

A MESSIANIC READING OF PSALM 89: A CANONICAL AND INTERTEXTUAL STUDY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Psalm 89 closes Book III of the Psalter, perhaps the most theologically challenging book of the Psalter due to its recurring laments over the perceived absence and silence of God. A “royal” psalm, Psalm 89 is found at one of the “seams” of the Psalter, and has been recognized as making a significant contribution to the overall theme and structure of the Psalter itself.¹ Its canonical significance emerges also from its content. Interpreters consider Psalm 89 a lament over the failure of the Davidic covenant and the loss of the Davidic dynasty.² This raises a number of questions regarding the nature of God vis-à-vis his promises to his people as a whole. Has the Davidic covenant failed? Has God reneged on his promises to his people? The psalmist is asking these very questions (89:39–52) in light of what he knows about God (89:6–19) and the glorious promise to David (89:20–38).³ These questions arise not just in light of the content of Psalm 89, but in light of the OT as a whole, which reveals a messianic hope rooted in Davidic and royal themes.⁴ If Psalm 89 laments the failure of the Davidic covenant, how does this square with the messianic hope found elsewhere that testifies to a coming king in the line of David?

In light of these considerations, what is the canonical significance of Psalm 89? The thesis presented here is threefold: (1) Psalm 89 is messianic in that it encour-

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¹ See Gerald H. Wilson, “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JSOT* 35 (1986) 85–94.

² See Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 213; cf. Richard J. Clifford, “Psalm 89: A Lament Over the Davidic Ruler’s Continued Failure,” *HTR* 73 (1980) 35–47, esp. 36; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990) 416; John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2: *Psalms 42–89* (Baker Commentary on the OT Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 663–64. Not all scholars follow this interpretation, most notably, Knut M. Heim, “The (God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89: A Historical and Intertextual Enquiry,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford OT Seminar* (ed. John Day; JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 296–322; Robert L. Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III* (JSOTSup 307; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 177–230. See also Michael K. Searly, “The Return of the King: Book V as a Witness to Messianic Hope in the Psalter,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* (ed. Andrew J. Schmutz and David M. Howard Jr.; Chicago: Moody, 2013) 209–17.

³ Verse numbers reflect the Hebrew text.

⁴ See Daniel I. Block, “My Servant David: Ancient Israel’s Vision of the Messiah,” in *Israel’s Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 17–56.

ages hope in a return for David in the midst of lament; (2) the psalm indicates the loss of the Davidic dynasty is only temporary and the covenant has not failed and is not broken; and (3) this messianic hope is rooted in God's character and kingship, indicating that Psalm 89 anticipates themes that scholars have rightly argued are the answer to the laments of Book III given in Books IV and V of the Psalter. While some interpreters think the focal point of Psalm 89 is its lament over the "failed covenant," this psalm is better read as expressing and encouraging a messianic hope, though recognizing the depth of emotion over the *perceived* abnegation of the Davidic promises. Put another way, the psalm reflects the pathos of the demise of the Davidic dynasty while simultaneously being grounded in a messianic hope that recognizes the demise is only *temporary*.

In order to demonstrate this, an examination of Psalm 89 is necessary. Second, Psalm 89's connection to the broader canonical context of the Psalter will be explored, especially its connection to the subsequent Books IV–V. Finally, the significance of Psalm 89 will be explored in an intertextual dialogue with two prophetic texts, Isa 55:1–5 and Jer 33:14–26.⁵

II. PSALM 89

As noted above, scholars have suggested that Psalm 89 is a lament over some national disaster, most likely the loss of the Davidic dynasty during the exile.⁶ For example, Tate suggests,

The key to the interpretation of the psalm in its present form is found in the lament of vv 39–52. The hymn and the oracle must be read in relation to the distress reflected in these verses. The promises of Yahweh and his praise have been called into serious question by the trouble and pain of disasters and unfulfilled expectations which are expressed in the last part of the psalm.⁷

⁵ A brief word on methodology is in order. This article will build on the foundation of the canonical shape of the Psalter established by Gerald Wilson (*The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, esp. 199–228; idem, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* [ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993] 72–82; idem, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter" 85–94). This article will also be employing an intertextual approach that will intentionally read not just the Psalms in relationship with one another but will read the Psalms in relationship with the Prophets. As Craig Broyles notes, each Biblical passage is a part of a canonical context of shared traditions and texts that "both narrow[s] the range of possible meanings for any given passage and open[s] possibilities for new associations and overtones in meaning. [The traditions and texts] restrain a passage's range of meanings, because its meanings must be generally consistent with those of other sacred texts and traditions. But traditions and texts also import meanings as the given passage links with other texts and traditions and their meanings" (Craig C. Broyles, "Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon," in *Interpreting the OT: A Guide for Exegesis* [ed. Craig C. Broyles; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001] 157). See also Richard Schultz, who offers a "redeemed" understanding of intertextual theory based on the work of Michael Riffaterre, in which he suggests the Biblical canon by its very nature offers a natural context for clarifying and enriching interpretations of any given passage ("Intertextuality, Canon, and 'Undecidability': Understanding Isaiah's 'New Heavens and New Earth' (Isaiah 65:17–25)," *BBR* 20 [2010] 19–38).

⁶ See note 2 above.

⁷ Tate, *Psalms 51–100* 416.

