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Psalm 1 as an Interpreter of Scripture

Brian Russell

Scholars have observed that Ps 1 invites the community of faith to view the Psalter as Torah.¹ The Torah psalms (1, 19, and 119) reflect this stance as does the division of the Psalter into five books, which perhaps mirrors the Mosaic Torah.

Psalm 1 is troubling for many interpreters because of its unflinching optimism and bold confidence in the efficacy of Torah piety for securing the future. In Walter Brueggemann's system of classification, Ps 1 serves as a model *psalm of orientation*.² Its unambiguous commitment to obedience allows for no wavering. He argues that such a confident outlook will soon be challenged by the poignant parade of laments that dominate the first three books of the Psalter until the reader experiences a new orientation as one moves

¹ James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 121-23 and 128-35; J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 25-40; Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 81-88, and "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 83-92; Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico: Scholars, 1985), 204-7, and "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 72-82; and C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Encountering Biblical Studies; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 57-82.

² Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 19-23 and 38-39. In Brueggemann's helpful schema, he argues for two movements in the Psalter: 1) a move from settled orientation to an unsettled disorientation and 2) a movement from this disoriented state into a new orientation.

through the concluding books of the Psalter. Brueggemann's schema has proven to be a helpful one for interpreters. Yet a close reading of Ps 1 suggests that it is less a starting point from which one departs into a movement from *orientation* to *disorientation* to *new orientation* than it is a hermeneutical introduction to the Psalter that betrays a sober yet secure view of the life of the faithful through commitment to Torah.

Psalm 1 not only identifies devotion to Torah as the "way of the righteous," but its authorial voice also embodies attentiveness to Scripture through its dependence on and interpretation of other texts. In fact, Ps 1 is a tapestry of the writings of ancient Israel. In its first three verses, Ps 1 alludes to Deut 6:6-9; Josh 1:8; Gen 39:3, 23; Jer 17:5-8; and Ezek 47:12. These five allusions serve a critical exegetical function by actually modeling the very devotion to Torah that the psalm extols and by interpreting reality in light of this reading.

The body of this paper will demonstrate that Ps 1 does indeed allude to these texts (and not vice versa) and explore the effects of these allusions on the reader.³ The study concludes with a series of critical reflections.

I. Texts Interpreted by Psalm 1

The author or authors of Ps 1 drew upon other texts from ancient Israel for inspiration. Parallels between Ps 1 and other biblical passages have been noted by some commentators.⁴ In the majority

³ Following Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 14, allusion is defined as "the imbedding of fragments of an earlier text with a later one...the voice of Scripture, regarded as authoritative in one way or another, continues to speak in and through later texts that both depend on and transform the earlier."

⁴ For example, Carroll Stuhlmueller in *Psalms 1 (Psalms 1-72)* (OTM; Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1983), 58, writes, "In many subtle ways then,

of such studies, however, the direction of dependence is either assumed, or similar passages are mentioned as parallels without any explanation of the nature or significance of the relationship.⁵ None of the alleged allusions studied below is signaled explicitly in the text of Ps 1. The primary criteria used to discern allusions are similarities in vocabulary (including synonyms), phraseology, and context. These data are then analyzed for clues regarding the direction of the borrowing.⁶

A. Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 falls immediately after Moses' initial recitation of the Shema' and conceives of a lifestyle for the practical appropriation of this fundamental commandment. Deuteronomy 6:7

Ps 1 represents a medley of many biblical traditions....” Cf. S. Bullough, “The Question of Metre in Psalm 1”, *VT* 17 (1967): 45. On the relationship between Josh 1:8 and Ps 1:3, he writes, “Everyone notices the echoes in Ps. i from Joshua i 8....”

⁵ E.g., Nahum Sarna in *Song of the Heart: An Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 40 describes Jer 17:7-8 as “a close parallel” to Ps 1:3 without elaboration. Much earlier, Charles Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (ICC; 2 vols.; New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1907), 1:3, argued that the psalmist was dependent on Jer 17:5-8; Ezek 47:12; and Josh 1:8. His argument was based chiefly on the assumption of a late date for Ps 1.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the method employed here, see Brian D. Russell, “The Song of the Sea: The Date and Theological Significance of Exodus 15:1-21” (Ph.D. Diss., Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 2002), 183-96. See also Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 281-440 (esp. 283-87); Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 25-32; Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences; Stanford: Stanford University, 1998), 6-31; and Beth L. Tanner, *The Book of Psalms Through the Lens of Intertextuality* (Studies in Biblical Literature 26; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 39-83.

exhorts a practice in which God's commands continually occupy the focus of the family. The writer employs four verbs whose sphere of activity encompasses virtually all of the movements of life: dwelling/sitting, walking, lying down, and rising up. Psalm 1:1 echoes this passage in terms of the happy person's avoidance of evildoers⁷ (underlining words held in common):

Deut 6:7

ושננתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך
ובשכבך ובקומך

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are sitting at your home and when you are walking on the path, when you are lying down and when you are getting up.

