

# Digging Deeper

*Appendixes for*

TREASURING

THE

PSALMS

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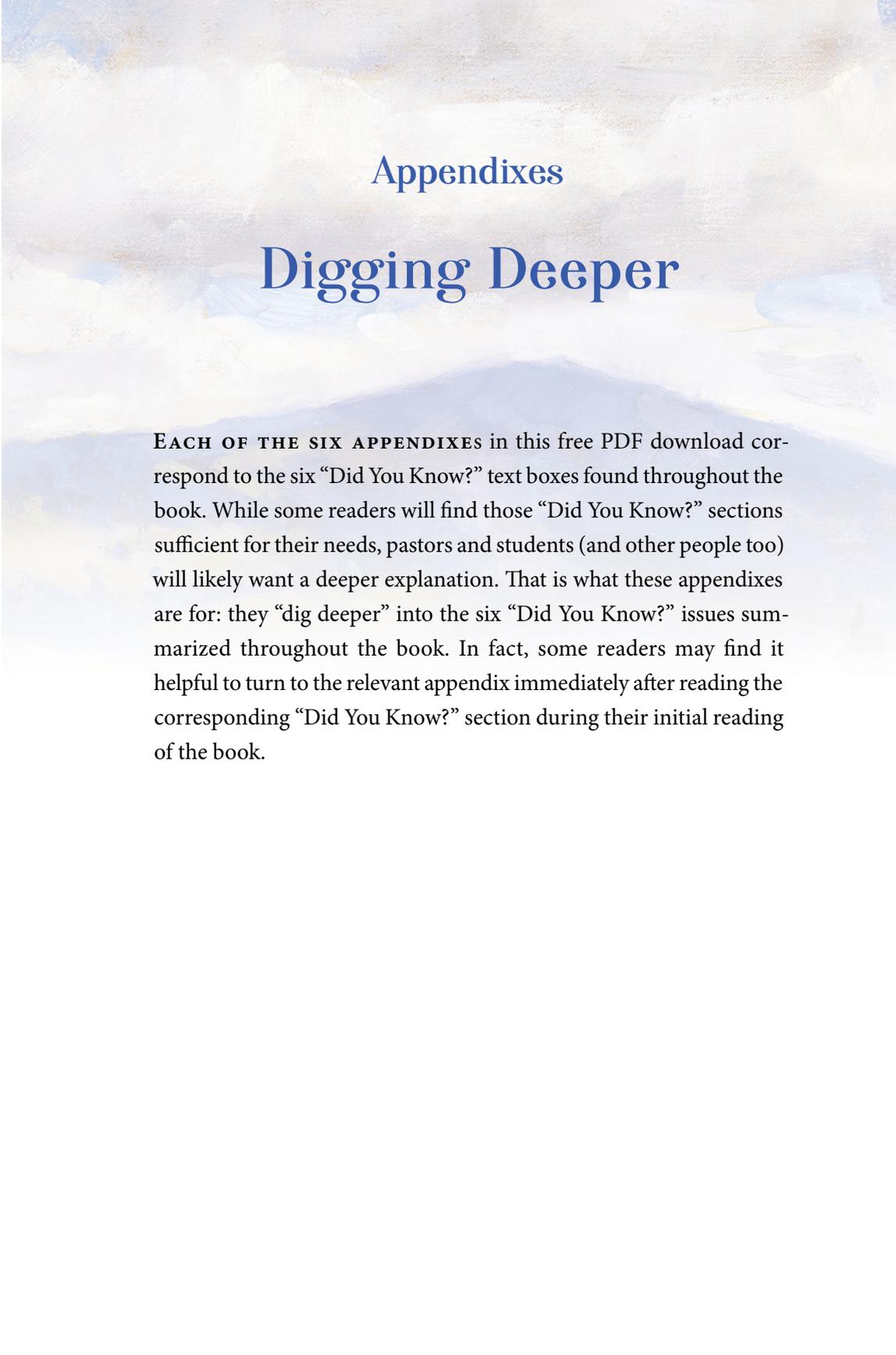
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The background of the page features a soft, painterly illustration of a mountain range. The mountains are rendered in shades of light blue and white, with a hazy, atmospheric quality. Above the mountains, the sky is filled with soft, white and light blue clouds, suggesting a bright, slightly overcast day. The overall style is gentle and serene, typical of a religious or educational publication.

## Appendixes

# Digging Deeper

**EACH OF THE SIX APPENDIXES** in this free PDF download correspond to the six “Did You Know?” text boxes found throughout the book. While some readers will find those “Did You Know?” sections sufficient for their needs, pastors and students (and other people too) will likely want a deeper explanation. That is what these appendixes are for: they “dig deeper” into the six “Did You Know?” issues summarized throughout the book. In fact, some readers may find it helpful to turn to the relevant appendix immediately after reading the corresponding “Did You Know?” section during their initial reading of the book.

## Appendix A

# Digging Deeper

### THE CANONICAL APPROACH TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS THROUGH TWO THOUSAND YEARS OF CHURCH HISTORY

IN THE “DID YOU KNOW” SECTION of chapter one, I summarized the history of reading the Psalms as a purposefully shaped book. In this appendix, we will dig deeper into this important issue.

After first learning about approaching the Psalms as a purposefully shaped book, perceptive readers may want to ask an important question: how *new* is this approach? If a person is asking this question about the latest technological gadget, newer is typically better. But if a person is asking this question about an approach to interpreting the Bible, the opposite may be the case. By God’s grace, we do not have a faith that is reinvented in every generation of the saints. Instead, we have a faith that was *once for all* handed down to the saints. Therefore, we should *usually* be suspicious of any interpretation of a biblical text, or approach to interpreting in general, that has never been attempted in the two-thousand-year history of the Christian church. This is one reason the study of church history and historical theology are mandatory in most seminary programs.