The lamented disaster is likely the “broken and failed” covenant, the failure of the promise of Psalm 2, according to Gerald Wilson.⁸

While these interpretations certainly have merit and offer one potential reading of Psalm 89 in its canonical context, another reading of the psalm is possible, and perhaps more appropriate. Rather than viewing the lament as the controlling interpretive key to the psalm, as Tate suggests, there is good reason to read the psalm with the hymn and oracle sections (vv. 6–19 and vv. 20–38, respectively) playing a more prominent role in the interpretation of the psalm. If this proposal is followed, the result is an entirely different understanding of the psalm. Rather than a lament over the failure of the Davidic covenant, the hymn and oracle sections encourage a messianic hope and an anticipation of restoration in light of God’s character. To describe the message of Psalm 89 as a “failure” is to miss the messianic hope that dominates the psalm; it is better to see the demise of David as creating an existential crisis for the psalmist whose faith and hope in God’s promises to David lead the psalmist to recognize the *temporary* nature of the crisis.⁹

The Psalm is composed of four major components, with the addition of a title/superscription and a closing doxology/postscript.¹⁰ Despite the *prima facie* disparate sections and themes, the psalm is a unified whole.¹¹ The superscription, as is the case with all the superscriptions of Book III, links Psalm 89 with Psalm 88.¹²

⁸ See Wilson, *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* 213; idem, “Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter” 90.

⁹ Wilson modifies the word failure with the adjective “apparent” elsewhere (*Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* 215), which softens the notion of failure a bit. This, however, takes away from the reality of the demise of the Davidic dynasty. The lament over the pathos is real; but the hope is real too, and the hope is rooted in the certainty of Yahweh’s promise to bring David back, and thus is best understood as a messianic hope, as will be seen in the study below.

¹⁰ Interpreters generally agree about the major sections of the psalm, though they tend to see only three major sections, including vv. 2–5 with vv. 6–19 to comprise the first section. See, for example, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 406–7; Tate, *Psalms 51–100* 413; Heim, “(God-)Forsaken King” 296–97; Nahum M. Sarna, “Psalm 89: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis,” in *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. Alexander Altmann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) 30–31; Goldingay’s structure is somewhat idiosyncratic: vv. 2–5; vv. 6–15; vv. 16–19; vv. 20–28; vv. 29–38; vv. 39–46; vv. 47–52 (660–63; note he uses the English numbering system, which I have modified for consistency’s sake). That said, Hossfeld’s insightful comment that vv. 2–5 function as a “proem” to the psalm leads me to see four sections (407). These sections are: (1) The Proem (vv. 2–5); (2) the Uniqueness of Yahweh (vv. 6–19); (3) the Davidic Promise (vv. 20–38); and (4) the Lament (vv. 39–52).

¹¹ This is evidenced by the presence of key words throughout: **חֶסֶד** (vv. 2, 3, 15, 25, 29, 34, and 50), **עוֹלָם** (vv. 2, 3, 5, 29, 37, 38, and 53), and **אֲמוֹנָה** (vv. 2, 3, 6, 9, 25, 34, and 50), among others (e.g. **כִּן** and **כֶּסֶף**). Interestingly, both **חֶסֶד** and **אֲמוֹנָה** occur in each of the major sections of the psalm, and **עוֹלָם** occurs in the proem, oracle, and postscript. Furthermore, there is an inclusio formed by plural construct **יְהוָה חֶסֶד־יְהוָה**, occurring in v. 2 and v. 50. Additionally, Nahum Sarna has drawn attention to the overwhelming connections between both the hymn and the oracle (Sarna, “Psalm 89” 31, table 1) as well as the hymn/oracle and the lament (*ibid.* 32, table 2). I agree with Ward, who concludes, “It is not a patchwork but, from beginning to end, the deliberate composition of a skillful poet who knew exactly what he was doing from line to line, section to section” (J. M. Ward, “The Literary Form and Liturgical Background of Psalm LXXXIX,” *VT* 11 [July 1961] 324).

¹² See Cole, *Shape and Message of Book III*, who consistently notes the linking function of the superscriptions.

Psalm 89, then, becomes a response to the dark and alienated situation of Psalm 88.¹³ This has been a consistent pattern throughout Book III, where the questions voicing lament over the “disoriented reality”¹⁴ are addressed and answered by interspersed proclamations of eschatological hope. Psalms 75 and 76 offer hope of Yahweh’s vindication and victory over the enemies that are lamented in 73 and 74. Psalm 78 responds to the questions of divine anger and absence in 77:8–10 by illustrating Israel’s repeated and consistent faithlessness despite Yahweh’s repeated and consistent faithfulness to Israel. Nevertheless, it concludes with a statement of Yahweh’s rejection of Shiloh (78:60) and Ephraim (78:67) and the election of Judah (78:68) and David (78:70–72), the one who will shepherd Yahweh’s people “according to the integrity of his heart” and will “guide them with his skillful hands” (78:72). Additionally, the questions of 79:5 and 80:4 are answered by Psalms 81 and 82.¹⁵ Likewise, Psalm 89 takes up the questions of Psalm 88, and, even though it ends with a lament itself over the still far-off reality, affirms that the dark situation of Psalm 88 is not the final word.

1. *The proem (89:2–5)*. The proem¹⁶ of verses 2–5 sets the theme and structure for the entire psalm. Verses 2–3 emphasize Yahweh’s faithful and steadfast character, while verses 4–5 refer to the covenant that Yahweh established with David. These twin themes become the focus of the entire psalm. The hymn (vv. 6–19) will precede the interpretation of the oracle (vv. 20–38), as set by the pattern in the proem. In this way, the proem itself initiates a messianic hope that becomes the dominant theme of the psalm: the references to the covenant and its eternity coupled with Yahweh’s faithful and steadfast character assert from the very beginning of the psalm that, regardless of the current reality of the Davidic dynasty or the dark and alienated condition of Psalm 88, God is faithful and has established his covenant in perpetuity. Because of the proem’s efficacy as the thematic and structural introduction to the psalm, it is reasonable to allow the hymn and the oracle to play a greater role in the function of the psalm than normally is assigned. The proem is the foundation for the subsequent sections.

2. *The hymn (89:6–19)*. The themes set by the proem are developed more fully by the hymn and the oracle. The hymn, initially set in the heavenly council, celebrates Yahweh for his “wonders” (פְּלִאָתָיו) and “faithfulness” (אֱמוּנָתוֹ) (v. 6). Both of these words look back to Psalm 88 (88:11 and 88:12, respectively), affirming their veracity vis-à-vis Yahweh. The psalmist in Psalm 88 asked if Yahweh displayed these characteristics while the psalmist was in Sheol. Psalm 89 responds with a quick and powerful affirmative. These characteristics reveal that Yahweh is, indeed, unique in the entire cosmos (89:7, 9). He is feared by all those who surround him (v. 8), a reference to his royal position and authority in the heavenly council.

