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PSALMS 1–72

A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition

David L. Thompson

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Importance of the Biblical Psalter

Perhaps no other book of the OT is more beloved, more widely used, and more often interpreted than the Psalter. Several factors justify its broad appeal and import. It presents a veritable compendium of OT themes and theology, its horizons stretching from creation to consummation. And the Psalms do not simply *present* these themes; they *wrestle* with their validity and coherence for faith and practice.

Beyond Isaiah, no book of the OT apparently proved more formative in the self-understanding of Jesus of Nazareth than did the Psalter, judging from his appeals to Pss 22 and 110. When Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn at the "last supper" they most likely sang the Great Hallel, Pss 13—18, traditionally read at Passover.

New Testament writers pressed no OT book into service more than the Psalter in presenting and expounding the gospel of Christ. (See the "Index of Quotations" in the UBS Greek New Testament, pp. 906-9.) At Pentecost, at times of persecution, in theological reflection the earliest church turned to the Psalter for guidance (e.g., Acts 2:25 ff.; 4:25; 13:35). When modern congregants join in readings from the Psalter in public worship, they step in a line that reaches all the way back to the first churches, in which the singing of "psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit" occurred (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).

From earliest days the Psalter exercised unrivaled influence on the Christian church. It provided the backbone for the church's liturgy by its presence in the liturgical offices—read, sung, and chanted at every turn throughout the day. Origen, Chrysostom, and Jerome, among others, preached and wrote extensively on the Psalms. It was Jerome's commitment to interpreting the Psalter that spurred him to learn Hebrew, which reintroduced that language into the church's exegetical resources from which it had disappeared because of the church's devotion to the LXX. Later the Reformers Luther and Calvin both featured the Psalms in their preaching and teaching, and the *Genevan Psalter* was a potent instrument in the spread and nurturing of reformed piety.

The strong European and American tradition of psalm singing carries a remarkable story of biblical influence via the Psalter. Reformed and Presbyterian churches, Congregationalists and Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic were exclusively psalm singing churches for over two hundred years, spanning the decades of the launching of the colonies in America. In the form of the old *Ainsworth Psalter* the psalms came to the new world on the Mayflower itself. And the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640) was the hymnal of American Puritans, reprinted seventy times through 1773(!), with the *Scottish Psalter* (1650) favored by Irish immigrants (Johnson 1994, v).

Over recent decades the church in the West has experienced a welcome revival of interest in singing the Psalter itself and in composing psalmlike music for worship. Believers ancient and modern have discovered the truth of claims on the Psalter's very first lines: those who give themselves to habitual recitation and reflection on the psalms will be extraordinarily happy (Ps 1:1-2)!

We may be surprised then to hear renowned Psalms scholar Hermann Gunkel opine that understanding the Psalter presents the modern reader with "extraordinary difficulties" (1998, 1). According to Gunkel, the poetic language that gives the Psalter its lyrical beauty also complicates its reading. The Hebrew poetry's brevity of expression, its economy in the use of syntactic markers, and each line's limited literary/historical context in its several brief poems all conspire to present an enigmatic text at points. Add to this the mysteries of its composition, and one may grant the claim.

B. The Psalms as a Collection

"The Psalter" names an anthology, a collection of diverse, discrete literary works. Each of its one hundred fifty psalms is a stand-alone poem in its own right. Understanding how we came to have the Psalter in its canonical form thus presents one of its puzzles, as does establishing the name of the collection.

The earliest attestation of the collection as a named book appears in Luke's writing where it is called "the Book of Psalms" (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20). Here the Greek *psalmos*, "a song accompanied by a stringed instrument," apparently translates the Hebrew *mizmôr*, a term with roughly the same meaning that appears in the superscriptions (SS) of fifty-seven psalms.

The NT may reflect LXX practice at this point, since a premier, fourth-century A.D. LXX MS (Vaticanus) titles the collection simply *psalmoi*, "Psalms." A roughly contemporary LXX MS (Sinaiticus) lacks a title for the psalms, while a slightly later MS (Alexandrinus) calls this book *psaltērion*, the "Psalter," indicating fluidity in assigning a title to the work.

Interestingly, Luke also reflects the Jewish practice of naming the third section of the Hebrew scriptures "the Psalms," after that section's lead entry following "Moses" and "the Prophets" (Luke 24:44). References in Luke/Acts also assume a collection with numbered psalms (citing "the *second* psalm" in Acts 13:33, emphasis added) attributed to David (Luke 20:42).

