THE ANONYMOUS KING: A FOUNDATION FOR A MESSIANIC READING OF THE PSALTER

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While scholarship on the Psalms has a long history, a more recent movement has been to study the Psalms not as a mere collection of individual pieces but as a whole, an editorially crafted book.[1] Within this stream, this paper argues that the intentional anonymity of the man/king in Psalms 1-2, which has received a new context and added meaning as the introduction to the Psalms, pushes the reader to see past David and others who have filled the position of king and, as the narrative of the Psalter unfolds, to look toward the future establishment of God's kingdom as he rules through an eschatological and messianic figure.[2] To this end, this paper examines the presentation in Psalms 1-2 of the four characters/groups and their interactions as the establishment of the groundwork upon which the over-arching story of the entire Psalter unfolds, with special attention given to the context and effectual purpose of the anonymous king. It then discusses the narrative of the Psalms in relation to the king, addresses some contrary viewpoints, and concludes with a brief note concerning Christology.[3]

The Characters of the Story

Psalms 1 and 2 present the same four characters/groups. The Psalter begins, "Blessed is the man" (1:1).[4] The first character is an unidentified man. He is characterized by his delight in and devotion to the law of the Lord (1:2) and by his

[1] Though inspired by intimations made by Brevard Childs, the work of Gerald Wilson laid the foundation for subsequent scholarship on the editorial arrangement of the Psalms; see Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985). The following are selected subsequent overviews of the canonical shape of the Psalter: Gerald H. Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 229-46; and Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 21-38.

[2] This paper considers only the final form of the MT. The redactional history of the Psalms, the LXX, and the Qumran texts will not be explored. Additionally, this paper assumes the purposeful, edited arrangement of the Psalter, as can be seen most clearly and basically in its introduction, five-book division with doxologies, and final conclusion. There is ample literature in support of this view; see footnote 1. Note the rare dissenting voice exemplified by Whybray: "There is no evidence that there was a systematic and purposeful redaction of the whole Psalter in any of the suggested ways"; see R. N. Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, JSOTSup 222 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 118-19. Also note a more recent contrary voice: David Willgren, "Why Psalms 1-2 Are Not to be Considered a Preface to the 'Book' of Psalms," *ZAW* 130 (2018): 384-97.

[3] I am indebted to J. Glen Taylor for his support and feedback on the shaping of this paper.

[4] All scripture quotations are from the ESV and follow English versification.

separation from the wicked, their counsel, and their ways (1:1b). Additionally, and consequently, this man is described in terms of well-being, fruitfulness, and prosperity (1:3). The second half of Psalm 1 elaborates on the second character; namely, the wicked (1:4; see v. 1). In contrast to the rootedness and fruitfulness of the man, the wicked are described as chaff that the wind drives away (1:4). Their end is destruction (1:5-6). Though already alluded to in verse 2, the third character, Yahweh, becomes the focus in verse 6, where he is further described as knowing the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Thus, the Lord is presented as the one who gives instruction, rules over the other groups, and by implication, blesses and destroys. The last two verses of Psalm 1 identify the final category; namely, the righteous. By implication, the outcome of the righteous is similar to that of the unidentified man: the righteous are known by the Lord and will thus prosper. In summary, Psalm 1 introduces the reader to four main characters: a man, Yahweh, the wicked, and the righteous.

Psalm 2 presents and elaborates on these same four characters. The wicked of Psalm 1 may be identified in Psalm 2 as the nations, peoples, kings, and rulers who rebel against the Lord and his Anointed (2:1-2).[5] They are warned to submit, or they will perish (2:10-12). In Psalm 2, the Lord is over all the nations of the earth and appoints a king to carry out his rule (v. 6; see 2b). He requires that all peoples and kings serve him (vv. 11–12). The rebellion of the nations is no match for the Lord's might. The righteous from 1:5b–6 are to be identified with the blessed ones in the last line of Psalm 2: "Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (2:12d). These are those who fear, submit to, and serve Yahweh and are blessed.

As others have observed, the unidentified man from Psalm 1 may be associated with the king of Psalm 2.[6] In his kingly role, this individual is first described as the Lord's Anointed (2:2). He is also described as being established as king by Yahweh and set on Zion, his holy hill (2:6). Yahweh gives the king the nations as his inheritance, and he rules over them (2:8-9). Moreover, this king is also described as the Son of Yahweh (2:7; see 2:12). The association of the man in Psalm 1 with the king is further supported by the psalm's echo of Deut 17:14-20. There, the king was to write a copy of the law, keep it with him, and read it all the days of his life so that he might fear God, keep his commands, and continue long in the kingdom. In this way, the king was to serve as an example and lead the people in righteousness.[7]

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[5] Patrick D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, Jr., JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 87, 89.

