

# INTRODUCTION

Volume One of *Psalms* in this series is a true reflection of Prof. Tesh's scholarship. Very little was excised or added except where it was considered essential to the volume. This means that Volume One reflects scholarship on the Psalms only up through the 1970s, plus a few works in the 1980s. Some works from the 1990s were added through the editing process. Prof. Tesh had interacted with the great scholars of "yesterday," but due to age and health was unable to research and interact with the latest scholarship of the past twenty years. Before Prof. Tesh's passing on March 17, 1999, he encouraged me to update and interact with the latest scholars in the field of Psalm studies, especially in Volume Two, which he had not completed. There are hints in the "Introduction" of Volume One concerning the direction for Volume Two.<sup>1</sup>

This does not mean that Volume One is inadequate as it is; rather, it is providential that we are able to read the results of the best older scholarship in Volume One for Books 1 & 2. This is appropriate for these "two books" (Psalms 1-41 and 42-72) are primarily attributed to David, and there are more laments than praise in these psalms. The older concern for identifying the genres and cultic usage of the psalms by Gunkel and Mowinckel and their followers has been adequately and critically evaluated by Prof. Tesh throughout Volume One.<sup>2</sup> Volume Two will interact with more modern scholarship in terms of both recent commentaries and issues. A brief historical survey of Psalms study will help the student understand the direction that such study has taken in the last twenty-five years.

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<sup>1</sup>See *Psalms*, Vol. 1, in this commentary series, pp. 37-39, 47-49, and 54 (fn. 67).

<sup>2</sup>The discussions for Gunkel and Mowinckel's work on the Psalms are found in *Psalms*, Vol. 1, in this commentary series, pp. 31-35, and 54-69, plus comments throughout the body of the commentary.

## THE OLDER SCHOLARS

Scholars at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries began in earnest what we call “critical” studies. They were concerned about “the historical backgrounds of the biblical materials and often included radical reconstruction of the biblical text. Representative of this period and the approach that predominated are the works of Briggs (1906), Cheyne (1891, 1904), Ewald (1880), Perowne (1890), and Wellhausen (1898).”<sup>3</sup>

Building on these critical scholars were the two groundbreaking scholars for the Psalms, Gunkel (1926, 1933) and Mowinckel (1922, 1962). As already discussed in Volume One, Gunkel concentrated on the literary forms of the Psalms (genres) and tried to get back to the *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life) for each form or genre. Of course, this approach has been refined by many scholars since, and the end product can be seen with such classifications as presented by W.H. Bellinger, Jr.<sup>4</sup> Mowinckel, on the other hand, went beyond Gunkel and sought a cultic (worship) setting for each psalm.<sup>5</sup> He emphasized that the Psalms grew out of a cultic setting in Israel’s early monarchy at the harvest and New Year festival (“Enthronement of Yahweh” New Year Festival). Since the festival was only a conjecture at best, scholars have either dismissed or modified much of Mowinckel’s work. However, it is evident that many of the psalms did have a cultic setting, and in that regard Mowinckel’s contribution is still relevant. A whole generation of scholars followed these two giants in Psalms studies, each giving critique and opinions about genres and their cultic settings.<sup>6</sup> But even Gunkel recognized his

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<sup>3</sup>David M. Howard, Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93–100* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>See *Psalms*, Vol. 1, in this commentary series, pp. 52-67, particularly p. 53, fn. 65.

<sup>5</sup>See *Psalms*, Vol. 1, in this commentary series, p. 34 for a brief critique of Mowinckel’s approach.

<sup>6</sup>See Howard, *Structure*, p. 2, where he lists the following scholars: “Anderson (1972), Buitendijk (1938), Calès (1936), Craigie (1983), Drijvers (1964), Kidner (1973, 1975), Kissane (1954), Kraus (1978, 1988–1989), Leslie (1949), McCullough and Taylor (1955), Nötscher (1947), Oesterley (1937, 1939), Sabourin (1969), Schmidt (1934), Weiser (1962), Kraus (1978), and Gerstenberger (1988). Dahood’s work (1966–1970) represented a major departure from these approaches, because he paid attention to Ugaritic materials, but he likewise had brief sections on forms and showed no real interest in the Psalter’s organization.”

approach had its limitations and did not address the Psalms in their final form and literary setting. As McCann has written: "It is precisely this recognition that eventually invited the movement beyond a method that aims at appreciating the *typical* and the *original* to methods that aim at appreciating the *individual* and the *final*."<sup>7</sup> This need led scholars in recent years to develop what is known as rhetorical and canonical criticism.<sup>8</sup>