¹³ Ibid. 203.

¹⁴ This phrase alludes to Walter Brueggemann’s taxonomy of psalms in “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 3–32, who outlines psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation.

¹⁵ See Cole, *Shape and Message of Book III* 203.

¹⁶ On this term, see Hossfeld, *Psalms* 2 407.

This royal imagery continues in verse 9 with the divine epithets (הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת) and (מִי־כִמוֹד) that bracket the question “who is like you” (מִי־כִמוֹד). The psalmist links this royal imagery with Yahweh’s faithfulness at the end of verse 9. In sum, verses 6–9 highlight Yahweh’s role as creator and his uniqueness and preeminent royal position. In this high king position, his faithful character is also highlighted with אֱמוּנָתְךָ, forming an inclusio around this subsection.

The royal imagery continues in verses 10–13. The presence of the second person personal pronoun (אַתָּה) in these few verses highlights its hymnic character. The context of the royal imagery has shifted, however. While Yahweh as king in the heavenly council was previously highlighted, here the psalmist emphasizes Yahweh as king over the cosmos. He conquers and rules over the menacing forces of the sea, including Rahab (vv. 10–11). He is the owner of all of creation, the one who receives shouts of acclamation from the corners of the earth (vv. 12–13). In sum, verses 10–13 highlight Yahweh’s role as creator, universal ruler, and divine warrior. He is the high king over all of the cosmos.

Yahweh’s power and character emerge to the foreground in verses 14–15. The former is indicated in verse 14 with the piling up of words for strength and images of his hand and right arm. The latter is indicated by the nouns that describe him and his throne in verse 15. The characteristics of “righteousness” (צְדָקָה), “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט), “lovingkindness” (חַסֵּד), and “faithfulness” (אֱמֻנָה) further emphasize Yahweh’s kingship and kingdom (cf. Ps 85:11–14; Ps 97:2).¹⁷ Yahweh’s high kingship consists of unique power to uphold and sustain all things as well as certain ethical qualities.

Verses 16–19 bring the hymn to a close, providing a conclusion and a transition to the oracle of verses 20–38. There is a blessing pronounced over the people who know Yahweh’s victory (vv. 16–17).¹⁸ Yahweh as king guarantees the glory and strength of Israel as well as that of her king (vv. 18–19). He will exalt the horn of Israel, which is further explicated in the next verse as the shield and king. This is a powerful echo of 1 Sam 2:10, where Yahweh will defeat all of his enemies and “will give strength to his king and will exalt the horn of his anointed one” (וַיִּתְּעַזּ וַיִּתְּעַזּ לְמֶלְכֵךָ וַיִּתְּעַזּ לְקַרְנֵךָ). This echo brings to mind significant messianic expectations that are set by this passage in the books of Samuel.¹⁹ In this way, the hymn clearly establishes an expectation of Yahweh’s kingship and reliability to fulfill his promise to David and the messianic ideal that is so powerfully communicated in the books of Samuel. Given Yahweh’s unique power and reliability, the lament cannot be over the failure of the Davidic covenant, but rather it is a reflection of the psalmist’s hope in Yahweh’s ability to act.²⁰ The hope undergirding this entire psalm is messi-

¹⁷ The reference to Ps 97:2 also indicates that Psalm 89 anticipates this theme in Book IV. This will be developed more fully below. Interestingly, these are also the very characteristics that describe the glorious picture of the ideal Davidic kingdom in Psalm 72.

¹⁸ The reference to the “festal shout” (תְּרוּעָה) and Yahweh’s “righteousness” (צְדָקָה) are mutually informing, highlighting the victory and salvation of Yahweh (cf. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* 410, 422).

¹⁹ See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the OT of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 272–73.

²⁰ Pace Wilson, Clifford, and Tate. See note 2. This fits with the common understanding of lament, namely that laments intend to move God to act on behalf of the psalmist. They are persuasive. See, e.g.,

anic in that it anticipates the restoration of David based on Yahweh's character and power. The hymn has stressed Yahweh's role as creator, his uniqueness and his preeminent royal position, his faithfulness and other ethical qualities that emerge in his kingdom, and his universal and national rule. Each of these themes is developed as a part of the high kingship that Book IV uses to respond to the situation of Psalm 89.²¹ The significance of the hymn, then, is to begin laying the foundation to the answer of the questions of the lament; the answer is certainly developed more fully in Book IV, but the very themes and theology are anticipated here in Psalm 89.

3. *The oracle (89:20–38)*. The hymn is perfectly crafted to lead seamlessly to the oracle of verses 20–38. The final word of verse 19, מְלִכְנוּ, introduces the theme of the oracle, namely the Davidic king.²² The oracle of verses 20–38 is not rooted in an independent tradition of the Davidic covenant, but is rather an interpretation of it.²³ The interpretation given to the Davidic covenant by the psalmist builds upon the hymn. The hymn celebrated Yahweh's uniqueness and royal authority, culminating in his ability to establish the success of the Davidic dynasty (vv. 18–19). The oracle rehearses the Davidic covenant, emphasizing its eternal nature—a truth rooted in God's very own kingship, character, and deeds.

God's proactive participation in the promise to David is highlighted throughout this larger section, but particularly in verses 20–30. In verse 20a–b, the oracle is introduced with two second person speaking verbs, both referring to Yahweh as the speaker. The psalmist then reports the words of Yahweh with a series of 1cs forms, which will continue through verse 38—a powerful rhetorical device highlighting the proactive participation of Yahweh.²⁴ These are Yahweh's very words, and given his power, uniqueness, and faithfulness (cf. vv. 6–19), they can be trusted. The repetition of the first person forms confirms the ongoing validity of the promises in light of the hymn.

