

## The Wisdom Shaping of the Psalter: From Wisdom Psalms to a Wisdom Framework

KYLE C. DUNHAM (DETROIT BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY)

### ABSTRACT

*Much debate surrounds the alleged presence of wisdom in the Psalter. Many studies focus on the identity and nature of wisdom psalms. This approach remains controversial in that few interpreters agree on which psalms constitute wisdom psalms. This article argues that a preferable approach concentrates on the function of wisdom persons, terms and themes in shaping the Psalter. Key markers suggest that the final editors of the Psalter intended the book to be read and mastered as a wisdom writing by their placement of wisdom vocabulary, paragons and motifs as mnemonic benchmarks. These features include the governing position of Pss 1–2 as the twin introduction to the Psalter, the distribution of the 'ashre' formula, lexical and thematic ties to Proverbs, the use of the term 'maskil' in connection to David's wisdom, the recurring presence of sages and the wisdom framing of Book V. These factors hint that wisdom carried a decisive, functional influence in shaping the Psalter.*

**KEYWORDS:** Wisdom, Psalter, Wisdom Psalms, Asaph, Canonical Approach

### A INTRODUCTION: WISDOM APPROACHES TO THE PSALMS

The twentieth century witnessed two revolutions in Psalms studies, both with implications for the study of wisdom influences in the Psalter.<sup>1</sup> Hermann Gunkel's *Die Psalmen* (1926) introduced the form-critical or genre approach, with the psalms understood mainly to be individual songs arising from the cultic setting-in-life of ancient Israel.<sup>2</sup> Gunkel delineated a number of psalm types including common categories such as hymns, communal laments and individual laments as well as lesser categories such as victory songs and pilgrimage songs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent synthesis of interpretative shifts in Psalter studies, see Gert T.M. Prinsloo, "Reading the Masoretic Psalter as a Book: Editorial Trends and Redactional Trajectories," *CurBR* 19 (2021):145–177.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926). Gunkel's student, Sigmund Mowinckel, pressed that each psalm be analysed more consistently for a particular *Sitz im Leben* within the Israelite cult.

<sup>3</sup> Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, ix–x; Herman Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck

In the latter grouping, he identified the genre *Weisheitsdichtung* (wisdom poetry), which he tied to wisdom psalms about human life and its necessary mastery to achieve favourable outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Wisdom psalms were a late development in Israel's psalmody, an outgrowth of reflection on earlier forms.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the recognition of these varied psalm forms, no discernible pattern could be traced for the arrangement of individual psalms.<sup>6</sup> Gunkel's approach would shape the works of the retinue of scholars who followed him.<sup>7</sup> To discern wisdom influences on the Psalter, many would concentrate on identifying these so-called wisdom psalms, a form that Gunkel concluded was not extensive in the Psalter.<sup>8</sup>

The second shift came with Gerald Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985).<sup>9</sup> Wilson's mentor Brevard Childs had asserted earlier that the Psalter be read as unitive, canonical Scripture rather than as an anthology of

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& Ruprecht, 1985), 3; cf. Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 293. Gunkel identified wisdom psalms as pertaining to form on the micro-level (e.g., proverbs, riddles, beatitudes, direct address, admonitions, instructions) and to themes (e.g., fear of YHWH, divine retribution, theodicy, contrast between the righteous and the wicked) (295–302).

<sup>5</sup> Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Zenger notes that by 1969, F. Crüsemann's dissertation on the Psalms began with the assessment that Gunkel's approach "had rendered all previous attempts to structure the Psalter so as to arrive at a proper understanding of the individual parts obsolete and invalid"; Erich Zenger, „Psalmexegese und Psalterexegese: Eine Forschungsskizze,“ in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (ed. Erich Zenger; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 17, author's translation. For the development of Gunkel's approach, see Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; 2 vols. in 1; reprint of 1962 ed.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Artur Weiser, *Die Psalmen: Übersetzt und erklärt*, (5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Continental Commentary [based on the 1978 German edition]; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT; Tübingen: Mohr, 1996); Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* (FOTL 15; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 1: Psalms 1–41*, (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2: Psalms 42–89* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90–150* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 382.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBL Dissertation Series 76; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

discrete songs.<sup>10</sup> Wilson in turn focused on the final form or canonical shape of the Psalter, arguing for 'purposeful, editorial organisation.'<sup>11</sup> The arrangement, concluded Wilson, mirrored Israel's historical relationship to God, moving from prayer to praise, from Israel to the nations and from David's earthly kingship to YHWH's universal reign.<sup>12</sup> The key to Wilson's proposed structure lay in the so-called seam psalms that open and close the five books of the Psalter, with Book IV as the 'editorial centre' of the Psalter.<sup>13</sup> Wilson would later observe a 'wisdom frame' within the Psalter, spanning the wisdom psalms of Pss 1, 73, 90, 107 and 145.<sup>14</sup> The wisdom frame emerges in the opening and closing psalms of Book V, with both psalms ending with a call to wisdom in view of its benefits (Pss 107:42–43; 145:20–21). The frame reaches back additionally to encompass Ps 90 at the opening of Book IV, with its clear wisdom themes of God's sovereignty and human transience.<sup>15</sup> Yet Wilson concluded that this frame lay in tension with the royal covenantal frame (Pss 2; 72; 89; 144). He subsumed the wisdom frame ultimately into the royal frame due to the perceived editorial strategy; the final compilers sought to bolster the collapse of the Davidic hope in Books I–III by focusing on Israel's true hope—YHWH's kingship—in Books IV–V.<sup>16</sup>

## **B THE CANONICAL APPROACH AND WISDOM'S ROLE**

Numerous scholars have elaborated on Wilson's canonical approach to the Psalter, focusing to a greater or lesser degree on its alleged wisdom elements. Erich Zenger, for example, whose independent work and collaboration with Frank-Lothar Hossfeld have singularly influenced twenty-first century interpretation of the Psalter, contends that canonical interpretation provides a distinctive paradigm for approaching the Psalter. Psalms are to be interpreted in the light of their context through catchword connections, psalm groupings and psalm positioning.<sup>17</sup> Hossfeld and Steiner expand these literary connections to

<sup>10</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 522–523.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 199–228.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, 215.

<sup>14</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of the Psalms," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann Jr.; JSOTSup 159, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 76–81.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter," 79–80.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson elsewhere concludes that, "in the final shaping of the Psalter, 'wisdom' elements clearly had the upper hand"; Gerald H. Wilson, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Int* 46 (1992):134. Yet in the end he still views the royal psalm of Ps 89 as determinative for the trajectory of the Psalter (139–140).

