a turning point. David's reign is over, and Solomon's reign will
end with the nation divided into two rival kingdoms that will be in constant
conflict with one another and the nations around them. Community laments
and community hymns dominate Book Three of the Psalter. The voice of David, the individual, gives way to the voice of the community of faith, which is
attempting to make sense of all that is going on around them.

Why, O God, have you rejected us forever?
    Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?
Remember your congregation which you acquired of old,
    the tribe of your inheritance which you redeemed,
        Mount Zion, where you dwell. (74:1-2)

Restore us, O God of our salvation!
    Break off your anger toward us!
Will you be angry with us forever?
    Will you stretch your anger from generation to generation?
Will you not turn and give us life,
    so your people will rejoice in you?
Show us your *hesed,* O Lord!
    Give us your salvation! (85:4-7)

Near the end of Book Three, readers/hearers encounter Psalm 88, an individual lament, but a lament like no other in the Psalter. It is almost wholly composed of only one of the five elements that are normally found in a lament psalm, the Complaint. The Invocation and Petition are brief lines within the song, and the Expressions of Trust and Praise and Adoration are missing completely. The psalm ends with the words:

> Your anger has swept over me;
>   your dread assaults destroy me.
> They surround me like waters all day;
>   they close in on me completely.
> You cause the one who loves me
>   and my friend to distance themselves from me;
>   only darkness knows me. (88:16-18)

Psalm 88's lament is followed by a royal psalm, Psalm 89. As Psalm 88 is a lament like no other in the Psalter, Psalm 89 is a royal psalm like no other. It begins as do other royal psalms, praising God for the good provisions to the king of God's choosing.

> Of the *hesed* of the Lord forever I will sing;
>   Generation to generation I will make known your faithfulness with
>   my mouth;
> for I will declare, "Your *hesed* is built to last;
>   the heavens, your faithfulness is established in them."
> "I cut a covenant with my chosen;
>   I have sworn to David, my servant.
> I will establish your descendants forever;
>   and build your throne for generations." (89:1-4)

But the psalm takes a sudden turn in v. 38.

> But [now] you have rejected, refused,
>   and become very angry with your anointed.
> You have renounced your covenant with your servant;
>   you have defiled his crown in the land. . . .
> You have put an end to his splendor;
>   you have thrown down his crown on the ground. (89:38-39, 44)

In 722 B.C.E., the Assyrians destroyed Samaria and scattered the population of Israel. In 587, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took a major portion of Judah's population into captivity in Babylon. The nations of Israel and Judah had come to the end; Davidic kingship had come to an end; the people were exiled from their homeland. Book Three of the Psalter ends with

the community of faith lamenting and asking questions of its God: "Who are we? Who will lead us? Who will help us to survive in this new world?"

Book Four opens with "A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God." It is the only psalm in the Hebrew Psalter so designated. In it, the reader/hearer encounters these words — placed in the mouth of Moses:

> Return *(šûḇ)*, LORD! How long?
>   Change your mind, with regard to your servants.
> Satisfy us in the morning with your *hesed*
>   so we might rejoice and be glad all our days.
> Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
>   as many years as we have seen evil.
> Let your work be shown to your servants
>   and your splendor to their children.
> Let the splendor of the Lord, our God, be upon us;
>   and the work our hands, establish it for us;
>   the work of our hands, establish it. (90:13-17)

Just as Moses admonished God to "turn" and "have compassion" on the Israelites during the golden calf incident (Exod. 32:12), so now Moses asks God to once again "turn" and "have compassion." The Targum to Psalm 90, in fact, titles it "A prayer of Moses the prophet, when the people Israel sinned in the desert." Not just Psalm 90, but the whole of Book Four of the Psalter is dominated by the person of Moses. Outside of Book Four, Moses is mentioned only once in the Psalter (77:20); in Book Four, he is referred to seven times (90:S; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32).[78]

The community of faith cannot return to the days of King David. They can only move forward. Moses intervenes with God on behalf of the people and then points the way forward. Enthronement psalms, which celebrate the enthronement of the Lord as king — rather than a king of the Davidic line, dominate Book Four of the Psalter.