The next section (vv. 31–35), a series of protases (vv. 31–32) followed by the apodosis (v. 33), is an interesting insertion in this context.²⁵ The condition suggests

Patrick D. Miller, "Prayer as Persuasion: The Rhetoric and Intention of Prayer," *WW* 13 (1993) 356–62; repr. in idem, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* (JSOTSUP 267; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 337–44.

²¹ See Michael G. McKelvey, *Moses, David, and the High Kingship of Yahweh: A Canonical Study of Book IV of the Psalter* (Gorgias Dissertations in Biblical Studies 55; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010) where he establishes these very themes throughout Book IV. See esp. 262–63 and 303–6 for his discussions on the significance of the high kingship of Yahweh.

²² See Sarna, "Psalm 89" 31.

²³ Ibid. 29. See also Heim, "A (God-)Forsaken King" 299–306.

²⁴ The 1cs forms: "I give help" (עָזַר שׁוֹיִתִּי); "I have exalted" (הִרְיִמוֹתִי); "I have found David my servant" (עֲבָדִי דָוִד מִצְאָתִי); "with my holy oil I anointed him" (מִשְׁחַתִּי קֹדֶשׁ בְּשֶׁמֶן); "my hand will establish" (אֲגִיד); "my arm will strengthen" (תְּבַזֵּן יָדִי); "I shall crush" (אֲגִיד); "I will strike" (אֲגִיד); "my faithfulness and my lovingkindness will be with him" (עִמּוֹ וְחֶסְדִּי וְאַמּוּנָתִי); "in my name his horn will be exalted" (קִרְנוֹ תָרוּם וּבְשִׁמִּי); "I shall set his hand on the sea" (יָדִי בַיָּם וְשָׂמַתִּי); "I myself shall make him the firstborn" (אֲחַדְנֵהוּ בְכוֹר אֲנִי); "my lovingkindness I will keep forever" (לְעוֹלָם); "my covenant shall be confirmed" (נִאֲמַנְתָּ וּבְרִיתִי); "I will establish his descendants forever" (לְעוֹלָם וְעַד וְשָׂמַתִּי).

²⁵ The two protases, both introduced by "if" (אִם), use four different verbs and four different nouns (though all are synonyms), which creates an intensifying effect. In v. 31 there is a chiasmic structure, with

that if David's descendants wander from Yahweh's ordinances, Yahweh will punish them for their disobedience (vv. 31–33). This condition/consequent has its foundation in 2 Sam 7:14, where Yahweh reminds David—while giving his promise—that disobedience will be punished.²⁶ These are powerful verses in the interpretation of the psalm; as Cole notes, the current lament over the disorientation is answered in the psalm itself with its reference to a promise to punish David and his sons for their lack of righteousness.²⁷

Despite the promise for punishment for disobedience, the next verse, verse 34, adds credence to the argument that there is a messianic hope in this psalm that is missed with too focused a view on the lament. It begins with a contrastive *waw* conjoined to one of the key words of our psalm, **הָסֵד**, with a 1cs pronominal suffix: “But my lovingkindness I will not break off from him” (author's translation). This is also rooted in 2 Samuel 7, just like the condition/consequent language in the preceding verses. Second Samuel 7:15 reads, “But my lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you” (**וְחֶסְדִּי לֹא יִסּוּר מִמֶּנּוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר הִסַּרְתִּי מֵעַם שָׂאוּל אֲשֶׁר הִסַּרְתִּי מִלְּפָנָי**).²⁸ This is a promise that is certain; it is this certainty in the promise that creates the messianic hope for the return of the Davidic dynasty despite the present reality.²⁹

The certainty of the promise is reiterated in verse 35. In God's own words the psalmist recites the inviolability of the covenant with David. The verb “profane” (**חָלַל**) recalls the conditions given to David's descendants in verse 32. The reference to Yahweh's covenant (**בְּרִיתִי**) recalls verses 4 and 29, which reiterate the ongoing nature of the covenant. While the second half of verse 35, “nor will I *alter* the utterance of my lips” (**וּמוֹצֵא שְׂפָתַי לֹא אֲשַׁנֶּה**), does not recall anything in Psalm 89, it responds to the lament of Ps 77:11: “the right hand of the Most High has *changed*” (**שָׁנוּת יְמִין עֲלֵיוֹן**). Psalm 89:35b responds by arguing that in regards to the Davidic covenant and the Davidic dynasty, Yahweh has *not* changed.

The element of certainty to the promise culminates in the closing three verses of the oracle (vv. 36–38). There are a number of connections to previous verses of

the two nouns “instruction” (**תּוֹרָתִי**) and “justice/judgments” (**דִּבְרֵי מִשְׁפָּטִי**) at the center. The verbs are both non-perfective, but the second is negated, which seems to emphasize both a positive and a negative element to obedience. In v. 32, there is a strong parallelism in the morphology of the verbs of the previous verses (i.e. both are non-perfective and the second is negated), which tightens the connection of these two verses. Verse 32, rather than a chiasmic structure, has an a-b//a-b pattern. This coherence draws the reader's attention.

²⁶ Note the corresponding terms **שָׁבַט** and **נָגַע** in 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 89:33.

²⁷ Cole, *Shape and Message of Book III* 221.

²⁸ Both 2 Sam 7:15 and Ps 89:34 begin with the same form: **וְחֶסְדִּי**. The verb that follows in 2 Sam 7:15 is different from Ps 89:34 (**סוּר** vs. **פָּרַר**), but this difference does not negate the powerful connection given the overlap in overall meaning of the two verses.