The Hebrew tradition eventually settled on *tĕhillîm* or *sēpher tĕhillîm* ("Praises" or "Book of Praises") for a title, using a masculine plural form of the noun apparently reserved for this particular use (see GKC 87n, o). The singular form appears in 145:1 as the title of a single psalm (*tĕhillâ*), whose plural would ordinarily be *tĕhillôt*. Why this should have been the case we do not know, since "praises" or "hymns" does not describe many psalms well. At least one earlier collection of predominantly Davidic psalms carried the title *The Prayers of David son of Jesse* (Ps 72:20). This designation, "prayers/*tĕphillôt*," suits many psalms in the early books of the Psalter but also is not comprehensive.

Indeed, it would be difficult to capture the diverse content and/or genre designations in a brief book title. Prayer psalms crying for deliverance dominate the early books of the Psalter, but more and more praise and thanksgiving songs appear toward the middle and final sections of the whole. This overall movement toward hymns and the fact that the Psalter ends in a flurry of extravagant praise in Pss 145—150 give the Psalter as a whole a positive cast, perhaps prompting the "Book of Praises/Hymns" as a title for the collection. Moreover, as James Luther Mays aptly put it, "Even psalms of prayer and instruction are, in effect, praise of the Lord." The prayers witness that "the LORD

alone is God and savior of those who pray." The instructions testify that "the LORD is the pathway of life" (1994, 17).

Citations incorporated in narratives of Israel's early life suggest that even before and during the Davidic monarchy collections of poetry (or literature containing poetry) were at hand. Craigie notes reference to the *Book of the Wars of the Lord* (Num 21:14) and the *Book of Yashar* (2 Sam 1:18) (1983, 27). The fact that a song sung by David appears with minimal variation in both 2 Sam 22:1-51 and Ps 18:1-50 could indicate the presence of an archive or document from which both of these compositions (2 Samuel and the Psalter) could draw. The fact that both versions include the same SS (2 Sam 22:1-2*a* and Ps 18:1) would tend to imply the antiquity of at least some of the SSs in the Psalter.

As we have seen, the Psalter itself preserves some evidence of collections that preceded it and contributed to its final form. *The Prayers of David son of Jesse* in 72:20 apparently refers to Pss 3—70 predominantly attributed to David. Indeed, of the first seventy-two psalms only seven lack an SS of attribution (e.g., "for/by David" or "for/by Asaph"). And of the remaining sixty-five poems, fifty-six are Davidic. An additional eighteen of these "for/by David" psalms are scattered across the Psalter as a whole (86, 101, 103, 108—110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138—145), giving the entire book a Davidic cast.

Evidence for an "Elohistic" editing of the songs now found in books two and three also sheds light on the formation of the Psalter. In this editing the name of Israel's covenant making God, "Yahweh" (written consonantally as YHWH), was replaced with the generic name of God, "Elohim." (See the chart below.)

Psalms	*YHWH Appears*	*Elohim Appears*	*Psalms Without YHWH*	*Psalms Without Elohim*
1—41	233	45	0	34
42—72	30	135	15	0
[73—83]	[10]	[35]	[3]	[0]
73—89	39	51	3	0
90—106	86	20	0	4
107—150	195	25	1	27

The editorial and collection work is especially obvious in poems that appear in both Yahwistic and Elohistic forms: 14 = 53; 40:13-17 [14-18 HB] = 70; and 58:7-11 [8-12 HB] with 60:7-12 [9-14 HB] = 108. Thus 14:2 reads "*Yahweh* looks down from heaven upon the children of men" (NKJV, RSV), while 53:2 [3 HB] has "*Elohim/God* looks down . . ." These doublets suggest the appear-

ance of these psalms in diverse, smaller collections before they were incorporated into the Elohistic Psalter en route to inclusion in the present book.

The fact that we are unable satisfactorily to explain why and how such an Elohistic collection came to be does not warrant rejection of the idea (Goulder 1996, 18-19). In addition, contiguous psalms carrying attributive SSs "by/for/of the Sons of Korah" (Pss 42—49, 84—85, 87—88) and "by/for/of the Sons of Asaph" (Pss 73—83) likely indicate collections related to these temple singers and musicians. According to the Chronicler, under King David Heman, Asaph, Ethan, and their families were designated singers and musicians in the Lord's house (1 Chr 15:16-17, 19 ff.; 25:1-2).