> The LORD is king!
>   He is robed in majesty, the LORD is robed;
>   with strength he has girded himself. (93:1)

> For a great God is the LORD,
>   and a great king over all the gods. (95:3)

> Say among the nations, the LORD is king!
>   The world is firmly established; it will not be shaken.
>   He will judge the people with equity. (96:10)

78. Marvin Tate describes Book Four as a "Moses Book." See *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990), p. xxvi.

> The king is strong; he loves justice!
>> You established equity;
>>> justice and righteousness in Jacob
>>>> You formed.
> Exalt the Lord your God;
>> and bow down at his footstool.
>>> He is holy! (99:4-5)

At the end of Book Four, Psalm 105 reminds the community of faith how God provided for, protected, and sustained them throughout their history.

> The Lord — he is our God;
>> Throughout the land are his judgments.
> He has remembered his eternal covenant —
>> A promise he commanded for a thousand generations —
> Which he cut with Abraham —
>> And his oath to Isaac.
>> And he confirmed it for Jacob as a statute,
>> To Israel as an eternal covenant. . . .
> He sent Moses his servant
>> And Aaron, whom he had chosen,
> Who set among them the promises of his signs
>> And wonders in the land of Ham. . . .
> He brought out his people with silver and gold,
>> And none of their tribes stumbled. . . .
> He gave them the lands of the nations,
>> And they inherited the labor of the peoples. (105:7-10, 26-27, 37, 44)

But the psalm immediately following, Psalm 106, reminds the people of their unfaithfulness to the God who protected and sustained them.

> We have sinned, like our ancestors;
>> We have done wrong and acted wickedly. . . .
> They were jealous of Moses in the camp,
>> Of Aaron, the holy one of God. . . .
> They made a calf at Horeb;
>> They worshipped a formed image. . . .
> They grumbled in their tents;
>> They did not listen to the voice of the Lord. . . .
> Many times he delivered them,
>> But they, they willfully rebelled!
>> They were brought low by their sin. (106:6, 16, 19, 25, 43)

God ruled as sovereign over the Israelites before the days of Kings Saul and David (see 1 Samuel 8); God could be sovereign once again. But the message

at the end of Book Four of the Psalter is: Remember the past and don't be disobedient and unfaithful in the future. Thus, Book Four of the Psalter ends very differently from Book Three. At the end of Psalm 89 are questions about why ancient Israel is suffering in its present situation. At the end of Psalm 106 is a simple petition to the Lord:

> Deliver us, O Lord our God,
>> And gather us from the nations
> So that we may testify to your holy name
>> And celebrate by praising you. (106:47)

In 539 B.C.E., the Persian army, under the leadership of Cyrus II, captured Babylon, the capital city of the Babylonian Empire. In 538, Cyrus issued a decree allowing captive people to return to their homelands, rebuild, and resume their religious practices. But the repatriated peoples would remain part of the vast Persian Empire and subject to Persian law. For the Israelites, it meant that they could rebuild their temple and continue their religious practices, but they could not restore the nation-state under the leadership of a king of the line of David.

Book Five of the Psalter opens with Psalm 107, a community hymn celebrating God's graciousness in delivering people from perilous circumstances. It begins with the words:

> Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
>> For his *hesed* is for all time.
> The ones redeemed by the Lord will thus say,
>> Those he has redeemed from the hand of the oppressor
> And those from the lands he has gathered in,
>> From the east and from the west,
>> From the north and from the sea. (107:1-3)

Verses 33-41 outline the great beneficence that the sovereign God can bestow upon the community of faith. The people may dwell in safety, establish a town, plant a vineyard, reap a harvest, be blessed with children and cattle, be defended against the enemy, and have their future secured. Psalm 107 closes with the words:

> Whoever is wise will hear these things,
>> And the *hesed* ones of the Lord will attend. (107:43)

Beginning with Psalm 108, David makes a dramatic reappearance in the Psalter. Psalms 108–10, 122, 124, 131, and 138–45 are "of David." David's voice returns, leading the Israelites in praise of God as sovereign. David sings:

I will give thanks to the Lord exceedingly with my mouth,
    and in the midst of the multitude I will praise him.
For he stands at the right hand of the needy
    in order to save from the judging ones his inmost being. (109:30-31)

All the kings of the earth will give thanks to the Lord,
    for they have heard the words of your mouth.
And they will sing in the paths of the Lord,
    for great is the glory of the Lord. (138:4-5)