<sup>17</sup> See Erich Zenger, „Was wird anders bei kanonischer Psalmenauslegung?“ in *Ein Gott, eine Offenbarung: Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese, Theologie und Spiritualität. Festschrift für Notker Füglistner* (ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer; Würzburg: Echter, 1991), 397–413; Zenger, „Psalmenexegese und Psalterexegese,“ 17–65; Erich Zenger and

eight devices that they discern as demonstrating canonical coherence across the Psalter including opening and closing catchwords and phrases, twin psalm pairings, cluster compositions and keyword and thematic groupings.<sup>18</sup> One of the most comprehensive approaches is the recent study by Peter Ho, who proposes thirty-two organisational principles (thirteen formal and nineteen tacit), suggesting conscious editorial arrangement across the Psalter.<sup>19</sup>

In seeking to apply the canonical approach to the Psalter based on its perceived wisdom elements, some scholars have proposed a larger role for wisdom as the editorial theme of the book. Walter Brueggemann, for example, has suggested that to take seriously the start of the Psalter as Ps 1 is to understand the Psalter as a didactic summons to obedience with implications for the righteous person who attains a happy, fortunate life by adhering to the norms of Torah.<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann builds on his proposed wisdom contour by identifying Ps 73 as critical to the theological and canonical shape of the Psalter.<sup>21</sup> In this psalm, the reader follows the wisdom course laid out in Ps 1 by moving from doubt to faith and from faltering obedience to praise in order to achieve Torah piety, an essential component of wisdom.<sup>22</sup>

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Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, „Das Buch der Psalmen,“ in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (ed. Christian Frevler; Stüttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016); Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Till Magnus Steiner, “Problems and Prospects in Psalter Studies,” in *Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence* (ed. Susan Gillingham; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 240–258.

<sup>19</sup> Peter C. W. Ho, *The Design of the Psalter: A Macrostructural Analysis* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 35–37. Ho’s formal techniques include the five book divisions, the prologue (Pss 1–2) and epilogue (Pss 146–150), symmetrical/concentric structures (i.e. chiasm) at the highest (book) level and at the lowest (couplet) levels, the five Davidic collections, the Elohist psalter in Books II–III, strategic placement of acrostics and alphabetic psalms, the dynamic interplay of authorship superscriptions, the progression of historical superscriptions as tied to 1 Samuel, the deliberate placement of anonymous psalms, the colophon of Ps 72:20, the doxologies as the conclusions in Books I–IV and the use of numerical devices and symbolism (35–36). His tacit or informal techniques reside mainly at the level of thematic and catchword links, not all of which are equally persuasive (36–37).

<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon,” *JSOT* 50 (1991):63–92.

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience,” 80–82.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Brueggemann and Patrick D. Miller, “Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker,” *JSOT* 72 (1996):45–56.

Nancy de-Claissé-Walford finds a similar wisdom shape in the Psalter, one that she discerns by beginning with Book V and moving backwards.<sup>23</sup> Alongside the trajectory lines of Davidic kingship, deClaissé-Walford discerns by retracing steps this way "an accompanying search for meaning and order, for an approach to reality, for an ethos, for assumptions and expectations about life in an ever-changing world."<sup>24</sup> She attributes this thematic imprint as bearing the marks of postexilic wisdom centred on 'living in such a way that concretely embodied the instruction of God found in Torah, what has come to be known as "Torah Piety".'<sup>25</sup> John Kartje has developed this approach extensively in his monograph *Wisdom Epistemology in the Psalter*. For Kartje, wisdom revolves around suffering; wisdom's concern is to address "the fundamental problem of why people suffer and what they can do to make sense out of their suffering and perhaps alleviate it."<sup>26</sup> He selects four wisdom psalms (Pss 1; 73; 90; 107), which he argues use metaphor and narrative to walk through the wisdom orientation process in the Psalter. The process begins with the fundamental worldview established in Ps 1, finds complication in the doubts and dissatisfaction of Ps 73, reflects on the brevity of life in Ps 90 and finally applies these realities practically to the receptive wise person who faces suffering and engages YHWH in the midst of the suffering in Ps 107.<sup>27</sup>

### C DETRACTORS OF THE CANONICAL APPROACH AND WISDOM'S ROLE

While many scholars have followed the trajectory of the canonical approach,<sup>28</sup> the methodology itself is not without its detractors. John Day, for example, concludes that "it is apparent that any attempt to find one grandiose scheme to account for the ordering of the psalms is bound to end in failure."<sup>29</sup> Other interpreters share his scepticism.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the most detailed treatment to push

<sup>23</sup> Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, "Reading Backwards from the Beginning: My Life with the Psalter," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 41 (2006):119–130.

<sup>24</sup> deClaissé-Walford, "Reading Backwards," 128.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>26</sup> John Kartje, *Wisdom Epistemology in the Psalter: A Study of Psalms 1, 73, 90, and 107* (BZAW 472; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 67.

<sup>27</sup> Kartje, *Wisdom Epistemology*, 68.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the survey of canonical approaches to the Psalter in Ho, *The Design of the Psalter*, 12–57.

<sup>29</sup> John Day, *Psalms* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 111.

<sup>30</sup> Nogalski contends that "no single organizational principle can adequately explain every aspect of Psalms." James D. Nogalski, "From Psalm to Psalms to Psalter," in *An Introduction to Wisdom Literature and the Psalms: Festschrift for Marvin E. Tate* (ed. H. Wayne Ballard, Jr., and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr.; Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000), 52. Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2*, 11, admits that he is "not enamored of this study. It seems to me to involve too much imagination in the connecting of too few dots." Meanwhile, Gerstenberger suggests that *Psalter* exegesis vis-à-vis *psalm* exegesis risks

against the canonical interpretation may be found in David Willgren's recent monograph.<sup>31</sup> Willgren argues that the Psalter is an anthology rather than a unified book and that it possesses no coherent markers indicating conscious editorial arrangement. Rather, the Psalter's superscriptions, doxologies and thematic groupings were the result of late canonical implicatures added to the existing scrolls for practical and paratactical purposes rather than as the result of deliberate editorial organisation at the level of the psalms themselves. He concludes that more attention should be given to the Judean desert texts, especially 11Q5 as an alternative canonical collection, with the implication that the horizon of psalms study lies no farther than the psalm itself.<sup>32</sup>

Others downplay more specifically the role of wisdom in the canonical shaping of the Psalter. While discerning many intriguing intertextual links across the Psalter and the OT canon, Zenger, Hossfeld, Ho and other canonical interpreters pay comparatively scant attention to wisdom elements in the formation of the book. Ho contends that such endeavours are largely

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making a "marmalade" out of the wonderful individual pieces of fruit in the psalms themselves (as relayed privately to Erich Zenger and recorded in Zenger, „Psalmenexegese und Psalterexegese,“ 25). Cf. also Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 84–85; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, „Der Psalter als Buch und als Sammlung,“ in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (ed. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 3–5; Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 252.