The sons of Korah, on the other hand, were appointed keepers of the tabernacle service and gatekeepers (i.e., sanctuary guards) (1 Chr 9:19; 26:1 ff.). Although Korahites functioned as temple singers under Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:19), at the return from exile Ezra still has only the Asaphites as singers (Ezra 2:41 ff. = Neh 7:44 ff.). And now, by the time the Psalter reached its final form, it appears the sons of Korah had become temple musicians parallel to the sons of Asaph with songs attributed to each family. But this sketchy evidence does not allow us to write a history of these developments.

The SS, *šîr hamma'ălôt/"Song of Ascents,"* found on Pss 120—134 could indicate another collection antedating the Psalter. But the SSs could as easily have been added in the final editing of the book.

The so-called *Egyptian Hallel*, Pss 113—118, could also present an earlier collection, marked as it is with the exhortation, "Praise Yah"/*halĕlû Yâh!* (*Yah* being a short form of the name Yahweh) at the beginning of Pss 113—114 and then at the end of Pss 115—117, with 118 ending in a bicolon doxology. Similarly Pss 146—150 all open with *halĕlû Yâh*, while Ps 150:6 concludes Ps 150 and the entire Psalter with this exhortation to "Praise Yah!" This "*Great Hallel*," which now concludes the Psalter with a flurry of praise, could also have been an earlier collection. It remains difficult to say.

Incorporation of material into the Psalter also made it available for broader use. We see this in the Chronicler's nearly verbatim use of Pss 105:1-15, 96:1-13, and 106:1, 47-48 to build his narrative of David's installation of the ark in Jerusalem in 1 Chr 16:8-36. Psalm 106:48 contains the doxology that marks the end of Book IV of the Psalter. Similar subscript doxologies also conclude the other books of the Psalter: 41:13 [14 HB] for Book I, 72:18-20 for Book II, 89:52 [53 HB] for Book III, and 106:47-48 for Book IV. Psalm 150 then closes Book V together with the Psalter as a whole. The fact that the Chronicler included the subscript doxology when he appropriated Psalter material for his narrative most likely indicates that the division of the Psalter into its five books had already occurred by the time of the Chronicler (ca. 400 B.C.).

C. Psalm Superscriptions

Perhaps the most obvious and often puzzling indicator of collection activity in the formation of the book of Psalms is its ubiquitous SSs. Only fifteen of the psalms carry no SS whatsoever (thirty-two if one does not regard *halĕlû Yâh* as a superscript or subscript in the *Hallel* collections). The SSs themselves are the most obvious indication that the majority of these poems have in some way been in the hands of temple personnel. These are the types of notations one encounters in the ancient world in connection with temple archives and the filing of materials there.

Since earliest times translators of the book of Psalms have included the SSs and where possible translated them (LXX, Tg.). Modern translators commonly do the same, with the exception of the NEB and REB, which omit the SSs altogether (but inconsistently include indications of the speakers in the Song of Songs). With the majority tradition we regard the notes as part of the canonical text. We have not been given this book without its SSs and subscripts. Although their meaning is at times uncertain, we are obliged to discern insofar as we can their contribution to understanding these poems.

The Psalter displays the following SSs.

1. Attribution

a. lĕdāwîd, "of David," appears on seventy-five psalms scattered across all five books of the Psalter (3—9, 11—32, 34—41, 51—65, 68—70, 86, 101, 103, 108—110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138—145). The various meanings of the Hebrew preposition *l-* attached here to the name *dāwîd* open the phrase up to several possible meanings, none of which suits all its appearances.

It can indicate authorship, as for example, with Pss 3, 7, or 18, which carry notations suggesting an occasion for the poem, or with Pss 21 or 23, which simply could make sense as a song from David's pen. This understanding picks up the tradition that knows David as a poet and musician (2 Sam 23:1; 1 Chr 15:16-24; 16:7, 31; Amos 6:5). It also reflects the viewpoint registered often in the LXX renderings of *ldwd*, and the understanding generally assumed in the NT (e.g., Acts 2:34; 4:25). Although it was once fashionable and still possible to deny authorship of virtually any psalms to David (Seybold 1990, 37-38), there is no reason he cannot have written and even performed numerous psalms (Craigie 1983, 35).

