

The Redactional Agenda of the Book of Psalms

JOHN C. CRUTCHFIELD
Columbia International University

Scholars are currently paying increased attention to the literary shape of the final form, or the redactional agenda, of the Book of Psalms. This article seeks to evaluate the most prominent of these proposals. Some proposals emphasize the nation's disappointment surrounding the failure of the office of Davidic king; others, wisdom motifs prominent during intertestamental times. Still others see eschatology as the redactional focal point. The author examines these proposals and concludes that they all have legitimate contributions to make to the study of the Hebrew Psalter. The problem with most of these proposals is that they are mutually exclusive, and therefore cannot benefit from the insights of other proposals. The author suggests that the main themes of the Hebrew Psalter are wisdom (right living), eschatology (the messiah in the eschaton), and worship (adoration of God for his person and works). These three themes are all emphasized by the prominent placement of psalms that deal with their respective subjects as well as by repetition of the various themes throughout the book. Part of the interpreter's task is to understand a given psalm in light of the overall thematic concerns of the Book of Psalms as a whole.

Recent studies have argued at length for a purposeful redaction of the Psalter.¹ Such studies point out that the Book of Psalms seems to have a clear *introduction*. Psalms 1 and 2 appear to introduce the Psalter as a whole and together cast a hermeneutical grid for its proper interpretation.² The many correspondences

- ¹ The best sources dealing with the arguments used to build a case for a purposeful redaction are: J. Clinton McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985); David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Also helpful is Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, JSOTSup 222 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). The most recent full-length treatment is by Jean-Marie Auwers, *La Composition Littéraire du Psautier: Un État de la Question*, CahRB 46 (Paris: Gabalda, 2000). Cf. also Leslie McFall, "The Evidence for a Logical Arrangement of the Psalter," *WTJ* 62 (2000) 223–56; and Duane L. Christensen, "The Book of Psalms within the Canonical Process in Ancient Israel," *JETS* 39 (1996) 421–32. Christensen's ideas are based on a calendrical scheme (which merely pushes the question of redaction back a step) and a highly doubtful analogy with a collection of oracles by a historically prominent native American.
- ² Patrick D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in J. Clinton McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 83–92; Joseph P. Brennan, "Psalms 1–8: Some Hidden Harmonies," *BTB* 10 (1980) 25–26. See also W. Brownlee, "Psalms 1–2 as a

between these two Psalms support this contention.³ The Book of Psalms also seems to have a clear *conclusion*. Psalms 146–50 place an emphasis on praise that exudes a sense of finality.⁴ In addition, there appear to be doxologies placed at several points in the Book of Psalms which divide the Psalter into five books: Book I = Psalms 1–41; Book II = Psalms 42–72; Book III = Psalms 73–89; Book IV = Psalms 90–106; Book V = Psalms 107–50.

At this point, then, we have an introduction, conclusion and internal book divisions. Once these points are acknowledged, other phenomena about the Book of Psalms begin to add increasing evidence to the contention that the Book of Psalms was redacted with a specific purpose in mind. At the “seams” of the books listed above, royal psalms often appear, reinforcing a certain hermeneutical grid for the books of the Psalter.⁵ At various points in the Book of Psalms, adjacent psalms have lexical and thematic links which seem to indicate they were placed together intentionally.⁶ Intentionality can be discerned in other sections of the Psalter. For example, Mitchell discerns a broad chiasmic structure in Psalms 42–89, and argues for the unity of Books I–III.⁷ Finally,

Coronation Liturgy,” *Bib* 52 (1971) 321–36.

- 3 Against J. T. Willis, “Psalm 1 – An Entity,” *ZAW* 91 (1979) 381–401. Willis argues against the combination of Psalms 1 and 2, but most who affirm redactional intention here are simply asserting that Psalms 1 and 2 have been purposely placed where they are (without commenting on their origin) to provide an interpretational framework for the Psalter. They are certainly different psalms, but they have been placed together intentionally.

If Willis is unwilling to read these two psalms together, Robert Cole has probably overinterpreted the relationship between the two psalms in his recent article, “An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2,” *JSOT* 98 (2002) 75–88. Cole asserts that the “man” of Psalm 1 actually is the anointed king of Psalm 2. Although Cole finds many lexical connections between Psalms 1 and 2, and notes the common intertext of both psalms (Joshua 1), he, in some instances, downplays differences between the psalms and draws *necessary* conclusions which are really only *possible*. Moreover, his understanding of Psalm 1 changes the psalm from a wisdom psalm to essentially prophecy, but this downplays the prominence of wisdom psalms and themes throughout the Psalter. If Cole is right, the *entire psalter* should be messianic and eschatological in nature, but, as we shall see, this is not the case. Finally, as several studies have shown, the theology of Psalm 1 is investigated, re-evaluated, qualified and re-affirmed throughout the Psalter; but why should this be so if the psalm is essentially eschatological and messianic? In short, Cole’s suggestion robs the psalter’s introduction of its universal appeal and overemphasizes its eschatological elements.

- 4 Brennan argues that the links between Psalm 2 and 148 [= MT 149] means that a redactional process extends to the whole book (“Psalms 1–8,” 28).
- 5 See Gerald Wilson, “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JSOT* 35 (1986) 85–94.
- 6 See especially Joseph P. Brennan, “Some Hidden Harmonies in the Fifth Book of the Psalms,” in Robert F. McNamara, ed., *Essays in Honor of Joseph P. Brennan* (Rochester: Saint Bernard’s Seminary, 1977) 126–58; Brennan, “Psalms 1–8,” 25–29.
- 7 Mitchell, *Message*, 69–73.

appeal can be made to other hymnic collections from the ANE which show evidence of purposeful redaction.⁸

These observations are generally accepted in Psalms study as valid arguments for some kind of editorial or redactional agenda behind the canonical Hebrew Psalter.⁹ The impact of these arguments has been to push interpreters to examine a Psalm's "Psalter context" when doing exegesis. In light of the persuasiveness of the above arguments, I accept the suggestion that the Psalter was intentionally redacted with a particular theological agenda. The purpose of this article is to explore the nature of that agenda. I will argue that three dominant trajectories serve to explain the content and structure of the Psalter: wisdom, eschatology, and worship.

Before considering specific proposals, I want to address briefly the doubts of Norman Whybray, who questions the whole notion of a controlling theological agenda at work in the Psalter in his study *On Reading the Psalms as a Book*. After a helpful survey of current views on the composition and arrangement of the Psalter (chapter 1), Whybray looks at the Book of Psalms from several perspectives to ask if the book as a whole shows signs of a single redactional perspective. Although there are signs that Wisdom and Torah material (chapter 2) was placed at key points, and a few psalms show signs of alteration, Whybray does not think this constitutes a coherent redactional strategy. "However hard one may try to account for the arrangement of the Psalter, it is difficult to dismiss the impression of randomness in the positioning of many of them."¹⁰ Similarly (chapter 3), he sees no clear eschatological redaction either.

There is no evidence that redactors set themselves deliberately to document the failure of the Davidic monarchy and to draw theological conclusions from this: rather the contrary. . . . It is clear that there was no *systematic redaction* of royal psalms, any more than there was a systematic wisdom

8 Wilson laid the methodological groundwork here in *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (chaps. 2 and 3). However, what Wilson demonstrates is editorial intention at a somewhat "pedestrian" level, i.e., according to author, genre, divinity addressed, etc. No one, as far as I know, has argued for a broad theological redactional agenda for these collections, but that is *precisely* what is argued for in the Hebrew Psalter, as we shall see below. I do not believe this kind of editorial shaping has been proven in ANE collections.