[6] For example, see Miller, "Beginning," 92; and Robert Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter*, HBM, ed. David J. A. Clines, J. Cheryl Exum, and Keith W. Whitelam (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013).

[7] Miller was among the first in recent times to see the connection between Deut 17:18–20 and Ps 1:2; see Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress, 1986), 84; and Miller,

Psalms 1-2 not only introduce the characters but also set the scene for the rest of the Psalter. The ensuing narrative can be understood as the interactions between these four characters.[8] The Psalter tells the story about the sovereign Yahweh and his choice to rule through an earthly king. It is the story of the struggle between the anointed king(s) and the rulers/peoples who rebel and fight against him. It is a conflict between the righteous and the wicked. And it is the story of Yahweh's ultimate victory and the establishment of his kingdom. Thus, Psalms 1-2, as an introduction, presents the characters, the settings, and the conflict that follows in the rest of the book. And it has already declared the end.

The Anonymous King

The man/king of the Psalter's introduction is described in many ways: a man who delights in and meditates on the law, whose way is characterized by righteousness; a king; the anointed; the Son of Yahweh; and ruler over the nations. Amidst the myriad of titles and descriptors, there is one striking omission: the king is anonymous. This paper argues that this initial anonymity is no mere editorial oversight but a purposeful distancing from David as it reflects the psalm's forward-looking function in the final shape of the Psalter.

For various reasons, Psalm 2 is often assumed to be Davidic: 1) David is the most famous of Israel's kings; 2) David features prominently in the Psalms; 3) Books I-II center around David as the Lord's anointed king; and 4) 2 Samuel 7 speaks of God's established covenant with David in language similar to that found in Psalm 2. However, there is good reasons to postpone this immediate connection. First, Psalm 2 employs generic language of an anointed king and makes no explicit reference to David.[9] Second, David, though prominent, is not the only anointed king in the Psalms. Third, while Books I-II are unmistakably Davidic, Psalm 2 bears no superscription and so stands in stark contrast to the following Davidic collection (Pss 3–41).[10] Fourth, there is no prior mention of David to carry forward; that is, since

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"Beginning," 91. For a fuller treatment, see Jamie Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, SBLABS 17 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

[8] While the Psalter contains a variety of upright characters (priests, prophets, musicians, and various named individuals), these belong to the broad category of the righteous.

[9] Accordingly, allusions to 2 Samuel 7 can be understood more as highlighting the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his anointed king than with an exclusively Davidic identification.

[10] Goldingay, for example, notes that no particular king is named in Psalm 2 but does not explore its implications; see John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Vol 1: Psalms 1-41, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 25. Still, he argues that "the psalm is *lědāwid* ("for David" or "David's"), even though it does not say so"; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 96.

Psalms 1 and 2 are without superscription, present an anonymous man/king, and are located at the beginning of the Psalms (and even the beginning of the Ketuvim!), there is no previous Davidic designation or identification.[11] As one encounters the introduction, the reader is not introduced to a particular person but to a figure, a position, or a mantle, so to speak. As the narrative unfolds, the reader will see this position held by a handful of individuals. But for the introduction, it remains up to this point anonymous.[12]

Many scholars think that the *Sitz im Leben* of Psalm 2 was the coronation ceremony of a new king and, perhaps, even subsequent anniversaries or enthronement festivals.[13] What is sometimes overlooked, however, is that this view implies that Psalm 2 was given a new context with each successive generation as a new king took the throne. And when there was no longer a monarchy, the psalm was given a new context and a new meaning as part of the introduction to the Psalms as we have received it. While a psalm had an original *Sitz im Leben*, one must now consider its *Sitz im Buch*.[14] In its new context as part of the introduction, Psalm 2 plays a role by instructing the manner in which the reader is to approach and interpret the Psalter. If one is too quick to make the connection between Psalms 1-2 and the David that follows, one may miss the added meaning imbued by the editor in making it an introduction to the whole.

So, what specifically is the role of Psalms 1-2 with respect to the anonymity of the man/king and within its new context as an introduction to the Psalms? Apart from introducing the characters and the setting/conflict for the ensuing narrative, it instills a messianic quality that rings through the Psalter as it points the reader past David

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[11] The echo in Psalm 1 of Deut 17:14–16 provides a link only to an unnamed Deuteronomic king(s).