²⁹ Cf. Heim, “(God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89” 301–3. He notes that the psalmist could have altered the promise to alleviate the dissonance by making the promise conditional, but instead the psalmist has highlighted the unconditional element to put the focus squarely on the God who made the promise—the God whose promises are certain.

the psalm in this climactic unit.³⁰ The **אָחַת** (“once”) collocated with a speaking verb recalls verse 20 (**אִזְ דְּבַרְתָּ**), creating an inclusio for this section. The verb **נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי** recalls verse 4, which was a part of the proem that set the theme and structure of the psalm. The solemnity of the oath is signaled by the fact that it was done “by [Yahweh’s] holiness” (**בְּקִדְשִׁי**), which recalls the anointing of David with Yahweh’s holy oil in verse 21. The promise not to lie to David recalls verse 34. The reference to David’s eternal descendants and throne (v. 37) recalls verses 5 and 30. The verb **בִּזְוֹן** recalls the proem (vv. 3 and 5) as well as verse 22. **עוֹלָם**, as noted above, is a *leitwort* in Psalm 89, occurring in the proem (vv. 2, 3, and 5), verse 29, and the previous verse, verse 37. The reference to the “clouds/sky” (**שָׁחַק**) recalls verse 7, while the root **אָמַן** recalls verse 29. What this reveals is a tight thematic summary of the entire psalm. Verses 36–38 highlight the certainty of the promise given to David; it has not and will not be abrogated. Despite the present situation, there is a hope that is fostered in light of the certainty of the promise, which is rooted in the uniqueness and power of Yahweh, which the hymn powerfully communicates.

4. *The lament (89:39–52)*. The lament presents the biggest challenge to the thesis because it seems to question Yahweh’s faithfulness to the covenant. It is certainly understandable why scholars would suggest that Psalm 89 depicts the failure of the Davidic covenant. There is no denying the serious distress represented by the loss of the Davidic dynasty in verses 39–52. The strong contrastive *waw* in verse 39 sets the tone: “But you yourself have spurned and rejected!” (author’s translation). The second person forms return; this time, however, they depict Yahweh’s actions *against* David.³¹ Nevertheless, there are reasons to see why there is an element of messianic hope expressed in the midst of lament.

The reason to see hope in the lament is that verse 46 engages God despite this temporary crisis. The questions (vv. 47 and 49–50) and imperatives to remember (vv. 48 and 51) give evidence of a continued relationship with God in hope and faith.³² The particular question “how long” (**עַד־מָה**) attests to the psalmist’s hope in restoration, highlighting his recognition of the temporary nature of the crisis.³³ The

³⁰ Though the reference to the solar and lunar stars (vv. 37b–38a) does not recall anything in Psalm 89 (though it might actually bring to mind the reference to the heavens belonging to Yahweh in v. 12), it does bring to mind Jer 33:20–21 (see below).

³¹ Yahweh rejected (v. 39a), has become full of wrath (v. 39b), renounced the covenant (v. 40a), profaned the crown (v. 40b), destroyed the military strongholds (v. 41), caused David to be a disgrace (v. 42), given David’s enemies victory over him (vv. 43–44), and thereby caused great shame to come on the house of David (v. 45).

³² Walter Brueggemann, among others, has highlighted the faith and hope aspect of lament. He describes lament as “acts of relentless hope” (“A Shape for OT Theology, II: Embrace of Pain” *CBO* 47 [1985] 402). See also Patrick Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 130; idem, “Prayer as Persuasion” 356–62.

³³ The fact that this is the first of the questions and imperatives is significant in this regard. It is also interesting that **עוֹלָם** does not occur in the lament (vv. 39–52). The word used in v. 47 for “forever” is **לְעַד**. It seems the psalmist may have intentionally differentiated the two terms. One reason is probably because of the prevalence of **לְעַד** throughout the laments of Book III (cf. 74:1, 3, 10, 19; 77:9; 79:5). But does this also indicate a difference in degree in the eternal nature of the promise (**לְעוֹלָם**) and the perceived eternal nature of Yahweh’s silence and hiddenness (**לְנִצָּחַת**)? Perhaps this is the case in this psalm, but see Ps 85:6 where **עוֹלָם** is used of God’s anger toward his people.

questions exhibit a profound trust that what was so powerfully affirmed of Yahweh in the hymn (vv. 6–19) and the certainty of the promise in the oracle (vv. 20–38) will, in the end, prove true. Because of the dominance of the trustworthiness of God and his omnipotence in the first sections of the psalm, Psalm 89 is actually more concerned with the character of God and his relationship to the people than with the failure of the king.³⁴ The lament has a persuasive, or rhetorical, function, namely to move God to act on David's and the nation's behalf. The psalmist does not craft his psalm to fit with the political and theological reality of life without the Davidic dynasty, but rather he crafts his psalm as a way to enter the cognitive dissonance between reality and promise, taking this dissonance seriously.³⁵ Heim writes, "In this sense the psalm is open-ended, looking forward to the Lord's action in the defiant hope that the divine promise as expressed in Nathan's oracle is still valid."³⁶ Thus, he rightly argues that Psalm 89 contains an eschatological dimension which was developed in light of the difficult reality—even if this dimension is not overt.³⁷ Psalm 89 demands that Yahweh act by restoring the Davidic dynasty in hope and faith—a messianic hope and faith! The lament of Psalm 89 is rooted in the reality—the affirmation—of the ongoing validity of the promises and character of God. Because of the lament, Psalm 89 is the perfect conclusion to Book III. Psalm 73 opens Book III by showing a trajectory that begins with lament over the disorienting current reality and moves to God; Psalm 89 begins with God and concludes with angst over the disorienting current reality—a kind of large-scale inclusio for Book III. In completing this trajectory, Psalm 89 closes off Book III and anticipates the answers given to this disorienting reality in Books IV and V.³⁸

In sum, Psalm 89 represents the pathos of the reality of losing the Davidic dynasty, but in the midst of the lament an element of hope emerges—a messianic hope. The proem (vv. 2–5) created reader expectations that are fulfilled by the hymn (vv. 6–19) and the rehearsal of the promise to David (vv. 20–38). The lament engages God in a powerful way (vv. 39–52); it never relinquishes hope in the prom-