### MODERN SCHOLARSHIP<sup>9</sup>

We will arbitrarily call the last twenty-five years or so of the twentieth century "modern scholarship" on the Psalms. Since approximately 1980, a major shift in Psalms studies has taken place. This shift was anticipated by Westermann's brief chapter, "The Formation of the Psalter" (1961/62).<sup>10</sup> Westermann observed seven characteristics of the canonical form of the Psalter: 1) The predominant genre of lament psalms are found mostly in the first half of the Psalter. 2) The second half of the Psalter is predominantly made up of collections of psalms of praise. 3) The superscriptions to the Psalms

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<sup>7</sup>J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 652.

<sup>8</sup>See James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969): 4. *Rhetorical criticism* (as applied to the Psalms) is the study of the literary features of each individual psalm in order to understand its unique poetic and creative form. *Canonical criticism*, by contrast, is the study of the final shape and form of all the psalms as the "final editors" have given them to us. As one author has expressed it: "The discovery that the Psalter has something of an overall literary shape has opened up all sorts of new directions in study of the psalms." See Craig G. Bartholomew, "Towards a Post-liberal Agenda for Old Testament Study," *Make the Old Testament Live*, eds. Richard S. Hess & Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 39.

<sup>9</sup>Detailed review of recent scholarly work on the Psalms can be found in the following: Howard, *Structure*, pp. 1-19; also by Howard, "Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State-of-the-Field Survey," pp. 52-70, in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. by J. Clinton McCann (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); and Norman Whybray, "Recent Views on the Composition of the Psalter," chapter one in *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, JSOT Supp 222 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 15-35.

<sup>10</sup>See Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1965, 1981), pp. 250-258. This chapter first appeared as "Zur Sammlung des Psalters," *Theologia Viatorum* 8 (1961/62, 1962): 278-284, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

identify most of the individual laments as belonging somehow to David while community psalms appear mainly in the Korah and Asaph collections as well as the “ascents” psalms. 4) The psalms of praise usually function to close a collection, hence the doxologies at the end of the various books (Ps 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48; and Psalm 150). 5) The Royal Psalms have a collection of their own but are scattered throughout the Psalter as a “frame,” “having taken on a secondary messianic interpretation.” 6) The Psalter does not contain a clearly discernible collection of liturgies (hence a purpose for the Psalter can be discerned apart from a worship background!). 7) Two distinctions were made in the editing process: first, individual psalms were separated from community psalms; and secondly, lament psalms were distinguished from the psalms of praise.<sup>11</sup>

Brevard S. Childs is credited with advocating a “canonical approach” to the entire Old Testament.<sup>12</sup> His conclusion was that the editor(s) of the final form of the Psalms were governed by “eschatological” concerns; i.e., using so-called Royal psalms in such a way as to be “a witness to the messianic hope which looked for the consummation of God’s kingship through his Anointed One.”<sup>13</sup> The placement of Psalm 2 solidified this for Childs. Thus, as several have observed,<sup>14</sup> Psalms 1 and 2 formed an introduction to the Psalter, certainly to Books 1 & 2, as they are framed by the royal psalms of Psalms 2 and 72. The Book of Psalms was to be read as “a word of God to men” and not just “words of men to God” (prayers).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, God’s people were to read the Psalms as “Torah” with a theologically framed message about hope for a renewed Davidic dynasty and king.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>12</sup>See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). For his discussion on the Psalms refer to pp. 504-525.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 517.

<sup>14</sup>See especially Gerald Sheppard, a student of Childs, in his *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 151 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), p. 142.

<sup>15</sup>This was an emphasis made by Joseph Reindl in 1981, who, perhaps, encouraged the “canonical” work of Childs and subsequent scholars.

<sup>16</sup>For a complete development of this point see J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

These ideas were further developed by one of Childs's students, Gerald H. Wilson, in his doctoral dissertation published in 1985 that has since become a *groundbreaking* work for subsequent Psalm scholars.<sup>17</sup> With few exceptions most Psalm scholars today agree with the overall approach of Wilson's work.<sup>18</sup> He did a comparative study of Psalms with ancient Sumerian Temple Hymns, the Catalogues of Hymnic Incipits and Qumran Psalms manuscripts. The editorial techniques found in these enabled Wilson to find similar editorial work on the final form of the Psalms.