[12] One may try to argue that early audiences would have immediately seen a Davidic connection. However, from a literary perspective, the character is initially anonymous. Even if one adamantly holds an immediate Davidic identification, one could still apply this paper's proposal that the introduction presents four characters/groups, sets the scene for their interactions, and leaves David behind as it ultimately points to the king to come.

[13] See, for example, Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 32, 35; Jacobson, *Psalms*, NICOT, 65; Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms*, THOTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 44. In fact, most psalms were purposefully generic and designed for re-applicability.

[14] For discussion and arguments that psalms have added meaning in a new context, see Wilson, *Editing*, 1-121. Wilson builds an argument on the basis of Sumerian Temple Hymns, the Catalogues of Hymnic Incipits, and the Qumran Psalm manuscripts. See also J. Glen Taylor, "Psalms 1 and 2: A Gateway Into The Psalter and Messianic Images For the Restoration of David's Dynasty," in *Interpreting the Psalms For Teaching and Preaching,* ed. Herbert W. Bateman and D. Brent Sandy (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2010), 50-53.

and subsequent kings and to a future, final king.[15] This position is supported by many factors. For one, the final form of the MT Psalter was edited in a time when Israel had no king. Jacobson reflects, "Why was [Ps 2] preserved [after the end of the monarchy] and then placed as part of the introduction to the Psalter? Perhaps simply to indicate that the Psalter is to be read as a book of prophecy concerning God's expected Messiah."[16] Mays writes, "When there were no longer reigning kings in Israel, the psalms written for use in royal ceremonies were re-read as divine promises and prophecies of a future messiah."[17] In the absence of a king, it fostered hope in one to come.

Additionally, the promises and reign described in Psalms 1-2 were unfulfilled. The anonymous man in Psalm 1, already linked to the king by virtue of its resonance with Deut 17:18-20, is a royal figure described as walking righteously, meditating on the law, and prospering in all that he does, whom no king, including David, had yet fulfilled. In fact, there is an interesting contrast between the complete prosperity of the man in Psalm 1 and the laments that characterize the early Davidic collections. And there was no king in Israel's history whose reign could be described in the fullness of Psalm 2, not to mention the fact that the monarchy became defunct. The fact that all the kings sinned and the monarchy failed pushes the reader to look beyond the fallen kings of Israel's past and to one whose righteousness, rule, and success would fulfill the Psalter's introduction.

If the Psalter has an overarching narrative, as is commonly now held, then there is necessarily progression in the narrative as it moves from an introduction, through the psalms, and to its ending. Thus, the ultimate focus of the Psalter, as a narrative, is on its conclusion. This reality highlights how the Psalter is more about the David-to-come than any past king, including David. Moreover, it draws a particular and purposeful connection between the Psalter's introduction and the book's conclusion.

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[15] Some disagree. For example, Wilson interprets Psalm 1 alone as introductory and Psalm 2 as part of Book I. This, in part, contributes to his view of a final sapiential frame for the Psalter as well as his surprising downplaying of the Davidic figure in Book V; see Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," 232-33. Another case is McCann. Because he regards Psalm 2 to introduce the whole psalter and because, like Wilson, he sees Davidic kingship come to a halt at the end of Book III, McCann has seemingly no other option than to radically downplay the royal messianism inherent in Psalm 2 by regarding it instead, unconvincingly, as a psalm that speaks generally only of the rule of God; see J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 41-45 (this observation is owed to a conversation with J. Glen Taylor).

[16] Jacobson, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT, 57.

[17] Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation Commentary (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1994), 11. Similarly, see Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 890.

In sum, Psalm 2 has been lifted from its original/past context(s) and given additional meaning and purpose as part of the introduction to the Psalms. The anonymity of the man/king in Psalms 1-2 does not downplay the importance of David. Rather, by virtue of its anonymity, it highlights its introductory role within the Psalter as well as the role of the king, inviting the reader to share in a larger vision and, as the narrative unfolds, to look beyond David and to hope in the messianic king-to-come presented at the end of the Psalms.

The Narrative of the Psalms

This section presents the general storyline of the Psalms. This will reveal, in part, how the narrative of the Psalter can be understood as the story of the interactions between the four characters presented in the introduction, strengthening the position that Psalms 1-2 constitutes the introduction. More importantly, for the purpose of this paper, the narrative of the Psalms will reveal a particular understanding of the anonymous king of Psalms 1-2; specifically, it points past Israel's kings and to the king-to-come portrayed in Book V.[18]

Books I-II

After the introduction of Psalms 1-2, Book I proper begins with Psalm 3. Immediately, the reader is presented with the first individual who takes the place of