Ps 1:1b

לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים
לא ישב

Who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the path of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.⁸

⁷ The medieval commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra made explicit this link centuries ago. On verse one, he wrote, "The import of this verse resembles what Moses said about the Torah, and the first fundamental of the Torah is the declaration of the unity of God 'when you sit in your house and walk on the road and lie down and rise up' (Deut. 6:7)." For this translation, see Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadiah Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Trans. by L. J. Schramm; Albany: SUNY, 1991), 322. Cf. S. C. Reif, "IBN EZRA ON PSALMI 1-2", *VT* 34/2 (1984): 232-36.

⁸ Against the charge that the words shared between these two verses are too common to serve as cogent evidence for an intertextual relationship, consider that these three words occur together in only twelve verses in

The direction of dependence is clearly from Deuteronomy to the psalmist. First, the context of Deut 6 focuses on devotion to Yhwh including instructions for passing on this piety inter-generationally. Psalm 1 assumes this sort of backdrop.⁹ Second, within the structure of Deuteronomy, Deut 11:19 repeats 6:7 almost verbatim and forms a loose inclusio around the Mosaic exhortations to obedience. This indicates the centrality of the phraseology to the overall arrangement of Deuteronomy. Third, if Ps 1 is the putative source for Deuteronomy, why the expansion of the psalm's tight three-fold description of movement to four verbs and, more importantly, why use a negative description of the wicked as a model for constructing a description of obedient behavior?

An objection to this proposed allusion is that the verb עמד does not occur in Deut 6:7. Instead, Deut 6 uses the phrase ובקומך ובשכבך. This may be explained in two ways. First, if Deut 6:7 is the source for Ps 1, the psalmist may have dropped one of the verbs for the sake of poetic artistry. This allows the poet to construct three parallel cola. Second, no essential meaning is lost because עמד is used frequently in parallel with קום (Job 8:13; Nah 1:6; cf. Josh 3:16, Ezek 3:28, Job 29:8, and Est 8:4) and שכב with שכב (Ps 4:9, cf. Lev 15:4, 20, and 26).

Additional support for the link between the two texts is the probability that ורברת בם in Deut 6:7 carries the same connotation

the Hebrew Bible (Deut 6:7; 11:19; Josh 2:22; 9:11; Judg 5:10; 1 Kgs 8:25; 19:4; 2 Chr 6:16; 21:13; Ps 1:1; 101:6; Jer 35:15). Furthermore, when the synonyms קום and עמד are considered, the range of verses in which these words occur together is reduced to Deut 6:7; 11:19; and Ps 1:1.

⁹ Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Deuteronomy and Psalms", in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* (JSOTSup 267; Sheffield: JSOT, 2000), 329. Commenting specifically on Deut 6:6-9; he writes, "The activity enjoined in Deut. 6:6-9 expresses a constant and total commitment to the law of the Lord comparable to what is pronounced the blessed way of the righteous in Psalm 1."

as **וּבַתּוֹרַתּוֹ יִהְיֶה** in Ps 1:2.¹⁰ Both constructions imply an oral component comprised of a repetition or murmuring of the law.¹¹

This allusion to Deut 6 links the steadfast commitment of the psalmist to Yhwh's Torah with Deuteronomy's emphasis on whole-being devotion to Yhwh.¹² Psalm 1 is no call for a stale legalism, but a paradigm for a life lived for and with God. It also implicitly supports the psalm's overarching contrast between the way of the righteous and of the wicked. These two spheres of existence are polar opposites. For the Torah-centered Israelite, the description of the wicked in v. 1b would have evoked the positive imagery of Deut 6:7. Thus, by a subtle allusion to Deuteronomy, the psalmist offers the attentive reader the antithesis of Ps 1:1b.

B. Joshua 1:8

Psalm 1:2 and Josh 1:8 are virtually identical. This implies an allusive relationship:

Ps 1:2 **וּבַתּוֹרַתּוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלַיָּה**

And on his law he meditates day and night.

¹⁰ Ibid. Miller is influenced by Georg Fischer and Norbert Lohfink, "‘Diese Worte sollst du summen’: Dtn 6, 7 w^edibbarta bam – ein verlorener Schlüssel zur meditativen Kultur in Israel", *TP* 62 (1987): 59-72. Below this paper will argue that the phrase in Ps 1:2 is borrowed from Josh 1:8, which also stands under the influence of Deuteronomy.

¹¹ **הִגִּיד** is used for a variety of oral expressions: a lion's roar (Isa 31:4), muttering (Isa 8:9), and speaking (Ps 37:20).

¹² G. André, "'Walk', 'Stand', and 'Sit' in Psalm I 1-2", *VT* 32 (1982): 327, comes close to this conclusion by highlighting the allusion in 1:1 to Deut 6. She, however, misses the dynamic function of Torah and instead argues that the Psalm posits the happy individual as "the one who constantly, in word and deed, confesses YHWH as the one and only God."

Josh 1:8 והגית בו יומם ולילה (the antecedent of בו is הזה ספר התורה)

And you will meditate on it day and night.

These two texts are the only ones in the Bible with this clause in common. Scholars are mixed on the direction of borrowing.¹³ The evidence for the dependence of Ps 1 on Josh 1 turns on the likelihood that Josh 1:1-9 is based in part on Deut 17:14-20 and employs other features common to the Deuteronomistic history.