At the same time we know that Ugaritic tablets of the Baal and the Kirtu myths were given the SSs *lbʿl* and *lkrt* respectively. Clearly these SSs indicated not the author but the primary character in the works. One might also recall the common *lmlk*/"*belonging to the king*" impressions placed on large jars for wine and grain belonging to the crown. And a number of psalms carrying the

lědāwîd SS sit awkwardly in his mouth, usually assuming a historical circumstance incompatible with Davidic authorship (e.g., Pss 138, 144, 147).

More likely then, in these cases we should translate "for the use of the Davidic kings" or "for inclusion in the Davidic collection." One could also conceive of a "Davidic" guild, similar to that of Asaph or Korah, but claiming David as their spiritual and professional ancestor (Seybold 1990, 37; see Broyles 1999, 26-31). We will usually use the descriptor "Davidic" in this more general sense.

b. laměnaṣṣēaḥ, "by/for the liturgical leader" or "archival director," appears on fifty-six psalms (4—6, 8—9, 11—14, 18—22, 31, 36, 39—42, 44—47, 48, 51—70, 75—77, 80—81, 84—85, 88, 109, 139—140). The verb on which this personal title is built (*nṣḥ*) has to do with leadership or supervisory tasks such as overseeing work on or in the temple (1 Chr 23:4; Ezra 3:8-9). Especially important for our purposes are persons charged with leading musicians with the musical instruments (1 Chr 15:21). This SS perhaps puts poems so tagged in the care of this temple leader.

c. "Of Asaph." We find this SS on twelve psalms (50, 73—83). The Chronicler ties Asaph and his descendants to musical and instrumental leadership in Israel's worship, beginning with appointment by David for worship centered in the ark (1 Chr 6:44 [6:24]; 15:17-22; 16:4-6) and continuing through the postexilic period (Ezra 2:41 = Neh 7:44).

d. "Of the sons of Korah." Eleven psalms carry this SS (42, 44—49, 84—85, 87—88). With one exception, the sons of Korah are known in Hebrew Scriptures as gatekeepers for worship facilities, from the time of the wilderness tabernacle to the pre-temple tent and then in the return from exile (1 Chr 9:19-22; 26:19; Ezra 2:42 = Neh 7:45). They are mentioned, however, as praising the Lord loudly in the worship assembly during the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:18-19). And the SS of attribution, parallel to that of Asaph, implies a status or role parallel to the Asaphites by the time of the final editing of the Psalter. A clear understanding of these matters eludes us.

e. "Of Moses" appears only on Ps 90. It is possible that themes in Pss 90—91 reminiscent of God's revelation of himself to Moses by the name Yahweh have drawn this attribution from the editors of the Psalter (Wilson 1985, 177-78).

f. "Of Solomon." Two psalms, 72 and 127, carry the *lišlômôh* SS. Psalm 72 sits well either as "by Solomon" or "about Solomon," as does 127. Why the *lišlômôh* attribution should appear where it does we do not know. Perhaps Wilson is correct that in Ps 72 the change of "authorial" attribution marks the seam between Books II and III, and that the 127 reference is frozen in the Song of Ascents group (1985, 156-58).

g. "Of Ethan" and "Of Heman." According to 1 Chr 15:17-18 under David these musicians were appointed to instrumental leadership in Israel's worship at the "House of God." Some have suggested the descriptor "Ezrahite" identified Ethan and Heman as natives of the land (i.e., Canaanites) and preserved memory of the influence of pre-Israelite traditions on the development of early Israel's worship guilds (Albright 1969, 121-25). The genealogical connections the Chronicler makes with Levitical roots would then be a literary device for expressing that influence. Ethan's name is attached to Ps 89 and Heman's to Ps 88 (1 Chr 2:6; 6:33, 39, 44 [6:18, 24, 29]).

h. "Of Jeduthun" (Pss 39, 62, 77). The inclusion of Jeduthun among David's chief musicians along with Heman and Asaph (1 Chr 9:16; 16:38) has led interpreters generally to see the Jeduthun attributions parallel to those with David, Asaph, and the sons of Korah, perhaps a by-form of Ethan. Not many have followed Mowinckel in understanding the noun not as a proper name but as a genre descriptor indicating a song of "confession" built on the root *ydh* (1962, II:213). The fact that the SS has the preposition *ʿal-*, "upon" or "according to," rather than *l-* in the other attributions has led to the suggestion that it may be a musical technical term, designating a tune or an instrument, rather than an authorial attribution.