I remember the days of old;
    I muse over all of your work.
    Over the doing of your hands I meditate.
I spread out my hands to you,
    my inmost being like a parched land for you. (143:5-6)

In the middle of Book Five, with psalms of David forming an inclusio around them, are psalms used in various celebrations and commemorations in Jewish life:

- Psalm 113–18, the Egyptian Hallel, recited during Passover
- Psalm 119, a wisdom acrostic about torah piety, recited during the Feast of Pentecost
- Psalms 120–34, the Songs of the Ascents, recited during the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles or Sukkoth)

David leads, and the people join in to praise and give thanks to the God who created, sustained, protected, and guided them throughout their history.

The last psalm of David in Book Five, Psalm 145, is a masterful alphabetic acrostic that celebrates the kingship of God over the community of faith and over all creation. David begins the celebration in vv. 1 and 2:

I will exalt you, my God the king,
    and I will bless your name for all time and beyond.
Every day I will bless you,
    and I will praise your name for all time and beyond.

The community of faith joins David in v. 4:

Generation to generation will glorify your doings,
    and your mighty works they will make known.

In v. 10, all creation is called upon to add its voice to the praise of God:

> All of your works will give thanks to you, O Lord,
>> and your *hesed* ones will bless you.

The psalm ends in v. 21 with the words:

> The praise of the Lord my mouth will speak,
>> and all flesh will bless his holy name for all time and beyond.

The Psalter ends with five doxological psalms that bring it to a climax of praise of God as sovereign:

> The Lord will reign for all time,
>> your God, O Zion, for all generations. (146:10)

> Hallelujah!
> Sing to the Lord a new song,
>> his praise in the gathering of the *hesed* ones.
> Let Israel be glad in his doings;
>> let the children of Zion rejoice in their king. (149:1-2)

What is the shape of the book of Psalms? It is five books that narrate the history of ancient Israel, the very history recorded in the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and a number of the prophets. Books One and Two (Psalms 1–72) chronicle the reigns of Kings David and Solomon; Book Three (Psalms 73–89) tells of the dark days of the divided kingdoms and their eventual destructions; Book Four (Psalms 90–106) recalls the years of the Babylonian exile during which the community of faith had to rethink their identity as the people of God; and Book Five (Psalms 107–50) celebrates the community of faith's restoration to the land and the sovereignty of God over them. Ancient Israel — emergent Judaism — survived in the world of which it found itself a part because it found in its past a way to make sense of the present and future.

The story of the shaping of the Psalter is the story of the shaping of survival. The Psalter was, along with the other texts that make up the Hebrew Scriptures, a constitutive document of identity for postexilic Israel. Within that collection of texts, the community of faith found a new structure for existence and identity that transcended traditional concepts of nationhood. The story of the Psalter gave the people a new rationale for existence and a new statement of national identity. With the Lord as sovereign, the people could survive as a separate and identifiable entity within the vast empires — Persian, Greek, and Roman — of which they were a part.

V. THE POETRY OF THE PSALTER

The psalms, like about a third of the Old Testament, are poetry — they are songs, prayers, liturgies, and words of instruction that take poetic form. They express their intended meanings through poetry. Two special features typical of Hebrew poetry deserve introduction here since they will aid interpretation later.

A. PARALLELISM

The basic characteristic of Hebrew poetry is known as parallelism, the juxtaposition of two or more balanced grammatical elements. But it might be useful first to say a word about poetic features from other languages that are generally not present in Hebrew. In many Western languages, including English, poetry often is characterized by end rhyme and/or meter. Neither of these is characteristic of Hebrew poetry. End rhyme is so infrequent in Hebrew poetry that instances of it can be described as the exception rather than the rule. Some scholars hold that meter was once a common characteristic of ancient Hebrew poetry.[79] The majority of scholars, however, while allowing that meter is present in Hebrew poetry, deny that meter functioned with predictable regularity in most Hebrew poetry. The pattern of syllables and stresses in Hebrew poetry is so much less regular and so much more unpredictable than it is in most Western language poetry that it cannot truly be said to be a meter. A true meter is a pattern of syllables or stresses to which poetic lines must conform. This pattern is simply not present in Hebrew poetry.[80] This is not to say that Hebrew poetry lacks a sense of rhythm. When one reads Hebrew poetry, a sense of rhythm does emerge. But this rhythm is not a set of beats or stresses to which the poetic lines conform, but rather is the simple "by-product of parallelism."[81] Because words and phrases are juxtaposed, a natural rhythm occurs — but this rhythm does not rise to the dignity of meter.

