

The Psalmists' Journey and the Sanctuary: A Study in the Sanctuary and the Shape of the Book of Psalms

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Introduction

The book of Psalms is saturated with sanctuary imagery.¹ However, a brief look at the scattered examples gives an impression that the sanctuary references in the Psalms have no specific intention and arrangement. This impression may be related to the general presumption about the book of Psalms that the Psalter is a relatively haphazard collection of disparate pieces with little or no discernible organization.²

A number of settings for Psalms have been surveyed by various scholars throughout the history of psalmic interpretation. These settings have ranged from the historical situation of ancient Israel to the existential

¹ Examples are, the sanctuary (Pss 15:1; 20:2; 63:2; 68:24, 25; 73:17; 96:6; 150:1), the house of the Lord (Pss 23:6; 27:4; 36:8, 9; 93:5; 122:1; 135:2), the temple (Pss 5:7; 11:4; 18:6; 48:9; 65:4; 68:29; 138:2), God's holy hill (Pss 2:6; 3:4; 15:1; 24:3; 43:3,4), Zion (Pss 2:6; 14:7; 20:2; 48:11, 12; 50:2; 128:5; 129:5; 132:13; 133:3), the sanctuary items (Pss 26:6; 56:12; 66:15; 84:3; 141:2), festivals and sacrifices (Pss 42:2,4; 50:14, 23; 54:6; 55:14; 56:12; 76:11; 95:1, 2; 96:8; 98:4-6; 100:1-4), the great assembly (Pss 22:25; 26:12; 40:10; 89:7; 102:22; 107:32; 149:1) and other allusions to the sanctuary (Pss 4:6; 13:3; 26:6; 51:7; 61:4; 80:3, 7; 116:13).

² J. F. D. Creach, "Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, no. 217 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 12-13.

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situation and cultic setting.³ Yet one more setting has begun to have an important impact on modern Psalms research, i.e., the setting of the Psalter itself.⁴ The words “shaping” and “shape” used by the scholars refer to “literary structure, the internal clues that give directions as to how the whole should be read and understood.”⁵

Modern trends in psalmic studies seek to trace the history of structuring the book of Psalms and to understand the overarching purpose and message of the entire book.⁶ In other words, the Psalms are not seen as a random anthology of prayers and praises, but as an intentional collection with a

³ Attempts to find a link between the Psalms and events in David’s biography are seen in the headings attached to some of the Psalms (e.g., Psalm 34 refers to the events described in 1 Samuel 21:10-15; Psalm 51 is linked to the events recorded in 2 Samuel 12:1-14). With the Enlightenment came an increased emphasis on rational inquiry, and the study of the Psalms focused on seeking to assign each Psalm its proper chronological niche and to dissect each in quest of its reflection of historical events (e.g., J. Wellhausen, *The Book of Psalms: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text Printed in Colors, with Notes by J. Wellhausen . . . English Translation of the Notes by J. D. Prince* [Facsimile] [Leipzig J. C. Hinrichs, 1895]). The nineteenth century practitioners of the historical-critical method were more interested in the individual psalmist’s psychological condition than in theology in the Psalms (e.g., E. F. K. Rosenmuller, *Annotations on Some of the Messianic Psalms, from the Commentary of Rosenmuller, with the Latin Version and Notes of Dathe*, Volume 32 [Ulan Press, 2012]). H. Gunkel and S. Mowinckel gave rise to cultic approaches to the Psalms by arguing for the cultic origins of the Psalms. See H. Gunkel, *What Remains of the Old Testament and Other Essays* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1928); S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004). For a survey of history of interpretation of the book of Psalms, see, e.g., Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, with Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 19-112.

⁴ H. P. Nasuti, *Defining the Sacred Songs: Genre, Tradition and Post-critical Interpretation of the Psalms* (Sheffield, England: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999), 163.

⁵ Creach, 11.

⁶ For example, G. H. Wilson, “The Use of the Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (1986): 85-94; J. L. Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 3-12; W. Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: the Psalms as Canon,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 50 (1991): 63-92; W. Brueggemann & P. D. Miller, “Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 72 (1996): 45-56; McCann, “Psalms,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: a Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 159-165; M. D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: an Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007).

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clear purpose and a unified message.⁷ Looking for interaction between psalms within a context means that the contemporary reader can seek out themes that editors of the final form of the Psalter wished to emphasize.⁸

An attempt is made here to look at one aspect of the present shape of the Psalter, i.e., the psalms which introduce and close the Psalter together with the psalms which represent the canonical markers of the Psalter. The main objective of this article may be formulated as the following question: What is the significance of the sanctuary motif for the shape and overall message of the book of Psalms?

The Sanctuary and the Introduction to the Psalter

Psalms placed in certain positions within the Psalter take on special importance. This applies particularly to the psalms which are placed at the beginning and end of the five Books of the Psalter.⁹ There is wide agreement in modern scholarship that Psalms 1 and 2 function as an introduction to the Psalter and underscore certain key themes that resonate throughout the whole book.¹⁰ These two psalms are intentionally separated from the rest of the psalms in Book I by not being designated “A Psalm of David” as the others are (except Psalms 10 and 33). Do Psalms 1 and 2 underscore the sanctuary theme as one of the key themes of the Psalter?