As we consider the Psalms as an intentionally shaped book, we may be tempted to think that this approach is fairly new. And in one sense, it is. The turn toward a “canonical” approach to biblical interpretation

in general came with the work of a Yale scholar named Brevard Childs (1923-2007). Childs was an influential scholar whose work focused on the Bible as we now have it, the state that he referred to as its “final form.”<sup>1</sup> Instead of attempting to reconstruct the process of writing and compiling the biblical manuscripts, Childs believed that the final form represented the culmination of this process. In his view, since this final form of the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) has been the authoritative Scriptures of Christians (and Jews) for thousands of years, interpreters should take that final form seriously. For evangelical Christians, this may not sound revolutionary. They might ask, “Hasn’t the church been interpreting the Bible this way for its entire history?” Although this has been true of Christians for two thousand years, broader biblical scholarship had largely moved away from interpreting the Bible as a completed book for the few hundred years leading up to Childs.

As Brevard Childs approached the book of Psalms in particular, he advocated for this final form reading. Although he recognized that the various psalms were originally written independently of one another, in a 1976 article Childs argued that they had been intentionally shaped into a collection, and that that collection communicated a message that was greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>2</sup> However, it was Gerald H. Wilson (1945-2005)—a student of Childs at Yale—who would expand on Childs’s article-length work and write his doctoral dissertation on the canonical approach to the book of Psalms.<sup>3</sup> Like Childs before him, Wilson believed that the individual psalms were intentionally gathered into a well-ordered book that communicated an important message. Since the 1985 publication of Wilson’s doctoral

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<sup>1</sup>His most important work in this regard was: Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

<sup>2</sup>His first work in this regard was Brevard S. Childs, “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” in *Magnalia Dei: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 377-88. The thinking in this article was further refined in his Psalms chapter in Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 504-25.

<sup>3</sup>Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

dissertation, Psalms scholars have focused much attention on insights that can be gained from studying the structure and message of the book as a whole—its canonical shape.

At first glance, this seems to confirm our suspicions. Are we to mark 1976 (Childs) or 1985 (Wilson) as the beginning of a study of the Psalms as a purposefully shaped book? On the contrary, when we look at the sweep of church history, we find numerous examples of scholars who approached the book of Psalms in a similar manner. Although Childs and Wilson were responsible for the *more recent* scholarly focus on studying the Psalms as a book, they were simply correcting an impulse that had taken hold of academic Psalms scholarship for the previous two hundred years of critical biblical scholarship and *resumed* the study of the Psalms as a book.

The short version of the story is that for the few hundred years leading up to Childs and Wilson, the impulse in biblical studies was to atomize the text of Scripture, looking at smaller and smaller portions, without reference to a coherent whole. Along with this, secular biblical scholars focused on separating out what they saw as the original sources that were stitched together to produce the Bible as we now have it. This was a highly theoretical discipline, and the result was that the interpretation of the Bible in its current form was not the focus. In summary, the goal of biblical interpretation during that period was to pull the Bible apart and to “discover” the “more pure earlier form” of the material, as it appeared *before* its present state. It was only in recent decades that broader biblical scholarship witnessed various “corrective” approaches that have sought to read the entire Bible as an intentionally shaped collection that was put together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The canonical shape of the book of Psalms has been one such movement.

Up to this point, our survey of the history of reading the Psalms

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, there were many Christians (and even academics) throughout these few hundred years who continued to read the Bible as the Holy Spirit-inspired Word of God. These observations relate to the dominant approach in academia in particular.

has been working backward. We have noticed that from 1976 to present, it has been increasingly common for biblical scholars to read the Psalms as an intentionally shaped book. We have also seen that for the few hundred years prior to this period, it was common for the entire Bible—including the book of Psalms—to be read as a hodgepodge of material that did not fit together well. But as we step back even further and look at the broader sweep of church history, we find numerous influential scholars who believed that significant insights come from a study of the way the various psalms fit together into the larger book. These scholars held to this in varying degrees, but as we trace a bit of its history, we will see that Childs and Wilson did not introduce something completely new into Psalms studies.

An initial hint at this approach came from Augustine (AD 354-430), who asserted that “the arrangement of the Psalms, which seems to me to contain a secret of great mystery, has not yet been revealed to me.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, even if Augustine was not sure of its significance, he recognized that there was something to the shape of the book of Psalms that deserved closer attention. In fact, Cassiodorus (AD 490-583) is another example of an early interpreter who believed this approach to be important and fruitful.<sup>6</sup> Into the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225-1274) also argued for a structural logic in the book of Psalms.<sup>7</sup>

Closer to our own day is the work of Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890), whose commentary paid attention to key word links between adjoining psalms.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he believed that the book of Psalms as a whole bore the stamp of an “ordering spirit.”<sup>9</sup> On a more popular level,

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<sup>5</sup>As cited in Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Adele Berlin, SBLABS 17 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 1.

<sup>6</sup>This remark was made to me by Christopher Seitz, personal communication.

<sup>7</sup>This remark was made to me by Christopher Seitz, personal communication.

<sup>8</sup>See Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 3 vols., trans. James Martin, Keil and Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>9</sup>As cited in Erich Zenger, “Psalmexegese und Psalterexegese: Eine Porschungsskizze,” in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 29.

Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910) chose to open his exposition of the book of Psalms with an entry on Psalms 1:1 and 150:6, the first and last verses of the book. He wrote: “It is not by accident that they stand where they do, the first and last verses of the whole collection, enclosing all, as it were, within a golden ring, and bending round to meet each other.”<sup>10</sup> Evidently, this nineteenth-century Baptist also read the Psalms as a book, with the twin themes of blessedness and praise purposefully enclosing the entire collection.

As we step back and survey the landscape, it would seem as though the more recent “pioneering” work of Childs and Wilson was not so pioneering after all. In fact, their work seems to have *resumed* an impulse that can be detected in numerous prominent voices throughout church history. The most pioneering aspect of their work, perhaps, was that it came out of the university (Yale). While it was very difficult for a conservative Christian to complete a university-based Old Testament PhD prior to Childs, this has been much more possible since his paradigm-shifting work.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, while scholars in the immediate few hundred years prior to Childs and Wilson tended to emphasize the atomization of psalms or even portions of psalms, without relation to their place in the collection, the work of these two scholars served to re-awaken a movement that has had numerous proponents over the previous two thousand years of church history. Although new insights have been gleaned over the past few decades, the approach I am advocating—of reading the Psalms as an intentionally shaped book—is far from new.

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<sup>10</sup>Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, vol. 4: Psalms*, Accordance electronic edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1932), n.p.