9 Note, however, the reservations of Whybray, *Reading the Psalms* and, more recently, Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Davidson writes: "There have been many attempts in recent years to explain how this motley collection of material came into its present shape and form. . . . Whether we can discover one overarching literary or theological purpose linking all the psalms together and accounting for the present order of the book remains uncertain" (*Vitality of Worship*, 7).

10 Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 86.

redaction. The most that can be said is that the hope of a restoration of the monarchy under a royal figure was alive for some during the post-exilic period and that some expression was given to this in the Psalms, though not usually by means of textual additions and interpolations.¹¹

Whybray concludes much the same with regard to the psalmic (re-)interpretation of ritual sacrifice (chapter 4): "While the Psalter does testify to the work of redactors of individual psalms who made 'corrections' to offending passages, it is clear that there was no systematic activity of this kind in the final redaction of the book."¹² Whybray concludes his study with several observations:

1. "There is no evidence that there was a systematic and purposeful redaction of the whole Psalter in any of the suggested ways."
2. "There is no direct evidence (except Ps. 72.20), internal or external, about the process by which the Psalter received its shape."
3. "There is no lack of evidence to show that particular groups of psalms within the Psalter were formed for different purposes and at different times."
4. "We also remain in ignorance of the date and the purpose of the division of the Psalter into five Books."¹³

He then concludes:

There is no evidence of the thorough and systematic changes that would have been necessary if the Psalter were to become the expression of a single theology. The stages by which it took its present shape lie mainly beyond our knowing.¹⁴

Although Whybray has given some helpful correctives and questioned approaches that appear to *create* a redactional strategy rather than discover one, he has probably demanded too much from the enterprise as a whole. For example, is it true that "Any theory of a coherent pattern ought surely to provide some explanation of the arrangement of the *whole collection*"?¹⁵ Do we hold redactional studies of other books of the Hebrew Bible to that standard? Must *every psalm* demonstrate evidence of the proposed redaction?

11 Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 99.

12 Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 117.

13 These quotes are all from Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 119.

14 Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 124.

15 Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 120.

Also, although he correctly points out that we have no direct evidence, internal or external, about the process by which the Psalter received its shape, is it not also true that we have the *book itself* as evidence? Do we have any explicit statements about a redactional intention in other books of the Hebrew Bible? Are not redactional studies of those books based on the *text itself* regardless of any internal or external descriptions of the redactional process? By lodging these objections, Whybray is really casting doubt on *any* redactional study of texts. Finally, Whybray pays insufficient attention to the affect the placement of certain psalms at certain points can have on the structure and message of the book as a whole.¹⁶ My conclusion is that Whybray has been unsuccessful in his attempt to end the search for a discernable editorial intention in the Book of Psalms.

THE REDACTIONAL AGENDA AN EVALUATION OF PAST PROPOSALS

Although there is general agreement that the Book of Psalms was intentionally redacted, there is little unanimity on what that redactional agenda *really is*. In this section, I will review and evaluate the more influential proposals. In the following section, I will seek to move the discussion forward by acknowledging the contributions of each of these proposals but also by setting aside the search for a single, exclusive agenda for the redaction of the Psalter.

J. P. BRENNAN

In a pair of articles on "hidden harmonies" in the Psalter,¹⁷ J. P. Brennan anticipates a great deal of the current discussion on the Psalter's redaction and offers some helpful suggestions on the current shape of the Book of Psalms. For example, he writes:

I would like to suggest in this article that a careful reading indicates that the Psalter has not developed in a haphazard and arbitrary way, but has been carefully woven together in such a manner that previously independent compositions, or smaller collections of such compositions, now comment upon or respond to one another. Hence, for a proper understanding of the Psalter it is not enough to study each of its 150 components in the historical context from which it originally sprang. They must all be studied in their relationship to each other, since all of them together convey more than they do if looked at separately.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. his discussion of Wilson and others (Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 30ff.).

¹⁷ Brennan, "Fifth Book of Psalms"; Brennan, "Psalm 1-8."

¹⁸ Brennan, "Fifth Book of Psalms," 126-27.

He summarizes his approach as follows: "I wish to suggest that a consecutive reading of the Hebrew Psalter leads to the conclusion that one of the principles governing the compilation of this collection was that of juxtaposing Psalms in such a way that various key words and expressions in one pick up and develop a theme already enunciated in another."¹⁹

Then, he applies his method to two major portions of the Book of Psalms: first, Psalms 1–8; then the entirety of Book v (Psalms 107–50). Brennan sees Psalms 1 and 2 as key for understanding the Psalter as a book; they provide "a kind of prologue or overture" to the entire book. The effect of this prologue is as follows:

... [T]he editors who are responsible for the Psalter as we now have it, have skillfully taken this earlier collection and provided it with an introduction which not only sets the scene for the great conflict (Psalm 2), but also makes it possible for the reader to become involved in the process (Psalm 1). By aligning ourselves with "the just" in Psalm 1, and with those who "trust in Yahweh" in Psalm 2, the "wicked enemies" against whom the king prays for help in 3:8–9 become our enemies as well, as we become part of that people upon whom he invokes Yahweh's blessing (3:9).²⁰

Brennan then goes on to show how each Psalm picks up and develops themes of the previous one, usually by means of leitmotifs or catch-words. He also suggests a close connection between Psalms 2 and 149; the former introduces the conflict, the latter concludes it. In his conclusion he comes close to stating an overall grand scheme for the Hebrew Psalter:

Such a reading of the Psalter opens the way to an eschatological and messianic interpretation of many texts which had originally only a limited national and historic setting. The Psalter comes to be seen as a magnificent dramatic struggle between the two ways – that of Yahweh, his anointed king, and the company of the just, and that of the wicked, the sinners, the evil-doers.²¹

In his article on Book v of the Psalter, he suggests that the book was put together on literary grounds versus liturgical grounds, and states the theme of Book v: "They [the Psalms of Book v] seem to form a series of meditations or reflections on the inner meaning and the present application of the great themes of the Covenant Renewal Festival as this was celebrated in the post-

19 Brennan, "Psalms 1–8," 25.

20 Brennan, "Psalms 1–8," 26.

21 Brennan, "Psalms 1–8," 29.

exilic period.”²² By “present application” he means the post-exilic community in and around Jerusalem, since he goes on to analyze three cycles of psalms in relation to the historical situation of the post-exilic community. Specifically:

The first cycle (107–119) looks back to the events of the Exodus and to the gift of the Law, and sees these as renewed in the events of the return from Babylon. The second (120–136) highlights the various phases of the annual pilgrimage to restored Jerusalem, and the third (137–150), with its moments of desperation and exaltation, anticipates the final great confrontation in which all creation will ultimately join Yahweh’s covenant-people in acknowledging him as God and King.²³

Brennan demonstrates the interrelatedness of individual psalms in Book v by noting how often themes, concepts, and/or words are picked up in adjacent psalms and developed, answered, or commented on.

There is much to commend in Brennan’s proposals. He has done good work in noting the lexical links between both adjacent psalms and psalms stretching across the whole Psalter. He has properly noted the importance of Psalms 1 and 2 as an introduction to the book as a whole. Also, he has made many helpful observations on individual psalms. However, although he suggests a broad eschatological/messianic drama in the Psalter, he has not demonstrated how to read the book consistently in the light of this drama. Moreover, in his discussion of Book v, he has departed from this agenda himself by interpreting most of Book v from the historical standpoint of the post-exilic community in Israel. Of course, allowances must be made for what can realistically be accomplished in two articles, but Brennan is not ultimately successful in putting forth a broad proposal for a redactional agenda for the Psalter.

