

# Psalms 1 and 2 as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Psalter

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## Scholarship and interpreting the Psalms

The Psalter is in many respects something of a hermeneutical puzzle. On the one hand it is arguably the most popular and immediately rewarding part of the Old Testament for the modern reader, and yet on the other, the proposals regarding the hermeneutical lenses through which it can be read seem never ending. For example, over the last one hundred years or so, interpretation has centred variously on (i) a focus on the life of David, (ii) the psalms as creations of the Maccabean period,<sup>1</sup> (iii) the classification of psalms according to their form, (iv) the cultic context of the psalms, (v) proposals for the Psalter to be read as a book. The latter three paradigms are considered further below.

Some approaches and discoveries have tended to highlight the gap between ‘then’ and ‘now’. This could be said of the search for the setting (*Sitz im Leben*) which gave raise to particular categories (*Gattungen*) of psalms,<sup>2</sup> and the discovery of similar cultic songs and prayers among Israel’s neighbours,<sup>3</sup> perhaps most notably the Ugaritic texts.

Other proposals lie much closer to the testimony of many who go to the Psalms with little expectation of any gap between ‘then’ and ‘now’, and find immediate spiritual sustenance. Perhaps the most well known scholarly justification for this closing of ‘the gap’ is Brueggemann’s identification of psalms of orientation, disorientation and reorientation that facilitates a ‘fusion of horizons’ based on an assumed parallel of readers’ psychology/emotions/spirituality between ‘then’ and ‘now’.<sup>4</sup>

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1 See, for example, L. M. Wray Beal, ‘Psalms 3: History of Interpretation’, in T. Longman III and P. Enns (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 605–13 regarding this brief scholarly excursus.

2 A central part of the work of Gunkel and other form-critical studies.

3 See W. L. Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 18–23.

4 W. Brueggemann, ‘Psalms and the Life of Faith’, in P. D. Miller (ed.), *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3–32 explores this approach and it is applied to 50 psalms in W. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A theological*

The distinction between the various interpretive schemas is a matter of answering the question: 'What is the context of a psalm?' The answers are wide-ranging and include:

1. The life of David, as indicated by many psalm superscriptions.
2. The Christ Event.<sup>5</sup>
3. Its form.
4. The original cultic use.
5. The reader's horizon, which is a central element of Brueggemann's approach mentioned above.
6. Canonical context (see below).

This matter is further complicated in that this list is not exhaustive, the precise nature of these approaches is not a settled matter, and the various approaches are, of course, not necessarily mutually exclusive. This paper explores Pss. 1 and 2 as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Psalter in this context.

### **Psalms 1 and 2 as an introduction to the Psalter**

We shall see below that there are ancient reasons for seeing both Pss. 1 and 2 as something like an introduction to the Psalter. This has been rediscovered as part of so-called canonical criticism.<sup>6</sup> Before we consider such a role for Pss. 1 and 2 we first turn to consider how a variety of more contemporary approaches to the Psalms have, as part of their underlying presuppositions, obscured consideration of this possibility.

It was Gunkel who founded the line of scholarship that grouped the Psalms according to *Gattung*. The term means both something akin to genre but also implies a similar origin for the psalms belonging to the same *Gattung*. This approach, the form-critical interpretive paradigm, sees individual psalms as separate compositions that have been fitted together in a collection with no identifiable rational structure or editorial purpose. By concentrating on scholarly categories any rationale for the canonical order of the Psalms is obscured. Such a hypothesis, therefore, mitigates against any possibility that Pss. 1 and 2 might be an introduction. Firstly, there is nothing to be introduced in that the Psalter is a disorganised anthology. Secondly, neither Ps. 1 nor Ps. 2 belong to the categories/*Gattungen* that 'excite' form-critics.

A complementary paradigm of interpretation, building on Gunkel's work, was proposed by Mowinckel, who identifies the cult as the explicit context in which the various categories of psalms originated. He suggested that Ps. 1 was placed at the head of the Psalter during the final editing of the collection,<sup>7</sup> seeing the

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*commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

5 This raises the question of how, or even whether, this can be done legitimately when this would be alien to the original intent of the author.

6 See G. H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 204–07.

7 S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship: Volume 2* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962),

date for this final editing as no later than 200 BC.<sup>8</sup> This non-cultic role for Ps. 1 means that Mowinckel has little to say about it although he alludes to its introductory role.<sup>9</sup> He also made nothing of Ps. 2's position at the start of the Psalter despite his interest in such, so-called, Royal Psalms.

Much scholarship has built on the foundations laid by Gunkel and Mowinckel, but for all the insight this brings to ancient psalmody there is very little benefit for contemporary appropriation of the Psalms as Scripture. These paradigms are so focused on the 'then' that they have little hope of illuminating the 'now'. This does not make them illegitimate paradigms but means that they address questions that are not those that the Church, or believer, considers central to worship. They suffer from the additional problem that such critical scholarship gives a never ending series of competing hypotheses.<sup>10</sup>