<sup>11</sup>In a reflection on the scholarly literature on book of Isaiah, Paul R. House notes that twentieth century shifts in interpretive approaches have made “theological dialogue between differing camps more possible. At this point critical and conservative scholars alike are dealing with texts as they have been received into the Hebrew canon.” Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 273.

# Appendix B

## Digging Deeper

### PSALM SUPERSCRPTIONS THROUGH THE CENTURIES

IN THE FIRST “DID YOU KNOW” SECTION of chapter two, we briefly surveyed the way the psalm superscriptions have been viewed throughout the history of the Christian church. In this appendix we will dig deeper into this question and survey the material in a more thorough manner.<sup>1</sup>

As we dive into our study of psalm superscriptions, we can begin with two important observations. First, superscriptions appear in every ancient Psalms manuscript we possess. This includes the book of Psalms from the Greek translation of the Old Testament—known as the Septuagint (LXX)—which was likely completed around 300 BC. This also includes the forty-five Psalms manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls,<sup>2</sup> which were copied during the few centuries prior to and after the birth of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For further study on this topic, written in a slightly more academic manner, see Ian J. Vailancourt, “Reading Psalm Superscriptions Through the Centuries,” *Themelios* (forthcoming, 2023).

<sup>2</sup>This number includes the scrolls found in Qumran proper, as well as the surrounding vicinity. See Peter Flint, “The Contribution of Gerald Wilson Toward Understanding the Book of Psalms in Light of the Psalms Scrolls,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, edited by Nancy deClaissé-Walford, 209-30, *Ancient Israel and Its Literature* 20 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 209.

<sup>3</sup>Although archaeologists have been able to date when these manuscripts were copied, they are less sure when the “mother text” from which they were copied originated.

Our next chronological stop is the New Testament period: when the authors of the New Testament quote a psalm, they often appeal to its superscription for information (e.g., “For David says,” Acts 2:25-28, citing Ps 16:8-11). As we continue to move forward through church history, Jewish manuscripts from the first century AD and beyond consistently included the superscriptions in their Psalms manuscripts. In appendix C we will notice some textual differences between these various manuscripts, but for now we can simply observe that every single ancient Psalms scroll included the superscriptions.

Second, we may be surprised to learn that superscriptions appeared in the (non-canonical) poetic material of Israel *and* her neighbors. In fact, superscriptions and postscripts (information at the end of a work) were well-known in the ancient world, from Mesopotamia to Egypt to Rome.<sup>4</sup> In the book of Psalms as it appears in the Hebrew Old Testament, only twenty-four out of 150 psalms have no superscription, and an additional ten are only introduced by a cry of “hallelujah.” This means that one hundred and twenty-six of the psalms appear with some sort of heading.<sup>5</sup> So the first thing we learn is that assigning superscriptions to poems was a common practice among Israel’s neighbors, and that the vast majority of the psalms in the book of Psalms have superscriptions.

It may also surprise us that until the past few hundred years, the vast majority of Christian and Jewish scholars believed that the psalm superscriptions provided definitive information about the origin of the various psalms.<sup>6</sup> Consider the words of Jesus from Luke 20:42-43: “For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” According to Jesus, then, Psalm 110 was written by David. Where did

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<sup>4</sup>See Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms, Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 75.

<sup>5</sup>See Wilson, *Psalms, Volume 1*, 78.

<sup>6</sup>See Willem VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 27.

he get this information? If we turn to Psalm 110 in our English Bibles, we will find the following superscription: “Of David. A Psalm.” In other words, Jesus took the superscription for Psalm 110 seriously, and according to Samuel Terrien, so did the Jewish Rabbis from a similar time period.<sup>7</sup>

Moving on from the first century, we find that the vast majority of early Christians interpreted each psalm in light of the information found in its superscription. When Jerome (AD 340-420) was translating the Bible into the language of the people (Latin), he included the superscriptions in his work. And his work was the dominant Bible of the church for over one thousand years. If we were to read Gregory of Nyssa (AD 335-395), Augustine (AD 354-430), or Theodoret of Cyrus (AD 393-458), Thomas Aquinas (AD 1224-1274), Martin Luther (AD 1483-1546), John Calvin (AD 1509-1564), C. H. Spurgeon (AD 1834-1892), and the vast majority of biblical interpreters in-between, the psalm superscriptions figured prominently in interpretation.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Gregory of Nyssa believed that the theological essence and purpose of the Psalms was indicated by their superscriptions.<sup>9</sup> In light of this conviction, he wrote an entire book on the superscriptions in AD 376-378.<sup>10</sup>

So far, we have hinted at something, but now we need to explicitly say it: the most significant impact of interpreting each psalm through

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<sup>7</sup>See Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 10-11.

<sup>8</sup>A notable exception to this trend is Theodore of Mopseustia (AD 350-428), who believed the superscriptions were later additions. Therefore, “they held almost no importance for him in his exegesis.” William Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 83.

<sup>9</sup>See Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, ed. Casimir McCambley (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup>See David L. Balás, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms: Introduction, Translation and Notes,” *Church History* 66, no. 3 (1997): 545. Balás describes the book as a whole: “part 1 treats the aim (skopos) of the Psalter (chapters 1-4) and its division into five sections (chapters 5-9), part 2 treats first the inscriptions of the Psalms (chapters 1-9), with an excursus on the meaning of diapsalma (chapter 10), and then the order of the Psalms (chapters 11-16), a problem raised by the divergence of this order from the historical sequence of events, and ends abruptly with Psalm 58.” Balás, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms,” 545.

the lens of its superscription is in determining its author. Since seventy-three of the psalms bear “Of David” (*ledavid* [לְדָוִד]) as part of their superscription, the vast majority of interpreters through the ages have taken this as essential information that will help us interpret the psalm correctly. This also extends to the thirteen so-called historical superscriptions, which include a historical notice about the occasion for the psalm’s composition. Perhaps the best-known of these is Psalm 51. While our English Bibles begin verse 1 with “Have mercy on me, O God,” in Hebrew this is how *verse 3* begins. In Hebrew, *verses 1 and 2* of Psalm 51 read as follows: “1. For the director of music. A psalm of David. 2. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.” And as, for example, Thomas Aquinas (AD 1224-1274) unpacked Psalm 51, he did so through the lens of this essential material:

This story is contained expressly in Chapters 11 and 12 of 2 Samuel. When David was in prosperity, he saw a woman bathing herself and he greatly desired her and caused the death of her husband. And this was displeasing to God and the prophet Nathan was sent to him and brought him back to hatred for his sin, under the image of a lost sheep. And David said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And the sin was forgiven him. And this is the matter of this Psalm, namely, the forgiveness of sins. . . . He made this Psalm for his very own account: in which he shows his fault, which he made manifest to the world. 2 Samuel 12, “For thou didst it secretly, but I will make this thing manifest.” . . . the reason for this manifestation is divine mercy.<sup>11</sup>

So for Aquinas and the majority of interpreters before him, the superscription was the lens through which each psalm was to be read.