BREVARD CHILDS

In his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*,²⁴ Brevard Childs put forth a new understanding of the Psalter when viewed from what he called a “canonical” perspective. Initially, Childs makes two main points:

1. The impact of the critical approach has been largely negative in the sense that subsequent generations were cut off from the message of the Psalter, since individual psalms were studied from a strictly historical perspective.

²² Brennan, “Fifth Book of Psalms,” 128.

²³ Brennan, “Fifth Book of Psalms,” 128.

²⁴ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). His discussion of the Psalms is chapter 33, 504–25. Cf. also his earlier treatment “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” in Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick

2. The "canonical" approach to the Psalter remedies this problem by taking into consideration how the text was received and shaped by the community as sacred scripture.

Childs then considers how the present shape of the Book of Psalms determines how it should be read. He first acknowledges that the Psalter has a complex development both at the oral and literary stages. In fact, this development is so complex that Childs exhibits an agnostic opinion on ever being able to make sense of the current shape.²⁵

Nevertheless, he goes on to discuss several important factors of the Psalter's current literary shape. First, there is a clear introduction to the Psalter in Psalm 1. The prominent place of this Torah psalm indicates that the book as a whole is no longer simply a random collection of prayers; it becomes a source of meditation and blessing for the faithful. "The introduction is, therefore, the first hint that the original setting has been subordinated to a new theological function for the future generations of worshipping Israel."²⁶ Second, the "anthological style," i.e., the re-use of psalms in new contexts and for different purposes, leads one to focus on the psalms' literary nature more than on historical or cultic aspects. "The point to be stressed is that within Israel the psalms have been loosened from a given cultic context and the words assigned a significance in themselves as sacred scripture."²⁷ Third, the placement of royal psalms at strategic points throughout the Psalter instead of as a group like the complaints, songs of pilgrimage, etc., shows a secondary use of these psalms. The function of these royal psalms appears to create an eschatological perspective, for even when the throne was vacant these psalms celebrated the royal-Davidic ideology of Israel. In fact, these psalms function as an echo of the prophetic messianic expectation. Childs writes: "In sum, although the royal psalms arose originally in a peculiar historical setting of ancient Israel which had received its form from a common mythopoetic milieu, they were treasured in the Psalter for a different reason, namely as a witness to the messianic hope which looked for the consummation of God's kingship through his Anointed One."²⁸ Fourth, this eschatological perspective is present in other psalms as well. The psalmists are constantly looking ahead to God's future

D. Miller, Jr., eds., *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) 377-88.

²⁵ "Yet it is also evident that much of the history of the development [of the Psalter] remains obscure. Nor is it possible to determine with certainty the intention, if any, of the editors" (Childs, *Introduction*, 512).

²⁶ Childs, *Introduction*, 514.

²⁷ Childs, *Introduction*, 515.

²⁸ Childs, *Introduction*, 517.

actions. "The perspective of Israel's worship in the Psalter is eschatologically oriented. As a result, the Psalter in its canonical form, far from being different in kind from the prophetic message, joins with the prophets in announcing God's coming kingship."²⁹ Fifth, further evidence for communal re-use of psalms comes from the change of the historical individual "I" to the corporate "we." Finally, the psalm titles function to historicize originally cultic psalms by linking them not only with historical persons but even with specific events in the lives of these historical persons. All these phenomena which Childs discusses lead to his conclusion that, whatever its historical and cultic setting(s), the Psalter must now be approached as a whole and interpreted canonically.

In terms of evaluation, there is much to commend here. Strictly speaking, however, Childs did not present a "redactional agenda" for the Psalter; he even doubts that one can be discerned! Nevertheless, without endorsing every point he makes, I would suggest that Childs moved the discussion of the Hebrew Psalter ahead aggressively; it remained for his students to fill in the specifics.

GERALD WILSON

One of Childs' students to take up this challenge of fleshing out a full-fledged redactional agenda of the Psalter is Gerald Wilson.³⁰ His major work on the subject is his book *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*.³¹ He begins to discuss possible redactional agendas in chapter 6. He first discusses possible explicit statements in psalms headings as organizational criterion, and then he discusses non-explicit elements. With regard to explicit statements in psalm headings, Wilson makes the following observations:³²

1. *Author* is not the primary organizational criteria.
2. *Genre* is not the primary organizational criteria, although genre does function to "soften" transitions from one author to another.
3. *Cultic Terminology* is merely obscured and therefore cannot function as the primary organizational criterion either.
4. *Historical References* simply refocus a psalm's context from cultic to individual historicized personages.
5. *Untitled Psalms* do not play a major role in editing either.

²⁹ Childs, *Introduction*, 518.

³⁰ Wilson's debt to Childs is evident; cf. *Editing*, 143-44; 171-72; 206-7.

³¹ Cf. recently, Nancy deClaissee-Walford, *Reading From the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997) who, while making independent contributions, relies heavily on Wilson's general thesis.

³² See Wilson, *Editing*, 155-81.

Concerning non-explicit elements, Wilson argues the following:³³

1. *Doxologies* are not editorial additions, but they do coincide with other indications of book divisions.
2. *Hallelujah Psalms* conclude sections of groups of psalms, while *Hodu Psalms* begin sections of groups of psalms.³⁴
3. *Thematic Grouping* is present, but subjective, and apparently not the controlling organizational criterion anyway.
4. *Similar Incipits*, although common in Ancient Near East hymnic collections, are only rarely employed in the Hebrew Psalter.
5. "Catch Phrases" are also present but extremely rare.³⁵
6. Wilson finds some evidence for organization according to the *deity addressed*, largely in the so-called "Elohistic Psalter," but clearly this editorial technique does not predominate.

Wilson concludes this chapter by saying, "One is left to look elsewhere for indications of the editorial purpose behind the MT 150 arrangement."³⁶

In chapter 7, Wilson puts forth his own proposal for a redactional agenda of the Hebrew Psalter.³⁷ He begins by suggesting that the primary evidence to be used in deciphering a redactional agenda is the Psalter itself, which means looking primarily at those aspects of the Psalter which most clearly exhibit editorial shaping; for Wilson, that means: 1. Psalm 1 as an introduction; 2. the five-fold book division; 3. the Final Hallel in Psalms 146–50. Let us then take each of these in turn.

33 Wilson, *Editing*, 182–96.

34 Wilson is clearly wrong with regard to Psalm 117, which, according to his scheme, should conclude a section of psalms, but Psalm 118 concludes the "Egyptian Hallel" by incorporating the themes of Psalms 113–17; moreover, the first verse of Psalm 107 forms an *inclusio* with the last verse of Psalm 118. Cf. also my dissertation *Circles of Context: An Interpretation of Psalms 107–118*, page 20, where I summarize Davis's reasons for classifying Psalms 107–18 as a redactional unit. Cf. Barry Craig Davis, *A Contextual Analysis of Psalms 107–118* (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1996) 8–11. Clearly, then, Psalm 118 does not start a new section within Book v of the Psalter.

35 He makes no mention of Brennan's work, which is largely based on the presence of "catch phrases." Brennan does call attention to examples that are hard to deny. It may be that Wilson is defining "catch phrases" too narrowly, while Brennan uses the term more loosely to describe *leitmotifs* and thematic connections. Nevertheless, Brennan does not claim that these *leitmotifs* are the organizing criterion, but the technique is clearly present.