A study of the key features of Josh 1 demonstrates convincingly its close relationship with Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history. Joshua 1:7 records the injunction characteristic of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history:

אל-תסור...ימין ושמאל

You will not turn...to the right or the left.¹⁴

In Deut 17:18, the instruction is specifically for the king. Attentiveness to the Book of the Torah is the defining characteristic of an Israelite king. The degree to which he will succeed is tied inextricably to his commitment to a lifestyle marked by Torah devotion. In Josh 1, Joshua is not a king, but he is the first to lead

¹³ E.g., Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 86, writes, "The Lord's words sound almost like a quotation or pastiche from Psalm 1 (or vice versa)."

¹⁴ Deut 2:27, 5:32, 17:11, 17:20, 28:14; Josh 1:7; 23:6; 1 Sam 6:12; and 2 Kgs 22:2. This point is strengthened by the observation that such a phrase occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only in Prov 4:27 and the derivative 2 Chr 34:2.

Israel after Moses' passing and is portrayed in quasi-royal terms.¹⁵ Joshua's time of leadership as well as that of future kings is to be marked by obedience to the Torah given through Moses (Deut 17:14-20). In Ps 1, there is no explicit warrant for limiting the injunction to royalty alone.¹⁶ Rather, Ps 1 applies the charge given to Joshua in a universalizing move to any would-be "happy man" (אִישׁ שָׂשׂוֹן).

Deuteronomy 17:18 and Josh 1:8 describe the Torah as a book (סֵפֶר). The exact phrase in Josh 1:8 סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה is found throughout Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets.¹⁷ Psalm 1 assumes either the idea of a book or more likely, as will be suggested below, has already expanded the scope of the term *Torah* to include more than the Mosaic Book of the Torah.

Given the close connections between Deut 17:14-20 and Josh 1, the precise phrase וְהָגִיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה that connects Josh 1:8 to Ps 1:2 likely finds its provenance in Deut 17:19 בּוֹ כָּל-יְמֵי חַיָּיו

¹⁵ For this last point, see Richard D. Nelson, "Josiah in the Book of Joshua", *JBL* 100 (1981): 531-40. Nelson demonstrates that strong parallels exist between the portrayal of Joshua and Josiah. For our purposes, he notes links between Josh 1 and Deut 17.

¹⁶ This statement needs to be evaluated against a canonical reading of the Psalter as a whole. See Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 132-33 and Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," 91-92. Arguably, at one level, the king functions as the "ideal Israelite." Yet, in the end, the Psalter as Scripture serves as an authoritative guide to prayer and character formation for all the people of God. In short, both Ps 1 and the canonical Psalter aim to instruct God's people on how to live in this world. See J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "'The Way of the Righteous' in the Psalms" in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. William P. Brown; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 136-37.

¹⁷ Deut 28:61, 29:20, 30:10, 31:26; Josh 8:31, 34; 23:6; 24:26; 2 Kgs 14:6; 22:8; 22:11; and 23:24

וּקְרָא. The synonyms קָרָא and הִגִּיד both suggest individual study with an oral component.¹⁸ The object of both verbs is Yhwh's Torah. The two adverbial phrases (כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו and יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵה) are close parallels. Most importantly, both phrases occur in Joshua (1:5; 4:14) and Deuteronomy (28:66) suggesting that the change of wording is compatible with the style of each author.

Both Deut 17 and Josh 1 use the particle לְמַעַן to introduce purpose clauses that describe the successful end of the life devoted to Torah (Deut 17:20; Josh 1:8). The more discursive writing style of Deut 17 and Josh 1 contrasts with the prosody of Ps 1 in which the clause describing success (1,3c) follows an elegant simile.

All of the above evidence suggests that the phrase in common between Josh 1:8 and Ps 1:2 finds its provenance in Deuteronomy. The deuteronomistic writer behind Josh 1:1-9 has crafted the introduction to Joshua with an eye to Deuteronomy. The likelihood then is that the writer of Ps 1 borrowed an entire clause from Josh 1. The reverse of this proposed line of dependence seems unlikely.¹⁹

This allusion invites the audience of Ps 1 to embody the way of life envisioned originally for Israel's leaders. In the worshipping community served by the Psalter, there is a democratization of the mandate for devotion to Torah.

C. Jeremiah 17:5-8

¹⁸ Both roots occur in Isa 31:4.

¹⁹ This conclusion calls into question the suggestions of Sheppard that Josh 1 is dependent upon Ps 1 and that both passages are examples of the sapientializing of the Old Testament. The close ties between Deut 17 and Josh 1 mitigate any need to posit additional layers of redaction in either Josh 1 or Ps 1. See Gerald T. Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms", *Int* 46 (1992): 153.

When the psalmist compares the result of the life devoted to Torah to the fecundity of a tree planted by the water, the writer draws upon a time tested motif.²⁰ Yet, when the language is closely examined, the evidence points to a conscious borrowing from Jer 17:5-8. The similarity of the two contexts is clear.²¹ Both are structured around a pronounced contrast of the righteous and the wicked (or the blessed and the cursed), and arboreal imagery is used to illustrate the result of each way of life. Below are two sets of similar lines. The first

²⁰ E.g., “Instruction of Amenemope” (ca. 1100 BCE) in *The Context of Scripture* (eds. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger; 3 vols; Leiden - New York: , 1996), 1:117:

Chapter 4

As for the heated man in the temple,
He is like a tree growing indoors;
A moment lasts its growth of shoots.
Its end comes about in the woodshed;
It is floated far from its place,
The flame is its burial shroud.
The truly silent, who keeps apart,
He is like a tree grown in a meadow.
It greens, it doubles its yield,
It stands in front of its lord.
Its fruit is sweet, its shade delightful,
Its end comes in the garden.