It was in this context that Walter Brueggemann proposed a paradigm that, whilst not necessarily in conflict with such approaches, considered a quite different hermeneutical principle. In a complex analysis, using arguments from modern hermeneutics, he essentially argues that anthropologically the differences between humanity across the ages are narrowed by the extremes of joy and despair.<sup>11</sup> On this basis he argues that psalms, as individual compositions, tend to fall into one of three categories. They are said to be psalms of orientation, disorientation or reorientation. This categorisation refers to both the origin of a specific psalm *and* its contemporary appropriation. In a sense Brueggemann has essentially given scholarly credence to what many readers of the Bible have found for themselves, that specific psalms seem relevant according to the reader's context. Thus we might see Brueggemann's paradigm as having a reader-response dynamic. What it has in common with the earlier approaches, however, is that it also treats the psalms as individual compositions which function independently of the order in which they appear in the canonical Psalter. Elsewhere Brueggemann pays attention, to some extent, to the order of the Psalms but this is not part of this paradigm.<sup>12</sup> For example, he judges Ps. 1 to be placed intentionally as a preface to the collection.<sup>13</sup> In a later work Brueggemann sees Ps. 2 as joining with Ps. 1 as a theologically intentional introduction to the Psalter.<sup>14</sup>

It is all very well criticising the above paradigms for being hostile to seeing

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8 Mowinckel, *Worship 2*, 199.

9 S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship: Volume 1* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 207, and *Worship 2*, 197.

10 On this point see F. Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 46–59.

11 Brueggemann, 'Life', 7.

12 So, for example, W. Brueggemann, 'Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon', in P. D. Miller (ed.), *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 189–213.

13 *Ibid.* 190.

14 W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute and Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1997), 496.

any value in the canonical order of the Psalms, but we must ask the question: is there any warrant for thinking there is some recoverable intent or purpose in the ordering to the Psalter? We will consider this question in its broadest sense in the next section, but first we consider the evidence that Pss. 1 and 2, despite initial appearances, belong together.

There are a number of ancient sources that suggest that Pss. 1 and 2 were seen as a unity.<sup>15</sup> There is, for example, a Jewish tradition from the Babylonian Talmud, which picks up on the use of *'ašrē* in 1:1 and 2:12, where Rabbi Johanan is quoted as saying: "Every chapter that was particularly dear to David he commenced with 'Happy' and terminated with 'Happy'. He began with 'Happy', as it is written, *'Happy is the man'*, and he terminated with 'Happy', as it is written, *'Happy are all they that take refuge in him'*."<sup>16</sup> The earliest manuscripts of Acts make reference to Ps. 2:7 as being in Ps. 1.<sup>17</sup> Barrett points out that there is evidence from the Fathers to support a view that Pss. 1 and 2 were a unity.<sup>18</sup> Examples include Tertullian who quotes Ps. 2:7 as coming from Ps. 1<sup>19</sup> and Justin who quotes the entirety of Pss. 1 and 2 as a unity.<sup>20</sup>

More recent scholarship has drawn attention to other links between these two psalms:

1. In Book 1 of the Psalms the only psalms that do not have a title in the MT are Pss. 1, 2, 10 and 33.<sup>21</sup> Both Pss. 10 and 33 lack titles for cogent reasons. Pss. 9 and 10 are actually unified by an acrostic structure and constitute a single psalm in the LXX. In the LXX Ps. 33 has the title 'of David' and there is manuscript evidence from Qumran that it was sometimes titled in Hebrew texts.<sup>22</sup> Additionally there is a strong tradition of joining Pss. 32 and 33 in which case the title of Ps. 32 might have been judged to serve as a title for 33 in the MT.<sup>23</sup> Thus it is at least plausible that the lack of titles for Pss. 1 and 2 might indicate that they have a special role and/or that they are very late additions. Interestingly the LXX has headings for every psalm except Pss. 1 and 2 which gives further credence to a literary unity between Pss. 1 and 2, a tradition preserved in the slightly later Greek manuscript tradition.<sup>24</sup>

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15 For all the options see N. L. deClaisse-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 38.

16 P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (Waco: Word Publishing, 1983), 59 citing Berakoth 9b.

17 C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1* (Edinburgh: T&F Clark, 1994), 646.

18 Ibid.

19 Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 4:22.

20 Justin, *First Apology*, 40.

21 M. D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 59.

22 Craigie, *Psalms*, 270.

23 Ibid.

24 D. M. Howard, 'Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State-of-the-Field-Survey', in J. C. McCann (ed.), *Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 58; and D. C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme*

2. Pss. 1 and 2 both contain the verb *hegeh*. In Ps. 1:2 is often argued that *hegeh* means a meditative murmuring of scripture.<sup>25</sup> The same Hebrew verb, *hegeh*, occurs in Ps. 2:1 and is commonly translated as plot (NIV, NRSV), murmur (Alter),<sup>26</sup> or meditate (ASV). Again this same verb is at the heart of the psalm in that the murmuring/plotting nations provide the foil against which the claims of authority for Yahweh and his anointed are made.
3. Both Pss. 1 and 2 speak of a way (*derek*) and imply that there are two ways: one of righteousness and blessing (1:6) and one of wickedness and judgement (1:1, 6; 2:12). Both Psalms have a theme of refuge in Yahweh. This is explicit in 2:12 and implicit in the Lord watching over the individual standing against the wicked, sinners and mockers (1:6, cf. 1:1).