Because Hebrew poetry does not have meter, some claim that the fundamental characteristic of Hebrew poetry is the parallelism of its members, for short, simply *parallelism.* Although awareness of parallelism has existed since antiquity, the term itself was coined by Robert Lowth, a bishop of the

79. For instance, J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide,* trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). See also Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; 2nd ed.; Nashville: Nelson, 2004), Introduction; Sebastian Bullough, "The Question of Metre in Psalm I," *VT* 17 (1967) 42-49; O. Loretz, "Psalmenstudien," *UF* 3 (1971) 101-3.

80. Cf. Adele Berlin, "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry," in *NIB* 4:308: "[it] seems best . . . to abandon the quest for meter in the poetry of the Bible."

81. Berlin, "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry," 4:309.

Church of England who in 1753 published a study of biblical poetry.[82] Lowth's initial theories have been challenged, reworked, and advanced in the last thirty years. Many scholars have contributed to the modern conversation, but the work of Robert Alter, James Kugel, and Adele Berlin has been particularly important.[83]

As stated above, parallelism is the juxtaposition of two or more balanced grammatical elements. At its most recognizable level, parallelism happens between phrases. Consider the opening verse of Psalm 96:

> Sing to the LORD a new song;
>> Sing to the LORD, all the earth. (96:1)

In this example, the two phrases are said to be "in parallel" with each other. There is an obvious relationship between the two phrases — both contain the imperatival phrase *sing to the LORD*. But the two phrases are also slightly different. The first phrase describes "what" the song should be *(a new song),* while the second prescribes "who" should sing *(all the earth)*. Different scholars use different conventions when naming these phrases, e.g., as a "verset," "half verse," or "colon." In this commentary, we have preferred the term "colon" (plural: cola). Most often in Hebrew poetry, cola appear in parallel pairs, but it is not uncommon to have three cola in parallel:

> Shout to God all the earth;
>> Sing to the glory of his name;
>>> set forth gloriously his praise.
>>>> (66:1-2; cf. 1:1; 64:10; 65:7; 89:19; 97:10, etc.)

The energy of Hebrew poetry is generated by the essentially endless way in which the parallel cola play off each other. Poets will pair synonyms or antonyms. They will pair question and response (or call and response). They will pair a singular noun and a plural noun, or a masculine noun and a

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82. *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* (Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1753).

83. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (BRS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). See also Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Rome: Pontifico Istituto Biblico, 1988); Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984); Daniel Grossberg, *Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures in Biblical Poetry* (SBLMS 39; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980). For a review of the perspectives, cf. J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Recent Perspectives on Biblical Poetry," *RelSRev* 19 (1993) 321-27.

feminine noun. They will pair a statement with a supporting reason. They will pair an abstract concept such as "righteousness" with a concrete reality such as "earth." The variation is practically inexhaustible. The delight for the poet is in expressing something eloquently. The delight for the audience is in discovering the eloquence of the expression. Expressing something eloquently does not make it "more true" in the abstract sense. But it does make it ring with more resonance in the ear of the listener.

Even though parallelism is most recognizable at the phrase or cola level, it is misleading to limit one's understanding of parallelism to the juxtaposition between the cola. Hebrew parallelism occurs within cola, between cola, between sets of cola (a verse is a set of cola), between stanzas (a stanza is a set of verses), and between psalms (a set of stanzas). For instance, consider the opening lines of Psalm 27:

> The LORD is my light and my salvation,
>   whom shall I fear?
> The LORD is the stronghold of my life,
>   whom shall I dread? (27:1)

Notice that parallelism occurs within the first colon, where *my light* is juxtaposed with *my salvation.* This sort of parallelism within a colon is frequent in the Psalter, as two examples from Psalm 23 attest: *Your rod and your staff — they give me courage* (23:4b); *goodness and* hesed *pursue me all the days of my life* (23:6).