For a helpful summary of ancient Near Eastern usage, see William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 58-78.

²¹ Contra James A. Durlleser, “Poetic Style in Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-8: A Rhetorical Critical Study”, *Semitics* 9 (1984): 30-48. He argues that Jer 17 and Ps 1 drew upon a common stock of expressions and illustrations. His principal argument relies on rhetorical criticism to aver that the literary style and structure employed by each is too different for the texts to be related. He fails to appreciate that allusive links between texts are more dynamic and do not have to be wedded to formal structural features between texts. Furthermore, the precise repetition of key phraseology between the texts suggests a closer relationship than a mere sharing of a common motif.

uses a similar clause structure with roughly synonymous vocabulary. The second are virtually identical lines:

Ps 1:1a אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר Happy is the man who

Jer 17:5a אָרוּר הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר Cursed is the man who

Jer 17:7b בְּרוּךְ הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר Blessed is the man who

Ps 1:3a וְהָיָה כְעֵץ שֶׁתוֹלַעַל־פְּלִגֵי מַיִם

And he will be like a tree planted by channels of water

Jer 17:8a וְהָיָה כְעֵץ שֶׁתוֹלַעַל־מַיִם

And he will be like a tree planted by the water

The direction of dependence may be demonstrated by the following evidence. First, the language of Ps 1 assumes the state pronounced in Jer 17:5-8. There is a measure of semantic overlap between אֲשֶׁרִי and בְּרוּךְ, but there is a key difference.²² אֲשֶׁרִי focuses on an individual's observed state of happiness and typically includes comments regarding the conduct and character of persons who enjoy it. On the other hand, בְּרוּךְ stresses God's agency in bringing about such a state. The idea of invocation is often implicit. The pericope in Jer 17:5 begins, "Thus says the Lord" and goes on to invoke the

²² James L. Mayes, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 41; Michael L. Brown, "בְּרוּךְ" in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. W. A. Vangemeren; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1:757-67; Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of the Cult in the Wisdom Literature of Israel and the Ancient Near East* (SBLDS 30; Missoula: Scholars, 1977), 272; and W. Janzen, "Ašrē in the Old Testament", *HTR* 58 (1965): 215-26.

curses and blessings of God depending upon the object of one's trust. Psalm 1 assumes this and simply describes the resulting states.²³

Second, the linguistic shifts between *אִישׁ/גִּבֹר* and *אִשְׁרָא/בְרוּךְ* are explained best by a line of dependence moving from Jeremiah to the Psalter. Above the differences between *בְרוּךְ* and *אִשְׁרָא* were discussed and a rationale given for the shift from Jeremiah to the Psalm. Regarding the synonyms *גִּבֹר* and *אִישׁ*, the decisive evidence for the direction of dependence is their usage in blessing and curse formulas elsewhere in Jeremiah. Jeremiah 17 is the only context in which *גִּבֹר* occurs with either *אִשְׁרָא* or *בְרוּךְ*.²⁴ Furthermore, given that *אִשְׁרָא הַאִישׁ* occurs in Jer 11:3 and 20:15, it seems unlikely that a shift to *גִּבֹר* would occur in Jer 17 if it were dependent upon Ps 1.²⁵

Third, Ps 1 construes Jeremiah's insistence on trust (*בְטַח*) in terms of devotion to Yhwh's Torah. Both trust and Torah are themes throughout Jeremiah.²⁶ Psalm 1 focuses exclusively on devotion to

²³ It is interesting that the psalmist does not use "curse" language. Instead, he opts for a more subtle style to the same end. As W. Vogels, "A Structural Analysis of Ps 1", *Bib* 60 (1979): 413, points out, the psalmist employs a partial acrostic technique. The first word of the poem (*אִשְׁרָא*) describes the state of the "righteous" and final word (*הַאִבְדָּה*) describes the destiny of the "wicked."

²⁴ In fact, Jer 17:5 is the sole occurrence in the Hebrew Bible of *גִּבֹר אִשְׁרָא*. *בְרוּךְ גִּבֹר* is found elsewhere only in Ps 128:4.

²⁵ *אִשְׁרָא הַאִישׁ* also occurs in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic corpus (Deut 27:15; Josh 6:26; and 1 Sam 14:24, 28).

²⁶ *בְטַח* occurs in Jer 5:17; 7:4, 8, 14; 9:3; 12:5; 13:25; 17:5, 7; 23:6; 28:15; 29:31; 32:37; 33:16; 39:18; 46:25; 48:7; and 49:4, 11, 31. *תּוֹרָה* occurs in Jer 2:8; 6:19; 8:8; 9:12; 16:11; 18:18; 26:4; 31:33; 32:23; and 44:10, 23.