### SUMMARY OF WILSON'S WORK

Wilson divided his "evidence" for editorial work into two kinds: explicit and tacit (nonexplicit). There was only one explicit piece of evidence in the Psalter: the postscript at Psalm 72:20 – "This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse." This is clearly an editorial hand bringing together what we call Books 1 & 2. All other "evidence" must be considered tacit, which includes the *superscriptions* of each individual psalm. The superscriptions were descriptive and not organizational for the Psalms.

Wilson observed that Books 1–3 (Psalms 3–89) had concern for authorship. Psalms 3–41 are all attributed to David (10 and 33 by combination with its predecessor); Psalms 42/43–49 to Korahites; Psalms 51–65, 68–70/71 to David; Psalms 73–83 to Asaph; Psalms 84–85, 87–88 to Korahites (a second grouping); Psalm 86 to David; Psalm 50 to Asaph and 72 to Solomon while Psalms 66–67 are untitled. Of course, Psalms 1–2 are unattributed, but Wilson (and many others) considered these Psalms to be an introduction to the whole Psalter. Psalm 1 emphasizes an *approach* to the Psalms as *wisdom* and *Torah* (i.e., the final "wisdom" frame: 1, 73, 90, 107, and 145) while Psalm 2 (a royal psalm) is the beginning of a theological emphasis

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<sup>17</sup>Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup>See Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), who gives an excellent overview of Wilson's work (pp. 20–22) and subsequent scholarly works on the canonical shape and purpose of the Psalms (pp. 23–33). Whybray, himself, is sceptical of Wilson's and other's conclusions about the final form of the Psalter (see pp. 41, 85, 93, 94, 99, particularly 118–124.). His criticisms have not persuaded many scholars from accepting the results of such scholars as Wilson, Mays, Howard, and McCann.

on the Davidic dynasty with royal psalms scattered strategically throughout the Psalter (i.e., 2, 72, 89, and 144).

Books 4 & 5 (Psalms 90–106, 107–150) had a different scenario: only 19 Psalms out of 61 are attributed to authors.<sup>19</sup> Of the 19 authored psalms, 17 are attributed to David: Psalms 101, 103, 122, 124, 131, 133 (the last four as part of the *Songs of Ascents*), and eleven are in two groups (Psalms 108–110 and 138–145). Of the two remaining attributed psalms, one is attributed to Moses (Psalm 90) and the other to Solomon (Psalm 127).

Wilson discovered that attention to authorship was important at the “seams” of the Psalter; that is, the abrupt breaks. As one moves from Book 1 to 2, one moves from “David” (Psalms 3–41) to “Korah” (Psalm 42). At the end of Book 2 is a psalm of “Solomon” (Psalm 72), an abrupt change of authorship. Book 3 begins with “Asaphite” psalms (Psalms 73–83). Again, moving from Book 3 to 4, authorship changes from Korahite (Psalms 87–88[89]) to a psalm of Moses (Psalm 90). By contrast the transition between Books 4 and 5 have unattributed psalms (but note a collection of “David” psalms at Psalms 108–110). This phenomenon will be discussed below.

The major book divisions and the doxologies corresponded with the authorship changes (see Ps 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48; and Psalm 150 [perhaps Psalms 146–150]). Wilson noticed, too, that when Book 2 was combined with Book 1 authorship grouping at that point was not a primary concern. Also, the genre or type of psalm did not influence the editorial principle for the organization of the Psalter.<sup>20</sup> What Wilson uniquely discovered was the use of Psalm Headings (superscriptions) as “binding techniques” to soften transition between different authors and nonattributed psalms. At the same time no softening techniques were to be found in the major seams between the books. This accounts for the use of “hallelujah” psalms (Psalms 104–106) ending Book 4 up against an “orphan” psalm with no superscription (“thanksgiving” psalm) beginning Book 5. The very next group of psalms, however, are attributed to David (Psalms 108–110). As Wilson expressed it, “[t]he widespread and consistent nature of this phenomenon militates

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<sup>19</sup>In Psalms 1–89, only six are unattributed to an author. Four are combined with attributed psalms and two form the introduction to the Psalter (Psalms 1 & 2).