Parallelism also occurs between sets of cola. Notice in the example above from Ps. 27:1 that the first two cola are juxtaposed with the second two cola. Each of these "verses" has the same structure. The first colon of each has *The LORD* as the subject + an object that is modified by the pronoun *my.* The second colon of each expresses a similar question: *Whom shall I fear?* and *Whom shall I dread?* So the two "verses" (or sets of cola) are in parallel to each other.

More broadly, one can see parallelism happening between stanzas and even between psalms. In some psalms there are stanzas that are constructed in parallel fashion. In Psalm 107, the body of the psalm contains four parallel stanzas: vv. 4-9, 10-16, 17-22, 23-32. In Psalm 139, the entire psalm is made up of four very carefully balanced parallel stanzas: vv. 1-6, 7-12, 13-18, 19-24. Even between psalms — in the case of what are sometimes called "twin psalms" — parallelism occurs. For example, Psalms 111 and 112 are both alphabetic acrostic psalms of almost exactly the same length — the former focuses on theology, the latter on anthropology. Psalms 103 and 104 also parallel each other — they are the only two psalms that begin with the phrase, *Praise the LORD, O my soul.* Also, Psalms 105 and 106, which are two of the three so-

called historical psalms, parallel each other: the former narrates Israel's history as the story of God's mighty acts; the latter narrates Israel's history as the story of Israel's constant disobedience. In each of these cases, the respective pair of psalms forms a literary unit in which the meaning of the whole, taken together, is greater than merely the sum of the parts.

B. EVOCATIVE LANGUAGE

Even though parallelism endows Hebrew poetry with its most recognizable feature, there is much more to Hebrew poetry than parallelism. Indeed, as William Brown has put it, "the power of Psalms lies first and foremost in its evocative use of language."[84] That is, the power of the psalms to touch people's lives flows from the way the Psalter uses metaphor, simile, hyperbole, imagery, drama, intensity, repetition, and so on. Again, as Brown writes, the Psalter is "poetry with a purpose" and "the discourse of the heart. . . ."[85] And, "it is precisely the psalmist's deployment of metaphor that enables the personal language of pathos to be felt and appropriated by readers of every generation."[86]

In this commentary, we have chosen to pay special attention to the poetry of the psalms. Without denying the power or importance of historical or form-critical approaches to the Psalter (see above, section III. Form Criticism), we recognize that because the psalms are *poetry* of faith, faithful interpretation must attend both to their theological nature (that is, to the *faith* element of the psalms) and also to their poetic nature. This is not merely to focus on the aesthetic dimensions of the poetry, but to recognize that when it comes to theological testimony, the aesthetic nature of the testimony cannot be treated as a "husk" to be discarded in search of some elusive theological kernel. The theological truth of the psalms is a truth that has "a purpose" (so Brown) — it aims to move the audience. At times this audience is God, at other times an ancient or modern human reader/hearer, and most times it is both. But in every case, the aesthetic power of the poetry is as much a part of its theological witness as its semantic content. As Patrick Miller has put it:

> Meaning and beauty, the semantic and the aesthetic, are woven together into a whole, and both should be received and responded to by the interpreter. To ignore the beauty in pursuit of the meaning is, at a minimum, to close out the possibility that the beauty in a significant fashion contributes to and enhances meaning.[87]

84. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms,* p. 2.
85. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms,* p. 2.
86. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms,* p. 3.
87. *Interpreting the Psalms,* p. 30.

But here, in our view, Miller does not go far enough. It is not simply that the evocative power of the psalms' poetry "contributes to" or "enhances" the meaning. Rather, the power of the language is inseparable from the meaning. The meaning of the psalms exists "in, with, and under" the poetic language. The psalms, like all theological witness, comprise a truth that wishes to grab hold of readers, shake them vigorously, and leave them forever changed. The truth of the psalms does not wish to be held at arm's length, considered dispassionately, and then set aside. Because this is so, the truth of the Psalter is fully bound up with how the various psalms employ the power of language. A testimony that is spoken eloquently, and thus that rings with more resonance in the ears of the hearer, is for that person "more true" than a testimony that falls flat and does not resonate at all. Therefore we must be wary of the temptation to try to extract the theological meaning from the semantic shell. We must fight against the idea that the evocative language of the Psalter only enhances, or amplifies, or contributes to meaning.[88] For that reason, in this commentary we have striven to attend carefully to the way psalms draw power from the many poetic techniques of the ancient psalmists.[89]

