

The Movement and Message of the Hebrew Psalter



AN OVERVIEW ON WHAT IT MEANS TO READ
THE BOOK OF PSALMS AS A BOOK

WEEK TWO
THE PSALTER AS A PURPOSEFULLY
ARRANGED BOOK

Book Recommendations



- J. Clinton McCann, “A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms”
- Patrick Miller, “Interpreting the Psalms”
- Firth and Johnston, ed., “Interpreting the Psalms”

Last week recaps

- A compositional-canonical approach?
- The psalm writers were considered _____ by other passages in the Bible
- A connection between music and prophecy in the Old Testament (and New Testament too!)

The Psalms as a Book?

- Gerald Wilson, comparing form criticism to what we are doing:
 - “In contrast to the predominately negative conclusion of a preceding generation of Psalms scholars that the canonical arrangement was largely random and without a unifying editorial purpose, recent scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that the canonical Psalter is the end result of a process of purposeful editorial arrangement of psalms and collections of psalms producing a unified whole marked by **structures indicating editorial intent.**”
- Our goal, then, is to arrive at the editorial intent by paying attention to the various structures of psalms

The Psalms as a Book?

- David Mitchell on Wilson's foundational study:
 - "Thanks to Wilson's work, there arose a scholarly consensus that the Psalms were redacted around a **purposefully developing sequence of ideas**. Instead of a jumble of unrelated lyrics, they became instead an oratorio, forming together a **literary context for their mutual interpretation**. And so Wilson became, in Isaac Newton's celebrated phrase, one of the giants upon whose shoulders we all stood. However it was one thing to demonstrate deliberate arrangement in the Psalter, another to interpret it."
- To pay attention to the structures we must use the psalms to mutually interpret one another, which will lead to a sequence of ideas purposed by the editor.

Three Questions to Guide Us

- If there is an editor, then where should we look for any editorial activity that might have helped shape the book as we have it?
- What is the social matrix of the editorial movements? That is, what was the theological climate of Second Temple Israel?
- What is the significance of the final form? Does the shape itself lead us to any conclusions?

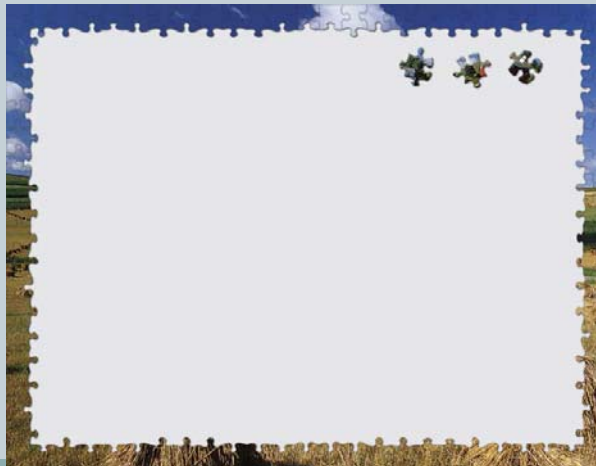
Where to begin?

- A Puzzling Illustration



Where to begin?

- You begin with the edges, or in the Psalter's case, the "seams"



Where to begin?

- Which puzzle are we putting together?
- David's puzzle?



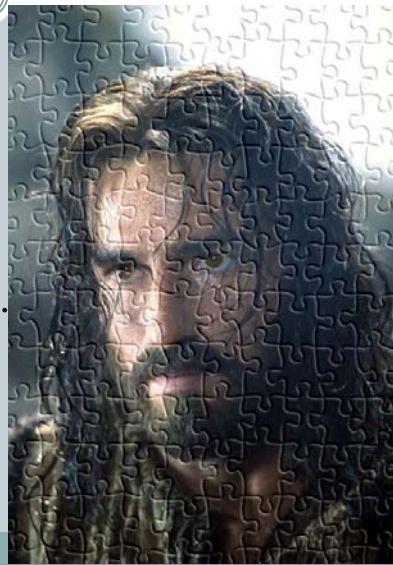
Where to begin?

- Which puzzle are we putting together?
- David's puzzle?
- My puzzle?



Where to begin?

- Which puzzle are we putting together?
- David's puzzle?
- My puzzle?
- Jesus' puzzle? Thanks Jim.



Where to begin?

- Which puzzle are we putting together?
- David's puzzle?
- My puzzle?
- Jesus' puzzle?
- A messianic puzzle?



What have scholars used to put it together?