2. Instrumentation

A number of the psalms carry notes that appear to designate an instrument with whose accompaniment a given psalm is to be sung or recited. As at other points in the superscriptional vocabulary, some of these terms remain unintelligible to us, although the form or syntax of the note may indicate that quite likely it is a musical notation. Translators often flag this uncertainty by simply transliterating the term, as does the NIV with "According to *sheminith*" on Ps 12, and as did the LXX translators centuries ago.

a. bingînôt or *ʿal nĕgînôt.* Built on the verb *ngn "to play a stringed instrument,"* this SS indicates that a given song is to be performed "*with* a stringed instrument" (SS on Pss 4, 6, 54, 55, 67, 76) or "accompanied *by* a stringed instrument" (SS on Ps 61). So also the LXX, *en psalmois,* and most modern translations.

b. ʿal šĕmînît probably calls for accompaniment on an eight-stringed instrument (SS on Pss 6 and 12). The meaning is not clear, however, as most modern translations register by simply transliterating "According to *Sheminith*." It could carry other meanings associated with the number eight, that is, "the eighth string" of an instrument (a lyre? [1 Chr 15:21]), or a particular octave (*HALOT,* 1562); thus NABRE the "upon the eighth."

c. ʾel hannĕḥîlôt. A (probably musical) technical term of uncertain meaning, occurring only in the SS of Ps 5, transliterated in the NJPS "On *neḥiloth*."

Most related it to "flutes," *ḥălîlôt* (ESV, RSV, NJPS; see NABRE, "with wind instruments") or the root *ḥlh*, "to be ill," in which case it would be a topical not an instrumental designation. Appearance of the preposition *ʾel-* where we would expect *ʿal-*, is probably the result of *aleph/ayin* reduction common in later Hebrew.

d. ʿal haggittîṯ, "O*n/by the gittite*," an uncertain musical term associated perhaps with the wine press (*haggat*) (8:1; 81:1; 84:1). Modern versions simply transliterate, "According to/On the Gittith."

See Othmar Keel (1997, 335-52) for fascinating images of the instruments and choreography of sacred music in Israel and the ANE.

3. Tune or Song Titles

As moderns sometimes do, biblical editors and worshippers at times referred to compositions by their opening words. Some psalm SSs reflect that custom. This *may* be reflected in Jesus' appeal to Ps 22:1 in the cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34).

a. ʾal tašḥēt, "Do Not Destroy." Probably a song referring to Moses' historic intercession with Yahweh for Israel (Pss 57—59, 75; see Deut 9:26). Thus most modern versions; but see NJPS, "*al tashḥeth*," simply transliterating, because of uncertainty regarding the note's meaning. An NABRE note ad loc. takes "Do not destroy!" as a scribal note urging retention of the psalm in a collection. This seems odd but does have support in the lack of prepositional phrase common to the other tune notations.

b. ʿal yônaʾ ʾēlîm rĕḥôqîm, "Sung to the Dove on the Distant Majestic Tree" (Ps 56) or the like appears in most versions with disagreement as to the specific tree involved. Note the NJPS transliteration, "on *yonath elem reḥokim*," perhaps indicating overly cautious uncertainty in this case.

c. ʿal ʾayyelet haššaḥar, "Sung to the Doe of the Dawn" (Ps 22), as in most modern versions with variation, or perhaps "To the *Defense at Dawn*," reading *ʾĕyālût*, "defense, aid," with LXX (see 22:19 [20 HB]). The NJPS transliterates.

d. ʿalmût labbēn (Ps 9) is of uncertain meaning. One should perhaps redivide the MT to *ʿal mût labbēn*, "Sung to 'Death to/for the Son,'" or read *ʿălûmôt*, "Hidden things," with LXX. The RSV, NABRE, and NJPS transliterate. The NABRE in Ps 46:1 translates *ʿal ʿălāmôt* as "According to 'Virgins.'" Some suggest "for sopranos" or "in the style of young girls" (*HALOT*, 836).

e. ʿal māḥălat, a technical musical term of uncertain meaning. Most modern versions simply transliterate. Perhaps one should read *mĕḥôlat*, "a ring dance."

f. ʿal šôšannîm (Pss 45, 69), *ʿal šôšannîm ʿēdût* (80), and *ʿal šûšan ʿēdût* (60) may indicate accompaniment by a six-stringed instrument. Most take it

as a tune designation, "Sung to 'the Lilies' [of the covenant in Pss 60 and 80]" (ESV, NABRE, NIV, RSV). As Koehler-Baumgartner concede (*HALOT*, 791 and 1455), "no certain meaning for this has yet been found," leading the NJPS to transliterate "On *shoshannim*" and "Shoshan eduth."