[18] A study with a more strictly narrative-critical methodology could yield interesting results. For example, one could interpret in the Psalter the five-stage concentric design of the pediment structure. Accordingly, Psalms 1-2 constitutes the exposition, where it introduces the characters and the settings of their interactions. Books I-II represent the complication stage, where the constant threat of the wicked and the battered state of the righteous differ from the scene put forward in Psalms 1-2. Book III represents the change stage as it speaks of Israel's sin and the failure of the monarchy. The unraveling stage, largely reflected in Book IV, records the after-effects of the change; namely, the recognition that the Lord reigns and his steadfast love endures. The ending stage, Book V, conveys the re-emergence of the Anointed King and the establishment of God's kingdom over all the earth. Thus, in chiastic fashion, the Psalter ends with a picture reflective, but with development, of the one presented in the introduction. See Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Yael Lotan (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 46-49. Alternatively, see Brueggemann's typology and categorization of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation; Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 3-32.
Debate continues on the extent of the editorial shaping of the Psalter as a whole, of Books I-V individually, and of smaller sections within each book. Many of the significant conversations are noted below. There is room here for further study.

the anointed king; namely, David. David remains the primary figure for Books I and II.[19]

At this early point in the unfolding narrative, there is a striking difference between the reader's expectation of the king based on the introduction of Psalms 1-2 and the presentation of the king in Psalm 3. In Psalm 2, Yahweh laughs at the feeble efforts of the wicked and the king is established with strength to rule over the enemies. But in Psalm 3, David begins with a plea for help (3:1-2). Rather than ruling over his enemies with a rod of iron and dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel (2:9), David laments the abundance of his foes rising up against him (3:1) and appeals to Yahweh to save him (3:7). The presentation of the king in Psalm 3 is not an anomaly but is characteristic of the portrayal of David as king throughout Books I-II. David is constantly assailed by his enemies and cries out to Yahweh for deliverance. Still, this oft-beleaguered king trusts in Yahweh and takes refuge in him. At times, David declares his integrity (e.g., Ps 26). At other times, David is sinful, but repentant (Ps 51).

The last psalm in Book II, Psalm 72, references Solomon in its superscription and closes with the postscript, "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended" (72:20). David's reign is over, and this psalm reads as a prayer of David for his successor, Solomon. Specifically, David is praying for blessing (72:2, 5, 8, 11, 15, 17). In short, David is, in effect, praying that Solomon be like the man/king described in Psalms 1-2. Solomon is next to fill the position of king and the psalm expresses hope in the establishment and endurance of the kingdom.

Book III

Book III begins with Psalm 73 and, while it questions the prosperity of the wicked and the poor state of the righteous, the psalmist resolves to take refuge in God and declares that the wicked will perish. But then in Psalm 74, Israel seems to be identified as the wicked and the psalm speaks of the destruction of the city and the temple.[20] Sinful Israel has fallen.

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[19] For a detailed study of the portrayal of David in these early chapters, see Andrew C. Witt, *A Voice Without End: The Role of David in Psalms 3-14*, JTISup 20 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021).
[20] Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III: Psalms 73–89*, JSOTSup 307 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 36. Ps 81:11-12 indicates that Israel did not listen to the Lord but followed her own counsel. In Psalm 82, God responds and describes the sin of Israel's rulers as judging unjustly and showing partiality (82:2). Ps 79:9 asks God to atone their sins. And many psalms in Book III ask how long God will be angry with them and plea for restoration (see 74:10; 79:5; 80:3, 7, 19; 85:4; 89:46).

Book III ends on a low note with Psalm 89. The psalmist declares that God has rejected his anointed and renounced his covenant, even though God said it would endure. As a result of transgressions, Israel faces the wrath of God, and the psalmist questions God's steadfast love. Israel has no king. What has unfolded in Book III has departed from and left unfulfilled the portrayal of the king in Psalms 1-2 and from the hopeful language in Psalm 72, which closed Book II. Instead of complete devotion to the law of the Lord, there is sin. Instead of ruling over enemies, Israel is overruled. Instead of an everlasting kingdom, Israel's monarchy has come to an end.[21] The attentive reader would note this discrepancy and ponder its resolution.