36 Wilson, *Editing*, 197.

37 He first interacts with the proposal of some that the Psalter, with its five books, corresponds with the liturgical readings from the Pentateuch. Most of his criticisms of this proposal are

Wilson, following Childs, asserts that Psalm 1 tells us a great deal about the book, namely, that it is a book for *reading* as opposed to *performance*, that its contents determine *life and death*, that the response of the reader to its teaching determines whether the reader is *righteous or wicked*, etc.; however, Psalm 1 does not give us the *message* of the book.³⁸ The reader must discern the *message* from the five-fold book division.

Wilson makes a good case for the relative unity of Books I–III of the Psalter; for example, the psalms of these books are usually “titled” psalms and Books I–III end with royal psalms (41, 72, 89) while Books IV and V do not. Therefore, Wilson reads Book I–III together as a narrative unity. I let Wilson speak for himself here:

[Book I] is a very Davidic group of pss in which the proclamation of YHWH’s special covenant with his king in Ps 2 is matched by David’s assurance of God’s continued preservation in the presence of YHWH.

So the covenant which YHWH made with David (Ps 2) and in whose promises David rested secure (Ps 41) is now passed on to his descendants in this series of petitions in behalf of “the king’s son” (Ps 72) [=Book II].

At the conclusion of the third book, immediately preceding the break observed separating the earlier and later books [i.e., separating Books I–III from IV–V], the impression left is one of a covenant remembered, but a covenant *failed*. The Davidic covenant introduced in Ps 2 has come to nothing and the combination of three books concludes with the anguished cry of the Davidic descendants.³⁹

For Wilson, then, Psalm 89 ends on a very negative note, so negative, in fact, that Book IV must provide an answer. How can the Davidic covenant have failed? The answer provided in Book IV, which Wilson calls “the editorial ‘center’ of the final form of the Hebrew Psalter,”⁴⁰ is presented under four summary statements:

1. YHWH is king;
2. He has been our refuge in the past;
3. He will be our refuge now that the monarchy is gone;
4. Blessed are they that trust in him!⁴¹

sound (Wilson, *Editing*, 199–203).

38 Wilson, *Editing*, 204–7.

39 These quotes are from Wilson, *Editing*, 210, 211, 213, respectively.

40 Wilson, *Editing*, 215.

41 Wilson, *Editing*, 215.

Wilson then attempts to demonstrate that these themes are repeated throughout Book IV.

His discussion of Book V is less detailed, due in part to the composite nature of the material. Clearly the editor(s) has incorporated previously existing blocks of material into the Book, and this state of affairs limited his (their) editorial freedom. Nevertheless, Wilson makes a suggestion, the summary of which I quote:

Following the lead of Ps 107, it seems that in some sense the fifth book was intended to stand as an answer to the plea of the exiles to be gathered from the *diaspora*. The answer given is that deliverance and life thereafter is dependent on an attitude of dependence and trust in YHWH alone (107:12–13, 19, 28). David is seen modeling this attitude of reliance and dependence in Pss 108–110 and 138–145 and is rewarded with YHWH's protection. Throughout, emphasis falls on YHWH's power and former acts of mercy (especially in the Exodus, cf. Ps 114) as evidence of his trustworthiness. This attitude of dependence on YHWH will issue in obedience to his Law, as set forth in the central *Torah* Ps 119, which is to serve as man's guide on the "way" of righteousness and life.

Finally, David, in Pss 145–146, returns to the theme of YHWH's kingship that so dominates the formative Book Four and stands in tension with Pss 2–89. YHWH is *eternal* king, only *he* is ultimately worthy of trust. Human "princes" will wither and fade like the grass but the steadfast love of YHWH endures forever.⁴²

Wilson's work on the divisions between the five books is sound. It is also true that Books I–III have a certain feel and appearance to them that distinguish them from Books IV–V. This makes the importance of Psalm 89 hard to deny. His discussion of the importance of Psalm 1 is accurate as well. He has established that the royal psalms function editorially at the seams of at least Books II (Psalm 72) and III (Psalm 89). In summary, it is hard to deny the importance of the Davidic covenant, and the questions surrounding its continuance, to the present shape of the Psalter. Essentially, Wilson has explained the redaction of the Psalter in terms of this issue.

Nevertheless, I want to raise a few questions that may weaken Wilson's suggestion as a proposal for the entire Psalter. First, how does he account for the many laments in Book I, the Book which was supposed to be a celebration of David's assurance? Wilson hardly touches Psalms 3–40 at all! How do these fit into his proposal? Another way of stating this objection is to suggest

⁴² Wilson, *Editing*, 227–28.

that perhaps Wilson has relied *too much* on the royal psalms at the seams. How does he understand Psalms 42–71, and Psalms 73–88? I wonder if Wilson has ended up pitting the *seams* against the *material*. The *cloth*, as it were, of the Book in question should have some relation to its *seam*, but Wilson has not elucidated this relationship.

Second, Wilson makes no mention of messianism or eschatology at all. This may stem from the rigorous separation he makes between Psalms 1 and 2. He insists that Psalm 2 heads Book I by introducing the idea of covenant, and does not play a role in introducing the book of Psalms as a whole.⁴³ He follows Willis's argument for the independence of Psalm 1 completely and fails to notice that Willis is arguing more on the grounds of original *Sitze* as opposed to editorial placement. Certainly the two psalms are separate literary creations, but, as Auffret has shown,⁴⁴ there is a strong case for asserting their complementarity in introducing the Psalter as a whole. If this is allowed, the expectation created by Psalm 2 is that the Psalter will also include discussion of God's eschatological kingdom and the messiah. Wilson even seems to ignore blatantly eschatological passages like Psalm 110. Is this merely a Davidic paradigm of walking in faith? What about Psalm 132 where the very theme of Psalm 89 is taken up and apparently answered by appeal to a Davidic messiah? What is more, Wilson's major point, that Psalm 89 creates a problem that must be answered, seems to *demand* an eschatological answer.

Others have expressed objections as well. Mitchell, for example, registers three main criticisms. First, Mitchell observes that Wilson's contention that the Davidic covenant has come to ruin does not mesh with the reappearance of "David" in Book v, on the throne and conquering. Second, it is difficult to understand the Psalter's purpose as simply to exhort Israel to trust YHWH's word when that is the very thing that has proven untrustworthy! As Mitchell writes: "[T]he redactor seems deliberately to emphasize their failure, and God's falsehood, in vividly representing the disappointment of their hopes. Is it for this celebration of divine disloyalty and incompetence that jubilant halleluyahs close the Psalter?"⁴⁵ Mitchell's third objection is a historical one. When, asks Mitchell, did such a bleak assessment of the future of the House of David prevail in Israel? There does not appear to be a likely historical period in which this kind of redaction could arise; quite the contrary, as Mitchell shows, the expectation of a Davidic restoration continued well into the second temple period.⁴⁶

43 Wilson, *Editing*, 205–7.

44 Pierre Auffret, *The Literary Structure of Psalm 2*, JSOTSup 3 (Sheffield: The University Press, 1977). See also Cole's overstatement of the case in Cole, "An Integrated Reading."