<sup>20</sup>Wilson, *Editing*, p. 161. The general summary of Wilson’s conclusions are taken from chapters 6 & 7 in his published dissertation, pp. 139–228.

against any chance distribution of the pss and supports the idea of purposeful, editorial activity behind the organization process.”<sup>21</sup>

An important observation was made concerning the *hllwyh* (“hal-lelujah”) psalms and the *hwdw* (“thanksgiving”) psalms in Books 4 and 5. Wilson concluded:

In summary, the survey of these pss reveals several facts about the editorial arrangement of the pss. First, the *hllwyh* pss conclude segments, both at the end of major divisions (as Pss 104–106) and within them (as Pss 111–117 and Ps 135). Second, rather than forming a related part of these concluding *hllwyh* groups, the *hwdw* pss which follow introduce the next segment of pss. This conclusion helps to understand better the relationship of such pss as 117 (*hllwyh*) and 118 (*hwdw*); 135 (*hllwyh*) and 136 (*hwdw*). Finally, the results indicate that the positioning of the opening and closing pss of these segments reflects purposeful choice and arrangement of pss rather than chance juxtaposition.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps Wilson’s most insightful contribution came with his analysis of the placement of the “royal” psalms in Books 1–3 and how Books 4 and 5 relate to the “discussion” of kingship and the Davidic covenant: Psalms 2, 41, 72, and 89. Psalm 2 introduces the idea of the Davidic covenant with reminiscence of 2 Sam 7:14. While Psalm 2 establishes the Davidic dynasty by a covenant of God, Psalm 41 gives assurances of God’s divine protection and security in the face of David’s enemies, though it is not a “royal” psalm. The establishment of David’s dynasty (Psalm 2) and its security (Psalm 41) is now passed on to his son (Psalm 72, attributed to Solomon), whose reign in some respects is a climax of the Davidic dynasty. Books 1 and 2, thus, highlight in a positive manner the Davidic rule. But with the addition of Book 3, a new perspective is given: the covenant with David and his dynasty has been broken and has failed (Ps 89:38,39,44). Psalm 89 concludes with the anguished cry of the Davidic descendants (Ps 89:46): “How long?” The people of the kingdom are in exile and long for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty and the honoring of God’s eternal covenant (2 Sam 7:16). Books 4 and 5 are an answer to this dilemma and probably account for their

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

unique content and composition in contrast to Books 1–3. Book 4, with its high number of “untitled” psalms (13 out of 17 psalms), seems to have been used editorially at this juncture as the “center” message of the Psalter as a whole. Wilson wrote concerning Book 4:

In my opinion, Pss 90–106 function as the editorial “center” of the final form of the Hebrew Psalter. As such this grouping stands as the “answer” to the problem posed in Ps 89 as to the apparent failure of the Davidic covenant with which Books One–Three are primarily concerned. Briefly summarized the answer given is: (1) YHWH is king; (2) He has been our “refuge” in the past, long before the monarchy existed (i.e., in the Mosaic period); (3) He will continue to be our refuge now that the monarchy is gone; (4) Blessed are they that trust in him!<sup>23</sup>

While Book 5 is rather lengthy (44 Psalms) and complex in structure and collections (Davidic 108–110, 138–145; *hllwyh* 111–118, 135, 146–150; “songs of ascents” 120–134; and the one great “Torah” psalm, 119), it presents the “Davidic” psalms as an *inclusio* for the final book (Psalms 108–110, 138–145, Psalms 146–150 being a fitting climax to the entire Psalter). The exiles must mimic their great Davidic Messiah who in times past relied upon God’s trustworthiness (Psalm 107) and who trusted in God’s Torah (Psalm 119). “Ps 145 stands as the ‘climax’ of the fifth book of the Psalter, with the final *hallel* (Pss 146–150) drawing its impetus from 145:21.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, the exiled people of God are encouraged to “meditate” upon the Psalms as God’s Torah (Psalms 1 and 119), to become a “people of the Book!” They must rely upon God as their king and their refuge, not human princes who will undoubtedly disappoint.

Subsequent studies by Wilson have only served to refine the conclusions of his groundbreaking dissertation.<sup>25</sup> Other scholars, such

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>25</sup>See Gerald H. Wilson, “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, JSOTS 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 72–82. Also in the same volume, “Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise,” pp. 42–51. Other relevant articles by Wilson include the following: “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 129–142; “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85–94; “The Use of ‘Untitled’ Psalms in the Hebrew Psalter,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97 (1985):

as J. Clinton McCann and David M. Howard, while accepting Wilson's basic thesis, have either extended his ideas (McCann) or added more detailed analyses (Howard).<sup>26</sup> The scholarly discussions on this subject are continuing into the new millennium.