Some scholars, most notably Whybray, have disputed the possibility of any certainty in identifying Pss. 1 and 2 as an intentional unity.<sup>27</sup> Indeed he argues against the validity of the canonical paradigm for interpreting the psalms despite the title of his work. Whybray's objections regarding the pairing of Pss. 1 and 2 have been refuted by Grant in the midst of a compelling study which argues that these two psalms are united by the theme of the king as an exemplar to the faithful readers of the Psalter.<sup>28</sup> The need to interpret Pss. 1 and 2 in the light of their proximity and location seems to be part of a new consensus in psalms scholarship.<sup>29</sup>

## Modern scholarship and the structure of the Psalter

Frequently those who use the psalms in worship and those who study them have both noted that neighbouring psalms tend to have links between them. The purposeful linking of neighbouring psalms is termed concatenation, which literally means 'to form into a chain', the inference being that the psalms are formed into a continuum by the repetition of links. Despite the fact that some evidence for pairing might be dependent on the ingenuity of the interpreter, or down to coincidence, the quantity of evidence indicates that this is a real literary feature created by purposeful editing. Understanding it is complicated by the variety of postulated links between psalms, which includes: strategically placed paired keywords, thematic links and repeating phrases.<sup>30</sup> Such evidence seems to point

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*in the Book of Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 18.

25 So, for example, R. Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 3 and Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 58.

26 Alter, *Psalms*, 5.

27 N. Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 78–81.

28 J. A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 41–70.

29 See, for example, G. J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Songs Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 34.

30 See F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms: Volume I* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), 17–21 and Howard, 'Activity', 66–68 on more recent work on concatenation.

to careful positioning and/or later editing of the psalms.

Concatenation is termed microstructure by some scholars.<sup>31</sup> Whole collections of psalms reveal what can be termed mesostructure in the Psalms. Despite scholarship often focusing on individual psalms at the expense of the broader picture much recent work has illuminated the artistry and design which is evident in the collections of psalms. Even a cursory examination of the Psalter reveals that a great many psalms have headings that indicate they belong to what might be termed prior collections, for example: The Psalms of Asaph (50, 73–83), the Psalms of the Sons of Korah (42, 44–49, 84–85, 87–88), and the Psalms of Ascents (120–134). Even the psalms that do not have clear headings are often grouped according to opening phrases, like the so-called Hallel psalms (113–118, 146–150), or dominant unusual phrases, like the ‘YHWH *Malak*’ Psalms (47, 93, 96–99). Recent studies of these collections tend to conclude that there are organising principles based on concerns with eschatology or Zion theology in spite of the often mixed *Gattung* within the collections.

Having recognised that there might be both a purposeful microstructure and mesostructure to the Psalter we turn now to the big picture, or macrostructure. Gerald Wilson initiated nothing less than a new interpretive paradigm in his consideration of the Psalter’s macrostructure. Wilson considered the possible role that the psalm superscriptions play in the structure of the Psalter. His argument is that their preservation demonstrates that the editors saw them as part of the text they wished to hand on.<sup>32</sup> Wilson examines the occurrence of the titles carefully and argues that there is a complex editorial intent which does not cohere with any singular fully consistent criteria but that variously (i) authorship is an important grouping criteria (especially in books I–III), (ii) genre grouping takes place (based on terms such as *mizmor* and *maskil*), (iii) genre superscriptions are used to ‘soften’ transitions, and (iv) a lack of superscripts pairs neighbouring psalms.<sup>33</sup>

Wilson adds to this argument by exploring other techniques for the grouping of the psalms (arguably most famously the Hallel Psalms 145–150).<sup>34</sup> Wilson saw the doxologies that close the first four books (41:13, 72:18–19, 89:52 and 106:48) as structurally important in confirming that the fivefold structure was significant to the editors.<sup>35</sup> Building on this he argued that the use of Royal Psalms at the ‘seams’ of these books not only reveals structure, but also the intent of

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Note also C. Barth, ‘Concatenatio in Ersten Buch des Psalters’, in B. Benzinger, O. Böcher and G. Mayer (eds.), *Wort und Wirklichkeit: Studien zur Afrikanistik und Orientalistik* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1976), 30–40 and his claim that there are some 17 different types of concatenation employed in the Psalter.

31 For example, see J. P. Brennan, ‘Some hidden harmonies of the Fifth Book of Psalms’, in R. F. McNamara (ed.), *Essays in Honor of Joseph P. Brennan* (Rochester, NY: St. Bernard’s Seminary, 1976), 126.

32 See Wilson, *Editing*, 144 for the evidence for this proposal.

33 Wilson, *Editing*, 155–57, 158–62, 163–67 and 173–81 respectively.

34 Wilson, *Editing*, 193.

35 Wilson, *Editing*, 183.

the editors.<sup>36</sup> These strategically placed Royal Psalms tell the story of the Davidic monarchy from inauguration through to its failure, and finally to the recognition that it is Yahweh who reigns and is trustworthy rather than human kings.<sup>37</sup> Thus Wilson's argument leaves little room for a future *māšīah*, a point we will return to towards the end of this paper.

## The focus of the hermeneutical lens

### *Torah and wisdom*

Much recent work on the purposeful editing of the Psalter has tended to examine the Psalter in the light of Ps. 1's concerns with *tôrâ* to see if this theme is developed elsewhere and thus can be identified as a key aspect of the purpose of the editors redacting the Psalter.<sup>38</sup> Such approaches see *tôrâ* in this context as conveying the breadth of the generic meaning of *tôrâ* as instruction *including* Deuteronomic concerns.<sup>39</sup> In this way these recent efforts escape the earlier anachronistic portrayal of Ps. 1's *tôrâ* concern as a narrow legalism or retrograde late Jewish piety.