VI. THEMES AND THEOLOGY

As noted above, one reason for the powerful role that the Psalter has played in both synagogue and church is that it addresses such a wide span of human emotions, life experiences, and personal situations. The themes of the Psalter range from singing God's praise to crying in despair, from calling for the oppressor's destruction to confessing personal sin, from teaching about God to questioning God's ways. In many ways, the various form-critical categories express the main themes of the Psalter: *pleas for help* (including penitence for sin and curses of the oppressors), *praising testimony* (including the Lord's creation, the Lord's action in history, and God's choice of Abraham and Israel/ David and Zion), *trust in the midst of crisis, thanksgiving following delivery from crisis,* and *instruction on walking in God's ways.* Various individual psalms touch various of the themes. No one psalm touches all of the Psalter themes. But as was noted above, the story of the shaping of the Psalter is the story of the shaping of survival. It is a collection of poems that charts a new structure for existence and identity for a postnational, Lord-centered community.

88. See Brown, *Seeing the Psalms,* p. 11.
89. A review of those techniques is beyond the scope of this introduction. For further reading, see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry;* Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry;* Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics;* and Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry.*

To answer the question "What is the theology of the Psalter?" is to endeavor on an integrating, synthetic task. Various psalms represent various theological confessions and expressions — some older, some newer; some more confident, some more questioning; some more theologically-centered in God, some more anthropologically-centered in the chosen people. When dealing with this diverse array of theological expressions, one legitimate option is to refuse to synthesize the diversity. Thus, Erhard Gerstenberger has explored how the diversity of life settings behind the Psalter's many poems contributed to the diversity of theological perspectives in the psalms.[90] Or again, Beth Tanner has argued that the synthetic task of describing the theology of the Psalter will be a frustrating task that is "transitory" and "incomplete," because "we can only find what our own context has structured and trained us to see."[91]

But other interpreters have also legitimately sought to imagine the theological mosaic that the individual songs of the Psalter create when viewed together. A sample of the current proposals illustrates the possibilities. Brueggemann has explored how the psalms bear a dialectical witness both to God's "incommensurability" and God's "mutuality."[92] Hermann Spieckermann argues that the presence of God's salvation is both the persistent theological problem that drives the Psalter's theology and the confession that answers that problem.[93]

What might be the Psalter's theological center? James Luther Mays sees the confession of the enthronement psalms that "The Lord reigns" as the center that holds together the Psalter.[94] Jerome Creach favors the metaphor of God as "refuge" as its theological center,[95] whereas William Brown has built on Creach's work to argue that the metaphors of God as "refuge" and "way" together form the dual theological centers of the Psalter.[96] In Gerald Wilson's

90. "Theologies in the Book of Psalms," in Flint and Miller, *The Book of Psalms,* pp. 603-25.

91. "Rethinking the Enterprise: What Must Be Considered in Formulating a Theology of the Psalms," in *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship,* ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), pp. 139-50, quoting pp. 145 and 139, respectively.

92. "The Psalms in Theological Use: On Incommensurability and Mutuality," in Flint and Miller, *The Book of Psalms,* pp. 581-602.

93. *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen* (FRLANT 148; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

94. *The Lord Reigns.*

95. *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter;* see his further work on this theme in *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2008), and in "The Destiny of the Righteous and the Theology of the Psalms," in Jacobson, *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms,* pp. 49-61.

96. *Seeing the Psalms.*

view, however, the reign of God is the center of the Psalter's theology.[97] Thus, Wilson is not far from Mays — both working out the Reformed confession of God's sovereignty as it applies to the Psalter. J. Clinton McCann has joined the voices within this sovereignty-centered theological conversation, but has explored how this confession relates to the Psalter's approach to the issue of injustice. He concludes that "God's sovereignty is exercised ultimately as love, not force. Thus, as we move toward a theology of the Psalms, this means that, if there is a word that is as important as the word 'justice,' it is ḥesed. . . ."[98] For Rolf Jacobson, in contrast, "the dominant theological confession of the Psalter may be summed up concisely: *The Lord is faithful.*"[99]

Another synthetic approach has been to investigate the theology of collections within the psalms, such as the Psalms of Asaph or the Psalms of Ascent.[100] Or some scholars focus on certain genres of psalms, as Nancy deClaissé-Walford and Joel LeMon have done with the imprecatory psalms.[101] Whatever the approach, in this commentary we have sought to understand the theological witness of each psalm individually — but within the larger contexts of the Psalter's story and theological witness and the twenty-first century world.