³⁴ Heim, "(God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89" 302–3.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 303.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Heim suggests three lines of argumentation to demonstrate this, which can be supplemented by additional observations ("The (God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89" 304–6). First, the postscript, though no doubt is functioning on a broader canonical level, closes Psalm 89 by reaffirming Yahweh's character as one worthy of blessing. The presence of "amen and amen" indicates confidence in Yahweh and his ability to respond to the complaint (cf. Cole, *Shape and Message of Book III* 180–81). Second, the promise given to David was unlimited and eternal. Heim points out that the promise was "open-ended from the start (vv. 29–30, 34–38)." He alludes to sections of the oracle, and rightly so. But it is important to add that the eternal nature of the promise goes all the way back to the proem, which sets the theme and structure for the psalm (cf. vv. 2, 3, 5). The sevenfold repetition of the key words עוֹלָם, חֶסֶד, and אֱמוּנָה solidify this argument. עוֹלָם testifies to the eternal nature of the promise; חֶסֶד and אֱמוּנָה testify to God's character that guarantees it. Third, the lament demands a response. As Heim notes, "In an exilic or postexilic context, without restored national sovereignty and without restoration of the Davidic line to the throne, the psalm's demand for the Lord to fulfil [*sic*] his covenant obligations continues to sound with urgency."

³⁸ See below. See also Cole, *Shape and Message of Book III* 182–205, who shows how Psalm 89 is a fitting conclusion to Book III.

ises, but demands that God would act, believing that he is the God the hymn describes and that his promise is as certain as the oracle describes. The doxology confirms the expectant messianic hope by blessing Yahweh despite the circumstances (v. 53).

III. PSALM 89 AND THE REST OF THE PSALTER

In the preceding section I argued that the story of Psalm 89 develops an eschatological, messianic hope in the midst of the lament over the loss of the Davidic dynasty rather than reflecting the failure of the Davidic covenant, as Wilson and others have argued. Crucial to Wilson's argument is his thesis that Book IV of the Psalter responds to the failure of the Davidic covenant by returning to a pre-monarchic hope that rests, not on the Davidic dynasty, but on the kingship of Yahweh. He argues Book IV is the "editorial center" of the Psalter and argues that Yahweh is king; he is the refuge of the people—not David—and he will continue to be their refuge if they rest in him.³⁹ Elsewhere Wilson argues that the "Mosaic frame" (Psalms 90–92, 94, 105–106) to the so-called "YHWH-*mālak*" psalms (Psalms 93, 96–97, 99) highlights a pre-monarchy perspective, where complete reliance upon Yahweh is emphasized, and which also stresses God's wonderful and awesome acts in creation and history—Yahweh alone is the one who saves.⁴⁰ These insightful observations and arguments certainly challenge my thesis. If Books IV and V of the Psalter respond to the broken and failed Davidic covenant as lamented in Psalm 89 by stressing the kingship of Yahweh *alone* then there is not any element of messianic hope that emerges in Psalm 89. So, what is the canonical function of Psalm 89 in the Psalter as a whole? Does it depict a broken and failed covenant? Or does it anticipate a messianic hope that continues into Books IV and V?

1. *Critique of Wilson's proposal.* First, it is necessary to state that Wilson's observations and arguments regarding the kingship of Yahweh as a response to the loss of the Davidic dynasty are both significant and helpful. Nevertheless, it is equally important to stress that David is not lost in an emphasis on Yahweh's kingship. In fact, given the interpretation of Psalm 89 adumbrated above, the celebration of Yahweh's kingship in Book IV further stresses our messianic reading of Psalm 89. It seems that the YHWH-*mālak* psalms develop the imagery and content of the hymn of Psalm 89. In other words, Psalm 89 anticipates the very development found in Book IV, namely that God is king and ruler over all things.⁴¹ McKelvey shows that Psalms 93–100 are a unit and that together they celebrate the high kingship of Yahweh (cf. 93:4; 95:3; 96:4; 97:9; 99:5, 9). Each of these psalms relates to the theme of Yahweh as king, and Psalm 89 anticipates each of these Psalms with shared vocabulary and thematic overlap. Psalm 93, as the first Yahweh-*mālak* psalm,

³⁹ Wilson, *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* 215.

⁴⁰ Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter" 76.

⁴¹ See McKelvey's masterful study, *Moses, David, and the High Kingship of Yahweh* 21–252, esp. 67–167. See also Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III* 216, where he notes that the assurance that Yahweh reigns ensures David's kingdom; see also 223, where he notes the link between Ps 89:15 and Ps 97:2.