And then it changed. By the mid-1800s interpreting the psalms in light of their superscriptions was all but abandoned by academic

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Aquinas, “Commentary on Psalm 8,” n.d., <http://josephkenny.joyeurs.com/CDtexts/PsalmsAquinas/ThoPs50H51.htm>.

biblical interpreters, because they were now viewed as “late, inauthentic, and insignificant.”<sup>12</sup> Although the 1842 Psalms commentary by Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802-1869) took the superscriptions seriously, and although prominent pastors such as C. H. Spurgeon would continue reading the psalms in light of their superscriptions, this period witnessed a shift in the majority opinion.

As a result of this scholarly shift, massive changes occurred in the way most interpreters—Christians and non-Christians—received the psalm superscriptions. For example, it was suggested that “Of David” (*ledavid* [לְדָוִד])—a term that had most often been interpreted to mean “authorship of David” (including by the New Testament authors)—was now taken to mean “concerning David,” or something similar.<sup>13</sup> In fact, others argued that this term had a wide variety of interpretive possibilities, but authorship was low on the list. By way of another example, beginning in this period the thirteen “historical superscriptions” (e.g., Ps 51) were not considered to be authentic, and were believed to have been added much later.

Over the years, there have been many responses to this massive shift. Brevard S. Childs, for example, was very much a product of this new “Enlightenment” way of interpreting the Bible. However, he was also a Christian, and as we saw in a previous appendix, he believed that the final form of God’s Word had priority in a culminating way. For Childs, then, the superscriptions were late additions, but they also reflected what the later editors believed.<sup>14</sup> Although he did not believe they represented the actual historical details, he did suggest that the later editors understood them this way. He also pointed out that since the “historical superscriptions” have “Of David” attached to them, it seems clear that “authorship by David” was meant by this

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<sup>12</sup>See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 509.

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, Léopold Sabourin, *The Psalms, Their Origin and Meaning* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969), 1:13.

<sup>14</sup>See Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 520.

term. Along with Gerald H. Wilson, Childs believed that the superscriptions were progressively added over time, and although not a part of the original, they are extremely significant for their interpretive value. For example, Wilson argued that the musical terms denoted a psalm's genre. Also important, the superscriptions were seen as an organizing principle for a well-ordered book of Psalms, as well as the lens through which the editors intended each psalm to be read. Although I do not agree with everything Childs and Wilson advocated, for our purposes we can observe that they both helped to bring the superscriptions back into play for interpreters.

Finally, a study of the psalm superscriptions would not be complete without considering the contribution of Bruce Waltke. As a recent scholar, Waltke has surveyed two thousand years of scholarship on the Psalm superscriptions, and has adopted a conservative position on them. He writes:

The historical context of a psalm's composition must be gleaned from its superscription, which often looks back to the book of Samuel, and/or from its content. Unfortunately, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, under the impact of historical criticism, many academics discarded the superscriptions and reconstructed the historical context by their limited knowledge of philology and a mistaken notion of the evolution of Israel's religion. Scholars such as Bernhard Duhm, T. K. Cheyne, Paul Haupt, and the later Charles A. Briggs came to the mistaken conclusion that the Psalter was principally the hymnbook of the second temple, and they interpreted many psalms with reference to Maccabees. For example, they attributed Psalm 3 "to a leader caught in the partisan battles and struggles of that time." No one accepts that interpretation today.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 871. For a fairly bold proposal by Waltke that has not gained as much traction in the broader field, see Bruce K. Waltke, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 4 (1991): 583-96.

Waltke went on to point out that since the meaning of many musical terms in the superscriptions were not known to the translators of the Septuagint (LXX, which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament from the centuries leading up to Christ), and since those translators didn't leave them out or change them, this suggests that they were valued as ancient and authentic.<sup>16</sup> Waltke also believes that the term "Of David" (*ledavid* [דָּוִד]) denotes authorship, citing Isaiah 38:9 and Habbakuk 3:1 as biblical evidence.<sup>17</sup> Finally, he points out that in the ancient Near East, poets in general were not anonymous (unlike narrators).<sup>18</sup> For Waltke, then, it makes good sense to view the superscriptions as authentic. For example, he asserts that "as Israel's poet laureate, there is good reason to suppose David composed the dedicatory prayer for the temple (Ps 30) just as he designed and prepared beforehand for its building (1 Chron 28)."<sup>19</sup>

In light of this brief consideration of over two thousand years of interpreting the psalm superscriptions, what should we conclude? I suggest that we interpret and value them. Where the terms are not understood today (e.g., musical terms), I suggest that we still read them and consider them as a possible clue to a psalm's genre. Most importantly, the claims of authorship and the historical occasions for writing should be the lenses through which we interpret the various psalms. Since the majority of interpreters in the past two thousand years of church history have interpreted the psalms this way, I suggest that the burden of proof should be on those who disregard them as inauthentic. Maybe this little historical survey will help people to consider their presuppositions—the ideas about the Bible they have brought with them to the task of interpretation—and the way these have possibly tipped them toward a less-than-conservative reading of the material.

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<sup>16</sup>Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 872.

<sup>17</sup>See Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 872.

<sup>18</sup>See Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 872.

<sup>19</sup>Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 873.

## Appendix C

# Digging Deeper

### QUESTIONS REMAIN ABOUT THE PSALM SUPERSCRPTIONS

IN THE SECOND “DID YOU KNOW” SECTION of chapter two, we noticed that the issues are not neat and tidy, and that questions remain in our study of the psalm superscriptions. In this appendix, we will dig deeper into this issue by exploring three of those difficult questions in a more thorough manner.