<sup>31</sup> David Willgren, *The Formation of the 'Book' of Psalms: Reconsidering the Transmission and Canonization of Psalmody in Light of Material Culture and the Poetics of Anthologies* (FAT 2/88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Other scholars have pointed likewise to the Qumran scrolls as supporting fluid editorial arrangements of the psalms. Peter W. Flint, "11QPs<sup>b</sup> and the 11QPs<sup>a</sup>-Psalter," in *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings from the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms* (ed. Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger, Jr., and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr.; LHBOTS 488; New York: T&T Clark, 2007); P. W. Flint, "The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls: Psalms Manuscripts, Editions, and the Oxford Hebrew Bible," in *Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence* (ed. Susan Gillingham; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); P. W. Flint, "Unrolling the Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (ed. William P. Brown; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Alma Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter: Psalms 146–150 in the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint* (BZAW 505; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017); A. Brodersen, „Quellen und Intertextualität: methodische Überlegungen zum Psalterende,“ in *Intertextualität und die Entstehung des Psalters: Methodische Reflexionen—Theologiegeschichtliche Perspektiven* (ed. Alma Brodersen, Friederike Neumann, and David Willgren; FAT 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); Friederike Neumann, *Schriftgelehrter Hymnen: Gestalt, Theologie, und Intention der Psalmen 145 and 146–50* (BZAW 491; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016).

"impressionistic" due to the paucity of psalms often selected.<sup>33</sup> In response to such critiques, a handful of scholars have sought to trace the presence of wisdom more generally by loosening the criteria by which to identify wisdom psalms.

Roland Murphy was one of the first to attempt a systematic approach to wisdom's presence in the Psalter. He freed himself to a large degree from the constraints of form criticism and focused instead on other factors including less rigid wisdom criteria, the sapiential milieu and didactic themes.<sup>34</sup> He identified no fewer than seven literary markers of wisdom and five essential wisdom themes.<sup>35</sup> To these markers J. Kenneth Kuntz added others,<sup>36</sup> while R.B.Y. Scott identified wisdom vocabulary as the key, leading him to compile sixty-four terms indicative of wisdom in the Psalter and elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> While arguing for more generalised criteria, these scholars still applied their methodology specifically to

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<sup>33</sup> Here, Ho, *Design of the Psalter*, 30–31, critiques especially Brueggemann and Kartje.

<sup>34</sup> Roland E. Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification 'Wisdom Psalms,'" in *Congress Volume: Bonn 1962* (ed. G. W. Anderson, P.A.H. DeBoer, G.R. Castellino et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1963), 156–167. Cf. also the discussion in Simon C. Cheung, *Wisdom Intoned: A Reappraisal of the Genre 'Wisdom Psalms'* (LHBOTS 613; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 9–10.

<sup>35</sup> Murphy, "A Consideration," 159–160. As to the literary markers, he notes the following: (1) the *ashre* formula; (2) numerical sayings; (3) 'better-than' sayings; (4) direct address from teacher to "son(s)"; (5) alphabetic structures; (6) simple comparisons; and (7) admonitions. With respect to themes, he observes several: (1) the contrast between the wicked and the righteous; (2) the two paths; (3) concern with the doctrine of retribution; (4) practical advice for conduct; and (5) the fear of YHWH (linked to Torah observance).

<sup>36</sup> Kuntz's categories include the rhetorical question, the aphorism, and the concentration of wisdom vocabulary itself. See J. Kenneth Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel: Their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimensions," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974), 186–222. See also Kuntz, "Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter," in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow, and Rodney A. Werline; Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2000), 144–160.

<sup>37</sup> R.B.Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 121–122. See the criticism in Diane Jacobson, "Wisdom Language in the Psalms," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (ed. William P. Brown; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 147–157 (148) and a much more chastened approach to wisdom vocabulary with respect to the Psalms in Avi Hurvitz, "Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of 'Wisdom Psalms,'" *VT* 38 (1988):41–51.

the task of identifying wisdom psalms, a category that James Crenshaw had all but given up on.<sup>38</sup>

Two other more recent contributions seek to refine the discussion surrounding wisdom's constitutive elements in the Psalter. Susan Gillingham proposes that rather than being bound to form-critical criteria, there are three different ways of assessing wisdom's impact on the Psalms: (1) wisdom as a particular way of *writing* (e.g. vocabulary, style, form); (2) wisdom as a particular mode of *thinking* (e.g. wisdom themes, practical orientation, adherence to Torah, creation theology, retributive justice); and (3) wisdom as a specific kind of *living* (e.g. family instruction, royal court wisdom, scribal tradition).<sup>39</sup> Manfred Oeming likewise concludes that an assessment of wisdom in the Psalter revolves around a matrix of at least five elements: (1) Torah piety; (2) a practical ethic of happiness or flourishing; (3) creation theology that reflects on human nature, world order and the mysterious workings of God; (4) personal dialogue with God through prayer, praise and lament; and (5) a direct causal connection between one's deeds and their consequences (the character-consequence nexus).<sup>40</sup>

In view of the preceding discussion, a few questions emerge. Does the integrative, canonical approach offer the best interpretative lens for the Psalter or do its potential detriments and, perhaps, fresh blind spots hobble its efficacy? What role, if any, does wisdom play in the formation of the Psalter, a theme often relegated to the peripheries of canonical studies? Is the discernment of wisdom's presence in the Psalter limited to formal criteria at the level of individual psalms? In this article, I contend that a canonical approach accounts best, in fact, for the continuity of pervasive literary features traceable across the Psalter. Further, I argue that a neglected focus on the Psalter's strategically placed, literarily binding *wisdom components* has led many to overlook a central aspect of its editorial organisation. Previous studies proposing a wisdom shape to the Psalter have centred on the form and placement of the *wisdom psalms* as integral to their reading of the Psalter. This approach carries weaknesses insofar as the identification of which psalms constitute wisdom psalms remains contentious.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> James Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 94.

<sup>39</sup> Susan Gillingham, "I Will Incline My Ear to a Proverb; I Will Solve My Riddle to the Music of the Harp' (Psalm 49.4): The Wisdom Tradition and the Psalms," in *Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Jarick; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 277–278.

<sup>40</sup> Manfred Oeming, "Wisdom as the Hermeneutical Key to the Book of Psalms," in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World* (ed. Leo G. Perdue; FRLANT 219; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 155–157.

<sup>41</sup> James Crenshaw, "Wisdom Psalms?" *CurRBS* 8 (2000):9–17; J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Reclaiming Biblical Wisdom Psalms: A Response to Crenshaw," *CurBR* 1 (2003):145–154; R.N. Whybray, "The Wisdom Psalms," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*



Such studies pay more heed to the *form* of wisdom in given contexts than to its *function*.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, these approaches often lose sight of the forest for the trees in focusing on the *sine qua non* of OT wisdom or on the fundamental elements of a putative wisdom genre with respect to individual psalms. These undertakings thus tend to overlook the larger structural wisdom links that develop across the Psalter. A preferable approach involves discerning a higher level, programmatic function for wisdom in the Psalter, one that is not inextricably linked to proving the existence and structure of wisdom psalms. To establish a hermeneutical horizon of wisdom within the Psalter I propose in the following a number of wisdom links within the canonical shape of the Psalter's five books.