The Sanctuary in Psalm 1

Psalm 1 depicts the righteous by a simile of “a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season and whose leaf does not wither”

⁷ Futato, 57.

⁸ J. A. Grant, “The Psalms and the King,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. D. Firth & P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 107.

⁹ Wilson, 85-94.

¹⁰ For example, J. L. Mays, *Psalms: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 15; Futato, 58-59; Grant, 108. Though some argue that only Psalm 1 serves as the introduction to the Psalter and Psalm 2 plays the role of the introduction to the first Book (Wilson, 88), it seems more likely that Psalms 1 and 2 combine to provide a joint introduction to the whole Psalter. Grant shares two convincing reasons: 1) their common lack of superscription, and 2) various linguistic links between the two psalms, including a bracketing inclusion based in the word אֲשֶׁר־ (“blessed,” Pss 1:1; 2:12) (Grant, 108).

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(Ps 1:3). Mays understands the simile of a tree in Psalm 1 as the description of “the blessedness of those who trust in the Lord.”¹¹

However, Psalm 1:3 seems to point to more than that, it seems to picture the righteous as abiding in the sanctuary. This interpretation is suggested by parallels with several other Old Testament texts, including several other examples in the Psalter, which repeat the motifs of the river and the tree found in Psalm 1 and place them in the sanctuary context.

Parallels between Psalm 1:3 and Other Related Old Testament Texts

Psalm 1:3 displays strong connections with a number of Old Testament texts. Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:7-8 share common wording and imagery: “But *blessed is the man* who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be *like a tree planted by the water* that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; *its leaves are always green*. It has no worries in a year of drought and *never fails to bear fruit*” (Jer 17:7, 8) (emphasis supplied).¹²

What is particularly interesting for this study is that the three images in Jeremiah 17:8 are placed in the sanctuary context, i.e., in the context of the living waters that are associated with God’s throne in his holy sanctuary: “A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. . . the spring of the living water” (Jer 17:12-13).

Psalm 1 displays clear connections with some other texts that contain a tradition equating Zion and the temple with paradise.¹³ Ezekiel 47:12a seems to be such a text. This view is supported by the almost exact wording of the two passages: “*Fruit trees* of all kinds will grow on both banks of *the river*. *Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail*” (emphasis supplied). Interestingly the tree image in Ezekiel 47:12a is placed in the sanctuary context: “Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them” (Ezek 47:12b). Ezekiel 40-47 focuses on the

¹¹ Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter,” 4. Also, N. M. Sarna, *Songs of the Heart: an Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1993), 40.

¹² Scripture quotations are generally given according to the versification of the English translation and are taken from the New International Version (NIV), except when they are taken from another English version which is noted in parenthesis.

¹³ J. F. D. Creach, “Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream: the Portrait of the Righteous in Psalm 1:3,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 46 (34-46).

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sanctuary. The river which gives life to everything it flows, including the fruit trees which grow on the river banks, has its source in the sanctuary (Ezek47:1-12).

Additional evidence that Psalm 1 involves the sanctuary scene is the word פלגים (“streams”) in Psalm 1:3, a word selected perhaps because of its presence in various texts where the waters of the holy mountain and its temple are described (Isa 30:25; 32:2; Pss 46:4; 65:9).¹⁴ Psalm 46:4 depicts the streams that make glad the city of God. In Psalm 65:9 the streams of water signify the Lord’s power experienced on Zion. Isaiah 30:25 and 32:2 associate the term with the waters of paradise. Isaiah 33:20, 21 envisions Zion and Jerusalem as a tent (אהל designates here the sanctuary) that will not be moved and as the place of broad rivers and streams. Psalm 36:7, 8 relates the sanctuary to the river motif, i.e., it speaks of the abundance in God’s house, which includes drinking from God’s river of delight.

Ezekiel 31:3-14 may be seen as additional support to the idea that Old Testament writers used the images of tree and the streams of water to describe the righteous in the sanctuary, though it does not display the textual similarities with Psalm 1:3 as Ezekiel 47:12 does. The association of waters with paradise and the sanctuary has wide biblical support (Gen 2:10-14; 1 Kgs 7:23-29, 44; 2 Chr 4:2-10; Isa 8:6, 7; Joel 3:18).

The image of the righteous being *planted* in Psalm 1:3 is also found in Exodus 15:17, where the author describes the exodus experience and the beginnings of Israel as the nation saying “You will bring them in and *plant* them on the mountain of your inheritance—the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, *the sanctuary*, O Lord, your hands established” (emphasis supplied). The sanctuary is designated here as the place where the righteous are planted.

The association of waters with paradise and the sanctuary has also wide extrabiblical support.¹⁵ In Mesopotamian texts, the tree and life-giving waters are placed in sanctuaries, e.g., the Epic of Gilgamesh depicts a special cult tree erected on the Apsu, the watery abyss, in Eridu, the

¹⁴ Creach, “Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream: the Portrait of the Righteous in Psalm 1:3,” 41, 46.

¹⁵ O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1978), 116-117, 136, 140-143.