45 Mitchell, *Message*, 80.

46 Mitchell's criticisms are found in *Message*, 78–81.

In summary, then: There is much in Wilson to be accepted; he has laid the foundation for any subsequent discussion of the Psalter's redaction. However, we cannot accept his proposal *in toto* for a redactional agenda of the entire Psalter.⁴⁷

JOHN H. WALTON

In a single article, John Walton has put forward a proposal for the Psalter's redactional agenda.⁴⁸ After summarizing and accepting much of Wilson's work, Walton suggests as a "working hypothesis"⁴⁹ that the Book of Psalms is "a cantata around the theme of the Davidic covenant."⁵⁰ He understands Psalms 1-2 as introductions to the book emphasizing the themes of 1. vindication of the righteous and 2. theocratic sponsorship of the Israelite (Davidic) king. Then, the themes of the individual books are suggested: Book I (3-41) emphasizes David's Conflict with Saul. Walton attempts to establish links between the Psalms of Book I and the narrative of 1 Samuel. Book II (42-72) follows chronologically by emphasizing David's reign. Walton finds links with the narrative of 2 Samuel. Book III (73-89) is "the most difficult to assess," admits Walton.⁵¹ He explains the presence of the Korahite and Asaph Psalms as corresponding to the Assyrian crisis of the late eighth century B.C.E. However, Psalm 89 does not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, but to the Assyrian siege by Sennacherib in 701. Book IV (90-106) centers around the theme "introspection about the destruction of the temple and the exile." Finally, Book V (107-45) contains praise and reflection on the return and the new era. However, very little mention is made of eschatology. Psalm 119 is the dominant message pointing to Law-obeying piety as the key solution to the exile. Psalms 146-50 constitute a conclusion of the Psalter centering on praise.

Walton's proposal has been examined and generally found wanting. Gerald Wilson charges that Walton's initial idea of a "working hypothesis" is too subjective. "Working hypotheses are a valid and useful means of research in the sciences where they can be tested repeatedly through experimentation in a controlled environment. They are, however, much more problematic in literary analysis where they can have the unfortunate effect of providing self-fulfilling prophecies."⁵² Wilson regards Walton's connections between the Psalter and

47 Wilson's proposal has been modified and supplemented; see the essays in McCann, *Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*.

48 John H. Walton, "Psalms: A Cantata About the Davidic Covenant," *JETS* 34 (1991) 21-31.

49 Walton, "Psalms: A Cantata," 23.

50 Walton, "Psalms: A Cantata," 24.

51 Walton, "Psalms: A Cantata," 27.

52 Gerald H. Wilson, "Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise," in J. Clinton McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 44.

the Samuel narrative too tenuous to be convincing. Mitchell, too, has registered criticisms, mostly surrounding the “gaps” which Walton’s reconstruction leaves in the history of Israel, i.e., the Fall of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C.E.⁵³

It is clear that Walton has not made the case for the lexical connections between Psalm and narrative that are necessary if his proposal is to be accepted. Also, he has downplayed the significance of Psalm 89 at the end of Book III. The finality of the language used in Psalm 89 demands a robust answer that Walton’s proposal does not provide. Finally, although Walton mentions the significance of Psalm 2, he has not developed a clear eschatological theme concerning the Davidic dynasty in the Psalter.

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

In a stimulating article,⁵⁴ Walter Brueggemann has proposed that the present shape of the Psalter leads us to the redactional agenda in this way: at the beginning of the Psalms is Psalm 1, which “presents a morally coherent world”⁵⁵ of Torah obedience which leads to well-being and prosperity; the Psalms end with Psalm 150, “the most extreme and unqualified statement of unfettered praise in the Old Testament.”⁵⁶ These are the themes that “bound” the Psalter: obedience and praise. Between these two poles, however, one encounters a complicated world. God’s *hesed* is questioned in Psalm 25 and celebrated in Psalm 103. Brueggemann suggests that Psalm 73 is a crucial juncture in the shape of the Book of Psalms and in Israel’s move from obedience to praise.

Psalm 73 stands distinctively and paradigmatically in the difficult, demanding pilgrimage of Israel’s faith from obedience to praise. Thus I suggest that in the canonical structuring of the Psalter, Psalm 73 stands at its center in a crucial role. Even if the Psalm is not literarily in the center, I propose that it is central theologically as well as canonically.⁵⁷

Brueggemann stresses the importance of Psalm 73 partly because of Wilson’s idea of the importance of the “seams” of the books of the Psalter. As Wilson has argued, Ps 72:20 is the only *explicit* evidence of editorial activity, and ends Books I–II. Moreover, Psalm 72 is a psalm exhorting the king to embrace righteousness and justice, an exhortation which the narrative of 1 Kings 11–12 demonstrates was not heeded by Solomon, resulting in a painful division of the

53 Mitchell, *Message*, 81–82.

54 Walter Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon,” *JSOT* 50 (1991) 63–92.

55 Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise,” 65.

56 Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise,” 67.

57 Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise,” 81.

country. Therefore, Psalm 73 would appear to address this historical problem, and its apparent discord with the way of wisdom espoused in Psalm 1.

Brueggemann then analyzes Psalm 73, pointing out the dispuative character of the work; first, the re-statement of the "Psalm 1 principle" (verse 1); second, the questioning of that principle (verses 2-13); third, the experience in the sanctuary of God which reorients the psalmist (verses 14-17); fourth, the reaffirmation of the principle but in an altered form (verses 18-28). As Brueggemann writes,

No judgment is finally made whether the world is morally coherent or not, whether Psalm 1 is true or not, whether Ps. 73:1 is sustainable or not. It is enough that the God of long-term fidelity is present, caring, powerful and attentive. . . . Now the 'goodness' treasured is not material blessing but God's own self. That is enough for the speaker, and for the faith with the Psalms. The Psalter assumes the moral coherence of torah piety, but moves beyond that piety of obedience to trustful communion.⁵⁸

There are many other fascinating aspects to Brueggemann's article which we cannot explore here.⁵⁹ In terms of a redactional agenda, however, what can we say about Brueggemann's proposal? He is certainly to be commended for picking up on Wilson's idea of the "seams" of the books in the Psalter and attributing significance to both sides of the "seam." If Psalms 2, 72 and 89 are significant, *by virtue of their presence at the "seams,"* why are not Psalms 42-43, 73, 90, 107 also important? Their significance seems to be borne out by the unique characteristics of Psalm 73, to which Brueggemann rightly draws attention. He also makes helpful and insightful comments on a possible theological movement within the Psalter, from unqualified acceptance of the "retribution principle" of Psalm 1 to unqualified expression of praise in Psalm 150. There is much more thinking to be done along these lines.

However, we can ask several questions about the adequacy of Brueggemann's proposal for the entire Psalter. First, if the "problem" has been solved at Psalm 73, how do we explain the presence of "suffering" psalms that appear *after* Psalm 73? Indeed, many of the psalms that follow Psalm 73 in Book III continue to express painful doubts about God's goodness, his faithfulness to his promises, his desire to care for and restore Israel, etc. How are these to be understood? Perhaps the most significant of these psalms of complaint that appear after Psalm 73 is Psalm 89; no one can deny the theological and historical importance of this catastrophic psalm. How should we read Psalm 89 in light of the "solution" of Psalm 73? Second, we can ask the same question

58 Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise," 86, 87.

59 For example, it would be very interesting to compare Brueggemann's understanding of the theology of Psalm 73 et al. with the theology of the book of Job; cf. his many footnotes which allude to this idea.

with regard to the psalms which continue to affirm the “retribution principle” after Psalm 73, an example of which is Psalm 112. Third, Brueggemann makes no mention of eschatology in the Psalter, yet it is undeniably present. Should not eschatological concerns contribute to the solution of a moral conundrum such as we find in Psalm 73? Ultimately, Brueggemann’s proposal is a “wisdom” proposal, suggesting we filter the Psalter through a sapiential grid.⁶⁰ This may certainly be a prominent theme of the Psalter, but is it sufficient to explain the entire redactional agenda of the Psalter?