## D THE WISDOM FRAMEWORK OF THE PSALTER

A close reading of the Psalter suggests a number of wisdom elements that function as ligatures or connecting devices in the final form of the Psalter, hinting at an editorial impulse that crystallised as a thematic emphasis. These ligatures operate not on the level of individual psalms but also as programmatic for the shape of the Psalter as a unitive book. Such literary links likely acted as mnemonic signposts to facilitate memorisation of the book in that the mastery and recitation of sacred writings served as an integral feature in scribal training, as David Carr has suggested elsewhere.<sup>43</sup>

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(ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 152–160; William P. Brown, "'Come, O Children ... I will Teach You the Fear of the Lord' (Ps 34:12): Comparing Psalms and Proverbs," in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Ronald L. Toxel, Kelvin G. Friebe, and Dennis R. Magary; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 85; Tova Forti, "*Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben*: Methodological Vagueness in Defining Wisdom Psalms," in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies* (ed. Mark Sneed; Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 205–220; Cheung, *Wisdom Intoned*; W. H. Bellinger Jr., "Wisdom Psalms," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible* (ed. Will Kynes; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 567–581. Jacobson, "Wisdom Language," 148, outlines the distinctions among ten Psalms scholars as to which psalms are, in fact, wisdom psalms, ranking them from the lowest to highest. Hurvitz, who sees only four psalms (34, 37, 112, 119) is the lowest, while the highest is Whybray, who sees twenty-five psalms as complete wisdom psalms or as possessing constitutive wisdom elements (8, 14, 18, 25, 27, 32, 34, 39, 49, 73, 78, 86, 90, 92, 94, 105, 107, 111, 112, 119, 127, 131, 139, 144, 146). Cheung, *Wisdom Intoned*, 1, lists A. Bentzen as identifying only three wisdom psalms, while L. Jacquet identifies thirty-nine.

<sup>42</sup> Kartje, *Wisdom Epistemology*, 67; Catherine Petranj, "Instruction, Performance, and Prayer: The Didactic Function of Psalmic Wisdom," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship* (ed. Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 87–103.

<sup>43</sup> David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

## 1 Psalms 1–2 as the Wisdom Foundation to the Psalter

Psalms 1–2 form a two-part introduction to the Psalter.<sup>44</sup> Several clues point to these psalms as constituting a mutually interpretative opening to the Psalter by which they are to be read in tandem as casting lexical and thematic lines that reverberate through the book: (1) The term *blessed* or *happy* (אַשְׁרֵי – *ashre*) in 1:1 and 2:12 provide bookends as a framing device;<sup>45</sup> (2) the verb הִגֵּה (*h-g-h*) ‘to rehearse, meditate, mutter’ on the Torah in 1:2 appears by contrast in 2:1 to describe the plotting of the peoples;<sup>46</sup> (3) the righteous man who refuses to ‘sit’ (יָשַׁב – *y-sh-b*) in the seat of scoffers (1:1) links ultimately to YHWH who ‘sits’ in heaven and scoffs at the wicked (2:4); (4) the notion of being ‘transplanted’ (שָׁתוּל – *shatul*) by streams of water is similar to the king who is ‘installed’ (נִסְּךְ – *n-s-k*) on Zion; (5) the contrast between the ‘way of the righteous’ and the ‘way of the wicked’ in 1:6 sets up the use of the term *way* (דֶּרֶךְ – *derek*) in 2:11–12 (‘lest you be destroyed in the way’); (6) the verb *perish* (אָבַד – ‘*b-d*) is used for the wicked in 1:6 and in 2:12; (7) both psalms lack a superscription and traditionally are attributed to David. With these connections in mind, we turn now to wisdom elements present in these introductory psalms.

### 1a Psalm 1 and Wisdom

While Ps 1 is usually classified as a wisdom psalm, our focus here lies on its functional wisdom elements as the doorway to the Psalter.<sup>47</sup> Burger notes the numerous wisdom forms and content that converge in this psalm to support this understanding. He includes the following elements:<sup>48</sup> (1) the *ashre* formula or macarism (‘blessed is the man’); (2) the use of wisdom comparisons with the conjunction כִּי (i.e. the righteous are *like* a rooted and well-watered tree while the wicked are *like* wind-driven chaff); (3) the aphorisms in verse 5 and 6 providing proverbial contrasts between the righteous and the wicked; (4) reverence for the Torah; (5) the doctrine of retribution; (6) practical advice for success in everyday

<sup>44</sup> See Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trans. M. E. J. Richardson; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 100; David J.A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (8 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011), 1:437.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel J. Estes notes that this is a common wisdom device in the Psalter and elsewhere, whereby a writer will consecutively use wisdom terms such as ‘prudence,’ ‘discernment’ or ‘meditate’ in surprising and seemingly antipodal ways (private conversation with the author).

<sup>47</sup> Nearly all interpreters classify Ps 1 as a wisdom psalm. See the discussion in J.A. Burger, “Psalm 1 and Wisdom,” *OTE* 8 (1995):327–339.

<sup>48</sup> Burger, “Psalm 1 and Wisdom,” 335–339.

life; (7) the two paths or ways; (8) a negative attitude toward mockers; (9) admonition for the righteous to separate from sinners; and (10) the importance of opportune timing (i.e. the righteous bear fruit in the right season or time [עת – *et*], v. 3).

The ‘blessing’ or ‘happiness’ (אַשְׁרֵי – *ashre*) theme characterising the Torah meditator becomes a key literary link refracted through the structure of the Psalter.<sup>49</sup> The interjection אַשְׁרֵי (*ashre*), the plural construct of אֲשֶׁר (*’eshet*) connotes the ‘happy,’ ‘fortunate’ or ‘blessed’ status of those who are the beneficiaries of favour, peace and prosperity.<sup>50</sup> The term occurs forty-four times in the Hebrew Bible, with more than half the occurrences in the Psalter and most other occurrences in wisdom contexts.<sup>51</sup> The D-stem verbal form (אָשַׁר – ‘-*sh-r*), ‘to consider fortunate/blessed,’ occurs a dozen times, with half the occurrences in Psalms and wisdom.<sup>52</sup> In his seminal study of the *ashre* formula, Janzen concludes that the pronouncement underscores the desirability of the person’s status. The formula emerges from the wisdom context and presupposes the earlier receipt of favour with its benefits (e.g., fertility, victory, *shalom*), although sometimes proleptically (Ps 41:2; Isa 30:18).<sup>53</sup>

The use of *ashre* in blessing contexts prompts the question of its relation to the more common word for blessing in the Hebrew Bible, בָּרַךְ (*b-r-k*). The latter verb in the D-stem usually connotes the bestowal of divine favour, with its concomitant benefits of fertility, peace, prosperity and dominion, conveyed by means of a relationship with God.<sup>54</sup> Mitchell sees an overlap between the terms,

<sup>49</sup> J. Clinton McCann Jr., “The Shape of Book I of the Psalter and the Shape of Human Happiness,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 340–348.

<sup>50</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (reprint of 1906 ed., Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 80; *HALOT*, 100; *DCH*, 1:437; *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew*. Cited 3 April 2023. Online: <https://semanticdictionary.org/semDic.php?databaseType=SDBH>.

<sup>51</sup> The term occurs twenty-six times in the Psalter (Pss 1:1; 2:12; 32:1–2; 33:12; 34:8 [9]; 40:4 [5]; 41:1 [2]; 65:4 [5]; 84:4–5 [5–6], 12 [13]; 89:15 [16]; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1–2; 127:5; 128:1–2; 137:8–9; 144:15 [2x]; 146:5). The term occurs seven times in Proverbs (Prov 3:13; 8:32, 34; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14), once in Job and Ecclesiastes (Job 5:17; Eccl 10:17) and twice in the contexts of Solomon’s wisdom (1 Kgs 10:8; 2 Chr 9:17).