### THE FINAL FRAME OF THE PSALTER<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to the first volume of this series (which covered Psalms 1–72, the first two Books of the Psalter), volume two will keep the entire framework of the Psalter in mind as each psalm is studied. In light of the above discussion and the “theological editing” of the Psalter (perhaps by the Asaphite group of the postexilic period), the Psalms can never again be read simply as individual psalms to the neglect of the whole. Indeed, the Psalms have become a book to be read and meditated upon (Psalm 1), not just a “Hebrew hymnbook” of individual songs to be performed in corporate worship. Its final canonical shape forces the reader to meditate on the wisdom of the “two ways” a person may walk (as evidenced by the wisdom frame of Psalms 1, 73, 90, 107, and 145). This way of wisdom is played out in terms of the exiled community's response to the failed Davidic covenant (as evidenced by the royal covenant frame of Psalms 2, 72, 89, and 144). Taking refuge in Yahweh as the true King, even by David himself (Psalm 144), is the certain answer to the renewed hopes of the people of God. Wilson concluded: “As a result of its final form, the Psalter counters continuing concern for

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404-413; finally before his published dissertation: “Evidence of Editorial Divisions in the Hebrew Psalter,” *VT* 34 (1984): 337-352.

<sup>26</sup>See J. Clinton McCann, Jr., “Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Hebrew Psalter,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, pp. 93-107. McCann suggested that by studying carefully the beginning books in the “seams” such as Pss 1–2, 42–44 and 73–74 one discerns that the first three Books of the Psalter reflect the laments and hope of the exiled community just as much as the last two Books. The need for reorientation of the exiled community away from the Davidic/Zion theology was their only avenue for renewed hope. Yet, the problem and its solution would return to the Davidic covenant and his kingly role in Book 5 (Psalms 108–110 and 138–145). McCann follows Nasuti in his *Tradition History* that the Asaphites of both the pre- and postexile era are prime candidates as the “editors” of our present canonical Psalter (see pp. 105-107 of the above chapter by McCann).

<sup>27</sup>See Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter,” pp. 72-82.

the restoration of the Davidic dynasty and kingdom with the wise counsel to seek refuge in a kingdom ‘not of this world’ – the eternal kingdom in which YHWH alone is king.”<sup>28</sup>

It remained for future generations from the exiles and afterward to understand that, indeed, God would fulfill His eternal promise to David (2 Sam 7:16) and that he would give the “kingdom of David” to the Messiah Jesus (Luke 1:32). The fact that the first-century Jewish community as a whole rejected the nature of the kingdom and its king (a “spiritual” kingdom with Jesus as King and Lord!) does not take away the fulfillment of God’s promises to his people in terms of the Davidic dynasty and covenant. The New Testament authors used the Psalms extensively as a source for teaching about God’s reign through his Messiah.<sup>29</sup> There are aspects of that kingdom that we will not realize until the second coming of our King, but until then we continue to marvel at God’s reign over us (Psalms 93, 96–99) in the past as well as in the present and future.

## HOW TO READ THE PSALMS

With the above discussion as a given, how should one read and study the Book of Psalms? There are basically three approaches one may take: 1) as individual psalms; 2) interrelationship of the psalms; and 3) canonical structure of the psalms.<sup>30</sup>

### INDIVIDUAL PSALMS

This is the traditional approach to the study of the psalms. It is also the approach of most commentaries, including this one. There is no question that this is a valid approach, for each psalm has its own origin, setting, and message. I would even say that each psalm has its own “personality.” Even a psalm that is related to other

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>29</sup>The most significant Psalm passages used in the New Testament will be discussed at the appropriate places in the commentary (Psalms 73–150).

<sup>30</sup>I am by no means saying there are no other ways to approach the Psalms, but these three represent the three basic ways one would approach the Psalms in terms of expository study. Of course, one could study the Book of Psalms with a topical approach (when one is sick, surrounded by “enemies,” praising God, or lamenting, etc.) or even a genre approach (lament, praise, royal, wisdom, etc.).

psalms around it will have a unique message all its own. For example, Psalms 111 and 112 are clearly related and function as a twin introduction to the “Egyptian Hallel.” Psalm 111 focuses on God and his generosity while Psalm 112 focuses on God’s people and their generosity as they imitate God. However, each psalm could be profitably read and studied without reference to the other. In fact, each of these two psalms must be studied as individual psalms before further relationships can be established. This commentary introduces each psalm, giving some idea of its origins, setting, date, and structure before the commentary is begun. When it seems helpful, attention is sometimes given to the particular psalm’s relationship to others around it and its canonical placement (which affects how one applies the message of the psalm).

### INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF THE PSALMS

In recent years several studies have provided much evidence about the interrelationships of groups of psalms. Using our first example, Psalms 111–112 are paired and perhaps come from the same author. By reading these two together one receives a greater message in terms of how God’s people relate to their God. It is basically one of “imitation” (see Ps 111:4 and 112:4; cp. Eph 5:1). Certainly groups of psalms are related beyond their individual meanings (e.g., Psalms 120–134, the songs of ascents; Psalms 113–118, the “Egyptian Hallel”; Psalms 146–150, the closing “Hallel”; Psalms 138–145, a Davidic collection; etc.). A good example of this kind of study was done by David Howard in his doctoral dissertation.<sup>31</sup>

### CANONICAL STRUCTURAL APPROACH

This approach is looking at the whole canonical form of the psalms. It is a study of how the five books which make up the collection of psalms are related to each other, and thus how each psalm is interpreted within that framework. This approach was established by Gerald Wilson and subsequently many have followed. A recent commentary that always shows how a particular psalm in a particular book of the psalms relates to the theological message of its canonical

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<sup>31</sup>Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*.

form has been written by Clinton McCann.<sup>32</sup> Some of this approach has already been given above. Briefly, the first two books of psalms have to do with the “establishment” (Psalm 2) and the “climax” (Psalm 72) of the Davidic dynasty. Book three is about its “failure” (Psalm 89). Book four is at the theological center with an “answer” to the problem of the destruction of David’s kingship (Psalms 93, 96–99): “Yahweh reigns!” Book five continues this answer but with hints of God’s future fulfillment of his promises for David’s dynasty (see Psalms 110, 132, and 144). Regardless of the original message of the individual psalm, its placement within this canonical structure affects how it should be “heard” and “understood,” especially by the first listeners (the returning exiles) of the final canonical form (c. fifth century B.C.). This approach has yet to be fully explored, in spite of the fact that McCann has done an excellent work.

### READING THE DIVINE NAME

Something should be said at this point concerning the way our English Bibles refer to the Divine Name.<sup>33</sup> Most English versions that are used by the majority of churches today (NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, ESV, NEB, and others) refer to God’s personal name as “LORD.” Explanations can be found in the introductions or prefaces to all these versions. But it is still confusing to most English readers as to why this is done.

Over the years the Hebrews became “superstitious” with the name in the sense that they began to use a *substitute* name in place of *Yahweh*. This was an attempt not to misuse God’s name (Exod 20:7), whether in magic or worship or any other way. The vowels for the substitute name *Adonai* (“Lord”) were placed with the four letters of God’s personal name. Every time a reader of the Masoretic Text read the Divine Name, instead of pronouncing the “true name,” he or she simply used the vowels as a reminder to say the substitute name, *Adonai*, “my Lord,” thus, supposedly, avoiding the *misuse* of God’s personal name! But this is taking our piety a little too far. God has never said that we should not pronounce his name. In

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<sup>32</sup>McCann, “Psalms,” *NIB*, vol. 4.

<sup>33</sup>See Volume One of this commentary, pp. 42-45, particularly fn. 50, for my comments. An extended version of the short discussion here in Volume Two is available from the College Press website, [www.collegepress.com](http://www.collegepress.com).

fact, he encourages it! There is no good reason for English versions today to continue the Jewish practice. Therefore, I encourage my students to say “Yahweh”<sup>34</sup> when they come across the word “LORD” in the English Bible.

In this commentary I have deliberately mixed the two practices together in order to help readers gradually move in the direction of my students in the classroom. You will find the commentary using “Yahweh” and “LORD” in the same context. I still encourage you, the reader, to say “Yahweh” every time you see “LORD.” This makes for more accurate reading, avoids confusing references (cp. Ps 110:1), and dispels the *superstitious* use of the Divine Name. A good example of the use of “Yahweh” can be found in the Jerusalem Bible as well as its revised form, the New Jerusalem Bible. It is a French Catholic translation from the original texts, and that version was then translated into good English, using “Yahweh” for God’s personal name. May I encourage you to do the same.

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<sup>34</sup>For the pronunciation of the name, see the article on יהוה (YHWH) by Freedman, O’Connor, and Ringgren in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. by David E. Green, Volume V (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 500-521.