The first question has to do with the timeline for when the various pieces of information in the superscriptions were added. Is it possible that David signed “Of David” on his psalms, just as most authors today add their name to their writings? Yes, it is. Is it also possible that the author of the psalm added “for the choir director” to the superscription? This is also possible. But while critical scholars tend to *assume* that this kind of information was added much later, I suggest that it is also important for conservative scholars not to *assume* that it was added *immediately* after it was written. For example, Asaph the choir director could have added the note about David’s authorship of Psalm 51.

What about the historical information found in thirteen of the superscriptions? They were written in the third person (e.g., “For the director of music. A psalm of *David*. When the prophet Nathan came to *him* after *David* had committed adultery with Bathsheba”; emphasis

added). Notice the words I have italicized. I may sign my name to the beginning of something I write, but I don't tend to say things like "*Ian* wrote this after *he* had finished teaching in the winter semester."<sup>1</sup> In our day, we don't usually write in the third person about ourselves. Is it possible that Asaph—the director of music—added these kinds of historical notices? We can picture him receiving the psalm while the ink was still wet and adding the note about its occasion for composition. As an "insider," he would have known what was going on in David's life when he wrote the psalm. However, Hamilton adds that "biblical authors regularly speak of themselves in the third person, and that it is not difficult to imagine David doing so."<sup>2</sup> He then cites the following biblical examples of this practice: Moses (e.g., Num 12:3), Isaiah (e.g., Is 1:1), Hosea (e.g., Hos 1:1, 4), Micah (e.g., Mic 1:1; 3:1), Daniel (e.g., Dan 10:1), and Ezra (e.g., Ezra 7:1-10). This is a reminder that we should guard against imposing contemporary standards on ancient writings.

The timeline for the addition of the musical and liturgical terms is even more up for grabs. When was "A Psalm" (e.g., Ps 110) or "A Song" (e.g., Ps 46) or "*Miktam*" (e.g., Ps 16) added to the various psalms? We simply don't know. Even from a conservative standpoint, these notes about the musical style or genre of the psalm could have been added hundreds of years later. Think of the way many Christian musicians today write new tunes to old hymns.

A second type of question is a little more serious: which type of Psalms manuscript should we interpret from? Many of us will find it surprising that the Hebrew (Masoretic text), Greek (Septuagint), and Dead Sea Scrolls have differences between them, especially when it

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<sup>1</sup>A rehearsal of positions on how to translate the *lamed* preposition on proper names in psalm superscriptions is beyond the scope of this book. For a summary of views, along with a convincing argument in favor of *lamed* as denoting authorship, see James M. Hamilton, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1-72*, EBTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 44-47.

<sup>2</sup>Hamilton, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1-72*, 43.

comes to the psalm superscriptions.<sup>3</sup> In the Hebrew (Masoretic text) manuscripts, only thirty-four psalms lack a superscription. But when we look at the Greek translation of the Old Testament—the Septuagint (LXX)—only seventeen lack a superscription. Willem VanGemeren explains that the LXX “adds ‘of David’ to psalms that do not contain this phrase in the MT (33; 43; 71; 91; 93-99; 104; 137) but deletes ‘of David’ in the superscription of Psalms 122 and 124.”<sup>4</sup> In the Dead Sea Psalms scrolls, even more variety occurs. The later Aramaic *Targums* have more variety still.

When we get looking at the way the LXX translated the musical and liturgical terms in the superscriptions, we find even more variety. For example, “for the choir director” (*lamnatseah* [לַמְנַצֵּחַ]) in the Hebrew was translated as “for the end” (*Eis to telos* [Εἰς τὸ τέλος]) in the Greek book of Psalms. Many scholars have posited theories about this, but I have found the eschatological explanation most convincing: by the time the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the centuries leading up to Christ, the Jewish community had heightened hopes for God to powerfully intervene. They were waiting for a direct and sudden turn of events. If the original meaning of a musical term was not understood by its Greek translator, it is quite possible that they inserted a future-oriented eschatological interpretation into their work. This is also the case with other musical terms. Susan Gill-ingham is helpful on this point:

The musical term “Gittith” (“a stringed instrument”) in Psalms 8, 81 and 84 is read by the Greek as “a wine-press”—a term which might denote their use as harvest-psalms, but also could be a metaphor about harvesting on the day of final judgement. Furthermore, the persona of David is more apparent in the Greek Psalter, so that even more psalms are given

<sup>3</sup>Although the majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written in Hebrew, many of them come from a different text tradition than the Masoretic text.

<sup>4</sup>Willem VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 45.

Davidic headings, and an extra psalm celebrating David's victory over Goliath is added at the end: this might indicate a future hope in a David-like Messianic figure, although it could also be a recognition of David as a pious hero of the past. It could be that the translator was concerned to provide as accurate a rendering as he could, and an eschatological reading has been read into the Greek text some time later, especially by Jewish-Christian commentators.<sup>5</sup>

The issues are not simple.

A sensible answer for all of these issues could be to look to the Hebrew (Masoretic Text) as the inspired edition. This was the view of the Reformers (Luther and Calvin and others) as they “returned to the sources” and revived the use of Hebrew in biblical scholarship. This is also the approach I take on the issue. In my view, the Hebrew Old Testament should have priority over its later Greek translation.

When we survey the sweep of church history, though, we see that prioritizing the Hebrew book of Psalms was not the norm for a very long time. In fact, Delitzsch observes that “the interpreters of the early church with the exception of Origen and Jerome possessed no knowledge of the Hebrew tongue, and even these two not sufficient to be able to rise to freedom from a dependence upon the LXX.”<sup>6</sup> This means that the early Christians were reading the LXX (Greek) book of Psalms—with wine-presses signifying, among other things, the day of judgment.

In fact, this practice of working from the LXX lasted until the

<sup>5</sup>Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, vol. 1 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 8. J. Glen Taylor represents one who reads the phrase Εἰς τὸ τέλος in the LXX Psalter eschatologically: “Since this notation is very often followed by the words ‘of David,’ readers of the psalms in Greek would read ‘of David’ in conjunction with ‘concerning fulfillment.’ I think it very likely that this influenced readers of the psalms to understand the psalms of David to be read no longer simply as hymns but as prophecies. Prophecies about what? Most likely: ‘of [the] David’ who is yet to come, God’s messiah, the one to resurrect David’s dynasty (Am. 9, Jer. 31, and Zech. 6).” 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), 58.