<sup>52</sup> See Job 29:11; Ps 72:17; Prov 4:14; 23:19; 31:28; Cant 6:9.

<sup>53</sup> Waldemar Janzen, “’*Ašrê* in the Old Testament,” *HTR* 58 (1965):215–226. Janzen argues that the term connotes envy of the person blessed since the form is never directed to God but this seems unlikely in these contexts.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of brk ‘to Bless’ in the Old Testament* (SBLDS 95; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 165; Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, (BZAW 332; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 90–104.

with בָּרַךְ forming the larger category of blessing;<sup>55</sup> yet a distinction between the senses seems likely, as words are rarely entirely synonymous.<sup>56</sup> Several distinctions emerge from a close comparison.<sup>57</sup> *Ashre* never invokes blessing, as *baruk* does but is always descriptive, while presupposing the favoured person’s prior action. To be recognised as *ashre*, a person has undertaken an action or attained a status such as trusting God (Pss 2:12; 34:8 [9]; 40:4 [5]; 84:12 [13]), fearing YHWH (Pss 112:1; 128:1), submitting to Torah (Ps 119:1–2) or having sins forgiven (Ps 32:1–2). God never pronounces a person *ashre*—only humans describe other humans this way. *Ashre* does not form an antipodal word-pair with cursing. Rather, it pronounces a person as prosperous without necessarily relating the source of prosperity. In sum, *bārûk* connotes the divine favour and gifts that God grants to those in relationship with him, while *ashre* depicts the favourable status enjoyed by those who have attained such benefits, often through prior action.<sup>58</sup>

From this background the use of *ashre* in the Psalms gains clarity; the Psalter is structured so as to bring the reader/meditator into the status of divine favour and prosperity. Not only does the term *ashre* form an inclusio device opening and closing Pss 1–2 but the term appears at critical junctures throughout the five-book structure of the Psalter. The closing psalm of Book I uses the term to denote the blessing that surrounds the wise person who remembers the lowly: “*Blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי) are those who have regard for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble” (Ps 41:1).<sup>59</sup> The term appears in verbal form as a blessing on the Davidic king in the closing psalm of Book II: “Then all nations will be blessed through him and they will call him *blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי!)” (Ps 72:17). The term occurs in the closing psalm of Book III to characterise the happiness of those who observe the festival with YHWH’s blessing: “*Blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי) are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, LORD” (Ps 89:15 [16]). Likewise, the closing psalm of Book IV mentions the term as a benediction for those who execute justice: “*Blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי) are they who act justly, who always do what is right” (Ps 106:3). Finally, the opening psalm of the Psalter’s epilogue (Pss 146–150) employs the term to describe the blessing

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, *The Meaning of brk*, 180. He notes that “*ašrê* is synonymous with *bārûk* over the entire range of meaning of ‘*ašrê* . . . However, all that can be called *bārûk* cannot necessarily be called ‘*ašrê*.”

<sup>56</sup> Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 159–161.

<sup>57</sup> See Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 114–115.

<sup>58</sup> Robin L. Routledge, “Blessings and Curses,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 61.

<sup>59</sup> All Scriptural citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

of those who hope and find refuge in YHWH: "*Blessed* (אַשְׁרֵי) are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God" (Ps 146:5).

Such distribution sets the tone for the Psalter as forming the pathway to human happiness or flourishing, attainable through attention to Torah and appropriation of its ethical demands and concretised through the reality of knowing YHWH and walking in his ways (Ps 1:6). Psalm 1 thus sets trajectory for the reading of the Psalter in tangible and implicit ways. The Psalms provide a pathway for the righteous to prosper by focusing on the understanding of and obedience to the Torah and by avoiding deleterious relationships that will corrupt and damage the righteous man's vibrant relationship to YHWH.

#### 1b Psalm 2 and Wisdom

While the wisdom elements present in Ps 1 are not as overtly traceable in Ps 2, the literary links binding the two psalms as discussed earlier suggest a cohesive framework, with Ps 2 likewise carrying sapiential features.<sup>60</sup> In this way, several aspects merit mention. Psalm 2 portrays the wicked nations as plotting (v. 1) with the term הִגָּה (*h-g-h*), which means customarily 'to meditate on,' 'to rehearse while meditating,' or 'to speak, proclaim.'<sup>61</sup> The term appears eleven times in the Psalter, appearing in each of the five books (Pss 1:2; 2:1; 35:28; 37:30; 38:12 [13]; 63:6 [7]; 71:24; 77:12 [13]; 90:9; 115:7; 143:5). Within the Psalter the term is usually taken to carry one of three nuances, reciting from memory, reading the written text or singing the melody.<sup>62</sup> The term occurs fifteen times elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, often to denote the moaning/growling of animals (Isa 31:4; 38:14; 59:11) or to prioritise divine revelation as the source of wisdom and blessing (Josh 1:8; Job 27:4; Prov 8:7; Isa 8:19). The word appears only once elsewhere in Psalms to characterise the actions of evildoers, in Ps 38:12 (13) where the wicked "*meditate* treachery all day long" against the psalmist.

In other places, the term appears in the context of wisdom formulations or didactic concerns such as in Ps 37:30, where the psalmist characterises the speech of the upright: "The mouth of the righteous *utters* (הִגָּה) wisdom and his tongue speaks justice" (Ps 37:30). In Ps 90, the term describes the *moaning* or sigh that characterises life's end for fallen, mortal humans who nonetheless are encouraged to seek a heart of wisdom (90:9; cf. v. 12). In Ps 143, the psalmist *meditates* on the works of YHWH (v. 9) before asking YHWH to teach (לִמְדָה – *l-*

<sup>60</sup> See Philip Sumpter, "The Canonical Shape of Psalms 1–14," *OTE* 32 (2019):516–517.

<sup>61</sup> *HALOT*, 237; *DCH*, 2:487.

<sup>62</sup> Michael LeFebvre, "Torah-Meditation and the Psalms: The Invitation of Psalm 1," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (ed. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 218.

*m-d*) him to do his good pleasure (רָצוֹן – *ratson*), with the latter term in another context denoting the desire or favour (רָצוֹן – *ratson*) that YHWH fulfils for those who fear him (Ps 145:19), along with resonances to the pleasure or delight (חֶפֶץ – *khefets*) that the righteous man finds in Torah (1:2) and that God finds in the righteous man (Ps 41:12).