recalls the entire hymn of Psalm 89 with its emphasis on the kingship of Yahweh. But there is more than just the thematic connection. Psalm 93 has shared vocabulary with Psalm 89: “strength” (עֹז) is associated with Yahweh (89:11; 93:1); Yahweh’s creative work in the “world” (תְּבִלָּה) is noted in both (89:12; 93:1); Yahweh promises David an eternal “throne” (כִּסֵּא) like his, despite the current reality (89:5, 15, 30, 37, 45; 93:2); Yahweh subdues the mighty and threatening waters (89:10; 93:3–4);⁴² Yahweh’s testimonies are certain (נִצָּח) just like his promise to David (89:29, 38; 93:5); the foundation of Yahweh’s oath in Psalm 89 is his holiness, a central characteristic celebrated in Psalm 93 (89:21, 36; 93:5). Though the verbal connection is not as strong between Psalm 89 and Psalm 94, there is thematic overlap as Psalm 94 opens with kingship imagery by appealing Yahweh’s role as judge (94:1–2).⁴³ Yahweh’s role as judge grounds the psalmist’s understanding that Yahweh will not forsake his people (94:14–15; cf. 89:34–38);⁴⁴ it is Yahweh’s “loving-kindness” (חַסֵּד) that supports the psalmist (94:18; cf. 89:2, 3, 15, 25, 29, 34, 50); also indicating Yahweh as a support in Psalm 94 is the psalmist’s declaration that Yahweh is the “rock” (צוּר) of his refuge (cf. 89:27). Psalm 95 also opens with a reference to Yahweh as a “rock” (צוּר), this time as the “rock of salvation” for the people (cf. 89:27 where David will have such a close relationship with Yahweh that Yahweh will be the “rock of his salvation” [וְצוּר יְשׁוּעָתִי]). Psalm 95 also celebrates the kingship of Yahweh, the most high of all the gods and the ruler of creation (95:3–5), which thematically connects to 89:6–9 and 89:10–12, respectively.⁴⁵ Psalm 96 opens with the same verb as Psalm 89, “sing” (שָׂר) (שִׁיר). The exhortation to praise in Ps 96:3–6 is grounded in Yahweh’s “wonders” (נִפְלְאוֹתָיו), that he is to be “feared above all gods” (נִרְאָה הוּא עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים), created the “heavens” (שָׁמַיִם), and is “strong” (עֹז) and “glorious” (תְּפִאֲרָת) (cf. 89:7, 11, 18). This latter connection is especially interesting because both “strength” (עֹז) and “glorious” (תְּפִאֲרָת) occur in 89:18, where Yahweh is described by these terms. Like Psalm 93, the declaration that Yahweh reigns (יְהוָה מִלְּךְ) in 96:10 in light of his creative work thematically links to the whole hymn of 89 (cf. 89:12 in particular); Yahweh’s role as judge recalls the royal position of Psalm 94, but in 96:13 Yahweh is specifically said to judge “in his faithfulness” (בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ), echoing one of the key words of Psalm 89 (cf. 89:2, 3, 6, 9, 25, 34, 50). Psalm 97 also connects thematically with Psalm 89’s hymn which celebrates the kingship of Yahweh (cf. 97:1). Key in this psalm is the almost exact repetition of 89:15 in 97:2, declaring the foundation of Yahweh’s throne to be

⁴² There are verbal connections with common words like נֶשֶׂא and יָם, but the parallel is not exact. What is clear is a thematic overlap, however: Yahweh rules over the chaotic forces of this world.

⁴³ See McKelvey, *Moses, David, and the High Kingship of Yahweh* 84–86. He concludes, “With its emphasis upon the judging rule of God, the psalm accentuates YHWH’s role as King and aids the theme of kingship in Psalms 93–100” (92).

⁴⁴ The connection here is thematic, not verbal, and so it is not quite as strong as some of the other explicitly verbal links. That said, in Psalm 94 two main themes of Yahweh as royal judge and Yahweh as faithful correspond to themes that the hymn and oracle of Psalm 89 use in shaping its reader.

⁴⁵ There are some verbal links between these passages (דָּ, יָם, and אֶרֶץ), but these words are so common it is hard to sustain a clear verbal link.

the characteristics of righteousness and justice.⁴⁶ Psalm 97:9 also connects thematically with 89:6–8 regarding the theme of Yahweh’s exclusive claim to supremacy. Psalm 98 opens, like Psalm 96, with a call to worship in light of Yahweh’s wonders (using שִׁיר and נִפְלְאוֹת, echoing Psalm 89:2 and 6. It also celebrates Yahweh’s “holy arm” (זְרוֹעַ קְדוֹשׁ) and “right arm” (יְמִין) as images of his royal supremacy (cf. 89:11, 14, 22, and 26). Psalm 98:3 is one of the clearest links with Psalm 89. The psalmist declares the Yahweh “remembered his lovingkindness and his faithfulness” (זָכַר הַסְּדוֹ וְאַמּוּנָה). The verb recalls the imperatives in the lament (89:48, 51), and two of the key words of Psalm 89, הִסָּד and אֲמוּנָה. Psalm 89 anticipates the declaration made explicitly by the psalmist in 98:3 by grounding the hope despite the loss of David in Yahweh’s lovingkindness and faithfulness and calling on Yahweh to remember these characteristics. Psalm 99 also opens with the refrain that “Yahweh reigns” (יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ), thematically recalling the entire hymn of 89. Words like “give thanks” (יָדָה), “awesome” (נֹרָא), “holy” (קְדוֹשׁ), “strength” (עֹז), “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט), and “righteousness” (צְדָקָה) that are found in 99:3–4 recall 89:6, 8, 11, 14, 15, 18, and 19, that is, most of the hymn.⁴⁷ Notably, Psalm 100, the culmination of this unit, highlights specifically Yahweh’s lovingkindness (רַחֲמֵי) and faithfulness (אֲמוּנָה), and their eternal (עוֹלָם) quality (100:5). That the culmination of Psalms 93–100 uses the three key words from Psalm 89 indicates clearly that Psalm 89 anticipates the themes that are later developed in Book IV. The upshot of this is that the answers to the disorienting reality lamented in Psalm 89 are found, even if not fully developed, in the psalm itself and establishes the reading of Psalm 89 which I proposed above.

Moreover, given the intimacy of God’s kingship and David’s throne, the celebration of Yahweh’s kingship just outlined prepares the reader for the return of David in Book IV (Psalms 101–104). Yahweh’s kingship is, in fact, the answer to the *temporary* collapse of the Davidic covenant; but not for the reasons Wilson indicates. Rather than reliance upon Yahweh, according to Israel’s orthodox faith prior to the establishment of the monarchy, being the answer to the demise of the Davidic dynasty, Yahweh’s kingship continues to serve as a guarantee for the re-emergence of the Davidic dynasty as the Psalter continues. Just as in Psalm 89, Book IV’s focus on Yahweh’s kingship engenders a messianic hope. This is also confirmed by McKelvey’s study, where he argues that the voices of Yahweh and David in Book IV indicate that David will return. David returns in Psalms 101–104, and follows the celebration of Yahweh’s lovingkindness (רַחֲמֵי) and faithfulness (אֲמוּנָה) in Ps 100:5 by declaring he will sing of God’s lovingkindness (רַחֲמֵי) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט); David recommits himself to the ideal of kingship (101:6–8).⁴⁸ To-

⁴⁶ The lone difference in these verses is the pronominal suffix on כָּסָא. Psalm 89:15 reads צָדִק כָּסָא מֶלֶךְ וּמִשְׁפָּט; Ps 97:2 reads כָּסָא מֶלֶךְ וּמִשְׁפָּט צָדִק.