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sanctuary of Enki.¹⁶ Brown points to iconographic parallels among numerous seal impressions, tomb reliefs, and statuettes, images of goats and caprids eating the leaves or buds of trees which assume a prominent position.¹⁷

The imagery of a tree is undoubtedly prominent among sanctuary images. The tree motif lies in the background of the two pillars that flanked the vestibule of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:21; 2 Kgs 25:16-17; 2 Chr 3:15-17). "[T]he twin pillars of the Solomonic temple, in addition to marking the boundary between the profane and the holy, represented the 'paradisiacal life-giving aspect of the sanctuary.'"¹⁸ Some objects and walls of the temple were decorated with tree images (Exod 37:17-22; Ezek 40:16, 22; 41:18-20, 25, 26). "Iconographically and architecturally, the temple reflected the garden of God."¹⁹

Creach rightly contends that "the writer of Ps 1:3 transforms the simile of the tree (as it appears in Jer. 17:8) into a comparison of the righteous to trees planted in the temple precincts" as given in Ezekiel 47:12.²⁰ This conclusion leads to a relevant question: What is the meaning of the inclusion of the sanctuary in Psalm 1? To answer this question, the study now turns to exploring the parallels between Psalm 1:3 and several other passages in the Psalms, which place the motifs of the river and the tree in the sanctuary context.

Parallels between Psalm 1:3 and Other Related Texts in the Psalter

Psalms 52:8 and 92:12-14 speak of the righteous as trees planted in the temple of God. In Psalm 52:8, the righteous one is "like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God." Contrary to this image of prosperity and security, the wicked ones are destined to be *uprooted* from the land of the living (v. 5, emphasis supplied), namely destroyed.

Psalm 92:14 describes the righteous as trees planted, flourishing and bearing fruits in the house of the Lord, using the language that is strongly

¹⁶ W. P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: a Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 60.

¹⁷ Brown, 61-67.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁰ Creach, "Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream: the Portrait of the Righteous in Psalm 1:3," 36.

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reminiscent of Psalm 1:3. The parallels between these two texts deserve special attention because Psalm 92:12-14 undoubtedly portrays the sanctuary scene: “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.”

The linguistic parallels between Psalms 1 and 92 may be demonstrated in several key examples from both psalms. The key words in Psalm 1:3 used to describe the righteous one as the flourishing tree (Hebrew, שָׁרֵי, “planted, deeply rooted” and פָּרָה “to bear fruit, be fruitful, flourishing”) are used again in Psalm 92:13 to describe the prosperous trees “*planted* (שָׁרֵי) in the house of the Lord” which “*flourish* (פָּרָה) in the courts of our God” (emphasis supplied). Not only is the destiny of the righteous described with the same terms in Psalms 1 and 92, but also the destiny of the enemies or the wicked ones. The wicked are called רָשָׁעִים (Pss 1:4; 92:8), who are destined “to perish” (אָבַד) (Pss 1:6; 92:9).

Interestingly, both psalms open with the three actions which characterize the righteous followed by the Hebrew preposition כִּי which introduces the reasons why the three actions mentioned are performed. In Psalm 1:1-2 the righteous one “does not *walk* in the counsel of the wicked or *stand* in the way of sinners or *sit* in the way of mockers, *but* (כִּי) his delight is in the law of the Lord. . .” (emphasis supplied). In Psalm 92:1-4 the righteous one wants “to *praise* the Lord and *make* music to your name, O Most High, to *proclaim* your love. . . *for* (כִּי) you make me glad by your deeds. . .” (emphasis supplied). The linguistic parallels between Psalm 1 and Psalm 92, which clearly displays the sanctuary scenery, strongly suggest thematic parallels between the two psalms and allow the tree imagery in Psalm 1 to be interpreted as referring to the sanctuary. The fruitful tree imageries are later found in the Psalter in Psalm 128:3 and 144:12, again in the context of blessings coming from Zion.

The development of the image of the tree in the Psalter sheds new light on the tree image in Psalm 1 and contributes to making a stronger connection between this psalm and the sanctuary, and also points to a possible narrative revolving around the sanctuary.

The Psalter marks the journey of the righteous which begins in Psalm 1 and provides the ideal description of who the righteous should be—“a tree planted by the water” in the sanctuary. In Psalms 52 and 92, the tree has

gained full entrance into the precincts of YHWH, flourishing within the temple itself. The righteous, moreover, have aged, reaching full maturity yet still “full of sap” and bearing fruit in the sanctuary (92:14). Near the end of the Psalter, botanical imagery has spread its shoots, as it were, to envelop the family and nation of Israel (Pss 128; 144).²¹

Similar conclusions seem to be implied by the Hebrew word אָשְׂרִי (“happy”), which opens Psalm 1:1 and is found at the end of Psalm 2. This Hebrew word is closely related to the verb אָשַׁר (“to walk straight”), and it may point to the way in which a believer seeks happiness, i.e., he must come to Zion (Pss 65:5; 84:5), where refuge is to be found (Pss 2:12; 34:9; 84:12), and where sins are forgiven (Ps 32:1, 2).²²

The Hebrew word אָשְׂרִי which opens the Psalter (Pss 1:1; 2:12), is later missing from the first two books of the Psalms with the exception of the last psalm in each group; it occurs in the psalms which conclude sections I (Ps. 41:2), III (Ps 89:16), and IV (Ps 106:3), and finally appears quite often in the last book (8 times).²³ This seems to suggest that the journey toward happiness culminates in the last book of the Psalter, i.e. in praises to God in the sanctuary.