Examination of the Psalter for *tôrâ* material might seem problematic given the existence of only, at best, three Torah Psalms. Such an examination reveals, in addition to Ps. 1, the massive Ps. 119 with its 25 uses of the word *tôrâ* and 153 uses of seven other words that belong to the same cluster of meaning as *tôrâ*.<sup>40</sup> Only one other psalm, Ps. 19 (or 19:7–14), can be argued to have a singular concern with *tôrâ*. Although we do note: (a) Mays identifies a further 14 psalms where *tôrâ* is an important part of a psalm's content (Pss. 18, 25, 33, 78, 89, 94, 94, 99, 103, 105, 111, 112, 147 and 148),<sup>41</sup> and (b) the fivefold division of the Psalter is generally viewed as echoing the Pentateuch.<sup>42</sup>

36 Wilson, *Editing*, 209 and G. H. Wilson, 'The Use of Royal Psalms at the "Seams" of the Hebrew Psalter', *JSOT* 35 (1986), 85–94.

37 Wilson, *Editing*, 208–20.

38 See, for example, McCann, 'The Psalms as Instruction', *Interpretation* 46 (1992), 119; Mays, 'The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter', *JBL* 106 (1987), 10; and LeFebvre, 'Torah Meditation and the Psalms: The Invitation of Psalm 1', in P. S. Johnston and D. G. Firth (eds.), *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 225.

39 Any claim about the nature of Deuteronomic concerns is not without its problems given the difficulty in pinning down a consensus on just what might be meant by the term; see Grant, *Exemplar*, 253–73 for a helpful exploration.

40 See L. C. Allen, *Psalms 100–150* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 139.

41 Mays, 'Torah-Psalms', 8–9.

42 So, for example, B. W. Anderson and S. Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms speak for us today*, third edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 203; and G. H. Wilson, 'Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms', in J. C. McCann (ed.), *Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 72–73.

Ps. 119, as is often noted, has a dominant position in Book V of the Psalter.<sup>43</sup> Its size and very nature point to it being either uniquely authored for its role in the Psalter or unique *and* having been chosen for its uniqueness. Thus Westermann suggests that at some point Pss. 1 and 119 formed a *tôrâ*-focused inclusio for the then extant Psalter.<sup>44</sup> Clearly such a literary device would have made a very powerful statement of editorial intent. The fact that the Psalter then grew further might indicate that the later editors had other interests than those of *tôrâ*. McCann takes the use of Ps. 1, and Ps. 119's dominance of Book V, as points of departure and argues that the key agenda of the final redactors of the Psalter was to make a decisive shift of purpose for the collection from cultic use to on-going value as instruction.<sup>45</sup> It seems doubtful that such a singular purpose can be ascribed to the editors. It has been pointed out that there is not such a strong gulf between cultic and instructional concerns; they simply are not related as polar opposites and they are not mutually exclusive.<sup>46</sup> It is more likely that *tôrâ* concerns are just one element, albeit an important one, of the concerns of the Psalter's editors.

The lack of a decisive volume of evidence of a *tôrâ* concern has been addressed by proposing that a *tôrâ* focus is part of a larger concern with wisdom.<sup>47</sup> Ps. 1 does contain what might be judged wisdom elements and some interpreters consider it to be a Wisdom Psalm. For some the theme of 'blessing' and how it might be obtained is a wisdom topic, as are terms like *derek* (way).<sup>48</sup> In this manner Ps. 1 seems to integrate wisdom and *tôrâ* concerns which as Whybray notes (a) occurs in Ben Sira (early second century BC) and (b) was a feature of late post-exilic Jewish literature.<sup>49</sup> A plausible proposal is that Ps. 1 has mixed *tôrâ* and wisdom concerns although some have refuted the idea that either classification is helpful in discerning what Ps. 1 says.<sup>50</sup>

If Pss. 1 and 2 are a purposeful hermeneutical lens through which to read the Psalter it is a natural question to ask whether Ps. 2 has any *tôrâ* concerns. Grant argues that this is the case.<sup>51</sup> Ps. 2 contains an explicit reference to an impor-

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43 So, for example, Mays, 'Torah-Psalms', 11 and Grant, *Exemplar*, 24.

44 C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 253.

45 J. C. McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

46 See W. Brueggemann, 'Response to James L. Mays', in J. C. McCann (ed.), *Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 35.

47 S. E. Gillingham, 'The Zion Tradition and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter', in J. Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 303, which sounds a warning in noting how diffuse such a theme becomes.

48 See S. Weeks, 'Wisdom Psalms', in J. Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 293.

49 Whybray, *Reading*, 36.

50 So, for example, LeFebvre, 'Torah', 214–17. LeFebvre's point is a good one; he is correct in identifying the propensity for interpreters to be constrained in their interpretation of Ps. 1 by the decision made as to its *Gattung*.

51 Grant, *Exemplar*, 62–63.

tant decree of Yahweh's; the Mosaic Law or a part of it perhaps?<sup>52</sup> Such evidence might appear at best ambiguous, but in Grant's larger thesis a strong editorial connection between Royal Psalms and Torah Psalms is explored.<sup>53</sup> As part of this proposed editorial agenda, Deuteronomic concerns, especially via the Kingship Law of Deut. 17:14-20, become central. For Grant, not only does a *tôrâ* concern for Ps. 2 sound plausible, but Ps. 1 can also be reread as having a Royal dynamic via the possibility that the subject is Yahweh's ideal king.<sup>54</sup>

### *Kingship, Yahweh and the king*

The importance of the theme of kingship in the Psalter cannot be disputed. Despite the fact that Gunkel identified only some eleven, or so, Royal Psalms,<sup>55</sup> the influence of the king is wider than this statistic indicates. Eaton, in an extensive and careful study, suggests that a much larger number of Psalms, some 38 or so, can be said to have a serious concern with kingship.<sup>56</sup> Eaton is not suggesting that these psalms can usefully be identified as Royal Psalms in terms of a *Gattung*. Rather his point is that Gunkel inadvertently, by essentially making a category mistake, shifts emphasis away from this central concern of the Psalter. The theme of kingship has had other problems in being handled appropriately in the interpretation of the Psalms. Much pre-critical, and some modern devotional, exegesis quickly conflates concerns of kingship to refer to God the Father, or Jesus as Messiah, to a level where a Christian rereading is marred by unhelpful dogmatic eisegesis. With cult-critical approaches, although kingship becomes a dominant theme, the quest to find a detailed festal hypothesis that does justice to all the data can create a ditch between 'then' and 'now'. The former approaches privilege the interpreter's horizon and the latter the ancient horizon.