<sup>6</sup>Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 3 vols., trans. James Martin, Keil and Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 48. The rest of Delitzsch’s sentence betrays his bias. It reads, “which only led them into frequent error.”

time of the Reformation. This means that for a thousand years of church history, interpreters had “for the end” and “for the wine-presses” in the psalm titles, and therefore, as the lens through which they interpreted the rest of the corresponding psalm.

It was not until the Reformation “returned to the sources” and revived the study of Hebrew, that the corrections were made. Again, I tend to answer this question in the manner of the Reformers, by returning to the original source—the Hebrew (Masoretic text)—and by viewing later manuscripts (LXX, DSS, Targums) as later interpretations that veered from the original. A similar move is done in New Testament studies, as conservative scholars believe that the original manuscripts were inerrant, and that later (minor) differences between manuscripts need to be solved by asking which reading was most likely original. When I interpret, my base text is the Hebrew book of Psalms as it existed in the centuries leading up to and after the birth of Jesus. But at the same time, it is important to recognize that the issues are not as neat and tidy as we may prefer.

A third and final question has to do with the meaning of the various musical and liturgical terms in the psalm superscriptions. For example, regarding the term *Shiggaion* in Psalm 7:1, Calvin writes,

The Jewish interpreters are not agreed. Some understand it to mean a musical instrument. To others it seems to be a tune to which a song is set. Others suppose it to have been the beginning of a common song, to the tune of which David wished this psalm to be sung. Others translate the Hebrew word, *delight*, or *rejoicing*. The second opinion appears to me the most probable, namely, that it was some kind of melody or song, as if one should term it Sapphic or Phaleucian verse.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps this is the root of the “for the wine-press” and “for the end” readings found in the LXX. Answering this question is a little less

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<sup>7</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Volume 1*, trans. James Anderson, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 75.

troublesome, however. For one thing, the fact that the LXX still included these terms in its translation shows that they were understood as an essential part of the text. In other words, they *needed* to be included. And even if we don't know what each term means, I suggest that we interpret what we do know—the author, the historical information, some of the liturgical terms—instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

## Appendix D

# Digging Deeper

### A THEMATIC APPROACH TO THE INDIVIDUAL PSALMS

IN THE “DID YOU KNOW” SECTION at the beginning of part three, I compared my thematic approach to a form-critical study of the individual psalms. As a way of digging deeper, in this appendix we will explain the differences more thoroughly. I will show the prominence of the form-critical approach of Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) and observe its strengths and a few of its key weaknesses. Since Gunkel’s form-critical approach to the book of Psalms continues in prominence today, a little introduction to his theories will help set my work in the context of the larger discussion.

Prior to the work of Gunkel, the academic study of the Psalms was dominated by an approach broadly called “historical criticism.” For proponents of this approach, one of the main jobs of the interpreter was to understand the world “behind” the text. Instead of primarily dealing with the passage of Scripture as it appears in the Bible, these scholars focused their interpretive energies on the theoretical process of the text’s composition, editing, and inclusion in the Bible. In the case of the book of Psalms, historical critics also focused on the task of “determining” the historical settings of individual psalms. In a tongue-in-cheek manner, Childs observed that “this move was basically unsuccessful. As if one could write the history of England on the basis of the Methodist hymn book!”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 509.

As we have noticed in previous appendixes, historical-critical biblical scholars tended to atomize the text. By attempting to reconstruct the historical process that lay behind the book of Psalms (or any book of the Bible, for that matter), smaller and smaller pieces of text were analyzed, and the focus was taken off each psalm as a unit, much less the overall shape of the book. The word I use to describe all of this is “distraction.” Scholars were distracted from the task of interpreting the passage of Scripture as it appears in the Bible, in favor of developing theories of the process that led to the formation of the text. And scholars were distracted from seeing the parts in light of the whole in favor of an increasing atomization of the text.

In this context, the “form-critical” approach of Hermann Gunkel offered a refreshing twist, because the content of each psalm came back into focus for interpreters. This approach had two sides: to categorize the individual psalms according to genre, and to determine the “setting in life” (German: “*Sitz im Leben*”) which gave rise to each psalm.<sup>2</sup> The first “side” of form criticism—determining a psalm’s genre—was a breath of fresh air for scholars and students. This is because it necessitated repeated readings of each psalm, with a focus on its details, as well as its overall message. This meant that form critics were immersing themselves in God’s Word as they went about their work. Gunkel and his students would begin this process with descriptive, inductive study, as they sought to categorize the various

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<sup>2</sup>See Jerome F. D. Creach, “The Psalms and the Cult,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David G. Firth and Philip Johnston (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 120-21. See also John Barton, “Form Criticism: Old Testament,” *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 2:838; David J. A. Clines, “Psalm Research Since 1955: I. The Psalms and the Cult,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967): 105. For a comprehensive introduction to form criticism of the Psalter, see Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998). I discuss these issues further in Ian J. Vaillancourt, “Psalm 118 and the Eschatological Son of David,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 4 (2019): 722-23; Ian J. Vaillancourt, *The Multifaceted Saviour of Psalms 110 and 118: A Canonical Exegesis*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 86 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019), 3, 191-92; Ian J. Vaillancourt, “Formed in the Crucible of Messianic Angst: The Eschatological Shape of the Hebrew Psalter’s Final Form,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 31, no. 2 (2013): 128.

types of psalms, and as they also sought to determine the various elements that went into each psalm.

The second “side” of a form-critical study of the Psalms was a lot more theoretical in nature. Instead of focusing on the original context for the composition of each individual psalm as historical critics had done, form critics sought to determine the original historical context that gave rise to each genre of psalm. I should also mention that although Gunkel gave equal weight to each of these “sides” of form criticism, some of his followers favored one or the other side. For example, Claus Westermann (1909-2000) focused more on immersing himself in the text and determining each psalm’s genre, while Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965) spent more of his energies on the *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life) that gave rise to each psalm.