Book IV

Book IV picks up from the low point that concluded Book III.[22] Because of sin, Israel has encountered the wrath of God and has been exiled. Israel has no king and questions God's covenantal faithfulness. Are they completely rejected and abandoned by God forever? In short, Book IV "focuses the reader to Moses, Torah, and the proper place for Yahweh in the cosmos."[23]

Book IV opens with an authoritative voice, one which predates Israel's monarchy: "A prayer of Moses, the man of God" (90:1). In this psalm, Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel just as he did in the wilderness when Israel faced God's wrath because of their sinfulness.[24] Moses acknowledges Israel's sin (90:7-8), prays that God would teach them to have a heart of wisdom (90:12; see Ps 1), and concludes with a prayer that God would have pity and remember his people (90:13). Psalm 91 is without superscription and can be viewed as the continued voice of Moses.[25] Here, he declares that he will trust in the Lord his refuge (91:2) and that God will deliver and prosper all who take refuge in him (91:14-16; see 1:1-3; 2:12). God's response at the end of Psalm 91 leads to a response of praise in Ps 92.

Next comes a series of *Yahweh malak* ("the Lord reigns") psalms (Pss 93-100).[26] These shift the focus away from Israel's earthly kings to the Lord as their king, who

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[21] For a more detailed look at the narrative progression in Book III, see Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III*.

[22] For a detailed analysis of the narrative of Book IV, see Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, ed. Hemchand Gossai, SBLStBL 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

[23] Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV*, 1.

[24] Wallace draws a connection to the golden calf story in Exodus 32, after which Yahweh was ready to destroy Israel and Moses interceded for them. See Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV*, 18-19.

[25] Wallace argues for the portrayal of Mosaic authorship in Psalm 91 and notes six manuscripts that link Psalms 90 and 91; see Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV*, 23-26.

[26] While not every psalm in this span includes יהוה מלך ("The Lord reigns," 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1), they all speak of God in a ruling/kingly capacity. Psalm 94 conforms the least in this regard;

rules over all the earth forever (see 97:9). Torah connections continue in this section (see 93:5; 94:12; 95:10). Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Yahweh's throne (97:2); he hates evil (97:10), and he will judge (96:13; 98:9). This section concludes with the declaration that the Lord is good, and his steadfast love endures forever (100:5).

The psalmist has travelled a long way from the questioning of the Lord's covenantal love that concluded Book III. The rule of Yahweh and his enduring steadfast love become the basis from which the psalmist can once again petition Yahweh for deliverance and hope in restoration.

Now, for the first time in Book IV, and after the reorientation described above, David is reintroduced. In Psalm 101, David, as an example, offers a prayer declaring his resolve to live blamelessly and abstain from all wickedness (see Ps 1). While David may be speaking as a king in Psalm 101, in Psalm 102, he is presented as "hurting from exile with the nation" and a "fellow sufferer" who cries out in his affliction.[27] In Psalm 103, David presents Torah observance as the answer (103:7, 17-18). Book IV then concludes with hallelujah psalms (Pss 104-6) praising the Lord for his faithfulness, goodness, and steadfast love. After recounting the many times in Israel's history when the Lord relented, remembered his covenant, and delivered Israel (106:6-46), the psalmist concludes Book IV with a plea that God return Israel from exile: "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations" (106:47a).

In sum, God has not failed nor abandoned his covenant. The Lord still reigns, and Israel can take refuge in him. His steadfast love endures, and so, Israel can pray for deliverance and hope in restoration, while being reminded to return to and abide by the Law of the Lord.

Book V

The re-emergence of the king in Book V has led to a variety of interpretations and necessitates more careful consideration. The book opens with praise to God for answering Israel's cry at the close of Book IV to be returned from exile: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in

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however, it does speak of the Lord as the judge of the earth (94:2), and much of the language echoes that of Psalm 2. For similar reasons, some extend the group to include Psalm 100.

[27] Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV*, 67-68.

from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south" (107:1-3). Although Israel has returned from exile, she still has no earthly king.

After the initial psalm, the reader encounters David again in the first of two Davidic collections in Book V (Pss 108-10 and 138-45).[28] Of particular interest in this paper is the portrayal of the king.[29] The language of Psalm 110 strongly echoes that of Psalm 2. However, one striking difference is the new priestly language: "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (110:4b). Wilson argues that after the failure of the Davidic dynasty in Psalm 89 and the emphasis on Yahweh as king in Book IV, Book V's reintroduction of the Davidic-king figure relegates the king to a priestly role and an example of Torah-observance. "Contrary to all expectation, the one who is commissioned here is *priest* and not *king!*"[30] However, Wilson's position stems from a misinterpretation of Psalm 110 and the portrayal of David in Book V as a whole.[31] In contrast to Wilson's reduction, Vaillancourt, far more convincingly, argues for an expanded and multifaceted role of the kingly figure in Psalm 110: he is presented as a human royal figure who reigns; a cosmic figure whose throne is to the right of Yahweh; a protected figure who experiences Yahweh working for him; a conquering figure who acts in the strength of Yahweh to defeat his enemies (vv. 2, 3, 7); a priestly figure in the manner of Melchizedek (v. 4); and a figure who may exhibit some possible resonances with a Mosaic prophet.[32] Thus, the Davidic figure is not just represented as a priest, but also as a ruling king who reigns forever.[33]

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[28] Wallace notes the similarities to the Davidic material in Books I-II; see Robert E. Wallace, "Gerald Wilson and the Characterization of David in Book 5 of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship,* ed. Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, AIL (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2014), 199-200.