It is apparent throughout Ps. 2 that the *māšīah* is sovereign but only because of his relationship to the ultimate ruler, i.e. the *māšīah* has delegated authority (2:6) to rule with 'a rod of iron' (2:9). It is Yahweh who is to be feared (2:11). Even at the heights of the Davidic monarchy Ps. 2 must have sounded either ideological or idealistic. The central claim is that despite appearances it is Yahweh who has established his king in Zion (2:6). It is similar to the central claim of Ps. 1 that the righteous, despite the opposition of the wicked, have been 'planted by streams of water' (1:3). Perhaps Grant is correct in identifying the righteous man of Ps. 1 as the king of Ps. 2.<sup>57</sup> There is not space here to examine Grant's suggestion that Deut. 17:14-20 (i.e. Deuteronomy's Kingship Law) was paradigmatic

52 Grant, *Exemplar*, 62.

53 Grant, *Exemplar*, 41-188 examines in detail the relationship of the Torah Pss. 1, 19 and 119 with their respective Royal neighbours, Pss. 2, 18, 21 and 118.

54 Grant, *Exemplar*, 67.

55 H. Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 99.

56 J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, second edition (London: JSOT Press, 1986), 27-63.

57 Grant, *Exemplar*, 68.

but we can consider some of the relevant intertextual evidence which illustrates this possibility.

It has long been noted that Josh. 1:7f. has a number of apparent connections with Ps. 1. In particular, Joshua is encouraged to meditate on the law day and night (1:8) and blessing is promised if this is done. As Miller points out, this means that both the Deuteronomic History and the Psalter open with 'an explicit focus on the desirability of a constant attention to the law'.<sup>58</sup> At the opening of the Deuteronomic History we have Joshua, following on from Moses, being exhorted to hold on to the Mosaic Law. Perhaps the editors of the Psalter who placed, or perhaps even wrote, Ps. 1 are echoing this concern for an ideal leader who upholds this approach to *tôrâ*.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, if the above reasoning is correct, both Psalms show an ideal king as far as the editors of the Psalter are concerned. We turn now to the eschatological dynamic of the opening of the Psalter, an emphasis recognised by a number of interpreters.

### *Eschatology and Yahweh as refuge*

Ps. 1, even when considered in isolation, has some strong indications that it has an eschatological dynamic. The identification of the wicked with chaff is a metaphor which elsewhere in the prophets is unambiguously one of eschatological judgement, see Isa. 17:13; 41:15; Hos. 13:3 and Zeph. 2:2.<sup>60</sup> This interpretation is also affirmed by the finality of the wicked's fate, i.e. 'perishing'. This, in turn, denies that Ps. 1 exemplifies an Old Testament 'prosperity gospel' and implies that being a tree planted by a stream is a future hope. This suggests that Ps. 1 provides a rereading of Deuteronomy's blessings and curses. The centrality of *tôrâ* also links with the eschatological expectation of Torah going out from Zion.<sup>61</sup>

Christian scholars have sometimes been slow to ascribe an eschatological interpretation to Ps. 2. By the date of the editing of the Psalter, however, the demise of the Davidic dynasty meant that Ps. 2 was only preserved in such a prominent setting because of its rereading as a description of how God's promise would be fulfilled in a future *māšīah*.<sup>62</sup> We return below to consider how Christian interpretation might move from the *māšīah* of Ps. 2 to Jesus the Messiah.

If Ps. 1's blessing is, at least in part, eschatological, then the closing beatitude of Ps. 2 might be making a promise that refuge in God is something to be practised now but made complete in the future. It has been suggested that the clos-

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58 P. D. Miller, 'Deuteronomy and the Psalms: Evoking a Biblical Conversation', *JBL* 118 (1999), 11.

59 The opposite has been suggested, i.e. that it was the cult that gave rise to the Deuteronomic school, see A. R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1979), 18.

60 As noted by R. Cole, 'An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2', *JSOT* 98 (2002), 82.

61 Gillingham, 'Zion', 332.

62 See D. Sheriffs, *The Friendship of the Lord: An Old Testament Spirituality* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 3 on re-reading and canonisation.

ing beatitude of Ps. 2:12 is a late addition. Whether a late addition or not, it is the first statement of a theme that is found frequently in the Psalter.<sup>63</sup> At this point in the Psalter this first claim to refuge in Yahweh is perhaps in some ways foundational for what follows. First, the statement here of the possibility of refuge in Yahweh is unequivocal. This is an important point of certainty, given the almost relentless cries of lament that follow immediately on its heels. Second, there is more than a hint here that the offer is open not only to Israel but to the nations too, for they share in the warning to find refuge in Yahweh.