What are we to make of this approach to the Psalms? My suggestion is that we thank God for the advances the form-critical approach made in Psalms study, even as I suggest a few tweaks that I think are helpful. While this approach offered many helpful corrections to academics, it also went too far. For example, form critics moved from an inductive immersion in the individual psalms to the prescriptive assertion of what each genre should entail. This resulted in numerous weaknesses.

First, the prescriptive nature of form criticism meant that a given psalm would be categorized as, say, the lament of an individual, or a communal thanksgiving psalm, because it fit the various criteria that form critics themselves deduced from their own inductive study of the book of Psalms. In my view, this resulted in circular reasoning. This is seen when form critics speak of various psalms “missing” certain “essential” elements, when they are the ones who had “determined” which elements were essential in the first place.

Second, the prescriptive nature of form criticism left Gunkel with numerous psalms he categorized as “mixed” genres. Once again, the

circular reasoning resulted in many individual psalms that did not fit Gunkel's own mold. In part three of *Treasuring the Psalms* I have sought to correct this by referring to "themes" instead of "genres." Instead of offering prescriptive information on what every, say, lament psalm must include, I simply observe that a strong lament theme pervades the book of Psalms, and then I walk through one example of a psalm that contains this theme. In these chapters, I do suggest the various elements that are often present in a given type of psalm, but I do not think it helpful to prescribe what those elements must be in every single instance.

Third, theories of each genre's "setting in life" are also highly theoretical. For example, in my study of Psalm 118 for my doctoral dissertation, I counted twenty-six distinct historical-critical or form-critical theories about the origin of this single psalm. This alone should alert us to the danger of spending our energies on an approach that is too focused on the theoretical. As a second example, some form critics have advocated for an "enthronement of YHWH" festival that may have been the context in which the "YHWH reigns" genre arose. However, we should be cautioned by J. Clinton McCann's observation that, "The basic problem with [this proposal] . . . is that there is simply no solid biblical evidence for [this] festival."<sup>3</sup>

As a fourth and final weakness of form criticism of the book of Psalms, Gunkel and his followers continued the trend away from reading the Psalms as a book. Rather than investigating the significance of the book of Psalms as a whole, these approaches tended to view the Psalms "as a collection of disparate elements, each of which must be separated out and considered individually as to its

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<sup>3</sup>J. Clinton McCann Jr., "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Introduction to Hebrew Poetry; 1 & 2 Maccabees; Psalms; Job*, vol. 3, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 649.

significance,”<sup>4</sup> with the ultimate effect of deflecting concern from the study of the Psalms as a book.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Gunkel explicitly wrote:

No internal ordering principle for the individual psalms has been transmitted for the whole. To be sure, sometimes related psalms stand together in the collection of the Psalter. . . . More commonly, however, no internal relationship can be discovered between neighboring psalms. . . . What Goethe says . . . about the inscription goes for the individual psalm as well: It “has nothing behind it. It stands alone, and must tell you everything.”<sup>6</sup>

This is clearly out of step with the position I advocate in part one of *Treasuring the Psalms*. Instead of reading the Psalms as an intentionally ordered collection, form critics have omitted a study of the book’s overall design.

The solution I advocate is to approach the issue in terms of “themes” instead of “forms.” By employing the language of “themes” in the various psalms, I am seeking to distance myself from the prescriptive assertions of form critics, as well as their focus on the “setting in life” discussion. However, I do think it important to recognize that different themes are present in the book of Psalms. One example of the way my proposed language tweak may help is in the interpretation of Psalm 118. While form critics almost universally categorize this as a psalm of thanksgiving, the fact that its speaker is almost certainly a king has not been given its due consideration. I suggest that this

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<sup>4</sup>Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 1.

<sup>5</sup>See Gerald H. Wilson, “Evidence of Editorial Division in the Hebrew Psalter,” *Vetus Testamentum* 34, no. 3 (1984): 337. In a later work Wilson added that “an early assumption that the book is arranged accidentally long prevented scholars from identifying any indicators of shape” (Gerald H. Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Interpretation* 46, no. 2 [1992]: 129). This point is also made in Gerald H. Wilson, “Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, JSOTSup 159, ed. J. Clinton McCann (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 43.

<sup>6</sup>Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 2. Although Gunkel was unable to finish this work before he died, he entrusted it Begrich, who completed it in 1933; Nogalski translated it into English in 1998.

psalm is no less “royal” than, say, Psalm 72. However, the prominence of its most typical form-critical categorization has resulted in an almost universal disregard of Psalm 118 when canonical interpreters have studied the theme of the king in book five of the Psalms. By broadening the language from “forms” to “major themes,” Psalm 118 can be seen as containing both a thanksgiving theme, as well as a portrayal of the king.

## Appendix E

# Digging Deeper

### BRUCE WALTKE ON THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS

IN THE “DID YOU KNOW” SECTION of chapter ten, I briefly introduced the imprecatory psalms. In this appendix, we will dig deeper into this important issue, especially asking whether we should directly appropriate their words in our own prayers today. Since Bruce Waltke has summed up this difficult topic so well, he is worth quoting at length.

To set the stage for our Waltke quote, let’s consider the language of vengeance that he will help to explain. Once, when I was teaching a university course on the book of Psalms, I surveyed my class about the one aspect of this book they find most disturbing. The *only* answer that people gave (and several cited it) were the following two verses: “8 O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, / blessed shall he be who repays you / with what you have done to us! / 9 Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones / and dashes them against the rock!” (Ps 137:8-9). In response, I posed a question to the class: should we sing or pray these verses in church today? The response was one of immediate laughter. Intuitively, the class knew that a song or prayer of vengeance—especially vengeance that involves blood and gore—is not something we should pray in church. The question they could not answer, however, was why such a song or prayer *was* appropriate in the psalmist’s day. They also couldn’t answer the companion question:

“What makes it inappropriate as a prayer in our day?” I pointed out to them that if we reject this *intuitively*, then we are in danger of intuitively rejecting other parts of the Bible. If we follow this path, we will soon find ourselves rounding out the rough edges of the gospel. Within a generation or two, the gospel will be denied.