The Sanctuary in Psalm 2

Psalm 2 continues with an image which has strong connections to the sanctuary, i.e., Zion, God’s holy hill (v. 6).¹ Chr 17:12-14 makes a clear connection between the installment of the king and the sanctuary. In Psalm 1 both the righteous and the wicked are depicted with similes, i.e., tree and chaff, and the sanctuary is carefully implied with the imagery of a life-giving river. These entities become personalized and more concrete in the time of conflict between good and evil in Psalm 2. The chaff becomes “the nations and the kings of the earth” (vv. 1, 2 and 10). The righteous tree is depicted as the righteous king (v. 6) or even more intimately as “my Son” (vv. 7 and 12). The destinies of the righteous and the wicked are synonymously described in both psalms, i.e., the righteous are blessed (אָשְׂרִי “happy”) (Pss 1:1; 2:12) and the wicked destroyed (Pss 1:6; 2:9, 12). The

²¹ Brown, 78.

²² Cazelles, “אָשְׂרִי,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (1974), 1:446.

²³ *Ibid.*

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life-giving river becomes Zion, the Lord's holy hill (v. 6) which cannot be removed.

The Sanctuary in Psalms 1 and 2 and the Shaping of the Psalter

The themes of the conflict between the wicked and the righteous and of the sanctuary as the firm shelter and place of help that are presented in Psalms 1 and 2 are revisited elsewhere in the Psalms (Pss 3:4; 5:5-12; 18:6; 20:2). Jacobson asserts that the confession of the Lord's faithfulness in Psalms 1 and 2 "led Israel to develop a set of expectations about what the Lord's fidelity would or ought to look like."²⁴ The crisis of faith occurs when the world does not seem to be in harmony with what Psalms 1 and 2 claim. Brueggemann explains that because the world of Psalm 1 is not universally true, i.e., obedience is not always rewarded with prosperity, the psalmists face a crisis with only one solution and that is "to depart from the safe world of Psalm 1 and plunge into the middle of the Psalter where one will find a world enraged with suffering."²⁵

Brueggemann contends that the psalmists' journey of faith in the Psalter follows a progression from "hesed" (חסד) doubted to "hesed" trusted,²⁶ i.e., from questioning God's loving kindness to trusting it fully. He bases his argument on the conviction that "Psalms 1 and 150 provide special framing for the collection" and "assert the issues that should inform one's reading and singing the Psalms."²⁷ Brueggemann contends that the entire Psalter lives between the confident boundaries of obedience (Ps 1) and praise (Ps 150).²⁸

In the general plan of the Psalter the chief crisis seems to take place in the middle of the Psalter, in Psalms 73 and 74. A number of scholars depict Psalm 73 as a canonical marker of the Psalter or acknowledge its significant

²⁴ R. Jacobson, "Burning our Lamps with Borrowed Oil: the Liturgical Use of the Psalms and the Life of Faith," in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. S. B. Reid (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2011), 124.

²⁵ W. Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 197.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁸ Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: the Psalms as Canon," 68.

position in the Psalter.²⁹ Brueggemann believes that Psalm 73 stands at the center of the Psalter in a crucial role of enacting the transformation necessary to make a move from doubting God's "hesed" (חסד) to trusting it.³⁰ A number of parallels between Psalms 1, 2, 73, 74 and the concluding psalms of the Psalter suggest that these psalms and their parallel motifs may have played a significant role in the shaping of the Psalter. This suggests also that Psalm 74 together with psalm 73 should be regarded as the canonical marker of the Psalter.

The Relationship between Psalms 1 and 2 and Psalms 73 and 74

Psalm 73 resumes and develops the conclusions of Psalms 1 and 2, i.e., that the righteous will certainly find blessing from God and the wicked will certainly perish.³¹ Furthermore both Psalms 73 and 74 seem to parallel Psalms 1 and 2 as they deal with the problem of understanding of the reversal of what is claimed in Psalms 1 and 2. Both Psalms 73 and 74 deal with the problem of the prosperity of evil. However, while Psalm 73 deals with this as a personal dilemma, as suggested by the use of the first person singular (Ps 73:2, 13, 17, 22), Psalm 74 deals with it as a national dilemma, as supported by the use of the plural to denote those in whose name the psalm has been composed (Ps 74:1, 4, 8). Psalm 73 demonstrates close parallels with Psalm 1. Psalm 74 seems to be closely related to Psalm 2.

Psalm 73 seems to wonder at the reversal of what is claimed in Psalm 1. Psalm 1 claims that the righteous prosper (v. 3) and the wicked perish (vv. 4-6). However, in Psalm 73 the psalmist ponders over the harsh reality that seems to imply the opposite. The psalmist claims that he saw "the prosperity of the wicked" (v. 3) and the righteous being pure in vain (v. 13).