4. Song/Psalm Types

Scribes and worship leaders of the biblical period differentiated several types of compositions, in some cases song types.

a. mizmōr, a "psalm," appears on fifty-six psalms (3—6, 8—9, 12—13, 15, 19—24, 29—31, 38—41, 47—51, 62—68, 73, 75—77, 79, 80, 82, 83—85, 87, 88, 98, 100, 101, 108—110, 139—141, 143). This most common designation apparently indicates a composition written for stringed accompaniment, judging by the verb on which this noun is built, and by the LXX translation, *psalmos*, which carries the same meaning. Five times *mizmōr* appears also with the more general designation *shir*, "a song."

b. šîr/shir appears on numerous psalms, simply tagging the psalm as a "song" (45, 46, 48, 65—68, 75—76, 83, 87, 88, 92, 108, 120—134). The LXX translates *ōidē*, "an ode, a song" (usually of praise). If, as Mowinckel thinks, *šîr* (if it is not to be redundant) must have a more specific meaning than "a song," we do not know that meaning (1962, II:207-8).

c. *maśkîl*. Most modern versions indicate uncertainty as to meaning here by simply transliterating (e.g., NABRE, NIV, NJPS, RSV). The NKJV translates "A Contemplation," which may have support in LXX *suneseōs*, having to do with "intelligence." The Hebrew term itself may support this meaning, if it is related to the verb *lĕhaśkîl*, "to have success," especially with regard to insight, comprehension, and understanding. One is tempted to relate it to Israel's wisdom tradition, but it appears on few so-called wisdom psalms and is used as well more generally for singing praise (47:6 [7 HB]). See Pss 32, 42—45, 52—55, 74, 78, 88—89, 142.

d. miktām appears on Pss 16 and 56—60. Versions generally transliterate, indicating uncertainty. The LXX translated *stēlographia*, "an inscription" or "a title," which seems pointless; perhaps "an epigram"? The Vulgate understood it as a "lowly and simple" poem, perhaps "a plain song?" Check *HALOT* (583) for bibliography.

e. tĕpillâh. Found on Pss 17, 86, 90, and 142, all the versions understand this straightforward SS, as "a prayer." Since the majority of the psalms are in some sense prayers, one wonders what particular sense this SS carries, if any.

f. tĕhillâh. Found only on Ps 45 as an SS, the modern versions rightly translate as "a (song of) praise."

g. šiggayôn. Mowinckel may well have been right to relate this SS to an Akkadian cultic term meaning a "dirge" or a "lamentation" and also used in scribal colophons in worship materials (1962, II:209). The NABRE reflects this in its rendering as "Plaintiff song." Less likely, the NKJV has "a meditation." The fact that most modern versions simply transliterate indicates the uncertainty that prevails regarding the term's meaning (so also *HALOT,* 1414-15).

5. Uses

a. lĕhazkîr, "to make remember" or "for remembrance" or "to offer a memorial offering" is on Pss 38 and 70.

b. lĕʿannôt appears on Ps 88 and probably means "for singing" (see Exod 15:21). It could also mean "to answer" or "to respond," with the LXX, perhaps antiphonally, or even "to afflict" or "for affliction." The NABRE translates "for singing," following its meaning in Exod 15:21. Several modern translations link with the preceding *ʿal maḥălat* and transliterate (NIV, NJPS, RSV), perhaps surrendering prematurely.

c. lĕlammēd, "for instructing" marks Ps 60.

d. lĕtôdâh, "for giving thanks" or "for a thank offering" stands on Ps 100.

e. šîr ḥănûkat habbayit designates Ps 30 as a "song for the dedication of the house/temple."

f. lĕyôm haššabbat, "for the Sabbath day" marks Ps 92. See the SS for Ps 102 for more extended direction regarding use by the afflicted in pouring out their complaint before Yahweh.