Psalm 2 speaks of the Davidic king’s relationship to YHWH as grounded in a father/son covenant bond (v. 7), calling to mind the pervasive father/son relationship so crucial to the transmission of wisdom elsewhere. The rhetorical strategy of Proverbs likewise grounds the fatherly relationship and training in the will of YHWH, tying vitally to the familial education program outlined in Deuteronomy (e.g. Prov 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11). With respect to the trajectory of the Psalter, this father/son relationship is crucial in David’s own experience, as he is betrayed by the wrong son Absalom in Ps 3 before extending his legacy through the chosen son, Solomon, in Ps 72. The kings of the earth are warned in verse 10 to ‘receive instruction,’ using the wisdom term שָׂכַל (*s-k-l*) with wisdom connections to the life of David as discussed below. The term likewise carries integral ties to Proverbs as a programmatic term denoting one of the key benefits of wisdom, viz., gaining insight for the successful execution of the well-lived life (Prov 1:3; 3:4; 10:5; 12:8; 15:24; 16:20). Instead of pursuing folly, these kings are to follow the course of fearing YHWH (v. 11), the inception point and regulative principle of wisdom in Proverbs (1:7; 2:5; 9:10; 10:27; 14:27; 24:21; 31:30). The psalm concludes (v. 12) with a reference to the way (דֶּרֶךְ; *derek*) of destruction as ostensibly contrasted with the way of the righteous, which is the way of life as outlined in Ps 1. Those who follow the right path by finding refuge in the Davidic king and ultimately in YHWH himself are characterised as ‘blessed’ (אַשְׁרֵי), linking back to the blessing that derives from Torah meditation in Ps 1.

## 2 Lexical and Thematic Ties to the Book of Proverbs

Not only do Pss 1–2 carry wisdom elements but they also carry intriguing ties to the larger program of wisdom outlined in the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs offers clues to its purposeful and intentional structure aimed at moving inexperienced youths toward character formation and training for socio-political leadership through the inculcation of the virtues of righteousness, justice and integrity.<sup>63</sup> Instrumental to such a program is the literary framework of the book, which consists of seven stages of wisdom progression. In the prologue of the book (1:8–9:18) are ten speeches outlining the father’s instruction to the son as the ground-level entry point for attaining wisdom. His voice is paired with that

<sup>63</sup> See Kyle C. Dunham, “Structure and Theology in Proverbs: Its Function as an Educational Program for Novice Leaders in Ancient Israel,” *BBR* 29 (2019):361–388.

of Lady Wisdom, whose wholesome character presents an attractive patroness for the young man in his pursuit of wisdom.<sup>64</sup> Interesting in this connection are the literary and thematic connections found in the father's opening speech in Proverbs (Prov 1:8-19), compared with Ps 1 and in Lady Wisdom's opening discourse (1:20-33) compared with Ps 2.

First, Ps 1 closely mirrors the father's first didactic speech in Proverbs (Prov 1:8-19). The father's correction in Proverbs is paired with the mother's instruction (Prov 1:8), with the latter characterised as 'Torah' (תּוֹרָה), the same term denoting the body of sacred truth upon which the blessed man of Ps 1 is meditating (Ps 1:2). The son in Proverbs is to avoid at all costs the enticement of 'sinners' (חַטָּאִים – *khatta'im*) (Prov 1:10), a group posing potential risk to the blessed man of Ps 1 as well (Ps 1:1). The latter does not stand in the 'path' (דֶּרֶךְ) that these sinners traverse (הַלֵּךְ – *h-l-k*), implicitly the same path which the young son is also not to walk upon (הַלֵּךְ) or even enter (Prov 1:15). The sinners who cannot rise (קוּם – *q-w-m*) in the day of judgment in Ps 1:6 have their corollary in those whom the father describes as going down (יָרַד – *y-r-d*) to the pit (Prov 1:12). In both cases, the righteous preserve their life and achieve success by observing the instruction given and by refraining from the path of sinners that leads to death.

Second, the admonition and instruction of Ps 2 have corollaries in Lady Wisdom's opening discourse (Prov 1:20-33). Lady Wisdom takes up the mantle of a prophetess in confronting the wisdom seeker with respect to the deadly consequences of folly similar to the psalmist in Ps 2. Lady Wisdom cries out from 'atop' (רֹאשׁ – *ro'sh*) the city's commotion (Prov 1:21), a vantage point revealed later to be the highest points of the city (9:3), while the Davidic king echoes YHWH's decree from the summit of Mount Zion (Ps 2:6). Lady Wisdom addresses her discourse to scoffers who love their scorning (Prov 1:22), while the psalmist similarly addresses the foolish kings of the earth (Ps 2:10) who conspire together in vain (vv. 1-2). YHWH enthroned in heaven 'laughs at' (שָׂחַק – *s-kh-q*) and 'mocks' (לָעַג – *l-'-g*) the wicked (Ps 2:4), much as Lady Wisdom promises to 'laugh at' (שָׂחַק – *s-kh-q*) and 'mock' (לָעַג – *l-'-g*) the foolish ones who spurn her counsel (Prov 1:26), with the same terms in the same order. Those whom Lady Wisdom favours are those who choose the fear of YHWH (Prov 1:29), the same course the kings are admonished to take (Ps 2:11). Those who reject the counsel of Lady Wisdom will consume the fruit of their own way (דֶּרֶךְ – *derek*) (Prov 1:31), analogous to those who perish in their way due to the

<sup>64</sup> Dunham, "Structure and Theology," 373–377.

quickly kindled wrath of the king (Ps 2:12). ‘Blessing’ or ‘happiness’ (אַשְׁרֵי – *ashre*) is the outcome of submission to the rightful king (Ps 2:12), comparable to the flourishing available to those upon whom Lady Wisdom’s spirit is poured, as they find the blessing that attends those who embrace her (Prov 1:23; cf. 3:13).

Other lexical ties between Psalms and Proverbs emerge from careful comparison. The term הַכְּמָה (*hokmâ*) is crucial to the message of Proverbs, appearing thirty-nine times in the book including the programmatic Prov 1:7 (‘the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise *wisdom* and instruction’). The term denotes ‘skill,’ ‘expertise’ or ‘wisdom.’<sup>65</sup> The term focuses on the application of knowledge in the experiential and ethical realms. Cognates include the verb חָכַם (*h-k-m*), ‘to be wise, insightful’ and the adjective חָכָם (*hakam*), ‘wise.’ These terms appear collectively twelve times in Psalms, with growing frequency in Books IV–V.<sup>66</sup> The opening psalm of Book V uses the term twice, with a closing appeal to whomever is wise to heed the message of the psalm (107:43). Later in Book V, the programmatic statement of Prov 1:7 is repeated nearly verbatim in Ps 111:10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

Other sapiential terms appear less frequently in Proverbs but often in Psalms. One is the verb לָמַד (*l-m-d*), ‘to learn’ or in the D-stem, ‘to teach.’<sup>67</sup> The term occurs twice in Prov (5:13; 30:3), together with the synonyms מוֹרֶה (*môreh*), ‘teacher’ (5:13) and יָרָה (*y-r-h*), ‘to instruct’ (4:4, 11; 6:13). These terms appear extensively, however, in Psalms, with ‘learn/teach’ (*l-m-d*) occurring twenty-seven times.<sup>68</sup> The term occurs in Books I, II, IV and V of the Psalter. Nearly all the occurrences centre on divine instruction that YHWH provides humanity through Torah. The urgency and pervasiveness of the instruction grows as the Psalter progresses, with two-thirds of the occurrences appearing in Books IV–V. The other verb ‘instruct’ (*y-r-h*) likewise occurs eight times in the Psalter, framed as well in Books I, II, IV and V.<sup>69</sup> These lexical benchmarks suggest strategic placement with growing poignancy as the book progresses. The wisdom terminology is highly framed, with Books I–II providing the counterpoise to Books IV–V, where the summons to wisdom through Torah gains force, especially in Ps 119.