Psalm 74 discloses a number of linguistic and thematic parallels with Psalm 2. Both psalms begin with למה, "why," and inquire about the wicked actions of pagan nations. However, in Psalm 74 the psalmist wonders about

²⁹ E.g., Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: the Psalms as Canon," 81; J. C. McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 143; Brueggemann & Miller, 45-46; M. R. Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. D. Firth & P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 238.

³⁰ Brueggemann and Miller, 45.

³¹ Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: the Psalms as Canon," 87; McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah*, 143.

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the tragic reversal of what is demonstrated in Psalm 2. In Psalm 2 the righteous king is firmly installed on Zion, the Lord's hill that cannot be removed. In Psalm 74 Zion, the sanctuary of God lies in ruins (Ps 74:3-8). The mention of Mount Zion in both psalms seems to be remarkable (Pss 2:6; 74:2). In Psalm 2 Zion is the symbol of stability and strength of the king. In Psalm 74 Zion lies in ruins as the symbol of the utter defeat of Israel.

The predominant designation of the wicked in Psalms 1 and 73 is רשעים ("wicked") (Pss 1:1, 4, 5, 6; 73:3, 12). The predominant designation of the wicked in Psalms 2 and 74 is "enemies," "nations," "rulers" and "kings," terms that can be understood synonymously to depict nations in war against Israel and her king (Pss 2:1, 2, 8, 10; 74:3, 10, 18, 22). The clamor of enemies in Psalm 74 seems to echo the uproar of the nations in Psalm 2. While Psalm 1 and 73 deal with the question of prosperity, Psalms 2 and 74 deal with the nations conspiring (Ps 2) and finally raging war against the king of Israel (Ps 74). The parallels between Psalms 2 and 74 are highlighted by the common reference to the king of Israel. In both Psalms 2 and 74 the interest and prosperity of Israel is embodied in the king who dwells on Zion (Pss 2:6; 74:12).

Another parallel points further to the reversal of fate in Psalms 2 and 74. Psalm 2 shows how the Lord laughs, scoffs and rebukes the rebellious nations (vv. 4 and 5). In Psalm 74 the enemies mock and revile the Lord's name (vv. 10, 11, 22). In Psalm 2 the Lord rises up and speaks (v. 6-9). In Psalm 74 the Lord is mute and Israel calls to her God to rise and act (v. 1, 10, 11, 19-22). The parallels between Psalms 2 and 74 require further analysis, but the analysis offered here seems to suffice for the intention of relating the two psalms together.

The Sanctuary Experience in Psalms 73 and 74

In both Psalms 73 and 74 the sanctuary emerges as the place where the conflict and the solution reach their peak (Pss 73:17; 74:3-8). While some take verse 17 to be the turning point in Psalm 73,³² others rightly see verse

³² E.g., L. C. Allen, "Psalm 73: Pilgrimage from Doubt to Faith," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 6 (1-9).

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15 as the pivot of the psalm.³³ In verse 15 the psalmist realizes that if he keeps on pointing to seeming inconsistencies of God's justice, he would be unfaithful to his people and might cause them to go astray. It is remarkable that it is the psalmist's sense of belonging to his community of faith that led him closer to God and to the sanctuary where the genuine transformation took place (v. 17). What kind of experience in the sanctuary marked the transformation of the psalmist in both psalms?

The New Jerusalem Bible takes *מקדשי אל* in verse 17 (literally "the sanctuaries of God") to refer to the ruined pagan sanctuaries (because of the plural in Hebrew) and not to the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Thus when the psalmists entered the ruined pagan sanctuaries, he perceived them as a tangible proof of God's judgment over the wicked. Similarly Birkeland interprets the phrase to refer to the ruined illegitimate sanctuaries in Israel.³⁴

These interpretations do not seem adequate for at least two reasons. First, the holy places in verse 17 are not described as ruined. Verses 18 and 19 speak of God ruining the wicked rather than their temples. Second, verse 17 pictures the psalmist entering the holy place and receiving a revelation there. In the sanctuary the psalmist gains a new sense of God's presence: "Yet I am always with you" (v. 23); "But as for me, it is good to be near God" (v. 28). It seems very unlikely that the sight of the destroyed pagan or illegitimate Hebrew sanctuaries could have provoked such strong feelings of the closeness of God that are found in the latter part of the psalm. This experience is more aptly related to God's sanctuary than to ruined pagan temples.

The use of the plural to refer to the sanctuary of God may function to intensify the holiness of the place or it could reflect a common Canaanite practice of designating holy places with plural forms. The plural *מקדשי אל*

³³ E.g., McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah*, 141; J. L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: an Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 117.

³⁴ Quoted by J. N. Clayton, "An Examination of Holy Space in Psalm 73: Is Wisdom's Path Infused with an Eschatologically Oriented Hope?" *Trinity Journal* 27 (2006): 128 (117-142).

