

## PSALMS: A CANTATA ABOUT THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

JOHN H. WALTON\*

With respect to hermeneutics during the past century, there can be no doubt that context has finally come into its own. Biblical scholarship at large and specifically evangelical Biblical scholarship have come to realize that a verse or section must be treated in its context to be interpreted correctly. This is a principle that extends from the earliest OT books to the latest NT books as well as stretching across most genre lines. We have learned to speak of microcontexts within a particular pericope as well as macrocontexts on the scope of a book or even in the context of Scripture as a whole.

The advent of canonical criticism has heightened even further our sensitivity to context as a reflection of the editor's agenda. In books such as Samuel or Genesis, discerning the logic of selection and arrangement has become as important for interpretation as the meaning of words and phrases.

The book of Psalms has historically defied attempts to understand its macrocontext. Each psalm was considered an independent unit, related to those around it seemingly by only an arbitrary editorial process. This conclusion did not always arise out of the conviction that there was no editorial agenda or purpose as much as through a failure to identify such a purpose. Despite the consensus that there is no perceptible agenda to the editor's arrangement, there has been a certain intrigue over such editorial evidences as the five-book structure of Psalms even since Talmudic times.

The whole issue has been reopened for discussion in the aftermath of the 1981 Yale dissertation by Gerald Wilson,<sup>1</sup> who began by analyzing some of the principles of arrangement of psalmic literature observable in the ancient Near East in collections such as the Sumerian temple hymns and the Mesopotamian catalogues of hymnic incipits. He found a general tendency for compositions to be arranged by genre category.<sup>2</sup> He continues:

This chief principle of organization could be modified by a number of other concerns. Evidence has been adduced for divisions and groupings (within genre groupings or, indeed, on some occasions, overriding them) based on (1) liturgical correspondences; (2) series; (3) currency of usage; or (4) the language of the composition. What emerges is an extremely flexible system of

\* John Walton is associate professor of Old Testament at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>1</sup> G. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico: Scholars, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 59-60.

classification capable of sufficient modification to accommodate the various purposes for which individual catalogues were produced.<sup>3</sup>

Wilson then proceeded to examine the Psalms manuscripts from Qumran to discover what could be concluded about the canonical process and the fixed or unfixed nature of the Psalms at that time. The conclusion he drew from this very detailed and helpful discussion is that the evidence from Qumran suggests that by the first century B.C. books 1-3 of Psalms had achieved a high degree of stability whereas books 4-5 show a higher degree of variability extending into the first century A.D.

Wilson then analyzed the evidence of editorial activity that existed within the Psalms. Finding no explicit evidence of editorial organization with the exception of Ps 72:20, he concluded that "any organizational concern or purpose of the editor(s) must be inferred from the tacit arrangement of the Psalms."<sup>4</sup>

A study of the titles was an important aspect of his analysis. His view is that the titles were used in various ways by the editor(s) to either bind units together or to create disjunctures. So genre designations are used within books to soften transitions from one author to another.<sup>5</sup> Another of his conclusions in this section is that books 1-3 use author changes to indicate disjuncture.<sup>6</sup> There is certainly no evidence of any consistent attempt to group the Psalms by genre categories as was the case in the Babylonian collections.<sup>7</sup> In general he suggested that in their final form the Psalms have been supplied with a new context not necessarily related to the titles, which were part of a prior context. He agreed with B. Childs that there is evidence that even the titles in some cases were trying to do the same thing as they provided historical contexts for psalms that had their origin in the cult.<sup>8</sup>

What I considered perhaps the most valuable aspect of the study was Wilson's examination of evidence of individual instances of editorial activity within the Psalms. He summarized his finds as follows:

I have been able to show (1) that the "book" divisions of the Psalter are real, editorially induced divisions and not accidentally introduced; (2) the "separating" and "binding" functions of the author and genre groupings; (3) the lack of a superscription as an indication of a tradition of combination [with the previous Psalm]; (4) the use of *hllwyh* psalms to indicate the conclusion of segments; (5) the use of *hwduw* psalms to introduce segments; (6) the existence of thematic correspondences between the beginning and ending psalms in some books. All of these findings demonstrate the presence of editorial activity at work in the arrangement of the psalms.<sup>9</sup>

As can be seen, these conclusions are drawn almost entirely from the titles.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 163.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 157.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 143, 161-162, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 172.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 199.