<sup>65</sup> HALOT, 314; DCH, 3:22; SDBH; Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9* (Anchor Bible; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 32–33.

<sup>66</sup> Psalms 19:7 [8]; 37:30; 49:10 [11]; 51:6 [8]; 58:5 [6]; 90:12; 104:24; 105:22; 107:27, 43; 111:10; 119:98.

<sup>67</sup> HALOT, 531; DCH, 4:548–49.

<sup>68</sup> Psalms 18:34 [35]; 25:4–5, 9; 34:11 [12]; 51:13 [15]; 60:1; 71:17; 94:10, 12; 119:7, 12, 26, 64, 66, 68, 71, 73, 99, 108, 124, 135, 171; 132:12; 143:10; 144:1.

<sup>69</sup> Psalms 25:8, 12; 27:11; 32:8; 45:4 [5]; 86:11; 119:33, 102.



Cumulatively, these intertextual links suggest a similar tack in Psalms and Proverbs, hinting that both books possess a two-fold opening that serves both to instruct about the proper path to take and wrong one to avoid (Ps 1; Prov 1:8-19) and to warn about the devastating consequences that ensue from failing to heed the counsel of YHWH and his designated agents (implicitly the Davidic king mediates in Ps 2, while the parents mediate in Prov 1:20-33). With respect to this twofold opening of the Psalter, Sumpter states:

In sum, the Psalter opens with a delineation of the two paths to God-granted happiness—obedience to God’s torah and submission to God’s Davidically mediated rule—and it exhorts humanity as a whole ... to choose life by being wise and following these psalms’ guidance by believing in their promises.<sup>70</sup>

These openings likewise correspond to the thematic development evident in both books—God instructs humanity through Torah so as to attain the benefits accruing from covenant fidelity.

### 3 David and *Maskil*: Wisdom as Royal Success in the Psalter

Already in Ps 2, those who oppose the path of wisdom through submission to the Davidic king are instructed to ‘be wise’ or ‘receive instruction’ (Ps 2:10). The term שכל (*s-k-l*) denotes ‘to be wise,’ ‘have insight’ or ‘achieve success.’<sup>71</sup> Tova Forti and David Glatt-Gilad demonstrate the integral role this term plays in the rise of David to prominence in the succession narrative of 1 Samuel.<sup>72</sup> The term appears four times in 1 Sam 18 to describe David’s ascension. Initially, David ‘finds success’ (שכל) in whatever Saul sends him to do (1 Sam 18:5). His rousing ‘success’ (שכל) ensues in ‘all his ways’ (דֶּרֶךְ – *derek*) and springs from the reality that YHWH is with him (18:14). This ‘success’ (שכל) soon evokes Saul’s enmity, his menacing presence posing a danger to David (18:15). Nevertheless, David’s reputation grows because he ‘succeeds’ (שכל) in all his ventures beyond Saul’s other commanders (18:30). In surveying the usage of the term elsewhere in the historical books, Forti and Glatt-Gilad conclude that the term carries three connotations: (1) the successful one heeds the Torah and thereby achieves success in a cause-effect relationship; (2) the successful one possesses the presence of YHWH in a unique way; and (3) the favourable outcomes of the successful one follows obedience and fidelity rather than the other way around.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Sumpter, “Canonical Shape of Psalms 1–14,” 517.

<sup>71</sup> *HALOT*, 1328–29; *DCH*, 8:150–153.

<sup>72</sup> Tova Forti and David A. Glatt-Gilad, “The Function of the Root *skl* in Shaping the Ideal Figure of David in 1 Samuel 18,” *VT* 65 (2015):390–400.

<sup>73</sup> Forti and Glatt-Gilad, “The Function of the Root *skl*,” 398.

Returning to Psalms, the term שָׁכַל occurs at key junctures in the Psalter. Outside its use in the opening framework of Ps 2, the term occurs in the closing psalm of Book I. Psalm 41:1 uses the term in tandem with אֲשֶׁרִי (*ashre*) to denote the blessing upon one who acts correctly toward the less fortunate: “*Blessed (ashre) are those who have regard (שָׁכַל – s-k-l) for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble*” (Ps 41:1). In the closing psalm of Book IV, the term denotes the failure of Israel’s ancestors to properly discern YHWH’s works: “*When our ancestors were in Egypt, they gave no thought (שָׁכַל – s-k-l) to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses*” (Ps 106:7). Elsewhere, this kind of discernment is linked to the wisdom theme of fearing YHWH: “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; who follow his precepts have good understanding (שָׁכַל – sekel)*” (Ps 111:10).

This connection of the term שָׁכַל to the figure of David and to the theme of wisdom prompts a further question regarding the meaning of the term מְשָׁכִיל (*maskil*), used as a heading in thirteen psalms (Pss 32; 42; 44; 45; 52; 53; 54; 55; 74; 78; 88; 89; 142).<sup>74</sup> Six of these headings are attributed to David (Pss 32; 52; 53; 54; 55; 142), four to the Korahites (Pss 42; 44; 45; 88), two to Asaph (74; 78) and one to Ethan (Ps 89). The term has been interpreted traditionally to signify one of three different connotations: (1) a well-written or artful song; (2) a didactic song that teaches or illuminates; or (3) a successful or popular song.<sup>75</sup> While acknowledging the tension that a number of these psalms would not overtly be classified as wisdom psalms, our focus is not so much on genre classification as discerning the pattern of wisdom’s function or presence in key junctures of the Psalter. Interesting in this regard is the placement of מְשָׁכִיל in the psalms opening Book II (Ps 42) and closing Book III (Ps 89). Additionally, the term is first used as a heading and last used as a heading with two psalms attributed to David (Pss 32; 142), thus providing a Davidic frame and important textual link to the successful king whose imprint is determinative in the Psalms.

In considering David’s wisdom imprint on the Psalter, another important feature in the structure of Psalms is the unique colophon concluding Ps 72: “*The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended*” (Ps 72:20).<sup>76</sup> Psalm 72 is attributed

<sup>74</sup> The form מְשָׁכִיל would customarily be parsed as the *hip’il* masc sing participle of the verb שָׁכַל.

<sup>75</sup> Klaus Koenen, „Maškil—«Wechselgesang»: Eine neue Deutung zu einem Begriff der Psalmenüberschriften,” *ZAW* 103 (1991):109–110.