6. Historical Notes

Thirteen psalms, all Davidic, carry notes tying the several poems to some historical circumstance. In Ps 7 the event is not known from the OT. The others reflect OT texts as follows.

a. Ps 3	2 Sam 15:1—18:33; flight from Absalom
b. Ps 18	e.g., 1 Sam 19:1 ff.; 24:1 ff.; 26:1 ff.; 2 Sam 5:17 ff.; deliverance from enemies such as Saul
c. Ps 34	1 Sam 21:10 ff.; expulsion by Abimelech; 1 Samuel has Achish
d. Ps 51	2 Sam 11:1 ff.; confrontation by Nathan
e. Ps 52	1 Sam 22:6 ff.; betrayal to Saul by Doeg
f. Ps 54	1 Sam 23:14 ff.; hiding in a cave from Saul
g. Ps 56	1 Sam 21:10 ff.; 22:1 ff.; 27:1 ff.; in the hands of the Philistines
h. Ps 57	1 Sam 24:1 ff.; hiding from Saul in a cave
i. Ps 59	1 Sam 19:8 ff.; surveillance by Saul
j. Ps 60	2 Sam 8:3 ff.; 10:15 ff.; battle against Aram Naharaim

k. Ps 63 1 Sam 22:1 ff.; 24:1 ff.; in the Judean desert

l. Ps 142 1 Sam 22:1 ff.; 24:1 ff.; hiding in a cave

Which of these notes, if any, were provided by the composer of the poems we can no longer say. All references to David here are in the third person, indicating an annotator's note *about* David, not David's note about himself. The LXX and Targum evidence suggests the continuing addition of these and other parts of the SSs in the course of copying and editing. Evidence cited earlier, though, supported the antiquity of at least some of these notes. In many cases the psalm itself, though compatible with the historical setting given, would not necessarily suggest the event noted. For example, the classic penitential prayer, Ps 51, has no explicit tie with David's sins with Bathsheba and his response to Nathan. Nevertheless, it remains eminently appropriate to that set of events and actually implies that the interpreter should at least initially read the psalm in the context provided. The SSs have become part of the canonical text and provide guidance for canonical reading, perhaps offering clues as to how all the psalms should be read.

D. The Psalms as Poetry

In a modern introduction to the Psalms as poetry we may expect to learn that Hebrew poetry is characterized especially by (1) a repetition of thought known as "parallelism," (2) a flexible but identifiable rhythm, perhaps even a meter, and (3) by a terseness entailed in the parallelism, rhythm, and vocabulary selection. But features of Hebrew poetry that seem so obvious to many contemporary readers have not always stood out as important for the interpretation of the psalms and continue to spark debate.

1. Early Responses to Poetic Scripture

First-century Jewish writers Philo and Josephus worked under the assumption that Hebrew poetry would operate by the metrical canons they knew from the Greek and Latin classics. Although they were aware of the phenomenon we call "parallelism," it did not capture their attention as did meter. Under the influence of Greco-Roman culture they scanned the psalms looking for classical meters (e.g., iambic pentameter). As an interpretive tool, this cultural imposition gave less than satisfactory results.

The Dead Sea scrolls similarly exhibit some possible awareness of the binary/bicolar structure we associate with parallelism, but give no sustained attention to it. 4QPs^{c}, for example, generally shows a small break for verse beginning, but random placement of the verse beginnings in the text columns. It generally indicates the bicolas' caesura but does not the second pause for a tricolon. 4QPs^{e}, however, indicates neither the start of its verses nor the caesurae of bicola. 4QPs^{g} separates the stanzas of Ps 119's acrostic and justifies each

of the lines in the stanzas to the right, but shows no marking of the caesurae in its bicola. 11QPs[a] shows random lineation, minimal if any break between verses, and no consistent indication of bicola. This manuscript treats Ps 119 as does 4QPs[q].

The Aleppo Codex, the prize Masoretic Text from the early tenth century A.D., shows a similar ambiguity toward parallelism. It justifies verse beginnings of Ps 119 to the right, separating succeeding stanzas in the acrostic, and indicating breaks either at the caesura or the athnach of its bicola. Psalms 34 and 111 are not scanned according to their acrostic structure, and show no interest in verses as bicola. Treatment of other poetic materials (Deut 32; Judg 5; Exod 15) shows no consistent interest in verses as bicola or in the structure of these lines as parallelistic.