GERALD SHEPPARD

Another student of Childs, Gerald Sheppard, has written an essay on the Book of Psalms in which he puts forth a canonical approach. The essay was published in a book which addressed the nature of Scripture in general with special reference to the theological controversies within the United Church of Canada. As such, Sheppard’s book as a whole is not a work on the Hebrew Psalter, but the second essay in the book, entitled “Psalms: How Do the Ordinary Words of Women and Men Become God’s Word to Me?” addresses at length the nature of the Book of Psalms.⁶¹

First, following Childs, Sheppard contends that the psalms are works of poetry that were elevated to the level of Scripture by their interpretive community. Psalm 2 is his example of this process, a royal psalm, probably originally used in an enthronement festival, reappropriated to introduce a dominant theme in the Psalter, namely royal Davidic ideology and eschatology. Second, noting the tight literary relationship between the two poems, he argues that Psalms 1 and 2 should be understood as a dual introduction to the entire book. He writes:

Therefore, Psalm 1 has underscored the biblical subject matter of torah and wisdom, just as Psalm 2 highlights the idiom of prophecy. In other words, the two psalms together present the entire book as a resource for torah, prophecy and wisdom. The subject matter of the prayers in the Psalms is here declared to be the same as that of the rest of Jewish scripture!⁶²

Third, Sheppard observes that the unity of Books I–III, despite the apparent diversity, centers around the three dominant personages mentioned in the

60 Cf. also J. Kenneth Kuntz, “Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter,” in *For A Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000) 144–60.

61 The book is: *The Future of the Bible: Beyond Liberalism and Literalism* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1990).

62 Sheppard, *The Future of the Bible*, 69.

superscripts: David, Korah, and Asaph. The dominance of these three names gives a prophetic slant to the redaction of the Psalter because in Chronicles, these people are understood in prophetic categories (cf. 1 Chronicles 25:1-3; 2 Chronicles 29:30).

Fourth, Sheppard observes the "five-book" structure of Psalms and emphasizes the importance of the break between Book III (Psalm 89) and Book IV (Psalms 90 and 91). Psalm 91 was reinterpreted messianically due to its proximity to the end of Book III as an answer to the final lament of Book III.

Fifth, because of the centrality of David in the Psalter as a whole, Sheppard calls attention to the portrayal of David in the Psalms as "the great synthesizer of the truths of scripture." I quote him at length:

The identity of David is also significant because he plays a role elsewhere in scripture as the person most intimately involved with the organization of Israel's worship. In other parts of the Bible David is depicted as a person who is obedient to the law, endowed with prophetic powers, and skilled as a wise king. This background underlies all later messianic hope that longs for a son of David who would fulfill all the major offices of scriptural witness – prophet, priest, king, and sage – and, concomitantly, master all the subject matter of revelation. Accordingly, David is portrayed as the great synthesizer of the truths of scripture. Beyond offering us models of prayers, the book of Psalms – as the introduction of Psalms 1 and 2 make clear – present these prayers as objects of meditation and study, and as inner-biblical commentary on the torah, prophecy, and wisdom.⁶³

Sheppard's discussion is stimulating on a variety of fronts, but with specific reference to his treatment of the Psalter, what can we say? First, it is clear that it is not Sheppard's purpose to work out his proposal in detail; in fact, his proposal is set in the context of a discussion about the nature of Scripture in general, and serves mostly to further *that* agenda; admittedly, then, he has not put forth and spelled out in detail a rigorous program for the Psalter. However, he has made some helpful comments. Attention has already been drawn to the importance of Psalm 1 to the Psalter, but Sheppard includes Psalm 2 as well in this introductory role. The literary case for reading them together is strong.⁶⁴ The effect of including Psalm 2 in the introduction is to give legitimacy to eschatological concerns throughout the Psalter. As we have seen, eschatology is present, and others have been criticized for ignoring it; but Sheppard's analysis lends credence to this emphasis. Finally, and this is a point to which we must return later, Sheppard has demonstrated that Psalms 1 and 2 together set the

63 Sheppard, *The Future of the Bible*, 86–87.

64 Cf. Auffret's work, *Literary Structure of Psalm 2*.

Psalter in a context which includes *torah* ("the Law of the Lord"), *wisdom* ("Blessed is the man"), and *prophecy* ("I will make the nations your inheritance"). Sheppard weakens his analysis by ignoring the most obvious component of the Psalter, namely praise. This may stem from his omission of any discussion of Psalms 146–50. Certainly a book's conclusion should be just as important as its introduction, but this consideration does not enter into Sheppard's analysis.

JEROME F. D. CREACH

Jerome Creach, a student of James Luther Mays, has put forth a proposed agenda for the Psalter which builds upon the work of others.⁶⁵ He accepts Wilson's idea that Psalms 90–150 respond to the theological problem presented by Psalm 89.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Creach contrasts his approach with others:

Instead of examining the Psalter from the perspective of a certain type of psalm (i.e., Mays) or from the vantage point of breaks between collections (i.e., Wilson), this study evaluates the shape of the book in light of a common and recurring idea ('refuge') that appears early on as an apparent part of an editorial plan. . . . This study attempts to show that 'refuge' is central to the shape of the Psalter, both in the general sense of the 'thought world' of the book and in the more specific sense of literary structure.⁶⁷

Creach goes on to develop his thesis as follows: In chapter 2 of his book, Creach engages in linguistic analysis of the "word field" of 'refuge' which includes a wide variety of other terms. These terms constitute, for Creach, "a universe of terms" which have "grown together to communicate the common idea of dependence on Yahweh over against other sources of protection." This "universe" of terms "relates virtually every aspect of devotion to Yahweh: the nature of the believer, confessions of godly persons, requirements of rectitude, and the character of Yahweh himself."⁶⁸ In chapter 3, Creach largely devotes his attention to analyzing the origin of the metaphor(s) of 'refuge' in the light of historical issues, but he also traces the development of the metaphor with reference to other concepts of personal piety, concluding: 1. that the transition from a national policy of seeking refuge in Yahweh to personal devotion is a late development and can be seen in late psalms; and 2. that the aligning of the concepts of obedience to God's *torah* and Yahweh's refuge "provides a clue as to how Yahweh's instruction was understood and how the Psalter was meant to be

65 Jerome F. D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOTSup 217 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

66 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 18.

67 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 18–19.

68 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 48.

read: the contents of the Psalter seem to be intended as a guide to a life of dependence; the most concrete way of expressing such reliance was in the study of tora."⁶⁹ In chapter 4, Creach attempts to demonstrate how the word field of 'refuge' has influenced the present shape of the Psalter. First, he establishes the last sentence of Psalm 2 ("Blessed are all who take refuge in him") as redactional; then, he traces the occurrence of this field in Psalms 3-41. Moreover, if Psalms 1 and 2 are to be read together as an introduction to the Psalms, Psalm 1 then adds to this emphasis on personal piety in seeking God as one's refuge. He attempts to argue that the 'refuge' field is important for the shaping of all the books of the Psalter, though it is not entirely self-evident how this happened. In chapter 5, Creach attempts to establish the history of at least portions of the psalms, the order and date of redactional stages, based on inner phenomena; he admits that his conclusions are more tentative here than in other chapters.⁷⁰

Creach's analysis of the 'word field' of 'refuge' and like terminology is a helpful thematic study. It cannot be doubted that 'refuge' and its linguistic and thematic relatives play an important role in the teaching and theology of the Psalter, and this is Creach's best contribution. One expects that similar analyses of vocabulary 'clusters' would be helpful, say of 'nations/enemies,' or 'pray/call out/ask.' Moreover, the redactional "blessed are all who take refuge in him" of Ps 2:12d leads us to expect a thematic emphasis on "God as refuge." Assured results diminish, however, in the other aspects of his study. One problem is that the actual occurrences of "refuge" are heavily concentrated in the early part of the book, so it is hardly likely to be thematic for the whole.⁷¹ Another problem is that the broader one defines the 'word field,' the easier it is to demonstrate its influence in a corpus, but at the same time the broader the field, the less convincing it is that we are talking about a single theme. As one reads Creach's work, the concept of 'Yahweh as refuge' grows to the point that it can include almost any instruction a psalm gives to its readers; the focus on a single theme becomes confused. With such a broad 'word field,' it becomes difficult to understand how we can speak meaningfully of its influence on a redactional agenda. It is easy both to claim and to prove that 'refuge' is a significant theme in the Psalter; it is just as easy to claim but much harder to prove that it is more than that.