<sup>76</sup> Gianni Barbiero, “The Risks of a Fragmented Reading of the Psalms: Psalm 72 as a Case in Point,” *ZAW* 119 (2007):67–91; Hendrik Koorevaar, “The Psalter as a Structured Theological Story with the Aid of Subscripts and Superscripts,” in *The*

traditionally to Solomon in view of its superscription ‘by/for/to Solomon’ (לְשֹׁלֹמֹה – *lishlomoh*). Gianni Barbiero makes a persuasive case, however, for a likely reading of the psalm as ‘written *by* David *for* Solomon’ on the occasion of the latter’s accession to the throne.<sup>77</sup> He proposes a framing device through catchword links in the opening and closing lines of the psalm connecting Solomon to David’s benediction and ultimately YHWH’s blessing:

- A לְשֹׁלֹמֹה ‘to Solomon’ (designation) (v. 1a)  
 B בְּנֵי-מֶלֶךְ ‘the king’s son’ (attribution) (v. 1c)  
 C אֱלֹהִים ‘God’ (arbiter of blessing) (v. 1b)  
 C’ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים ‘YHWH God’ (arbiter of blessing) (vv. 18-19)  
 B’ בְּנֵי-יֵשׁוּ ‘son of Jesse’ (attribution) (v. 20b)  
 A’ דָּוִד ‘David’ (authorship) (v. 20b)

Beyond this, David’s ‘prayer’ (תְּפִלָּה – *tefillah*) (v. 20) links back to the ‘prayers’ (תְּפִלָּה – *tefillah*) and ‘blessings’ invoked continually for the king and his reign (v. 15). Barbiero identifies several other catchword links to the Davidic covenant and to the historical narratives of David and Solomon. These connections suggest a wisdom link to the royal sages of David and Solomon and serve to frame Books I–II as the product of royal wisdom mediated through the character of these two kings.

#### 4 Sages in the Psalter

In addition to the wisdom ligatures already discussed, another aspect of wisdom’s function in the structure of the Psalter is the strategic placement of sages. For example, Ps 73 and the sage Asaph come at a critical juncture in the Psalter.<sup>78</sup> Psalm 73 stands at the theological and canonical centre of the Psalter as the beginning of Book III and as the starting point of the second half of the Psalter. Further, Ps 73 echoes the Torah piety evident in Ps 1 as something of a secondary header reinforcing that the path of righteousness provides true blessing while the path of the wicked leads to destruction. Ps 73 carries evident

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*Composition of the Book of Psalms* (ed. Erich Zenger; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 579–592; David Willgren, “Psalm 72:20: A Frozen Colophon?” *JBL* 135 (2016):49–60.

<sup>77</sup> Barbiero, “The Risks of a Fragmented Reading,” 87–90. Barbiero connects the themes of this psalm to David’s last words to Solomon in 1 Chr 22:7–9.

<sup>78</sup> See Brueggemann and Miller, “Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker,” 45–46; Markus Saur, „Die Weisheitspsalmen Ps 49 und Ps 73 und ihre Bedeutung für die theologische Architektur des Psalters,“ in *Die kleine Biblia: Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen und des Psalters* (ed. Markus Saur; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 121–149; Christine D. Brown, “The Psalms of Asaph: A Study of the Function of a Psalm Collection” (PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 2009), 62–63.

traces of wisdom themes and metaphors even though its designation as a wisdom psalm remains controversial.<sup>79</sup> Asaph is linked to the putative wisdom term מְשֻׁבֵּל (*maskil*) twice elsewhere in the Psalter (Pss 74; 78) and is identified as a ‘seer’ (2 Chr 29:30), a ‘prophet’ (1 Chr 25:1-2) and the father of a prophet (2 Chr 20:14) outside the Psalter.

This latter prophetic designation links him conceptually in the Psalter to the figure of Moses, who is designated as “the man of God” (Ps 90:1) in keeping with his identification elsewhere as Israel’s greatest prophet (Deut 18:15; 34:10). In the Psalter, however, Moses assumes the garb of a sage, asking YHWH to “teach us to number our days so that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12). Other strategic placement of sages includes Solomon, who is featured in the close of Book II (Ps 72) and in the centre psalm of the Songs of Ascent (Pss 120–134), a key grouping in Book V.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, two other sages occupy a key place in the Psalter and are likewise associated with the wisdom-tinged term מְשֻׁבֵּל—the term appears in the headings of the psalms of Heman (Ps 88) and Ethan (Ps 89). Their psalms act in concert to close Book III of the Psalter. Both sages feature prominently also in the polemical presentation of Solomon as the greatest sage in 1 Kgs 4:

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else including *Ethan the Ezrahite*—wiser than *Heman*, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations (1 Kgs 4:30-31).

Such prominent placement of sages at critical junctures in the Psalter suggests their formative role in the trajectory of the book.

## 5 Wisdom Framing in Book V

One final note concerning the prominence of wisdom framing in the Psalter turns on the placement of wisdom phrases in the opening and closing of Book V. Psalm 107 opens Book V with a rehearsal of God’s movement to regather the exiles and bring them back to the land. The psalm ends with a wisdom admonition which *prima facie* appears to lie in tension with its context: “Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD” (Ps 107:43). This wisdom summons takes on a larger role, however, in setting a trajectory for Book V that receives its reply in the conclusion of the book.<sup>81</sup> The ending refrain of Ps 145, prior to its concluding doxology, is a wisdom summation that answers Ps 107 while also reaching back to Pss 1–2 with their depiction of the two paths: “He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

<sup>79</sup> See Cheung, *Wisdom Intoned*, 105–122; Kartje, *Wisdom Epistemology*, 106–112.

<sup>80</sup> See Ho, *The Design of the Psalter*, 112–117, for the strategic placement of Ps 127.

<sup>81</sup> Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter,” 80–81.

The LORD watches over all who love him but all the wicked he will destroy" (Ps 145:19-20). Psalm 145 also carries an alphabetic structure as an acrostic, a device identified elsewhere as pertaining to the wisdom milieu. Acrostics function to mirror the order, completion and symmetry in creation in a way that corresponds to YHWH's own character.<sup>82</sup> Fittingly, Proverbs also ends with an acrostic characterising the noble wife (Prov 31:10–31). Together these features suggest a wisdom finale to the Psalter intended to hark back to the opening of the book by solidifying the sapiential hue discernible at key junctures in the Psalter.

## E CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that a wisdom framework played a key role in the shaping of the Psalter. The nature of its wisdom shaping lies not so much at the level of form and genre criticism, inasmuch as scholars have sought to establish a wisdom orientation for the Psalter through the identification of wisdom psalms. Rather, wisdom operates in perhaps a more subtle but effective way at the level of catchword and catchphrase connections, lexical and thematic ties to the canonical corpus of wisdom (especially Proverbs), the strategic placement of sages and wisdom terminology and in themes present at critical junctures in the Psalter. This consistent and discernible placement of wisdom persons, terms and themes serves a heuristic role in guiding and ultimately shaping the worshipper who reads and memorises the Psalter. As the reader writes the psalms upon the heart, the psalms in turn render wisdom with its attendant blessing, flourishing, stability and meaning.

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<sup>82</sup> Anthony Ceresko, "The Sage in the Psalms," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, (ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 224–225.

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Kyle C. Dunham Old Testament, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Detroit, USA. Email: [kdunham@dbts.edu](mailto:kdunham@dbts.edu). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5528-7796>.