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in Psalm 73:17 most likely refers to the multiple holy precincts within the sanctuary as in Psalm 68:35; Jeremiah 51:51 and Leviticus 21:23.³⁵

The psalm ends with the psalmist's resolution "I will tell of all your deeds" (v. 28) which could fit a religious festival taking place in the sanctuary (Pss 26:7; 91:2; 105:2; 107:22; 145:4, 6, 11). It seems reasonable to assert that the psalmist experiences his remarkable transformation probably through sharing in one of the Hebrew religious festivals, such as the Passover or the New Year festival.³⁶ The psalmist could have experienced "a priestly oracle of salvation, some sort of festal presentation, a Levitical sermon, or some kind of mystical experience."³⁷ Bratcher and Reyburn argue that "the language suggests a special revelation from God, either in a vision or through the inspired word of a priest" and that "[p]erhaps some ritual was involved."³⁸

Mays nicely remarks that on entering the sanctuary, the psalmist entered the sphere of the powerful presence of God and "[t]he certainty he was given was not merely belief in the doctrine that the wicked perish; it was more certainty of God as his God."³⁹ Worship in the temple during the festivals revived the memories of God's great acts in the past. However, Allen rightly observes that in Psalm 73 "[t]here is a 'personal' application of Yahweh's ancient threat and execution of judgment to the contemporary situation of moral and religious chaos."⁴⁰

Certainty on the exact nature of the experience in the sanctuary seems not to be possible. However, one thing is certain in Psalm 73. Crenshaw nicely describes it: "The fresh insight has something to do with a place . . . a relationship that blossoms in that holy environment . . . Regardless of the actual manner by which inner renewal came about, a change is apparent. The burden is lifted, and the psalmist proceeds to tell others what is now

³⁵ M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 20 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 229; R. G. Bratcher & W. D. Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1991), 640.

³⁶ R. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: a Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 234.

³⁷ Clayton, 124. It was customary for the afflicted to receive a response in God's name from the temple personnel (e.g., 1 Sam 2).

³⁸ Bratcher and Reyburn, 640.

³⁹ Mays, *Psalms: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 243.

⁴⁰ Allen, 7.

certain.”⁴¹ The presence of God brought the certainty of faith where the uncertainty of understanding existed in the past. The transformation of the psalmist has to do with the “*effect* of God’s presence, as God lifts the pious out of despair over evil.”⁴² The possibility of experiencing the presence of God was the ministry and mystery of the sanctuary as demonstrated in other psalms (Pss 26:8; 27:4; 43:3; 65:4; 89).⁴³

Psalm 74 seems to mark a significant shift in the Psalter since it pictures the sanctuary in Jerusalem lying in ruins. Brueggemann rightly asserts that Psalm 74 “does not concern simply a historical invasion and the loss of a building,” but “[i]t speaks about the violation of the sacral key to all reality, the glue that holds the world together.”⁴⁴

The Significance of the Enthronement Psalms and the Psalms of Ascent

The further development of the sanctuary narrative in the Psalter is presented here only in broad strokes because of space limitations. Psalms 73 and 74 open Book III of the Psalter which engages in the challenge to acknowledge and embrace the negativity that causes disorientation.⁴⁵ Book III depicts how “the disoriented psalmists desperately look to reorient their theology by appealing to Temple, land, and Davidic covenant.”⁴⁶ The psalmists turn to the temple with acknowledgment that God’s temple is a lovely place, a place of security and blessings (Ps 84). The psalmists turn to the land which prospers under God’s blessing (Ps 85:12). The psalmists tie their hopes to Zion, the city of God (Ps 87). They turn to the Davidic king for help (Ps 89).

Wallace observes that it becomes clear that those traditional elements are no longer capable of providing hope when Psalms 84-89 are interpreted in the light of their canonical context, i.e., of their present placement in the

⁴¹ Crenshaw, 123.

⁴² Clayton, 132.

⁴³ Mays, *Psalms: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 243.

⁴⁴ W.Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: a Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁶ R. E. Wallace, “The Narrative Effect of Psalms 84-89,” *The Journal of Hebrew Scripture* 11 (2010): 3 (2-15).

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Psalter.⁴⁷ Psalms 84-89 come after Psalm 74, which depicts the ruined sanctuary and the destroyed land. The reader of the Psalter encounters Psalms 84-89 in the context of Jerusalem having been destroyed. McCann rightly observes that a new perspective is achieved “when Book I and II are read in conjunction with Book III and its concluding Psalm 89.”⁴⁸ Wallace contends that “with an exilic setting providing a hermeneutic lens through which to read the psalm, Ps 84 becomes an ironic expression of hopelessness and longing.”⁴⁹ This conclusion about the nature of Psalm 84 can probably be applied to Book III as a whole. The book opens with the scene of injustice (Ps 73) and the destruction of the temple and the land (Ps 74), and closes with the failure of the Davidic covenant (Ps 89).

If the Psalter ended with Book III, no hope would be left for Israel. However, the new orientation or reorientation of faith begins with Book IV and continues with Book V. It seems remarkable that Book IV and V appear to provide answers to the major concerns that caused disorientation in Book III. The predominant scenes in the opening psalms of Book IV are the scenes of the heavenly sanctuary and the divine King. Psalms 90 to 93 deal with the problem of the destroyed sanctuary and point the believers toward a better sanctuary, i.e., the heavenly sanctuary (Pss 93:2, 5; 96:6, 9; 99:1, 5, 9). Psalms 93 and 95-99 focus on a better king, i.e., the divine King. Psalm 94 deals with the land and reassures the believers that the Lord “will never forsake his inheritance” (v. 14); he will build up Jerusalem (Ps 147:2).