DAVID C. MITCHELL

The most ambitious proposal for the redactional agenda of the Psalter to date is the work of David Mitchell, detailed in his book *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*. In chapter 2, Mitchell puts

69 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 73.

70 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 106.

71 The statistics are: 19 times in Books I-II; 5 times in IV-V and none at all in Book III.

forth a preliminary case for an eschatological understanding of the Psalter.⁷² He makes four main points:

1. The historical period in which the Psalter was redacted was one of high eschatological consciousness. The limits of this time period, says Mitchell, are the end of the exile and the LXX. The redactors of the Psalter shared the eschatology of Ezekiel, Zechariah, 1 Enoch, Tobit, the Testament of 12 Patriarchs, the Sybilline Oracles, and other literature at Qumran.
2. The authors of the psalms are considered prophets and are discussed in prophetic categories elsewhere in Scripture (cf. 2 Sam 23:2-4, 1 Chr 25:1-3; 2 Chr 29:30). Moreover, "the essence of Israel's view of prophecy was that historic events prefigure future ones."⁷³ So even historical personages and events can be predictive.
3. Only eschatology can explain what Mitchell calls the "ultimate" language present in some of the psalms. The descriptions of a super-hero king and his *malkut* defy simple historical or literary explanations.
4. The inclusion of royal psalms *at all* implies some kind of hope; but these royal psalms are not only present, they are placed prominently, as Wilson has shown, at the "seams" of the books of the Psalter. Surely this leads us all the more to expect an eschatological emphasis.

In subsequent chapters, Mitchell attempts to establish the eschatological orientation of the Psalter by comparing the "eschatological programmes" contained in prophetic writings to two major groups of Psalms, the Psalms of Asaph (50, 73-83) and the Psalms of Ascents (120-34). These two groups of Psalms then fit into a "programme" as integral components. The Psalms of Asaph depict 1. the ingathering of scattered Israel from exile and 2. the ingathering of hostile nations against Jerusalem. The Psalms of Ascents depict the gathering of Israel and nations to celebrate Sukkoth on Zion.⁷⁴

The Asaph Psalms (Psalms 50, 73-83)

Ingathering of scattered Israel from exile

Ingathering of hostile nations against Jerusalem

The Ascents (Psalms 120-34)

Gathering of Israel and nations to celebrate Sukkoth on Zion

⁷² Mitchell, *Message*, 82-87.

⁷³ Mitchell, *Message*, 84.

⁷⁴ Cf. Mitchell, *Message*, 297 for the following chart.

Further, Mitchell attempts to broaden the correspondences between the programme of Zechariah 9-14 and Psalms.⁷⁵

Psalms Zechariah 9-14

	45	Bride-groom-king comes to Daughter Zion
<i>Psalms of Asaph</i>	50	Gathering of scattered Israel to Jerusalem
	72	Temporary messianic <i>malkut</i>
	73-83	Hostile nations gather against Jerusalem
	89	The king cut off
<i>Book IV</i>	90-106	Israel exiled in desert. Gather and return to Zion
	110	Rescue by king messiah
<i>The Hallel</i>	111-18	Paeans of messianic victory; the hero's welcome
<i>The Ascents</i>	120-34	Ascent of Israel and all nations to Sukkoth on Zion in messianic <i>malkut</i> . Includes royal Psalm 132.

Mitchell has sketched out a broad eschatological programme from the prophets that does indeed appear to have sweeping correspondences with portions of the Psalter. His evidence of "ultimate" language in the Psalms of Asaph is persuasive. Once the intertextual link between Psalms 120-34 and Zechariah 14 is granted, the correspondences between the eschatological Sukkoth in Zechariah and the festival described in the Ascents is also quite convincing. His analysis of messianic expectation in the prophets, and certain correspondences between that expectation and what is described about the king in the Psalms is also compelling at many points. Indeed, Mitchell's work repays careful study at most points.⁷⁶ While most of Mitchell's case is compelling, there are, however, a few points at which his overall thesis can be questioned. First, are there sufficient *internal* indications of an eschatological orientation within the Psalter itself? Very few would question the presence of an eschatological theme, but does this theme *control* the Psalter's structure? Second, how does the rest of the Psalter fit into the eschatological programme? Very little mention is made of Book 1; does the "eschatological programme" start only at Psalm 45 or so? How does Psalm 22, which many traditions have understood escha-

75 Cf. Mitchell, *Message*, 298 for the following chart.

76 One aspect of Mitchell's work that we have not mentioned is his mastery of the history of interpretation; he often buttresses his own conclusions with citations of NT, Rabbinic, and other early sources that embrace a similar eschatological orientation. This is helpful because the earliest written exegetical traditions (especially Qumran, and perhaps NT) may be virtually contemporary with the redaction itself, and therefore may demonstrate a similar ideology.

tologically, fit into the scheme? Third, at points, one gets the sense that Mitchell has foisted an eschatological programme on psalms that do not lend themselves to an eschatological perspective. For instance, Psalm 89 depicts, according to Mitchell, the temporary "cutting off" of the eschatological king, but there is little indication of this from within the Psalm itself. In fact, the entire perspective of the Psalm, and the rationale for its placement at the end of Book III, appears to be the unthinkable theological problem of God having broken his promise concerning the continuity of the Davidic line. Certainly it is true that the Psalm expects an eschatological solution to this theological problem, but Mitchell is arguing for more. Not only does the Psalm *expect* a future king, it *actually describes* that king and his being "cut off" *in the future*. In my view, Mitchell misunderstands this lament and its significance in the Psalter.⁷⁷ In conclusion, we might say this: if others have neglected and undervalued the role of eschatology in the Psalter, Mitchell has overcompensated for this neglect to the point of forcing psalms into an eschatological mold into which they simply do not fit. The effect at times is to distort the plain meaning and language of the psalm. Mitchell's proposal cannot in the final analysis explain the entire structure and contents of the Hebrew Psalter.

THE REDACTIONAL AGENDA THREE DOMINANT TRAJECTORIES

We have examined several proposals for the redactional agenda of the Psalter. As we have seen, each proposal has points in its favor (see the table below for a summary). We have also seen that each proposal suffers from flaws that inhibit its acceptance as the correct explanation of the redaction of the Psalter. At this point, we could either conclude that a redactional agenda with sufficient explanatory force has not yet been found or that a redactional agenda, though possible, is not discernable.

Both of these conclusions are possible based on the above survey. However, before drawing conclusions, we need to make an important observation concerning most of the above proposals: Many of the previous proposals are exclusive in nature and demand that their idea explains all the structure and content of the Book of Psalms in its present form; yet all of these proposals, while making many excellent points, fail to do so.

I would suggest that the search for a single agenda is a misguided search because there is not one dominant, driving agenda, but rather a collection of

⁷⁷ Psalm 89 probably frames Book III together with Psalm 73. The result is that Book III begins with difficult questions in a wisdom framework and ends with difficult questions in a royal framework, but the question is the same: how can God be faithful to his promises when the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? The expectation is that the answer to this question will be expressed in both wisdom and eschatological terms.