[29] For an overview of current interpretations of the portrayal of the Davidic figure in Book V, see Ian J. Vaillancourt, *The Multifaceted Saviour of Psalms 110 and 118: A Canonical Exegesis*, HBM 86 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2019), 11-72.

[30] Gerald H. Wilson, "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, VTSup 99 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 399. Wilson argues that Yahweh assumes the role of enduring kingship and is the one who rules over the enemies and that the verb רדה "to rule" in 110:2 is ambiguous and does not necessarily mean kingship; see Wilson, "King, Messiah," 398-400 (italics mine). For a similar view, see J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter: Psalms in Their Literary Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms,* ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 360-61.

[31] For a response to Wilson, see Wallace, "Characterization of David," 193-208.

[32] Vaillancourt, *Multifaceted Saviour*, 127-28. For a detailed discussion, see pages 85-129.

[33] In this light, Belcher argues that the best interpretation of this psalm is as "a direct prediction of the Messiah by David himself"; see Richard P. Belcher, Jr., *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from all the Psalms* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2006), 143-49. See Matt 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Hebrews 7.

Following the reaffirmation of Israel's king in Psalm 110, Psalms 111-18 can be viewed as praising God in expectation of the reestablishment of the kingdom in this David-to-come figure. Since God's steadfast love is forever, his covenant still stands; this forms the basis for Israel's messianic expectations. Psalm 118 portrays the figure of salvation as royal, a new David, and a new Mosaic prophet.[34] With strong echoes to Psalm 1, Psalm 119 depicts the future king as the "exemplary Torah student."[35] Concerning Psalms 120-137, Snearly writes, Zion re-emerges as a place of prominence, the place from which blessing flows ... and the place from which Yahweh's anointed king reigns.... The purpose of this emphasis on Zion in Psalms 120-137 is to reorient the reader's attention back to the place where the royal promises will be fulfilled.[36] Psalm 132 recalls the Lord's covenant: "The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: 'One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne'" (132:11).[37] Further, the Lord declares that he will raise up a descendant of David: "There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed" (132:17).[38] Once again, Book V exhibits clear messianic expectations on the basis of God's faithfulness to his covenant.[39]

Book V proper concludes with a final Davidic collection: Psalms 138-45.[40] In this group of psalms, the reader sees the David-to-come figure in conflict with the wicked and petitioning Yahweh for deliverance. Yahweh answers and establishes him. Yahweh strengthens him in battle and delivers his enemies: The Lord "trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle ... who subdues peoples under me" (144:1-2). Consequently, the righteous are blessed and the wicked are destroyed: "Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord!" (144:15b), and "The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy" (145:20; see 1:6; 2:12). This closing scene of Book V echoes the depiction in Psalms 1-2: Yahweh is sovereign over everything; he rules through his appointed king; those who take refuge in him are blessed; and the wicked will perish. As Psalms 1 and 2 conclude with the blessing/prosperity of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked, so does Ps

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[34] Vaillancourt, *Multifaceted Saviour*, 130-76. This is supported by the many connections between Psalm 119 and Psalm 1 as well as Deut 17:14-20. See also Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms*, 186-93.
[35] Michael K. Snearly, *The Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter*, LHBOTS 624 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 137-39.
[36] Snearly, *The Return of the King*, 154.
[37] Wilson rejects a messianic interpretation of Psalm 132 and argues that it speaks not of an enduring Davidic dynasty, but of Yahweh's rule: "Yahweh's declaration of *self-enthronement* has the effect of undermining the Davidic hopes and replacing them with his own kingship"; see Wilson, "King, Messiah," 397.
[38] Wilson admits the eschatological tones of this Davidic restoration but argues that this is ambiguous and just as easily could refer to something priestly rather than kingly; see Wilson, "King, Messiah," 397-98.
[39] For further discussion, see Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms*, 149-53.
[40] That is, apart from Psalms 146-50, which serve as a final conclusion to the entire Psalter.

145 in verse 20.[41] The sole verse after Ps 145:20 is a declaration of praise that transitions to the grand conclusion of praise in Psalms 146-50.