Torah. Again it seems unlikely that Jeremiah would modify Ps 1's distinctive message if the prophet were drawing upon it for inspiration. On the other hand, the change from trust to Torah devotion allows the psalmist to emphasize two related points: (1) Torah devotion is a natural outflow of trust in Yhwh and (2) Torah devotion is not a panacea that operates apart from a vital relationship with Yhwh.

Last, there are two key differences in vocabulary that betray the line of dependence. Both Ps 1:3 and Jer 17:8 describe the tree's ability to bear fruit despite circumstances:

Ps 1:3b אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיו יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוֹ לֹא יִבּוֹל

That brings forth its fruit in its season and whose foliage does not wither

Jer 17:8d וְלֹא יִמָּשׁ מֵעֲשׂוֹת פְּרִי

And it does not cease to bear fruit

Psalm 1's deviation from Jer 17 is caused by an allusion to Ezek 47:12.²⁷ Furthermore, the use of פִּלַּג in Ps 1:3a is exegetical as it adumbrates the allusion to Ezek 47:12 by associating the sustaining waters with those which flow out of Zion.²⁸ If Jeremiah is quoting the psalmist, why drop פִּלַּג?

²⁷ See below.

²⁸ Note especially the use of פִּלַּג in Ps 46:5 and Ps 65,10. In Isa 30:25 and 32:2, it also describes waters flowing from God. For discussion of these texts, see Creach, "Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream", 41-42.

William Holladay has objected to this proposed line of dependence.²⁹ His main arguments may be summarized briefly. First, he argues that Jer 12:1-2 and Jer 17:5-8 share links with elements of Ps 1. Thus, since two different contexts in Jeremiah exhibit links to different parts of Ps 1, they are most likely dependent on the psalm. Second, he avers that Jer 17:5-8 is more “dynamic” than the “static” Ps 1, because Jeremiah employs drought language for both the righteous and the wicked.

Holladay’s first argument is the stronger of the two. The points in common between Jer 17:5-8 and Ps 1 have already been discussed. Jeremiah 12:1-2 shares the following with the psalm (according to Holladay): 1) both use the phrase **דֶּרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים** (Jer 12:1, Ps 1:6); 2) Jeremiah’s charge (12:1) that the wicked “succeed” (**צָלַח**) is a possible reversal of Ps 1:3-4; 3) in another reversal of Ps 1:3, Yhwh is accused in 12:2 of planting (**נָטַע**) the wicked; and 4) in a final reversal of Ps 1:3-4, the wicked bear fruit (**עָשׂוּ פֵרִי**).

Under close scrutiny, this evidence does not support a direct line of borrowing from Ps 1 to Jer 12. First, the evidence proffered in this study strongly suggests a direction of dependence from Jer 17 to the psalmist. Second, Jer 12:1-4 takes the form of a complaint (lament) against God. Its basis lies in the assumption that, in a just world, the righteous will prosper over the wicked. This is the basic theological perspective of Deuteronomy and undergirds many similar complaints in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Hab 1:13). In the reading proposed here, Ps 1 is offering a reinterpretation this theology – one which specifically denies that material blessing is the necessary mark of divine blessing. Third, the arboreal imagery in 12:1-2 fits well in its immediate context (cf. 11:16-19, and 12:10-13) and thus there is no need to posit Ps 1 as its source. Furthermore, 12:1-2 has linguistic ties with 17:5-8. In particular, they share in common the word **שָׂרַשׁ**

²⁹ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 376-77 and 489-90. See also William L. Holladay, “Indications of Jeremiah’s Psalter”, *JBL* 121 (2002): 248-49.

and the phrase עֲשֶׂה פְרִי. Jeremiah 17:5-8 seems to answer Jeremiah's charge in 12:1-2. Fourth, the linguistic links between Ps 1 and Jer 12 are not strong enough to support a claim of dependence. דֶּרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים is a rare phrase in the Hebrew Bible. But, given that its highest frequency of use occurs in Proverbs, it appears to have ties to wisdom circles.³⁰ נָטַע (Jer 12:2) is synonymous with שָׂתַל (Ps 1:3, Jer 17:8), but נָטַע occurs frequently in Jeremiah and has ties to the immediate context (11:17).³¹ If the writer was indeed drawing from Ps 1, the use of נָטַע rather than the rarer שָׂתַל disguises rather than highlights the alleged allusion.³² Similarly, צָלַח is used regularly in Jeremiah.³³ In Jer 12:1, it occurs in parallel with שָׁלַח. In three of the four passages in which שָׁלַח means "prosper," it is used of the wicked (Job 12:6, Jer 12:1, and Lam 1:5). Also, a noun form occurs in Ps 73:12. In other words, the "success" language fits well into the lament genre, particularly those involving complaints about the prosperity of the wicked. Thus, it seems unlikely that Jer 12:1-2 is related directly to Ps 1.

Answering Holladay's second point, Creach has shown that, when compared with the use of the tree motif elsewhere in the

³⁰ Besides Ps 1:3 and Jer 12:1; it occurs only in Ps 146:9; Prov 4:19; 12:26; and 15:9. The occurrences in Pss 1 and 146 appear related. Given that Jeremiah 17:5-8 draws from the wisdom tradition (cf. Instruction of Amenemope), it is more likely that דֶּרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים is drawn also from Israel's wisdom tradition rather than directly from Ps 1:6.