### *Zion theology and the Psalter*

Thus far we have seen a number of thematic concerns are found within Pss. 1 and 2 which are found elsewhere in the Psalter. These themes have been variously singled out in competing hypotheses by various scholars. Is it possible, however, that a wider concern might unite these concerns/themes of *tôrâ*, wisdom, kingship, eschatology and Yahweh as a refuge?

Gillingham has made an interesting proposal about the centrality of a Zion tradition in the Psalter. At the outset of her study she notes that a Zion tradition immediately addresses two well rehearsed tensions within psalms scholarship. The first tension is that there are two popular agendas suggested as the key concerns of the editors: eschatological and didactic.<sup>64</sup> The second tension is that between those who suggest that the final editors were either a part of the Temple or quite distinct from it. Gillingham's proposal is that Second Temple priests and scribes edited the Psalter with a strong Zion tradition and that this can explain (i) the didactic *and* eschatological concerns of the Psalter as well as the strong cultic flavour of much of the Psalter, and (ii) those aspects which appear to be post-cultic.<sup>65</sup>

The attraction of this hypothesis is that it has potential for being tested on the basis of the occurrence and frequency of simple linguistic markers.<sup>66</sup> On this basis Gillingham carefully identifies a number of useful key terms which can be considered: 'Zion', 'Jerusalem', 'temple', 'house of the Lord', 'house of God', 'your house', 'gates', 'courts', 'the mountain of the Lord', 'my holy mountain', 'your holy mountain', 'dwelling place', 'habitation', 'holy place' and 'city of God'.<sup>67</sup> These and a small number of other less firm terms are used, based on evidence of their identification with Zion through parallelism and on the assumption that these terms would have had a Zion connection for the editors even if in some cases the term had originally been used in a different sense.<sup>68</sup>

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63 J. F. D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) explores this theme, concluding that it plays a central part in the Psalter's spirituality.

64 Gillingham, 'Zion', 308.

65 Gillingham, 'Zion', 309–12.

66 Gillingham, 'Zion', 313.

67 Gillingham, 'Zion', 313–16.

68 For example, 'House of God' might have originally referred to another sanctuary e.g.

Using these linguistic criteria alone 75 of the psalms are identified as having some Zion concern. Others can be added to this number, for example the Royal Pss. 45, 72 and 144, because of a Zion concern without recourse to the identified linguistic markers.<sup>69</sup> It is also evident that the linguistic markers are fairly evenly distributed throughout the whole Psalter.<sup>70</sup>

Gillingham goes on to show that a concern with Zion is evident in the structure of various important collections of psalms (i.e. mesostructure). Three examples must suffice here:

1. The Psalms of Ascent (120–134): they are structured around an arrival in Zion, stages of worship in Zion (lament and confidence, blessing from God followed by penitence and trust) and departure from Zion.<sup>71</sup>
2. The Psalms of Korah: the same structure focused on a longing to return to Zion, and confidence regarding God's presence in Zion, is found in both Korahite collections.<sup>72</sup>
3. Gillingham argues that the Psalms of Asaph have been edited to display a Zion focus despite their Northern origins and that Pss. 73–77 and 78–83 each have the same Zion focused structure.<sup>73</sup>

A Zion theology coheres with the challenges faced by the Jewish community in the late post-exilic period when the collecting and editing of the Psalter was underway.<sup>74</sup> This is the case, whether we accept a late date of closure (e.g. Wilson's late first century AD date)<sup>75</sup> or an early one (e.g. Gillingham's third century BC).<sup>76</sup> So how coherent is Zion Theology with the content of Pss. 1 and 2?

### *Zion theology and the themes of Psalms 1 and 2*

It is hardly controversial to suggest that Ps. 2 has a strong Zion influence. God's kingship is central to the psalm and it is clear that this authority is in some sense delegated to his anointed, who, as verse 6 claims, has been established on God's holy hill, i.e. Zion. This can be seen as an ideological statement that despite appearances God is king of the nations and at some future point there will once again be an anointed king who will rule with Yahweh's authority.

It is perhaps a less obvious claim that Ps. 1 is a psalm which exhibits a Zion

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Bethel, but the editors would most likely have reread its meaning as referring to the Second Temple in Jerusalem. See H-J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 78 for an interesting discussion on the antiquity and Northern origin of Zion theology.

69 Gillingham, 'Zion', 316.

70 *Ibid.*

71 Gillingham, 'Zion', 319ff. See also Mitchell, *Message*, 117–26.

72 Gillingham, 'Zion', 323ff.

73 Gillingham, 'Zion', 325. See also Holladay, *Psalms*, 32 on their Northern origin.

74 See DeClaisse-Walford, *Beginning*, 112–18 and *passim* on the shaping of the canon.

75 See G. H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 30.

76 S. E. Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries: Volume One* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 7.

theology. It certainly does not contain the clear linguistic markers used by Gillingham to identify a Zion concern within psalms. Instead any evidence is rather more subtle and each component piece of evidence is slight, but when taken altogether it is plausible that Ps. 1 has Zion concerns.