Once he had demonstrated that editorial activity exists, Wilson attempted to identify an editorial agenda in the final shape of the canonical collection. He focused initially on the seam psalms as "showing an interesting progression in thought regarding kingship and the Davidic Covenant."<sup>10</sup> Supported by only the analysis of the seam psalms he suggested that book 1 represents the covenant proclaimed, book 2 the covenant passed on, and book 3 the covenant failed.<sup>11</sup>

A psalm-by-psalm survey is used to support his conclusions regarding books 4-5. Book 4 is presented as a thematic development of the "answer" to the problem of Psalm 89, focusing on: (1) YHWH is king; (2) God is a refuge independent of the monarchy; (3) trust the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

He found it difficult to identify a clear editorial strategy in book 5 but suggests that the Davidic psalms present David as a model for individual and national response.<sup>13</sup> He concluded that Psalm 119 was the central focus<sup>14</sup> and that book 5 provided an answer to the plea of the exiles to be gathered from the diaspora.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, then, Wilson affirmed an editorial agenda for the Psalms that was built primarily (if not entirely) on the seam psalms in the first three books and on thematic developments in books 4 and 5. Individual sequencing within the books, in his view, is governed mainly by the titles.

Wilson's stimulating dissertation raised many questions that induced thought beyond the scope of his discussion. Specifically two areas of investigation will serve as the topics of this paper.

(1) In the first three books especially, can it be demonstrated that there is an editorial rationale in the placement of each psalm (or at least in the placement of the recognized collections of psalms) that is tied to something in the content of the psalm rather than being a function of what is conveyed in the title (e.g. author or genre)?

(2) When we consider the issue of authority, how would the editor's agenda be considered? Should we speak of an inspired author of the individual psalm or be more concerned with the inspired agenda of the editor? Is only one of them inspired (author or editor) or, if both are, do both carry equal weight? If the editor is to be considered inspired, did he convey enough of his rationale for us to identify it with any degree of objectivity?

## I. IS THERE A CONTENT AGENDA?

As Wilson and others have suggested, it is the function of Psalms 1 and 2 to introduce the Psalter, and the progression of the seam psalms must be the starting point for any identification of editorial agenda. Using those two elements I have attempted to frame the best working hypothesis that I

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 209.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 210-213.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 215-219.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 222.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 223.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 227.

could that would present a logical rationale for the ordering of the Psalms. What must be decided is whether this or any alternative hypothesis can offer enough logic and enough objective data to give it credibility.

The hypothesis that I have developed views the Psalms as a cantata around the theme of the Davidic covenant. The cantata analogy is helpful for it carries with it the idea that many of the pieces may not have been composed specifically for the cantata. Rather, compositions created for other reasons at other times have been woven together into a secondary framework in order to address a particular subject. It is therefore readily admitted that there may be little correlation between the Psalm titles, which convey information about an earlier *Sitz im Leben*, and the incidents to which the Psalms are applied in their cantata context.

This hypothetical cantata would have the following outline:

- I. Introduction (1-2)  
Theme: Vindication of the Righteous  
Theocratic Sponsorship of the Israelite (Davidic) King
- II. Book 1 (3-41)  
Theme: David's Conflict with Saul
- III. Book 2 (42-72)  
Theme: David's Reign
- IV. Book 3 (73-89)  
Theme: Assyrian Crisis
- V. Book 4 (90-106)  
Theme: Introspection about Destruction of Temple and Exile
- VI. Book 5 (107-145)  
Theme: Praise/Reflection on Return and New Era
- VII. Conclusion (146-150)  
Theme: Praise relating to Themes of Psalter

In this hypothesis, working beyond what was suggested by Wilson, I am trying to establish whether a rationale can be identified for the placement of each psalm in each small collection from within the psalm itself rather than simply from the titles. The search focuses on the content of each psalm, though it is possible that the element in a psalm that led to its placement may not be the major theme of the psalm. For instance, Psalm 71 is very appropriately placed because that is at the end of the section dealing with David's reign and David speaks twice in the psalm about being "old and gray." David's age is hardly the thematic center of the psalm, but this element could have been significant enough to influence the placement.