The early Christian readers of the Psalter almost without exception proceeded with the same Hellenized assumptions as did Philo and Josephus. Although apparently aware of the parallelistic structure of these compositions, their interests lay in scanning these psalms with the classical meters. Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and others all took this approach. The fathers occupied themselves with the search for uniquely Hebrew metrical schemes that might explain the psalms. They also pursued hermeneutical questions related to the use in inspired, sacred texts of tropes and stylistic conventions known already from pagan writers.

Jerome's opinion regarding Hebrew poetry influenced Christian reading of the psalms right on into the modern period. The result has been a continuing tendency to look to classical poetic canons for categories with which to understand Hebrew Scriptures. The classical meters named set patterns of alternating light and heavy stress (i.e., short and long duration of syllables) and line lengths. One iteration of the pattern was called a "foot." Short-long was an iambic foot (-/), long-short was a trochee foot (/-), long-long a spondee (//), long-short-short (/--) dactyl, and short-short-long (--/) anapest. A line of poetry is scanned in terms of the number of feet used. Thus a two foot line of iambic verse, "iambic dimeter," would scan -/-/. A four foot line of anapestic verse, "anapestic tetrameter," would scan --/--/--/--/. Recall of the accent distribution in almost any line from the Hebrew Psalter indicates why Hebrew poetry has resisted scanning in classical meters.

2. Modern Approaches to Hebrew Poetic Rhythm

Robert Lowth, in his *Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753), captured the attention of Psalms scholars for two centuries, prompting them to focus on poetic parallelism as a key to reading the Psalter. Unfortunately he retained and passed to his successors the assumption that Hebrew poetry would be scanned

in classic metrics or in Hebrew adaptations thereof. Julius Ley, Eduard Sievers, H. Ewald, K. Budde, G. B. Gray, and others carried this program forward.

A failed attempt at this endeavor was Budde's discernment of a so-called qinah (i.e., lamentation) meter in the acrostic poems of the book of Lamentations. Budde claimed the qinah meter exhibited a 3+2 word stress pattern and was especially prominent in dirges. Succeeding research has not confirmed Budde's conclusions. The 3+2 bicola are not confined to dirges, and dirges beyond the book of Lamentations are not predominantly written in a 3+2 pattern. (Goldingay's resort to psychologizing the 3+2 pattern illustrates the problem well [2006, 40].)

But scholars have increasingly adopted the stressed syllable count of the sort Budde used to scan poetic lines. This boils down to counting words or word clusters as the "feet" by which lines are measured (e.g., 3+3 or 2+2). W. F. Albright and his students Frank Moore Cross Jr. and David Noel Freedman have made this approach to Hebrew metrics common currency in North American biblical scholarship (Cross 1950, 16-25).

Lack of consensus as to how a word count scan should proceed, however, has led Freedman, Cross, and others to adopt counting syllables as the most straightforward approach to Hebrew poetic structure (Freedman 1987; see p. 25 n. 14 for bibliography; Stuart 1976, 1-39). These scholars have discerned remarkable symmetry in the structure of some large units, supporting the considerable regularity of poetic lines. But syllable count has delivered little interpretive payoff for individual bicola. In Cross's hands, it has actually been more useful as a text-critical resource than as an interpretive tool. It achieves a product more obvious to the eye than to the ear, and still open to debate over syllables to be counted.

Thus no consensus exists regarding the meter or rhythm of Hebrew poetry, in spite of twenty centuries of inquiry into the matter. Increasingly students of these texts are taking this failure itself as evidence that Hebrew poetry simply has no meter! Its regularity cannot be explained as meter. (For an excellent survey of history of this research, consult pp. 3-67 of M. O'Connor's *Hebrew Verse Structure*.) For all practical purposes the repetition of the cola themselves, joined in parallelistic relationships and limited in length by the terseness also characteristic of this literature, provides the rhythm of Hebrew poetry, the cadence discernible even in translation. O'Connor's work, though so cumbersome as nearly to defy practical use, seems to support this understanding, with its insight that it is in the interplay of syntactic patterns that poetic constraints provide a regulation analogous to meter (O'Connor 1980, 67 ff., 73). But while O'Connor develops a catalog of clause types found in his corpus, he does not appear to uncover the system he was seeking.