If we are going to claim that Christians today should not sing Psalm 137:8-9 in corporate worship, or pray it against their enemies, we need to have sound, biblical reasons for this. This is where the following extended quote by Waltke comes in. I suggest that it helps with clarity on this issue. He writes:

Thirty-five of the petition psalms ask God to punish the enemy. These psalms also trouble many. Lewis speaks of them as “terrible or (dare we say?) contemptible Psalms.” Here he joins hands with those who deny that all Scripture is inspired. Dispensationalists traditionally averred that they are part of the ethical inferiority of the Old Testament. In fact, however, upon reflection they teach sound doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16) and are most holy.

- a. These petitions are by saints (especially the innocently suffering king) who have suffered gross injustices. Few commentators have experienced the agony of utterly unprovoked, naked aggression and gross exploitation.
- b. The petitioners are righteous and just: they ask for strict retribution (cf. . . . Lev. 24:17-22). . . .
- c. The petitioners are faithful. The pious recognize that vengeance is God’s, not theirs (Deut. 32:35). They trust God, not themselves, to avenge the gross injustices against them.
- d. The psalmist is not vindictive (Ps. 109:5). “There have been few men,” says Derek Kidner, “more capable of generosity under personal attack than David, as he proved by his attitudes toward Saul and Absalom, to say nothing of Shemei.” The wicked, by contrast, avenge themselves (cf. Rom. 12:17-21).

- e. These prayers are ethical—that is, the petitioners ask God to distinguish between right and wrong (cf. Ps. 7:8-9; 2 Tim. 4:14-18).
- f. They are also theocratic, looking for establishment of a kingdom of righteousness by the moral administrator of the universe (cf. Pss. 72, 82). The earthly king asks no more of the heavenly King than the latter asked of him (cf. Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:13, 19; 21:9, 22; 22:22, 24).
- g. The prayers are theocentric, aiming to see God praised for manifesting his righteousness and justice in the eyes of all (cf. Pss. 35:27-28; 58:10-11). Calvin wrote, “It was a holy zeal for the divine glory which impelled [the psalmist] to summon the wicked to God’s judgment seat.”
- h. These prayers are evangelistic, aiming for conversion of earth (*sic*) by letting all people see that the Lord is Most High over all the earth (Ps. 83:17-18).
- i. They are “covenantal”; a wrong against a saint is seen as a wrong against God (Pss. 69:7-9, 22-28; 139:19-22). . . .
- j. The prayers are oriental and full of figures, especially hyperbole (cf. . . . Jer. 20:14-18).
- k. The prayers are political. If we may presume the enemy heard the prayer, he would be publicly exposed as one who opposed the kingdom of God. Moreover, the righteous identify with the psalmist and rally around him (Ps. 142:7; cf. the complaint of Ps. 38:11). Indeed, the enemy and potential evildoer may be instructed and converted through prayer (cf. Pss. 51:13; 94:8-11).
- l. These prayers are consistent with the central message of the Bible: “Thy kingdom come.” . . . The Lord’s Prayer entails that saints pray for the overthrow of Satan’s kingdom.

Though theologically sound, these petitions for retribution are nevertheless inappropriate for the church in the present dispensation for the following reasons. (1) Ultimate justice occurs in the eschaton (Rev.

20:11-15; cf. Isa. 61:1-2 with Matt. 13:30; 25:46; Luke 4:18-20; John 15:15; 2 Cor. 6:2; 2 Thess. 1:5-9). (2) Sin and sinner are now more distinctly differentiated (cf. Eph. 6:11-18), allowing the saint both to hate sin and love the sinner. (3) The saint's struggle is against spiritual powers of darkness. He conquers by turning the other cheek and by praying for the forgiveness of enemies (Matt. 5:39-48; 6:14; Luke 6:28, 35; Acts 7:60).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 878-80. Used by permission.

## Appendix F

# Digging Deeper

### THE LANGUAGE OF PRAISE

IN THE “DID YOU KNOW” SECTION of chapter twelve, I introduced the distinction between the book of Psalms as a *Tehillim*—“Book of Praises”—and some of the individual psalms that exhibit a specifically “praise” (Hebrew, *halal* [חָלַל]) theme. In this appendix, we will dig deeper into this issue, and learn something more about the language of praise as it is found in the book of Psalms.

A simple Hebrew lesson will help to clear up any confusion. The title for the book of Psalms is *Tehillim*, “Praises.” Lament psalms have varied language, and although there are numerous repeated terms, there is not one single term that appears in all of them. For example, even the common phrase “how long, O YHWH” does not appear in every lament psalm, and when it does, it is expressed various ways in Hebrew. So I prefer to call these “psalms of lament.”

Psalms of thanksgiving very often begin with the hiphil imperative *hodu* (הוֹדוּ), “give thanks.” For example, Psalm 118 begins this way: “Oh give thanks [*hodu*] to the LORD, for he is good; / for his steadfast love endures forever!” Scholars often refer to these as *hodu* psalms. We learned in chapter twelve that the meaning of the verb *yadah* (יָדָה)—which is spelled *hodu* in the hiphil imperative—is debated, so simply referring to them as “*hodu* psalms” (instead of “thanksgiving psalms”), circumvents the debate.

Next, hymns, or praise psalms, often contain an element of the Hebrew root *halal* (לָלַחַ), “to praise.” For example, Psalm 117 begins with the piel imperative *hallu* (לְלַחַ) “praise,” as it says “Praise [*hallu*] the LORD, all nations! / Extol him, all peoples!” And the Hebrew term *hallu yah* (לְלַחַ יְהוָה), simply means “praise Yah,” which is short for “praise YHWH.” (As a side note, this word is used in all languages. For example, when I was in Bible college, my missionary friend used to teach new believers from every culture the word “hallelujah” shortly after he led them to Christ.) In order to distinguish this type of psalm from the psalms in general as a “Book of Praises” (*Tehillim* [תְּהִלִּים]), scholars often refer to praise psalms as *halal* psalms.

So there we have it: the book of Psalms as a whole is a collection of *Tehillim*, a Book of Praises. There is a sense in which every single individual psalm is a praise psalm. But under the umbrella of this “Book of Praises,” we have psalms of lament, *hodu* (thanksgiving) psalms, and *halal* (praise) psalms among other less prominent themes (e.g., repentance, wisdom, etc.).

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