1. *Book 1.* The most noticeable characteristic of book 1 is the preponderance of individual lament psalms. Beyond this, however, is the fact that even those psalms that are not individual laments often still make at least passing reference to the enemies of the psalmist. Psalms 3-13 show the most consistency and could be tied thematically to the beginning of David's

troubles with Saul recorded in 1 Samuel 19–23. These laments are full of petitions for deliverance, protection, vindication and help of various kinds. At times the enemies are specifically referred to as “pursuers” (e.g. 7:1), which would certainly bring Saul to mind. Psalms 8, 9, and 11, which are not individual laments, all feature the enemies or the wicked somewhere in the piece.

Clear genre discontinuity is evident starting with Psalm 14. As a matter of fact, there are few sections in all of the Psalter that are so lacking genre indicators or that send such confusing genre signs as Psalms 14–22. The mention of enemies is still fairly prevalent, but there is a good mix of praise, lament and instruction. Psalm 18 could be seen as the core of this section, reporting a deliverance from enemies. We could suggest a possible correlation between this section and 1 Samuel 24 where David has his first opportunity to kill Saul, leading to Saul’s declaration that David is righteous. Of special note are verses such as 15:3; 19:13; 20:6.

Psalms 23 and 24 may seem out of place in the first book but could very easily reflect a correlation to the incident with Nabal and Abigail reported in 1 Samuel 25. The table prepared in the presence of enemies here is very tangible, and David’s thankfulness for having preserved “clean hands and a pure heart” would be very appropriate.

Psalms 25–26 return to individual laments and would reflect the renewed pursuit of Saul. Psalms 27–30 would then be reflections on the second incident where David could have taken Saul’s life (1 Samuel 26). 27:12 speaks of false witnesses and shows close correlation to 1 Sam 26:19. The deliverance of the anointed of the Lord in 28:8 would have two sides to it, and Psalm 30 is, like Psalm 18, a report of deliverance rather than the typical request for deliverance.

Psalm 31 is strikingly appropriate to David’s apparent desertion to the Philistines reported in 1 Samuel 29. Particularly noteworthy are vv. 6, 11–12, 20.

Psalms 32–41 are not as easy to connect. Certainly the theme of enemies is still prevalent, but there are no historical incidents that I can find that give logic to the ebb and flow of praise, lament, confession and instruction found in this section. Nevertheless by their general tone they are more appropriate to book 1 than to the other books.

Psalm 41 is the weakest conclusion of any of the five books. Verses 5–11, however, are certainly appropriate to reflect the end of this portion of David’s career. The hovering question, “When will he die?” (v. 5), could lead to this placement alone, and as a whole the psalm addresses the enemy’s failure to triumph.

2. *Book 2.* In our working hypothesis, this book would reflect some of the situations faced by David during the time of his kingship. Psalms 42–43 are linked together by the common phrase, “Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” These could reflect either the personal mourning brought about by the Amalekite raid on Ziklag where even David’s family was taken captive, or the victory of the Philistines over the Israelites at the battle of Mount Gilboa. This latter is

almost certainly the event reflected upon in Psalm 44, a national lament of defeat at the hands of the nations.

Psalm 45 is obviously appropriate as the coronation hymn for David with fitting acknowledgment of God's kingship as well (v. 6). Psalms 46-47 would then reflect the military successes of David as recorded in 2 Samuel 5-8, with Psalm 48 dwelling specifically on the conquest of Jerusalem.

At this point there is an intriguing lacuna in the correlation that I am uncertain how to explain. The next event in the narrative of Samuel is the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7. There is no correlating psalm here in book 2. That fact represents either a serious and perhaps mortal blow to the theory or could perhaps be explained by the observation that the whole cantata is about the covenant, so all of the appropriate psalms addressing it are used at other key junctures. Whatever solution might be suggested would play a significant role in confirming or refuting any hypothesis.

Instead of a psalm on the Davidic covenant we have Psalm 49, a unique composition that is more like Ecclesiastes than anything else. I would view it here as the first of three psalms concerning David's sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 49 would address the pride and vanity of wealth, Psalm 50 the ineffectiveness of sacrifice, and Psalm 51 the prayer for forgiveness.

Psalm 52 could easily be seen as a reflection on the situation of Amnon reported in 2 Samuel 14 (see especially 52:2, 7).