	<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
<i>Brennan</i>	<p>Recognized importance of Psalms as a book</p> <p>Stressed Psalms 1 and 2 as an introduction</p> <p>Recognized "catch word" method of psalms arrangement</p>	<p>Does not demonstrate his thesis consistently</p> <p>Ultimately his treatment is helpful but too brief</p>
<i>Childs</i>	<p>Seminal discussion of canonical issues with re: to Hebrew Psalter (emphasis on secondary setting)</p> <p>Importance of Psalm 1, Royal Psalms, eschatology</p>	<p>Too general</p> <p>Offered no redactional agenda</p>
<i>Wilson</i>	<p>Seminal application of Childs' thesis</p> <p>Sound methodology</p> <p>Demonstrated purposeful redaction via headings, seams, etc.</p> <p>Importance of Royal Psalms, and Davidic kingship</p>	<p>No acknowledgment of eschatology</p> <p>His redactional agenda is unconvincing</p>
<i>Walton</i>	<p>Good emphasis on importance of Davidic covenant and Royal ideology</p>	<p>"Working hypothesis" is methodologically unsound</p> <p>Does not prove lexical links between psalm and narrative</p> <p>Weak treatment of Psalm 89</p>

themes. These themes take turns coming to the foreground and receding into the background. Viewed from this perspective, the quest for a single unifying redactional agenda of the Psalter is akin to the search for a single, unifying theme or center in Old Testament Theology.⁷⁸ Many proposals were

⁷⁸ Cf., e.g., Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (4th ed.;

	<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
<i>Brueggemann</i>	Stimulating canonical analysis Helpful thematic analysis of Psalm 73 Recognizes importance of "wisdom" motifs	His redactional agenda is too simplistic to explain all data in the Psalter Ignores eschatological element
<i>Sheppard</i>	Good canonical discussion Stresses importance of Psalms 1 and 2 Acknowledges eschatology	Treatment is too brief to develop a redactional agenda No discussion of prayer/praise
<i>Creach</i>	Excellent thematic study of 'refuge' word-field Good analysis of "wisdom" themes (i.e., Torah piety)	'Refuge' idea becomes too broad Does not explain sufficiently the present shape of Psalter
<i>Mitchell</i>	Excellent discussion of inter-textual issues Strong support of eschatological content in the Psalter	Over-emphasis on eschatology Leaves much of the Psalter unexplained

put forth, but few, if any, could explain everything. Rather, dominant themes could be identified quite easily and analyzed as such. With reference to the

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1978) 20-40. More recently, cf. Carsten Vang, "'Der HERR ist einer!' Von der Einheit und der Verschiedenheit in der Theologie des Alten Testaments," *EuroJTh* 4 (1995) 145-60.

Psalter, then, the interpreter should be looking for the dominant themes of the book and following their trajectories across the shape of the book as we now have it. This will yield a coherent explanation of the whole without demanding a single, unifying theme as the only redactional agenda. We cannot explain the diversity of material in the Psalter by an appeal to one rubric; any agenda proposed must therefore be broad enough to encompass all the parts but also specific enough to be stated cogently and concisely.

A proper understanding of the Psalter in its present form should acknowledge the existence of several dominant trajectories.⁷⁹ What are these trajectories? We begin with a suggestion made by Gerald Sheppard. He noted the dual introduction of Psalms 1 and 2 and concluded that this dual introduction focuses on the themes of Torah, Wisdom, and Eschatology. Although we criticized him for not discussing the role of praise, his discovery of a collection of themes was very helpful. Perhaps this idea needs some development. Can we explain the content and structure of the Psalter by pointing to a variety of concerns that pervade the book?

The first trajectory is wisdom. We have seen from previous studies that Psalm 1 casts the Psalter in a 'wisdom' frame, creating the expectation of wisdom themes. Readers are exhorted to live in such a way as to separate themselves from the wicked and to align themselves with the righteous by meditating on God's Torah. Creach has shown that the concept of "seeking refuge in Yahweh" can be broadened, to a certain extent, to include other elements. Brueggemann has highlighted the tension this creates when readers encounter the world around them, a tension no doubt reflected in the Book of Psalms itself. The first undeniable trajectory of the Psalter is the sapiential, the themes of which are right living and theodicy.

Second, as Mitchell has shown, there is a clear eschatological element in the Psalter which flows from the structural prominence of Psalm 2. The theme of judgment beginning in Psalm 1:5 and reaching to the end of the Psalter in Psalm 149, the "ultimate" language of certain psalms, the discussion, beginning in Psalm 2, of God's *malkut*, and the prominence of God's anointed Davidic messiah can all be traced throughout the Psalter. Wilson and Walton's work emphasizes the importance of royal psalms and the Davidic covenant, both

79 For the idea that the themes of the Hebrew Bible can be grouped under four main trajectories, cf. Ronald J. Allen and John C. Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995). They delineate what they call "four trajectories within the Old Testament," which are: 1. the Deuteronomic Trajectory (the Choice of Love); 2. the Priestly Trajectory (the Way of Holiness); 3. the Dual Trajectory of Wisdom (the Way of Order and the Way of Questioning); and 4. the Trajectory of Apocalypticism (the Way of Radical Hope). In this way, Allen and Holbert urge Christian preachers to understand Old Testament texts as belonging to one of these trajectories. For some of their ideas, Allen and Holbert are indebted to Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

of which contribute to the eschatological concerns. The second undeniable trajectory of the Psalter is the eschatological, the themes of which are covenant, kingdom, justice and messiah.⁸⁰

Third, as Brueggemann emphasizes in his article, the driving goal of the book appears to be the transformation of lament into praise of God, as in Ps 30:12–13. Whatever themes may surface throughout the book, the redactor(s) moves the reader toward unhindered praise of YHWH. The primacy of worship surfaces in the conclusion of the book as a third trajectory in the book of Psalms.⁸¹

These three dominant trajectories yield a summary statement such as the following: The Book of Psalms teaches the community of faith to live in a world full of enemies and evil, death and disappointment, by trusting in God's character and word [wisdom]; by waiting for God's eschatological kingdom which he will establish through his messiah [eschatology]; and by worshipping him for the splendor of his person and the majesty of his works [worship].

CONCLUSION

This proposal of three dominant trajectories attempts to acknowledge the valid insights and contributions of previous studies. I acknowledge the role of wisdom themes due to the prominent placement of Psalm 1 (right living, righteous vs. wicked, the "way," meditation on God's Torah, taking refuge in God, etc.) as well as the eschatological elements due to the placement of Psalm 2 (royal ideology, God's anointed, God's kingdom, etc.) which are reinforced by the prominent placement of royal psalms at several of the seams of the five book structure. Finally, I acknowledge the role of prayer/praise which is stressed not only by the content of many individual psalms but also by the conclusion of the Psalter as a whole (Psalms 146–50). However, the structure of the whole is not placed at odds with the content of its parts. Each component is allowed to contribute to the building of its own particular theme in the context of the Psalter; at the same time, we can still speak meaningfully of a redactional agenda. Therefore, in the study of the biblical psalms, the interpretive task includes a consideration of the unique contributions of each psalm to the overall redactional agenda, an agenda that highlights wisdom, eschatology, and worship.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Drs. Alan Cooper and Samuel Greengus for their supervision of my research on the Psalms.

80 Zenger notes that Book v of the Psalter is the most eschatological of the five ("The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107–150," *JSOT* 80 [1998] 81–82).

81 Zenger notes that a hymnlike mood pervades all of Book v of the Psalter ("Composition and Theology," 78).



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.