In the end, what is of enduring and vital significance to the psalms is that they do testify to the character and activity of the Lord. They testify that the God who elected Abraham and David and their offspring is present and active in the world and that the Lord's character is such that the Lord's ears are open to all who cry out in pain and confusion. As such, the psalms are not simply texts about the past. They are promises about the future. Indeed, they are poems that pull us into a future that we usually cannot imagine, that is, to take our places in a community of faith that is being shaped to bear the mark and character of the Lord.

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97. "Psalms and Psalter: Paradigm for Biblical Theology," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect,* ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), pp. 100-110.

98. "The Single Most Important Text in the Entire Bible," in Jacobson, *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms,* pp. 63-76, quoting p. 73.

99. " 'The Faithfulness of the Lord Endures Forever': The Theological Witness of the Psalter," in *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms,* pp. 111-37

100. Harry P. Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph* (SBLDS 88; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); Loren Crow, *The Songs of Ascent (120–134): Their Place in Israelite History and Religion* (SBLDS 148; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996).

101. DeClaissé-Walford, "The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms," in Jacobson, *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms,* pp. 77-92; LeMon, "Saying Amen to Violent Psalms: Patterns of Prayer, Belief, and Action in the Psalms," in *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms,* pp. 93-109.

VII. ANALYSIS OF CONTENTS

The following analysis of contents presents a brief outline of the Psalter. For a fuller literary analysis of the Psalter's shape, see section IV of this introduction, "The Canonical Shape of the Psalter." This outline follows the "five books" of the Psalter as they are presented and preserved in the Masoretic tradition. The commentary in this volume corresponds to this outline — individual commentaries are provided for each psalm, and brief introductions to the five books of the Psalter are also included.

I. Book One (Psalms 1–41)
   a. Introduction (Psalms 1–2)[102]
   b. Psalms Proper (Psalms 3–41)
      i. Davidic psalms (Psalms 3:1–41:12)
   c. Closing Doxology (41:13)
II. Book Two (Psalms 42–72)
   a. Psalms Proper (Psalms 42–72)[103]
      i. Korahite Psalms (Psalms 42/43–49)
      ii. An Asaphic Psalm (Psalm 50)
      iii. Davidic Psalms (Psalms 51–71)
      iv. A Solomonic Psalm (Psalm 72)
   b. Closing Doxology (72:18-19)
   c. Editorial note: the end of the Davidic prayers (Psalm 72:20)
III. Book Three (Psalms 73–89)
   a. Psalms Proper (Psalms 73–89)
      i. Asaphic Psalms (Psalms 73–83; see also Psalm 50)
      ii. Korahite Psalms (Psalms 84–85)
      iii. A Davidic Psalm (Psalm 86)
      iv. Korahite Psalms (Psalms 87–88)
      v. An Ezraite Psalm (Psalm 89)
   b. Closing Doxology (Psalm 89:52)
IV. Book Four (Psalms 90–106)
   a. Psalms 90–106
      i. A Mosaic Psalm (90)
      ii. An Untitled Psalm (91)
      iii. A Sabbath Psalm (92)

102. Psalms 1–2 offer an introduction both to Book One and to the entire Psalter.
103. Psalms 42–82 are also often called the "Elohistic Psalter," because these psalms generally prefer the generic term for God rather than the divine name.

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104. Psalm 94 is understood here as one of the so-called enthronement psalms, even though it lacks the phrase "The Lord reigns." See commentary.

105. These psalms include two psalms marked for particular use ("Thanksgiving," Psalm 100; "A Prayer of One Afflicted," Psalm 102), two Davidic psalms (Psalms 101 and 103), and two sets of "twin psalms" (Psalms 103–4 and 105–6; these latter two psalms are historical psalms).

106. Some scholars consider only Psalm 150 the closing doxology, but it is clear that the last five psalms are an intentional grouping — each psalm begins and ends with the imperative call: "Praise the Lord!"