Psalm 53 presents an interesting situation in that it is almost identical to Psalm 14. Here it is the first of a new series of "enemy" psalms (the largest such series outside of book 1) and would serve to draw a parallel between the problems David faced with Saul and those he encountered at the hands of his son Absalom. Psalms 54-64 are all lament psalms, and all but one are individual laments. The exception, Psalm 60, would be appropriate as a national prayer for victory in battle. Verses that stand out would be 55:12-14 where the enemy is identified as a companion and friend and 55:21 where it is noted that his speech was smooth but war was in his heart. 61:6 speaks of prolonging the king's life. Psalm 64 ends this section and speaks of shooting arrows (vv. 3-4, 7), which would bring to mind the end of Absalom.

Psalm 65 begins a new section and stands out again by the genre discontinuity. It starts with silence (peace) before the Lord in Zion and the performance of vows. That theme is continued in the praise of Psalms 66 (vv. 13-14) and 67.

Psalms 68-69 renew discussion of enemies and could be correlated to the revolt of the northern tribes under the leadership of Sheba (2 Samuel 20). Particularly noteworthy are 69:8, "I have been estranged from my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons," and 69:20, "I looked for sympathy and found none," which could have struck the editor as reminiscent of David's grief over the death of Absalom. Whether Psalms 70-71 continue on this theme or have reference to something like the uprising of Adonijah is difficult to judge. As mentioned earlier, what does stand out in Psalm 71 is that David is old and gray (vv. 9, 18).

Psalm 72 is the seam psalm, the conclusion of book 2. As David's blessing on Solomon it is one of the anchors of the hypothesis. Also of interest in this psalm is what Wilson identifies as the only explicit statement within the Psalms that exercises an organizational function (v. 20). Usually translated "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended," it is also possible to translate as an objective genitive: "The prayers (variant: hymns) about David the son of Jesse are ended."<sup>16</sup>

3. *Book 3.* I have found book 3 the most difficult to assess. The seam Psalm 89 at first seems to suggest the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, thus making book 3 parallel to the history of the divided monarchy. This would correlate with Wilson's suggestion of "covenant failed," which he based solely on Psalm 89. But three observations led me in a different direction. (1) The first eighteen verses of Psalm 89 comprise a psalm of declarative praise, and though the psalm ends without coming back to a praise or deliverance context the first four verses seem to suggest that the crisis addressed in the second part of the psalm has found some resolution. (2) The king of this psalm unblushingly refers to himself as "thy servant" (v. 39) and acts as if he is totally undeserving of such shoddy treatment at the hands of the Lord. Such could hardly be an accurate reflection on the last kings of Judah. (3) As a whole, I did not see that the psalms of book 3 were addressing a succession of historical events through this period. Rather, since Psalms 73-83 are a small collection of Asaph psalms and Psalms 84-89 (except Psalm 86 [David]) are attributed to the sons of Korah (in Psalm 89 Ethan the Ezrahite may be a son of Korah; see Psalm 88), it seemed that each of the collections may have been placed as a whole. If this is justifiable, we would not be looking for a rationale for the placement of each psalm but for the collections.

The Asaph collection would have striking correlation and pertinence to the Assyrian crisis of the late eighth century B.C. The last psalm in the collection, Psalm 83, mentions Assyria specifically (v. 8). Beyond this are references in almost every psalm that are appropriate: 73:6-10, arrogance of the wicked; 74:10, 18, enemy mockery; 75:4-7, boastfulness of the wicked; God is judge; Psalm 76, God feared by kings; victory from temple; 77:7, whether God will reject forever; 78:9, 67, Ephraim, Joseph rejected; 79:1, nations have invaded; Psalm 80, petition to save; 81:13-14, if the people would listen, God would subdue enemies; 82:8, God judging the nations; 83:3-4, conspiracy against Israel. While many of these are generic enough that they could just as easily refer to the fall of Jerusalem (and indeed some explicitly do, cf. Psalm 79), the positive response in Psalms 84-89 would lead me rather to posit correlation to a crisis that was successfully resolved (at least for the southern kingdom).

Psalm 84 is praise concerning the temple, and v. 11 shows hopefulness: "The Lord God is a sun and a shield. . . . No good thing does he withhold

<sup>16</sup> GKC 128h; cf. Gen 18:20; Isa 23:5; Amos 8:10.

from those who walk uprightly." Psalm 85 speaks of restoration, forgiveness, peace, deliverance and prosperity.

Psalm 86 should be noteworthy, for it is a Davidic psalm placed in the middle of a sons-of-Korah collection. Perhaps it could be construed as representing one of the prayers of Hezekiah, who was likened favorably to David. "Preserve my life for I am a godly man" (v. 2) sets the tone for the psalm.