Gillingham notes that the Torah being 'taught in Zion is found in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, and indeed beyond it'.<sup>77</sup> In Isa. 2:3 we find that 'the law will go out from Zion' and importantly that this is directly connected with God teaching (i.e. 'general' instruction not just Deuteronomic law) his people his ways (*derek*). This verse in Isaiah is found also in Mic. 4:2. Gillingham identifies the same motif in other late Second Temple writings – 4QFlor 10-14, Ecclesiasticus 24:10-11 and 2 Esdras 2:40 – as well as noting the relationship between the key Torah Psalms (i.e. 1, 19 and 119) with psalms with very strong Zion markers (i.e. 2, 18, 20, 118 and the Psalms of Ascent).<sup>78</sup>

Creach has argued that the fruitful tree planted by water is a metaphor for the righteous person in the Temple.<sup>79</sup> Ps. 52, which has a number of thematic and keyword links with Ps. 1, uses such a metaphor: 'But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God' (52:8). Hauge notes that similar language is found in Ps. 92, where there are also links to Ps. 1's struggle between the righteous (92:12) and wicked (92:11), a day and night motif (92:2), talk of the wicked perishing (92:9) and the claim that the righteous, 'will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God' (92:12–13).<sup>80</sup> Hauge sees Ps. 1's tree and wind-blown chaff motifs as part of a much larger dynamic in the Psalter of dwelling/not-dwelling in the Temple, hence his monograph's title: *Between Sheol and the Temple*.<sup>81</sup> Ezekiel's eschatological vision of the river flowing from the Temple makes use of similar metaphors involving fruitful trees planted by water in close connection with the Temple (47:12). Thus a Zion motif is coherent with the imagery in Ps. 1 and has a strong central eschatological dynamic.

### *Psalms 1 and 2 as Psalms of orientation par excellence*

Our suggestion is that the motifs, themes and subject matter of Pss. 1 and 2 are more than just a topical pointer. Rather, they are a reference, or orientation, for reading, or more strictly rereading, the Psalter.

The function we ascribe to Pss. 1 and 2 in the light of the hypothesised worldview/ideology of the final editors of the Psalter has some affinity with the orientation dynamic of Brueggemann's paradigm. We have already seen how Brueggemann's paradigm is a very attractive one in that it enables pastoral and

77 Gillingham, 'Zion', 332.

78 Gillingham, 'Zion', 332–33.

79 J. F. D. Creach, 'Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream: The Portrait of the Righteous in Psalm 1:3', *CBQ* 61 (1999), 38.

80 M. R. Hauge, *Between Sheol and Temple: Study of the Motif Structure and Function of the I-Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 153.

81 Hauge, *Temple*, 153 and *passim*.

devotional use of the psalms. In a sense Brueggemann seems to want to legitimise just how the psalms have been used by women and men of faith for millennia. Our emphasis on the role of editors in choosing, rejecting and amending psalms for the final collection means that they have been chosen as pertinent to a context of disorientation. The editors prepared a book for God's people which would be clear about the certainties of the hope they had in their faithful God, Yahweh, and at the same time is realistic about the challenges they faced.

The faithful re-reader of this *tôrâ* will find the words to inform her prayers in the midst of her struggle with the 'wicked' who fail to acknowledge the kingship of Yahweh. If the poems were good enough for David, as proposed in the many titles,<sup>82</sup> then they are good enough for all the faithful in the midst of a nation threatened by those who do not recognise the authority of Yahweh.<sup>83</sup> The words of the Psalter provide the language to pray to God who has promised to answer; a God who will provide a new anointed king and redeem those who await him.

Pss. 1 and 2 are both highly unusual psalms. This is perhaps why form-critical methods fail to have much to say about them. Ps. 1 is so unique that, as one interpreter puts it, it is an 'entity'.<sup>84</sup> One key aspect of its uniqueness is its stark, no nonsense, claims. Everything it claims is certain; there is no room for doubt, or exceptions, in its demarcation of everyone as either righteous or wicked and there is no uncertainty about the criteria that demarcate these two groups. It is, in this sense, ideological; presenting the worldview of its implied author with an agenda of persuasion. Ps. 1 is how things are; it demands that its readers make a choice about whether they wish to join the righteous (or by default the wicked). As Deut. 30:19 puts the same point: 'choose life'.

Commentators frequently point out that much of the rest of the Psalter challenges the assertions of Ps. 1. If the Psalter is in any sense a work which is meant to be read like any other, i.e. from the beginning, it can be noted that as soon as Ps. 3 is encountered the situation of the psalmist seems at odds with the certitude of Ps. 1. Ps. 1 is either wrong in its assertions or it is providing an eschatological orientation; the choice of life starts now with commitment to Yahweh and his *tôrâ*.

As is often noted the Individual Laments are especially dominant at the start of the Psalter. Ps. 1 gives a reference point, a rock of certainty from which the faithful can cry out for the blessing of God against the trials they face. Ps. 2 is part of this same frame of reference. Whatever the current experiences of life, Yahweh's sovereignty, and that of his *māšîah*, is the true reality. Refuge in him is the only choice of the wise.

This latter point is a departure from Wilson's tracing of the history of the monarchy through the Royal Psalms at the seams.<sup>85</sup> Contra Wilson, the failure of the

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82 Both directly as Psalms 'of David' and indirectly with parties connected with him such as the Korahites and Asaphites.

83 Part of democratisation inherent in the Psalter.

84 See J. T. Willis, 'Psalm 1: An Entity', *ZAW* 91 (1979), 381.

85 Wilson, 'Seams', 88 and Wilson, *Editing*, 209–14.

earthly Davidic monarchy is put into broader perspective by the paradigmatic certainties of Ps. 2. Ps. 2 provides the clearest of lenses through which to see the outworking of God's promises. This lens opens up the possibility that *māšīah* means more than just another anointed king in the line of David.