J. C. McCann finds Psalms 93, 95-99 to be the theological heart of the Psalter.⁵⁰ He recognizes the theological relationship between these so-called enthronement psalms and Psalms 1 and 2. He argues that the two Hebrew roots שפט “to judge” and צדק “to be just, righteous”) that constitute a concise summary of God’s will in Psalms 1-2 are found in Psalms 93, 95-99 as key terms expressing God’s will for God’s world (e.g., the root שפט in Pss 96:13 [2x]; 97:2; 98:9; 99:4 [2x], and צדק in 96:13; 97:2, 6, 11, 12; 98:2, 9; 99:4). These two roots describe “the effects of God’s reign, the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2,7.

⁴⁸ McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah*, 43.

⁴⁹ Wallace, 7.

⁵⁰ McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah*, 41-50; “Psalms,” 159-165.

most prominent of which is the establishment of justice or setting of things right on earth.”⁵¹ In the rest of the Psalter McCann finds examples of the implementation of God’s justice (שפט) and righteousness (צדק) which results in peace and happiness for the needy, the poor and all nations (e.g., Ps 72). When these are not being implemented the psalmist finds refuge in God and expresses his hurt and hope in prayer.⁵²

By bringing to attention the importance of the two concepts of justice and righteousness for the structure of the Psalter, McCann appears to provide new ways of showing the importance of the sanctuary in the Psalter as the Hebrew roots שפט and צדק are among the key terms for sanctuary theology. In Leviticus 19:15 and Deuteronomy 1:16; 4:8; 16:18, for example, both roots appear together. The sanctuary was designated as the place of divine judgment as indicated by the judgment of Urim (Num 27:21) and by the breastplate of judgment of the high priest (Exod 28:15, 29, 30). The cultic decrees are called “righteous judgments” (Deut 4:8). Accordingly many psalms depict God as the one who sits enthroned ready to judge the world and relates this imagery closely to the sanctuary (Pss 9:4, 7, 8, 19; 50:2, 6, 8, 23; 96:6, 10, 13).

The purpose of the cultic acts was to restore the worshiper’s righteousness as indicated by the name of “sacrifices of righteousness” (Deut 33:19; cf. Ps 4:5). Not surprisingly, therefore, McCann finds the two key concepts of God’s justice (שפט) and righteousness (צדק) in Psalms 93, 95-99, which portray God ruling in or from his sanctuary (Pss 93:5; 96:6, 9; 99:7, 9).

Mays argues that the enthronement psalms might have been used in some temple festival to celebrate the enthronement of the Lord, but in the final form of the Psalter they function differently, i.e., eschatologically. “They no longer refer only to what happened in the cult, but as well as to what was promised in the prophecy,”⁵³ i.e., God’s reign over all nations and peoples (Isa 42:1; 45:22-23; 49:1-6; 52:10; 55:4-5; Ps 96:7, 10, 13).

As the new reign of God envisioned by eschatological passages involves the reign that goes beyond the present state of Israel, the new

⁵¹ McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah*, 45.

⁵² Idem, “Psalms,” 160-162.

⁵³ Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter,” 10.

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sanctuary of God goes beyond the present Jerusalem temple, i.e., it involves all nations and all creation (Pss 96-100; 148; 150; Isa 56:6-8). The whole city of Jerusalem becomes God's temple (Isa 54:11-13; 2 Chr 3:6; Exod 39:10-13).

The psalms of ascent (Pss 120-134) seem to further reinforce the sanctuary motif by inviting the worshipers to ascent to Zion (the sanctuary) and receive the blessing from the Lord, who reigns in Zion (e.g., Ps 128:5). As the Psalter reaches the Songs of Ascents, it seems that the theme of Zion and of the sanctuary is ever-present from that point to the end of the Psalter. Zion is mentioned in a great number of psalms that follow the Ascent psalms (e.g., Pss. 135:21; 137:1, 3; 138:2; 146:10; 147:12; 149:2; 150:1). The Psalter seems to lead the worshiper finally to Zion and the time when God will reign from Zion forever (e.g., Ps. 148:10).

The Sanctuary in the Concluding Psalms of the Psalter

The concluding psalms of the Psalter seem to revisit the major concerns expressed by Psalms 1, 2, 73 and 74 that have been discussed before. An attempt is made here to briefly point to certain linguistic and thematic parallels between Psalms 1, 2, 73, 74 and the concluding psalms of the Psalter.

The righteous in Psalms 1 and the final psalms of the Psalter engage in similar activities. The righteous in Psalm 1:2 delight in the law of the Lord. The righteous in Psalm 149:2 rejoice in the Lord. Since the righteous in Psalm 1:2 delight in the law of the Lord, the Lord delights in his people in Psalm 149:4. The righteous in Psalm 1:2 meditate on the law of God. The righteous in Psalm 145:5 meditate on God's wonderful works. The law of God is a prominent part of the identity of the righteous in both Psalm 1 and the final psalms (Pss 1:2; 147:19, 20).