The Hallelujah Psalms

After the conclusion of Psalm 145, the Psalter closes with five psalms (Pss 146-50), each beginning and finishing with the command to "Praise the Lord." Snearly writes, "What is this section climactically praising? The storyline of the Psalter—the story of a heavenly king and his earthly representative who form a people in the midst of a hostile world and extend their kingdom over the unruly nations."[42] This grand picture of praise that concludes the Psalms encompasses not only all people and all rulers (148:11) but also every living thing (145:21; 150:6) and, indeed, the entire cosmos itself (148:3-4). The picture is both universal and eschatological.[43]

In conjunction with this eschatological picture, messianic expectation is clear. Ps 148:1-13—the center of the Psalter's five-psalm conclusion—consists of far-reaching calls to praise before the last line of the psalm contains the reason for the summons: "He has raised up a horn for his people" (148:14). This can be seen as a response specifically to Yahweh's promise to raise up a horn for David in Ps 132:17 and generally to Book V as a whole with its portrayal of the messiah to come. The Psalter thus concludes with praise in response to this culminative, messianic, eschatological vision.

Who Needs a King?

Of course, there are other views regarding the narrative progression in the Psalms that either reduce or eliminate the future king presented in Book V. Wilson's

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[41] Snearly argues that "the body of the Psalter ends the way it started: with a king and his kingdom, ruled by his appointed vice-regent"; see Snearly, *The Return of the King*, 155. The two closing psalms present a royal psalm with David as king (Ps 144) and a psalm depicting Yahweh as king (Ps 145). These complementary pictures echo Psalm 2 and portray Yahweh ruling through this anointed king, a depiction presented at both ends of the Psalter; see David M. Howard Jr., "The Psalms and Current Study," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches,* ed. David G. Firth and Philip Johnston (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2005), 26-27.

[42] Snearly, *The Return of the King*, 181.

[43] While this paper focuses on the messianic character, the Psalter also presents a corresponding eschatological vision. For further discussion, see Mitchell, who bases his eschatological interpretation on five pillars: 1) royal psalms; 2) some psalms are eschatological or ultimate in tone; 3) the authors identified in the superscriptions were regarded as prophets; 4) dominating messianic expectations in second-temple history and literature; and 5) eschatological interpretations as the norm from biblical times to the nineteenth-century; see David C. Mitchell, "Lord Remember David: G. H. Wilson and the Message of the Psalter," *VT* 56 (2006), 528-29. See also, David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1997).

relegating of the Davidic, kingly figure to a priestly role in favour of the reign of the Lord has been mentioned above, and so has McCann's downplaying of the Psalter's messianic thrust. A similar approach proposes democratization. This view holds that promises that originally referred to the king have been transferred to the people, who carry out the function of the king. Proponents of this view often point to how Psalm 149 echoes Psalm 2 but seems to ascribe the kingly duties to the righteous instead. Goldingay writes,

> Yhwh's covenant with David seems to be suspended; there is no David on the throne. So what is to happen to Yhwh's commitment to David? Yhwh's answer is that it is fulfilled for the people as a whole ... The end of the monarchy makes possible a reversion to Yhwh's original intent, before Israel thought up the idea of kings and distanced itself from Yhwh ... Now the people themselves will take over that position.[44]

This view, however, has some serious shortcomings. First, it incorrectly sees the Davidic covenant as failed in Psalm 89. After Psalm 89, the narrative continues and affirms that Yahweh reigns and declares that his steadfast love endures; this becomes the basis for hope of restoration, which includes the reestablishment of the messianic figure.[45] Yahweh himself affirms the enduring nature of the king (Ps 110) and promises to raise up a horn for David (132:17). Israel's faithlessness led to doubt regarding God's promises and of the Davidic covenant, but God reminded them that his steadfast love endures forever.

Snearly argues that the democratization theory pits the king and the righteous people against each other and that an interpretation that sees the king and the people working together is much more plausible and consistent.[46] Just as the king's rule over the nations is harmonious with Yahweh's rule and the two are even sometimes conflated, so the ascription to the righteous in Psalm 149 in no ways needs to be interpreted as contradictory to the rule of the Messiah. Additionally, Snearly points out that the final form of the Psalms was edited in a messianic milieu—in a time when Israel had no king. At the end of his book, Snearly compares his conclusions

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[44] Goldingay, *Psalms*, 73. See also Erich Zenger, "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107–145," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 77–102; and McCann, "The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter," 360-61.

[45] Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 87. See also Cole, who argues for a merging and synonymity between the reign of David in Book III and of Yahweh in Book IV; see Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III*, 228, 235.