- The division of the Psalter into Five Books
- The placement of Psalms 1-2 and 146-150 as the introduction and conclusion of the Psalter, respectively
- The placement of other significant psalms at strategic junctures, such as Ps 72, 73, 89, 107, etc.
- The subtle thematic and theological arrangement of psalms into smaller groupings

The Five Books of the Psalter

The Doxologies to Each Book

Psalm 41.13 [14]	Ps 72.18-19	Ps 89.52 [53]	Ps 106.48
<u>Blessed be the LORD</u> <u>the God of Israel,</u>	<u>Blessed be the LORD</u> <u>the God of Israel,</u> who only does wondrous things! Blessed be his name	<u>Blessed be the LORD</u>	<u>Blessed be the LORD</u> <u>the God of Israel</u>
<u>From forever to</u> <u>forever!</u>	<u>forever;</u> And let the whole earth be filled with his glory!	<u>Forever!</u>	<u>From forever to</u> <u>forever!</u>
<u>Amen and amen</u>	<u>Amen and amen</u>	<u>Amen and amen</u>	And let all people say, " <u>Amen!</u> " Hallelujah!

Wilson's question: Does editorial activity exist only at the seams, or is there activity amongst the arrangement of individual psalms?

What about superscriptions?

- The superscriptions (psalm headings) are used to not only reinforce disjuncture between books, but also to group together psalms into various sub-collections
- Three methods of grouping psalms
 - The use of author designations in the psalm-headings
 - The function with genre categories in the psalm-headings
 - The use of “hallelujah” (praise God) and “khoda” (give thanks) at the beginning and closing of a group in books IV and V

Looking at the Titles

- Get your chart handout ready and follow along
- At exactly the point where books end and begin, author designations change
 - Psalms 3-41 are Davidic psalms, but change to the Sons of Korah from Psalms 42-49
 - Psalm 72 is a Solomon psalm, while Psalm 73 is an Asaph psalm
 - Psalm 89 is a psalm of Ethan, while Psalm 90 is of Moses
- But if author change designates book change, why are there only five books?

Looking at the Titles

- **There are eight ancient “genre” categories**
 - Siggaiion (1 pss; Ps 7)
 - Miktam (6 pss)
 - Tiphlah [‘prayer’] (5 pss)
 - Maskil (13 pss)
 - Tehillah [‘praise’] (1 pss; Ps 145)
 - Hallelujah (16 pss)
 - Mizmor [‘psalm’] (57 pss)
 - Seir [‘song’] (30 pss)
- **Genre categories function to either support author disjunction or to maintain unity within a book**

Looking at the Titles

- **To cause disjuncture**
 - Ps 38-41 are “Psalms of David”, while 42-44 are “Maskil of the Sons of Korah”
 - Ps 69-72 have no designation, while 73 is a “Psalm of Asaph”
 - Ps 88-89 are “Maskil of...Ezrahite”, while 90 is “Prayer of Moses”
- **To maintain unity**
 - Ps 47-51 are all “Psalms of...” through three author changes, uniting the text until 52, which is a Maskil, but by the same author
 - Ps 82-85 are all “Psalms” bridging the change from Asaph to Korah
 - Korah psalms (84-85, 87-88) bridge the gap over David (86), unlike the gap of 70-71-72-73, which have no consistent author on either side of the book change

Looking at the Titles

- **There are far less author and genre headings in Books IV and V (Ps 90-150)**
 - The Songs of Ascent are an exception proving the rule
- **The editor uses “Hallelujah” and “Khoda” to make divisions and sub-collections within these books**
 - A Psalm beginning with “Hallelujah” (‘Praise the Lord’) ends a collection when a Psalm following it begins with “Khoda” (‘Give thanks’)
 - For instance, Ps 104-107, 111-118, 135-136
- **Though it may sound a little far-fetched, this is at least an explanation which takes seriously how a psalm begins and ends through an editor’s eye**

Looking at the Titles

- **Here is an outline of the Psalter based on the superscription data:**
 - Ps 1-2 Introduction
 - Ps 3-41 Book One
 - Ps 42-72 Book Two
 - Ps 73-89 Book Three
 - Ps 90-106 Book Four
 - Ps 107-145 Book Five
 - Ps 146-150 Conclusion

Psalm 1	Psalm 2
<p>¹ Oh the blessings of the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the Torah of YHWH, and on his Torah he meditates day and night.</p> <p>³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water which gives its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.</p> <p>⁵ Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for YHWH knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.</p>	<p>Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yhwh and against his Anointed, ³ "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."</p> <p>⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury. ⁶ "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.</p>