Psalm 87 is a praise of Zion, and Psalm 88 again would represent a prayer of Hezekiah, being near death.

The rejection theme of Psalm 89 has most easily in the past been associated with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. If it is correlated to the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701, however, it would be dealing with an imminent rejection. This apparent rejection would have been evident in the success of the Assyrian armies as they destroyed one fortified city after another (v. 40). Furthermore the one who has been potentially rejected seems to be an individual (and righteous) king rather than a personification of the corporate line of David. Especially note v. 47 where the shortness of the span of life is invoked. Finally, the reproach of the enemies is again mentioned at the end of the psalm (vv. 50-51). There is nothing in the psalm that is notably relevant to the fall of Jerusalem.

As a result, I would see book 3 as most defensible as two collections that have been correlated by the editor to the Assyrian crisis that dominated the latter half of the eighth century. So construed, it celebrates a vindication of the Davidic line and a covenant victory. This leaves some gaps, for book 4 begins with an assumption of the destroyed temple and a people in exile. The fact that Psalm 89 is content to end on such a negative note may in part be an attempt to close this gap and serve a dual purpose.

4. *Book 4.* Beginning with a psalm of Moses, it ends with a recapitulation of a history of rebellion leading to a hope and plea for restoration. It does not take any imagination to see the introspection and resulting affirmations of the exile as being reflected here. I would generally agree with Wilson's thematic development with additional observations as follows.

Psalms 90 and 91 share the conviction that the Lord is their dwelling place. The words of Moses in Psalm 90 would be seen as anticipating the future crisis of the exile. Even v. 10 concerning the days of one's life being seventy years takes on new meaning in this context. While Psalm 90 is a plea for God's favor, Psalm 91 speaks of God's ability to deliver. Psalm 92 continues in the expression of confidence that God and the righteous will prevail. In Psalm 93 it is the Lord who reigns, and Psalm 94 speaks of the vengeance that God will exact. God will not abandon his people (v. 14), and the psalmist rejects the idea that a throne or tribunal of destruction could be allied with the Lord (v. 20).

Psalms 95-100 are a small collection of praise psalms that appropriately present the affirmations of faith and hope maintained in the exile. They speak of the Lord as king, a new song, deliverance, those who worship idols

being put to shame, YHWH above all gods, the judgment of the nations, and the continuation of *hesed*. Even the phrase "Tell his glory among the nations" (96:3) has significance here.

Psalms 101 is a commitment to righteous conduct, while Psalm 102 is a petition for the Lord to have compassion on Zion (vv. 12-13) and looks forward to the rebuilding (v. 16). Psalm 103 is critical as a discussion of God forgiving the sins of the nation: "He has not dealt with us according to our sins"; "he has removed our transgressions from us."

Psalms 104-106 seem to constitute a series surveying the mighty and gracious deeds of God. Psalm 104 begins the series by speaking of God's sovereign control of his creation. Psalm 105 moves on to the establishing of the covenant with Israel, covering the patriarchs and the deliverance from Egypt. Psalm 106 concludes the series with a summary of occasions of rebellion. The major focus is on the generation in the wilderness (vv. 6-33) but also covers generally the judges and the monarchy (vv. 34-43). The fact that the Lord was gracious to them despite their sin (vv. 44-46) gives hope that God may gather the exiles from among the nations (v. 47).

5. *Book 5*. Psalm 107 begins the last book with thanks to God for regathering them (vv. 1-4), and Psalm 108 offers praise among the nations for the *hesed* of the Lord. (I cannot identify any significance for the fact that Psalm 108 is made up of sections of Psalms 57 and 60, both from the Absalom section of book 2.) Psalm 109 is imprecatory and could be construed as being applied to Babylon.

Psalm 110 marks the return of victorious kingship. It is strongly theocratic in emphasis and may be eschatological in focus. The combination with a priestly office is very suitable to the postexilic development.

Psalms 111-117 are the *hallēlūyāh* collection, which appropriately follows Psalm 110 praising God for his faithfulness in reestablishing his covenant. Theocracy and deliverance are common themes. Psalm 115 includes the denunciation of idols, and Psalm 117 concludes the series affirming that the *hesed* of the Lord is great and his faithfulness everlasting. Though Psalm 118 is not strictly part of the *hallēlūyāh* series, I would see it as giving a summary conclusion to the themes of that collection.