[46] Snearly, *The Return of the King*, 183-84.

with the portrayal of David in other literature to show that his interpretation of Book V is consistent.[47] He concludes, "Future hope was tied to David and his offspring."[48]

Lastly, the democratization theory is incompatible with the Christological conclusions of the New Testament, which attest to a messianic rather than a democratic impetus in Israel at the time. In other words, on a democratic understanding, there would have been no expectation of a Messiah for Jesus to fulfil in the New Testament or for the Qumran community to expect in either a priestly or royal form.

In sum, non-messianic interpretations are not able to adequately account for these factors and are left wanting. The Psalter, as an edited whole, is unmistakably messianic.

A Note Regarding Christology

While not the direct the focus of the paper, a brief note concerning Christology is appropriate. In short, the New Testament identifies Jesus as the anointed king that the Psalms anticipated. The New Testament begins with, "the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David" (Matt 1:1). Echoing the language of Psalm 2, Jesus is identified as the Son of God at his baptism (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22), at his transfiguration (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8), in his teaching (John 10:36), at his death (Mark 15:39), in his resurrection (Acts 13:30-33), and by those who wrote letters after his ascension (Heb 1:5; 5:5).[49] Jesus came declaring the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 4:17) and, having received all authority in heaven and on earth, he commissioned the church (Matt 28:18-20).[50] Jesus also declared that he was the fulfillment of Scripture, including the Psalms (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). Most obviously, Jesus is expressly and repeatedly identified as the Christ; that is, the Messiah or the Anointed One (see Ps 2:2).

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[47] Snearly, *The Return of the King*, 187-95. Snearly looks at texts from the Hebrew Bible (Hos 3:5; Ezek 34:23-24; Amos 9:11; Jer 23:5; 1 Chron 22:10; 2 Chron 6:42; 13:5, 8; 21:7), Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, and the New Testament.

[48] Snearly, *The Return of the King*, 5. Similarly, Vaillancourt argues that the period of the Psalter's editorial activity was a time "characterized by eschatological hope"; see Ian J. Vaillancourt, "Formed in the Crucible of Messianic Angst: The Eschatological Shape of the Hebrew Psalter's Final Form," *SBET* 31.2 (2013), 140. Vaillancourt also points to how this eschatological hope was reflected in the LXX and at Qumran; see Vaillancourt, "Formed in the Crucible of Messianic Angst," 140-41.

[49] See James Luther Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 108-16.

[50] This can also serve as a further argument against the democratization theory. While he commissions, he remains their king. The two groups are not at odds with one another.

Not only is Jesus the Anointed One and Son of God from Psalm 2, he is also the man of Psalm 1 and the ideal king of Deut 17:18-20, to which Psalms 1-2 alludes.[51] He is a wisdom figure/teacher and a giver of beatitudes (see Matt 5-7). He delights in the law of the Lord and is the true example for all to follow, leading God's people into righteousness.

This Christological reading is not dependent on reading Christ back into the Psalms but a recognition of Jesus as the Anointed One that the Psalter purposefully and emphatically anticipated. The anonymous figure portrayed in Psalms 1-2, which proved too great for any of Israel's kings to attain, points toward a future king further described in Book V, who would come, rule, lead the people in righteousness, and establish the Kingdom of God. The correspondence between Jesus and the royal figure ultimately anticipated in the Psalter is unmistakable.

Conclusion

As an introduction to the Psalter, Psalms 1-2 presents four characters and sets the scene for their interactions in the ensuing narrative. Though Psalm 2 may have been solely Davidic at one point before it was applied to successive kings, its position in the introduction to the Psalter results in a new context with added meaning and purpose. The anonymity of the royal figure in Psalms 1-2 encourages the reader to redirect one's focus from a past king(s) toward a future messianic figure, a descendant of David through whom God would establish his reign over all the nations. This is the picture made clearer in Book V and celebrated in the closing of the Psalter. In this way, Psalms 1-2 forms the foundation for a messianic, eschatological reading of the Psalter, pointing to the king to come.

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[51] Jesus's connection with the man/king of Psalms 1-2 may also be supported by the account of his transfiguration, in which Moses and Elijah accompany him (Matt 17:1-13 // Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36). In connection with the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible, it is possible to see Moses as representative of the Law, Elijah as representative of the Prophets, and Jesus as representative of the Writings, which begins, in many accounts, with the Psalter. And as this paper argues, the Psalter opens with the man/king of its introduction and points to the David-to-come. Although, this is not to diminish the connections between the transfiguration, Mt. Sinai, and Jesus as the prophet like Moses (see Deut 18:15-19).

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