³¹ 16 of 59 verbal occurrences of the root are found in Jeremiah (1:10; 2:21; 11:17; 12:2; 18:9; 24:6; 29:5; 29:28; 31:5 [3x]; 31:28; 32:41; 35:7; 42:10; and 45:4).

³² Outside of Ezekiel, which has five occurrences, שָׂתַל is found only in Ps 1:3; 92:14; Jer 17:8; and Hos 9:13.

³³ 7 of 53 occurrences are found in Jeremiah (2:37; 5:28; 12:1; 13:7, 10; 22:30; and 32:5).

ancient Near East, Jer 17:5-8 shows little innovation and in fact is closely patterned after the style of the Egyptian piece, "Instruction of Amenemope," whereas Ps 1 breaks the pattern.³⁴ The most obvious difference is that Ps 1 applies the imagery of the tree only to the righteous one whereas Jer 17 and Amenemope apply it to the wicked as well. The psalmist alludes to Jer 17 in order to use it toward an exegetical end in its definition of success (Ps 1:3c) and not merely in a "static" imitation of a common motif,

The use of Jer 17:8 is the first of three allusions found in Ps 1:3. Psalm 1:3 describes the nature of the prosperity enjoyed by the one devoted wholly to Torah. The psalmist employs Jer 17:5-8 in order to emphasize that the arboreal imagery of the fecund tree does not imply exemption from the suffering and hardships of life. Jeremiah 17:8 reads:

They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. (NRSV)

The brevity of Ps 1:3a is expanded by the wider context of Jer 17:5-8 to remind the psalm's hearers that the righteous are not immune to seasons of heat and drought. This provides a key hermeneutical lens for reading the remainder of the Psalter. The life of faithfulness may be described as "happy" and "successful" but these realities exist and are experienced within the hardships of life rather than inoculating the righteous from the risks and suffering of human existence.

³⁴ For a translation of "Amenemope," see note 20. Creach, "Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream", 37-39. See also A. Cruells, "El just, un arbre sempre verd. El Salm I", *RCT* 14 (1989): 15-28.

D. Ezekiel 47:12

The phraseology in common between Ps 1:3b and Ezek 47:12b is indicative of an allusive relationship:³⁵

Ps 1:3b אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיו יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ וְעֵלְהוּ לְאֵיבּוֹל

That brings forth its fruit in its season and whose foliage does not wither

Ezek 47:12b לְאֵיבּוֹל עֵלְהוּ וְלֹא־יִתֵּם פְּרִיו

Its foliage will not wither nor will its fruit fail

Given the density of the allusions in Ps 1:3, it appears likely that once again the psalmist is drawing upon the prophet and not vice-versa. More substantively, this proposed allusion to Ezek 47:12 best explains the differences between Jer 17:8d and Ps 1:3 regarding fruit production (see above).

In verse 3, the psalmist employs a dense mixture of texts toward a theological end. If the use of Jer 17 highlighted the cruel realities of life, then the use of Ezek 47:12 points to that which sustains the righteous person. Ezekiel 47 describes a river flowing from Zion that provides sustenance for the flora and fauna that drink its waters. The imagery is idyllic and evokes the imagery of Eden and the tree of life.³⁶ The Torah devotion advocated by the psalmist provides an avenue for the righteous person to partake of the life giving waters,

³⁵ Creach, "Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream", 39-41; Sama, *Songs of the Heart*, 43; Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 3; and Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 59-60.

³⁶ Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 6; H. N. Wallace, "Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life," *ABD*, 6:659; James Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 77; and Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 59-60.

which will flow from the restored temple.³⁷ As mentioned above, this connection is strengthened by the psalmist's use of פלג'.

E. Genesis 39:3, 23

Psalm 1:3c offers a summation of the end result of the righteous life.³⁸ Such a person will prosper. Its unequivocal assertion of success often troubles interpreters because it is viewed narrowly in terms of a deuteronomistic paradigm of material blessing for obedience and loss for disobedience.³⁹ The psalmist, however, is not so naïve about such matters. On the heels of the tree imagery of 1:3ab, the psalmist alludes to another great leader in Israel's history – Joseph. Note the similarity between Ps 1:3c and Gen 39:3b and 23b:

Gen 39:3, 23 וכל אשר הוא עשה יהוה מצליח 23

And [in] all that he was doing, Yhwh gave success

Ps 1:3c וכל אשר יעשה יצליח

And all that he does prospers

³⁷ Creach, "Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream", 41-45.

³⁸ Some consider Ps 1,3c to be a later interpolation on metrical grounds. E.g., H. Bardtke in *BHS* and Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Continental Commentary* (Trans. by H.C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 113.

³⁹ James Crenshaw's recent remark (*The Psalms*, 58) is illustrative. He writes, "In this Psalmist's worldview no gray areas exist; people belong to one category or the other: good or evil. Those in the former group bear fruit; those in the latter group come to ruin. Given the preponderance of laments in the psalms that follow, such an interpretation seems remarkably simplistic, almost Pollyannish." Yet as seen in the discussion on Ps 1's use of Jer 17, not to mention a canonical reading of Ps 1:3 in light of the Psalter, this concern is not even an issue in the text itself.