The psalmist in Psalm 73:28 acknowledges that "it is good to be near (קרֵב) God." Psalm 145:18 says that "the Lord is near (קרֵב) to all who call on him." Psalm 148:14 depicts Israel as "the people close (קרֵב) to his [God's] heart."

Both Psalm 1 and the final psalms of the Psalter tell of the final destruction of the wicked at the Lord's judgment (Pss 1:4-6; 145:20; 146:9; 149:7-9). The Lord's judgment is described in similar terms in Psalm 1 and the concluding psalms of the Psalter. In Psalm 1:6, "the Lord watches over (יִדַע) the way of the righteous, but the way (דֶּרֶךְ) of the wicked (רָשָׁעִים) will

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perish.” In Psalm 145:20, “the Lord watches over (שמר) all who love him, but all the wicked (רשעים) he will destroy.” In Psalm 146:9, “the Lord watches over (שמר) the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways (דרך) of the wicked (רשעים).”

In Psalm 2:6 Zion stands as the unshakable guarantee of the prosperity of Israel. In Psalm 74:3, 4 Zion lies in ruins as the symbol of the utter destruction of Israel by her enemies. However, Psalm 147:2 expresses new hope in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and of the temple, and reaffirms the promises of Psalm 2:6. The glorious prospects of the king ruling over his enemies from Zion in Psalm 2:6 are severely questioned by the rule of enemies in Ps 74:4-8; 18-23. However, Psalm 146:10 reaffirms that “the Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.” Psalm 149:2 gives hope that the people of Zion will be glad in their king. The Lord is subject to shame in Ps 74:18-23 but he is exalted forever in Psalms 146-150. In Psalm 2:6, 7 the Lord’s son (בן) is honored as the king on Zion. In Psalm 149:2, 4 the Lord honors (פאר meaning “to honor,” “to crown,” “to glorify”) the people (בן) of Zion.

The introductory psalms (Pss 1 and 2), the psalms found in the middle of the Psalter (Pss 73 and 74) and the final psalms of the Psalter (Pss 145-150) may be brought together by their common concerns for the law of God (Pss 1:2; 147:19, 20), the king (Pss 2:6; 74:12; 149:2), Zion (Pss 2:6; 74:2; 149:2) and the people of God (Pss 2:7; 74:19; 149:2). The concluding psalms of the Psalter restore the faith in the proclamation of Psalms 1 and 2 and celebrate the victory of the Lord. They invite the worshipers to join the heavens and everything that exists in praising God in his sanctuary (e.g., Pss 148:1-14; 150:1-6). What bridges the secure world of Books I and II and the renewed praise in Books IV and V after faith was severely challenged in Book III is the scene of the heavenly sanctuary and the divine King who rules in it (Pss 91-101).

The Psalter closes with the eschatological hope of rebuilt Jerusalem (Ps. 147:2) and the people triumphantly praising God in his sanctuary (Ps. 150:1), which is so characteristic of the prophets (Isa. 52:7-10; 54:11-14). The descriptions of the people of Zion rejoicing in their king in Psalm 149:2 and the call for the universal praise in Psalms 146-150 strongly resemble similar descriptions of rejoicing and praises in the prophets (Isa. 24:14; 30:29; 51:11; 52:7-9; 65:18).

Conclusion

The possible parallels between the discussed psalms certainly deserve further study. However, the development of the sanctuary theme in the discussed pivotal psalms appears to suggest that the sanctuary motif played a significant role in the shaping of the Psalter and hints of a possible narrative movement from abiding in the sanctuary as an ideal in Psalm 1 to the eschatological abiding and praising God in his sanctuary in Psalms 149 and 150. Brueggemann nicely describes the psalmists' journey of faith by using the "scheme" of orientation–disorientation–new orientation. The journey of faith which starts with the season of orientation which is characterized by pure yet unchallenged faith in Psalms 1 and 2. The journey then takes the psalmists through the season of disorientation, when faith is challenged by evil and suffering, and finally brings them to new orientation, when transformed and mature faith emerges after trials.⁵⁴ At every stage the sanctuary appears to be the place where the victory is accomplished.

The Psalms seem to demonstrate that "[t]he reorientation has both continuities with and discontinuities from what has been."⁵⁵ Thus, Israel still hopes that the Lord will build up Jerusalem (Ps 147:2, 12-14), but the transformed faith now looks beyond the earthly Jerusalem to the splendor of the Lord above the earth and the heavens (Ps 148:13). The shape of the Psalter seems to promote Israel's faith in the heavenly sanctuary and the divine King.

This emphasis appears to be fully developed in the New Testament, which closes with the scenes of God welcoming the righteous ones into his sanctuary (Rev 22:1, 2), undoubtedly reminiscent of Psalm 1, Jeremiah 17 and Ezekiel 47. The praise of the righteous ones in Revelation 21:3 seems to echo the praise of the righteous ones praising God in his sanctuary in the closing psalms of the Psalter.

⁵⁴ This "scheme" is used to describe decisive moves of faith in the Psalms and not as an adequate description of the overall structure of the Psalter (Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: a Theological Commentary*, 9-10).

⁵⁵ Idem, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: a Suggested Typology of Function," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17 (1980): 6 (3-32).

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