### The Psalter as Christian Scripture

In our examination of Pss. 1 and 2 as twinned hermeneutical lens for interpreting the Psalter a large range of interpretive issues have been encountered. The approach is founded upon the twin hypotheses that the final shape of the canonical Psalter has been purposefully shaped and that this purpose can be discerned. These hypotheses are considered highly plausible in the light of recent work on the literary nature of the Psalter. Other paradigms, that seemed just as certain at points in the past, warn us that we must keep open these claims as hypotheses, i.e. open to challenge, rather than to fossilise them as unquestioned presuppositions.

Our examination of Pss. 1 and 2, against the background of form-critical, cult-critical, type-functional, and what might be termed canon-functional, approaches has led to the suggestion that the editing of the Psalter and the choice of Pss. 1 and 2 as a joint lens through which to read the Psalter can be discerned in terms of a coherent ideology. This ideology coheres with the editor's/editors' goals to claim the Psalms as a resource in holding on to Jewish traditions in the face of immense challenges to Jewish identity. The Zion tradition so pervasive in the Psalter coheres with the themes of didactic intent (so McCann), God's kingship (so Eaton), Messianic concerns (so naïve Christian readings), or David as the focus (so much pre-critical work), eschatological concerns (so, for example, Mitchell) and the theme of refuge in Yahweh (so Creach). Thus such an approach coheres with much other work on the psalms from pre-critical interpretation to contemporary scholarship. This means that our founding presuppositions produce a 'thick' interpretation which is an encouraging result as preunderstanding becomes new understanding.

A key dynamic of the approach we have considered is that the purposeful editing of the psalms has produced a Psalter which is already a rereading of the individual songs, poems and prayers it contains. The editors made this rereading in the light of the reality of exile and its aftermath. For ancient exegesis knew nothing of the fossilisation of texts. The canonical psalms are those that were readable by virtue of finding relevance, evidenced in their preservation (sometimes being given a heading). The most obvious examples are the Royal Psalms which shifted from cultic use to an exhortation to look to Yahweh's future deliverance of the nation (and indeed nations) through his *māšīah*.

As part of this editorial agenda some psalms were placed strategically to exert stronger intertextual influence over the collection. Some psalms were probably

authored specially for the final stage of the editing of the Psalter (Ps. 1 perhaps).<sup>86</sup> If we are correct in seeing Pss. 1 and 2 as an ideological lens for the Psalter there are potential theological consequences. When confronted with claims that are ideological there comes a point when we must either embrace or part company with the ideology. We face further ideological consequences that logically follow from the editors' intentions that we have attempted to discern. The final editors produced a text which they judged to meet the demanding needs of their day. They have taken selectively the liturgical resources of the Jewish traditions, edited, arranged and redacted to produce a finished product. To what extent they finished a longer programme is difficult to discern but it seems plausible that they intended this to be the finished work even ahead of its formal adoption as part of the Canon. Such an intention can be met with a hermeneutic of trust or one of suspicion. To put it another way we can treat this as Scripture.

A hermeneutic of trust will, I suggest, be necessary if we want to go beyond the realm of scholarship to enable the Psalms to continue the work intended by their editors. Such a claim for the Psalter – i.e. reading it as Scripture – might well make us uncomfortable because we are choosing that the text might have some claim over us. Its ideology will claim us and rather than dismissing it we must work through how we can reread it without rewriting it.

Two areas which are problematic to contemporary interpretation are (i) how to move to a Christian interpretation without doing violence to the initial context of the Psalter, (ii) some texts which condone a level of violence incommensurate with the Gospel, or indeed virtually all other modern perspectives, most notably Ps. 137.<sup>87</sup> We do not have the same liberty as the editors of the Psalter; we cannot discard or edit those parts that we judge to be problematic, but we can, and indeed must reread the Psalter. Just as the first editors responded to their context we too must respond to a new understanding of exile (a fresh appropriation of the fact that we are all exiles from Eden) and to our claim that Jesus Christ is God's promised *māšīaḥ*.

The New Testament itself seems to follow the trajectory we have identified above. For the New Testament authors the Psalms are most often prophetic or eschatological texts. The future hope is at the heart of the New Testament albeit with a dynamic rereading through Christ's death, resurrection and reign as God's *māšīaḥ*.

Our examination has indicated that a canonical hermeneutic in which Pss. 1 and 2 are a lens for reading the Psalter provides an eschatological and didactic rereading of the individual psalms. Such a hermeneutical agenda within Scripture itself opens a trajectory for the eschatological and didactic claims of Pss. 1 and 2 to be reread and in turn the Psalter to be reread as Christian Scripture. This is no naïve supersessionism, for the original reading of the individual compositions and the editorial rereading remain a coherent and necessary part of the

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<sup>86</sup> Pss. 119 and 150 would be two other possible candidates.

<sup>87</sup> See C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Collins, 1961), 20–21.

interpretive trajectory. In this way the Psalms are legitimately appropriated for Christian worship, prayer and transformation.

### **Abstract**

Psalms 1 and 2 are considered unimportant in many interpretative paradigms. It is argued that this is due, in part, to the canonisation of the presupposition that there is no coherent determinable literary structure in the Psalter. This presupposition is challenged by noting the evidence that exists of literary intentionality at the micro-, meso- and macro-structural levels within the Psalter.

The content of Psalms 1 and 2 is identified and the use of these themes and motifs within the Psalter is explored. A unifying overarching concern with Zion Theology is tentatively considered. The hermeneutical and theological potential of Psalms 1 and 2 as an intentional introduction are explored. Such an editorial agenda indicates that the collected Psalter is a deliberate rereading of its individual compositions. We conclude with the suggestion that this rereading might usefully be seen as a step in the direction of the more radical rereading demanded by NT faith.