The above comparison of the language demonstrates a virtual word for word correspondence with the principal differences being the explicit indication in Gen 39 of divine agency and the type of verb form employed in each context.⁴⁰ Psalm 1 refrains from emphasizing God's activity until its concluding verse.

Evidence for the direction of dependence is clear. First, Gen 39 narrates Joseph's rise in Potiphar's house and his subsequent imprisonment on account of Potiphar's wife's false accusation of sexual assault. Yet, the key recurring element that forms an inclusio around this episode is the assertion that Yhwh caused Joseph to prosper in everything that he did (Gen 39:2-3, 23). Joseph's prosperity is linked to the narrator's repeated observation that "Yhwh was with him" (39:2-3, 23). The link between divine presence and **צִלַּח** occurs also in Gen 24:40. Second, Hamilton argues that the use of participles in Gen 39:2-3, 23 (**עֹשֶׂה** [2x] and **מַצְלִיחַ** [3x]) "suggests that such prosperity became a pattern."⁴¹ In Ps 1, this pattern is assumed and becomes a general statement describing the outcome of a life devoted to Torah, i.e., God works to bring success to the righteous.

The genius of this allusion is its subtle interplay with the previous one to Josh 1:8. Joshua 1:8 ends with a declaration of the result of diligent obedience to Yhwh's Torah:

אִז תְּצַלִּיחַ אֶת־דַּרְכְּךָ וְאִז תִּשְׁכַּל

⁴⁰ The similarity of the phrases has been observed by a few commentators, most notably Nahum Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 369 n. 39:3. See also his discussion in Sarna, *Songs of the Heart*, 43-44.

⁴¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 459-460.

Then you shall make your way prosperous and you shall be successful...

The psalmist could simply have written 1:3c by drawing once again on the phraseology of Joshua or by using the more common deuteronomistic term שָׁכַל.⁴² Instead, the psalmist moves the attentive reader away from the victorious Joshua to an earlier hero in the faith of Israel, Joseph.⁴³ Coming on the heels of the application of the arboreal imagery from Jer 17 with its realistic portrayal of the peaks and valleys of human finitude, the use of the Joseph account serves to define success in terms of faithful service and perseverance in living out God's will rather than in terms of status or material prosperity. Whether in servitude to Potiphar or under the authority of the chief jailer, Joseph is portrayed, not as a cursed person, but rather as one to whom Yhwh brings success.⁴⁴ Thus, Ps 1 looks back

⁴² Deuteronomy 29:8; 32:29; Josh 1:7-8; 1 Sam 18:5, 14, 30; 25:3; 1 Kgs 2:3; and 2 Kgs 18:7. For example, Deut 29:8 reads: אֲשֶׁר תַעֲשׂוּן כָּל תִּשְׁכִּילוּ אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר תַעֲשׂוּן. Given the psalmist's demonstrated penchant for closely worded allusion, it is striking that, in his "success" clause, the less common term is chosen (צָלַח - Deut 28:29; Josh 1:8; Judg 18:5; 1Kgs 22:12; and 22:15). Of these, Deut 28:29 occurs in the negative and Judg 18:5 in a *hithpael* form. Joshua 1:8 does use צָלַח (note, however, two-fold use of שָׁכַל in Jos 1:7-8), but Psalm 1:3 moves away from the language of Joshua through the clause: וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה.

⁴³ Cf. Bullough, "The Question of Metre in Psalm 1", 48. He notes the close similarities between Ps 1:3c and Gen 39:3 and 39:23, but without explanation links Ps 1:3c with Josh 1:8.

⁴⁴ Gerhard Von Rad's comments in *Genesis* (Rev. ed.; trans. J. H. Marks; OTL; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 367 on Gen 39:23 are illuminating for our discussion:

Obviously the statement "Yahweh was with him" implies quite real protection and promotion in the matters of his external life, not, to be sure, protection from distress, but rather in the midst of distress. The

on two pivotal leaders in Israel's history – Joseph and Joshua. Joseph is the first Israelite in Egypt; Joshua is the leader of Israel as the people return to the land promised by Yhwh. Yhwh used Joseph to preserve Jacob and his family in a time of famine; Yhwh empowered Joshua as the agent to lead Israel into the promised land. Their circumstances were different, but in both cases, Yhwh brought them prosperity in the sense that each carried out the divine will.