Psalm 119 would function here as a reaffirmation of the law as the foundation of societal as well as individual conduct. The importance of living in accordance with the law has been accented by the experience of exile.

Psalms 120-134 are the collection of songs of ascent and would here reflect not just the pilgrimage feasts but the return to Jerusalem par excellence, the return from exile. Emphasis throughout this series is on deliverance by God and is punctuated by encouragement to trust the Lord. 126:1 is also noteworthy in its mention specifically of the return. Likewise 127:1 could easily reflect on the rebuilding of the temple.

Psalm 135 praises the Lord as being above all gods and denounces the idols. Psalm 136 is the covenant hymn with the recurrent refrain affirming that the Lord's *hesed* is everlasting. Psalm 137 is the last look back, cursing Babylon.

Psalms 138-145 are a final Davidic series that serves as a conclusion to book 5. Psalm 138 states that all the kings of the earth will give thanks (v. 4). Psalm 139 would be important in this context as a plea that it is time for the Lord to deliver Israel from her enemies (vv. 19-22). The rest of this collection follows that basic theme. In Psalm 144 there is a prayer for the deliverance of David and for the prosperity of the people (vv. 10-14). The last psalm in the series, Psalm 145 is the climax of book 5. It emphasizes the attributes of the Lord, leading off with his kingship.

Psalms 146-150 comprise a final *hallēlūyāh* series that serves as a chorus of praise concluding the cantata.

I think that I have been able to demonstrate that the possibility exists that the editor of Psalms may have used the content of the psalms as a key to organize them into a logical framework. Whether the logic, rationale or framework that I have identified is similar to the editor's is certainly open to question, but the feasibility of such a hypothesis can, I think, be affirmed.

The other part of the question, however, becomes significant at this point. While it may have been demonstrated that a cantata approach is feasible, is there enough objective data to substantiate it? Such data might include the following: (1) The five-book structure suggests editorial arrangement (Wilson); (2) the seam psalms suggest a progression, particularly a content progression (Wilson); (3) Psalms 1 and 2 as introductory suggest the existence of such an agenda (Wilson); (4) the grouping and placement of "enemies" psalms would appear far too logical to be fortuitous; (5) certain key psalms (besides the seam psalms) are placed precisely where they fit (e.g. Psalms 45, 48, 51, 78, 90, 103, 110, 119, as well as several of the collections).

This evidence falls short of demanding the existence of a content-oriented agenda, but I do not know what other treatment of the Psalms would give a better explanation for the existence and purpose of these elements.

## II. AUTHORITY IN THE PSALMS

The second question that we initially raised concerns the issue of authority and inspiration. If such an editorial arrangement of the Psalms exists, are we to consider it an inspired agenda? What is more important as we seek to identify God's purpose in giving us the Psalms—the individual psalm, or its meaning in context (i.e. the use to which the editor puts it)?

Certainly one of the hesitations here concerns our inability to recognize the editor's agenda with confidence. While it may be argued that it is conveyed no less clearly than the editor/author's purpose in other books (e.g. Song of Solomon), we still must wonder whether something so uncertain could possibly be God's main emphasis for the book. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the themes of Psalms 1 and 2 have never been lost sight of in the history of the interpretation of the Psalms.

The message of the editor would be one that combined individual and national elements, wisdom and eschatology. David is the quintessential example of the righteous man vindicated. He was vindicated *vis-à-vis* Saul, vindicated *vis-à-vis* Absalom, and ultimately vindicated on a national/eschatological scale in the development of the Davidic covenant. This is not an obscure message and could easily be affirmed as authoritative. Nothing is at risk in such a position, and a new appreciation of the Psalms could be gained.

Authority in theory is actually not as sticky an issue here as hermeneutics is. When we go to an individual psalm, what is the appropriate way to approach it? In historical literature we have no difficulty subordinating each individual narrative to the context, but there the context has not been radically changed in the editorial arrangement of the material—or if it has, we have no inkling as to the original context.

I find this problem unsolvable at this point, so I am not willing to give up either level of interpretation. Certainly dealing with only the macrolevel has the potential of resolving some of the perennial problems that arise with the book of Psalms, such as imprecatory psalms and the retribution principle. On the other hand, I cannot justify disregarding the original contexts of the individual psalms. Continued research is needed as we consider the options available.