

Salt and Light Institute
Psalter - 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, “Interpreting the Psalms”

- What does it mean that the book of Psalms is a Book?
 - o Quote from Gerald Wilson, comparing form criticism to canonical criticism:
 - “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.”
 - o Quote from David Mitchell about Wilson’s foundational work:
 - “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.”
 - o My goal for this class is to familiarize you with those indicators, and draw out, before we really begin our research, what they might mean
 - o So we begin with three questions:
 - If there is an editor, where should we look for any editorial activity that might have helped shaped the book as we have it?
 - What is the social matrix of the editorial movements? [theological environment]
 - What is the significance of this final form? [what does the shape mean?]
 - o To answer these questions we are going to use a metaphor: a jigsaw puzzle, why?
 - 1) you can put together a puzzle without its box top
 - 2) if you don’t have the box top, you start at the edges [our ‘seams’]
 - 3) after the edges, you group pieces by color [our ‘author’ and ‘genre’ groups]

- What are the structures which indicate editorial intent?
 - o We’ll look at these this week
 - Division of the Psalter into Five Books marked by Doxologies
 - Placement of Psalms 1-2 and 146-150 and introduction and conclusion to the Book
 - o We’ll at these as we walk through each ‘book’
 - The Placement of other significant psalms at strategic junctures (at the ‘seams’)
 - The Subtle thematic and theological arrangement of psalms within smaller groupings

- The division of the Psalter into Five Books
 - o This is a very ancient observation
 - o How does the division happen?

Psalm 41:13 [14]	Ps 72:18-19	Ps 89:52 [53]	Ps 106.48
<u>Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,</u>	<u>Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,</u> who only does wondrous things! Blessed be His glorious name <u>forever;</u> and let the whole earth be filled with His glory! <u>Amen, and Amen.</u>	<u>Blessed be the LORD</u> <u>forever!</u> <u>Amen, and Amen.</u>	<u>Blessed be the LORD the God of Israel</u> <u>from forever to forever!</u> And let all people say, <u>“Amen!”</u> Praise the LORD!

- o Why divide the book into five books?
 - To relate the Psalms in some way to the Book of Moses (which is also divided into five volumes)
 - A few suggestions:
 - This puts David on par with Moses as Scripture
 - To remind us of the Torah as to reinforce its superiority in interpretation
 - My idea: That this arrangement purposefully brings to mind the Torah of Moses a way to remind us of its great message and theme so that the Editor can make commentary on the Torah, especially concerning the King of Israel
 - o We’ll see this more when we get into Psalms 1-2
- Is this a real division in the text, or just coincidence?
 - o The previous generation of scholars saw this as pure coincidence and did not make a big deal about it
 - o The newest generation, however, has noticed that the superscriptions themselves reinforce this structure
 - o Three methods of grouping psalms
 - The use of author designations in the psalm-headings
 - The function of genre categories within the headings
 - The use of “hallelujah” and “khoda” psalms in books four and five
 - o For books I-III author designation plays a big part in grouping
 - At all of these junctures, there is a change of author which matches the doxology
 - Psalms 3-41 are David, 42-49 are Asaph
 - Psalm 72 is Solomon, Psalm 73ff are Asaph
 - Psalm 89 is a psalm of Ethan, Psalm 90 is Moses
 - Combined with the doxologies, this is a very powerful way to cause disjuncture
 - Psalm 104-107, however, are all anonymous, and so author designation is not the primary principle of organization
 - o But if author designation marks a disjuncture in the text, then why not have many more books than five?
 - The ancient genre categories act to both unite authors together and cause disjuncture
 - There are eight genre categories
 - *Siggion* (Ps 7)
 - *Miktam* (6 pss)
 - *Tiphlah* (5 pss)
 - *Maskil* (13 pss)
 - *Tehillah* (Ps 145)
 - *Hallelujah* (16 pss)

- *Mizmor* [psalm] (57 pss)
 - *Syr* [song] (30 pss)
 - Causing disjuncture
 - Psalms 38-41 “Psalms of David”, Psalms 42-44 “Maskil of Sons of Qorah”
 - Psalms 69-72 have no genre designation, psalm 73 is a psalm of Asaph
 - Psalms 88-89 are both maskil of Ezraheites, psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses
 - Examples of keeping unity across author changes
 - Psalms 47-51 are all “psalms” over 3 author changes, then 52 is a maskil
 - Psalms 82-85 are all “psalms” bridging from Asaph to Korah
 - Korah (84-85, 87-88) bridges the gap of David (86), unlike 70-71-72-73
- What about books IV-V?
 - Looking at the chart, we notice that there are far less author and genre designations in books IV-V as compared to books I-III
 - In fact, only the songs of ascent (120-134) are grouped with genre
 - This fact alone makes it unlikely that author designation would be used by the editor to reinforce book divisions
 - Instead, divisions in these books are marked by two words, “hallelujah” (Praise the Lord) and “Khoda” (Give thanks)
 - The use of *hallelujah* psalms
 - There are four groups of *hallelujah* pss (104-106, 111-117, 135, 146-150)
 - These groupings mark the conclusion of segments
 - The first group (104-106) concludes book IV
 - This is indicated by the doxology at the end of 106
 - The last group (146-150) concludes the entire Psalter
 - The use of *hwdw* (thanks) psalms
 - Each of the first three groups of *hallelujah* psalms is immediately followed by a psalm opening with the phrase “Praise Yhwh for he is good...”
 - 104-107
 - 104 (psalm) *hallelujah*
 - 105 *hwdw* (psalm) *hallelujah*
 - 106 *hallelujah hwdw* (psalm) doxology – *hallelujah*
 - 107 *hwdw*
 - Like 107, both 118 and 136 begin with *hwdw*
 - The doxology in 106 marks this sequence as conclusion-beginning
 - These psalms do not form part of a conclusion, but begin a new segment
 - So, 107 starts something new, 118 new, 136 new
 - More complicated, but it does make sense of the final book division, and does help to group book five up into smaller segments, which will we look at in our last meeting more in detail
- If that is the case, what else might we notice about the book divisions?
 - Psalms 1 and 2 are both untitled, as well as Psalms 146-150
 - These two groups of psalms serve as introductions and conclusions to the book
- BOOK OUTLINE
 - Psalms 1-2 Introduction
 - Psalms 3-41 Book One
 - Psalms 42-72 Book Two
 - Psalms 73-89 Book Three
 - Psalms 90-106 Book IV
 - Psalms 107-145 Book V
 - Psalms 146-150 Conclusion

- What can we gather from the bookends of the Psalter?
 - o The scope of the Psalter is eschatological and affirms the Davidic covenant
 - o The end of the Psalter is the praise, not lament, of God
 - This coincides with a general move from lament (books I-III) to praise (books IV-V)
 - o The doxologies are reminders at key points that God is to be blessed, even when it seems least likely that he should