II. Critical Implications

First, the psalmist's use of a variety of texts from ancient Israel demonstrates that Ps 1 is in fact a product of post-exilic times. This is hardly a novel conclusion, but by demonstrating that Ps 1 draws on both Mosaic Torah and the Prophetic Corpus (Former and Latter), it follows that sufficient time must have passed for the witness of these disparate literary works to have been inculcated into the consciousness of both the psalmist and his intended audience. Furthermore, given its late date and placement at the head of the Psalter, it seems at least plausible to suggest that Ps 1 may have been written specifically to serve as the first half of the dual introduction formed with Ps 2.⁴⁵

Second, the psalmist shows an awareness of an expanded notion of Torah. The allusions to Joshua, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel point beyond the Mosaic Torah to other sacred books that the psalmist implicitly

narrator's theology is not so naïve. On the contrary, the way he combines emphatic belief in God's protection and presence with the "permission" of severe afflictions is amazing.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bullough, "The Question of Metre in Psalm 1", 46. Bullough argues that Psalm 1 was composed in prose specifically to serve as an introduction or preface to the Psalter. Although most of his article seeks to demonstrate that Ps 1 is prose rather than poetry, he does aver that the allusions to Joshua and Jeremiah serve to support Ps 1's function as an introduction.

commends as authoritative guides for the righteous.⁴⁶ Perhaps Ps 1 provides a witness to the process of canonization in the Second Temple period of ancient Israel.⁴⁷ This implicitly supports the overall hermeneutical function of Ps 1 in its elevation of the Psalter as a whole as Torah. Ostensibly, this expanded canon includes the Psalter as well. Childs writes,

Certainly in its final stage of development, Ps. 1 has assumed a highly significant function as a preface to the psalms which are to be read, studied, and meditated through its written form as sacred scripture. With the written word Israel is challenged to meditate day and night in seeking the will of God. Indeed, as a heading to the whole Psalter the blessing now includes the faithful meditation on the sacred writings which follow.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ A slightly different approach to this is found in Jon D. Levenson, "The Sources of Torah: Psalm 119 and the Modes of Revelation in Second Temple Judaism", in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (eds. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul. D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 559-74. Levenson offers a corrective to the common assumption that Torah refers exclusively to the Pentateuch. This paper supports a textual view of Torah, but one that extends beyond the Pentateuch to include other texts accepted by the community as authoritative. For a narrower view, see Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (OTL; 2 vols; trans. by John Bowden; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 2:556-63. Albertz argues that Torah specifically refers to the written Pentateuch.

⁴⁷ The force of this statement is significant to the degree that the composition of Ps 1 can be demonstrated to have occurred early on in the Post-Exilic period. Certainly a *terminus a quo* exists at the date of the latest text to which Ps 1 alludes. The Greek translation of the Psalter in the 2nd century B.C.E. serves up as a *terminus ad quem*.

⁴⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 513.

Third, Ps 1 proclaims the need for constant meditation on Scripture by the faithful. The psalmist's words are more than merely prescriptive. Rather, the very language embodies the virtue extolled in the psalm. The author(s) of this text has in fact been shaped by Scripture in precisely the way advocated in the prosody. The psalmist's own words are a reappropriation of earlier Scripture. The allusive speech illustrates and fulfills tangibly the vocation of "meditating on Torah night and day."

Fourth, Ps 1 redefines success in terms of being near to God and implementing the divine will.⁴⁹ This moves the psalmist away from the vision of material prosperity present in Deut 27-28. Success does not mean an absence of suffering for the righteous. When read in light of the texts from which it was constructed, the arboreal simile of Ps 1:3 becomes a potent call to choose the way of life. McCann aptly writes, "The point of the simile is *not* that the righteous will not suffer, but rather that the righteous will always have in God a reliable resource to face and endure life's worst."⁵⁰ Even a casual reader of the Psalter is impressed by the high number of laments within the book. Yet, ultimately the Psalter moves from lament to praise and reaches its climax in the symphony of praise found in the Halleluyah hymns of 146-150. Psalm 146:5-9 is instructive in relation to Ps 1's redefinition of prosperity:

5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; 7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; 8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. 9 The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. (NRSV)

⁴⁹ J. Clinton. McCann, Jr., "Righteousness, Justice, and Peace: A Contemporary Theology of the Psalms", *HBT* 23 (2001):113-14.

⁵⁰ McCann, "'The Way of the Righteous' in the Psalms", 137.

Striking is the implication that the righteous (צַדִּיקִים) include those groups, which epitomize suffering, oppression, and marginalization. Yet, it is precisely such persons who are pronounced אֲשֶׁר. Under the tutelage of Torah, such persons endure, even prevail, over the hardships of life.

Last, Ps 1 serves to remind its readers that Yhwh is the ultimate agent over creation. Life is not simply a matter of plugging the correct numbers into the proper formula. The living and active God, who knows (יָדַע) the way of the righteous (1:6), is behind the scenes working on their behalf. The use of the participle serves to stress the continuous nature of Yhwh's work. Psalm 1:6 delivers a clear message that the relationship between the blessed life and God is not some mechanical transaction, but born of a bond between the God of the Exodus and his people. The faithful connect to this God through a vibrant and on-going commitment to the Torah.

III. Conclusion

Psalm 1 serves as a hermeneutical guide to the rest of the Psalter. It is not merely a starting point for a journey from *orientation* to *disorientation* to a *new orientation*. Rather it offers its audience a key to navigating the vicissitudes of the life of faith as chronicled by the Psalter. The psalmist insists that the way forward for the faithful is an unswerving devotion to Torah. This does not secure the individual or community of faith from tribulation, but it empowers the ability to follow the divine will. This alone marks success in the mind of the psalmist. The psalmist communicates this remarkable understanding of life through the use of allusive speech, and by so doing, models tangibly the very devotion envisioned for the community of faith.

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