⁴⁷ The holy character of Yahweh, which is a key characteristic of Yahweh and the foundation of the oath he makes to David (cf. 89:6, 8, 19, 21, and 36), is a prominent theme in Psalm 99 (cf. 99:3, 5, and 9).

⁴⁸ The justice of God here is probably brought in because of David’s sin which has been established as the reason for Yahweh’s judgment (cf. Ps 89:31–33; Psalm 90). See McKelvey, *Moses, David, and the High Kingship of Yahweh* 60, 173. The transition from Psalm 100 to 101 is made through the overlap of royal imagery, Yahweh and David respectively. McKelvey concludes from this, “Therefore, the transi-

gether Psalms 101–104 respond directly to Psalm 89 by affirming that the promise to David is still valid and a new David will reemerge. McKelvey argues Psalms 101–104

should be viewed as two sets of Davidic couplets that contribute a Davidic voice to Book IV. As this section of psalms is read in a Davidic context and as Book IV responds to the fall of Davidic kingship in Psalm 89, the recurrence of ‘David’ implies a future purpose for ‘David’ in the coming kingdom of God. Therefore, in reply to Psalm 89:50 [49], YHWH has not forgotten his covenant with David (Pss 101–104) because these psalms imply a future for Davidic kingship.⁴⁹

McKelvey concludes that the Davidic voice in this section “reminds the reader that God’s promise to David is still valid and that he has a place in YHWH’s restored kingdom.”⁵⁰ Book IV’s conclusion of Psalms 105 and 106 both specifically reference God’s faithfulness to his covenant (cf. 105:8 and 106:45). Book IV, therefore, closes by affirming twice that God has not forgotten his covenant; David has been judged for his sins, but the covenant is not broken or failed.⁵¹ This corresponds well to what is affirmed in Psalm 89 in the oracle (89:20–38). The Davidic voice in Book IV prepares for David’s restoration in Book V, especially in Psalms 110, 132, and 144.

Michael Snearly has also documented important key words that link Psalm 89 and the rest of the Psalter, focusing on Book V.⁵² He identifies five key words in Book V that provide cohesion for major units of psalms within the book: **צִיּוֹן**, **תּוֹרָה**, **עוֹלָם**, **עוֹלָם**, and **מְלִיכָה**.⁵³ According to Snearly, **עוֹלָם** and **מְלִיכָה** are dominant key words in Psalms 107–118, addressing the issues raised by Book III; the theme of **תּוֹרָה** obviously permeates Psalm 119; Psalms 120–137 emphasize **צִיּוֹן**; Psalms 138–145 address the issue of the king (**מְלִיכָה**).⁵⁴ He writes, “The concluding prayer of Psalm 89 (vv. 47–52) is addressed in Book V; yes, Yahweh remembers his servant and his covenant loyalty is eternal. ... [Psalm 89] should be understood as a lament over the present, shameful state of the Davidic dynasty. Yet hope remains that Yahweh’s covenant loyalty will reverse this deplorable condition.”⁵⁵ This analysis and these

tion between the second and third sections of Book IV appears to be based on the implication that YHWH’s rule must be reflected in the rule of the Davidic king” (266; cf. 266 n.50).

⁴⁹ Ibid. 216.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 220.

⁵¹ Ibid. 234–35; cf. Ps 102:29.

⁵² Snearly, “Return of the King” 209–17. He also examines Psalms 1 and 2, which, together with Psalm 89, are the three “key seam psalms,” functioning as the introduction (Psalms 1–2) and “turning point” (Psalm 89) of the Psalter (cf. 210 n.4).

⁵³ Ibid. 212–13. For important methodological issues regarding the use of key-word links, see 210–11.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 212–13. Snearly notes that **עוֹלָם** and **מְלִיכָה** link with Psalm 89, while **תּוֹרָה** and **צִיּוֹן** link with Psalms 1 and 2, respectively. **מְלִיכָה** links with both Psalm 2 and Psalm 89.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 212.

studies reveal that Books IV and V both look back to Psalm 89 in their own ways, testifying to the return of David.⁵⁶

2. *Critique of Wilson's rebuttal.* Wilson has responded to some of the criticisms leveled against his thesis in his essay "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter."⁵⁷ In this essay, he revisits the issue of Psalm 2 as a part of the introduction to the Psalter. He argues that to make Psalm 2 a part of the introduction would be to divorce the psalm from its connection to the other "royal seam" psalms (i.e. 72 and 89).⁵⁸ Why can Psalm 2 not be both a "royal seam" psalm and a hermeneutical introduction to the Davidic/messianic theme of the Psalter?⁵⁹ Wilson's diachronic argument that the original collection of Psalms 2–89 has no original messianic function assumes 89 is about a failed covenant with no messianic import,⁶⁰ which has been shown above not to be the case.

Responding to criticism regarding the return of David, he further argues that while Psalms 110, 132, and 144 present a challenge to his perspective, these challenges are not decisive. He suggests that Psalm 132 focuses on the eternal nature of Yahweh's throne, not David's.⁶¹ This does not prove convincing because of the

⁵⁶ This analysis supplements the criticism leveled against Wilson's thesis found in the works of others. See, e.g., David C. Mitchell (*The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* [JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997] 73, 87), Jamie A. Grant (*The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004] 228–31), and Robert L. Cole ("An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2," *JSOT* 98 [2002] 75–88 and "Psalms 1–2: The Psalter's Introduction," in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* [ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard Jr.; Chicago: Moody, 2013] 183–95), who have noted that the messianic hope established by Psalm 2 as a part of the Psalter's hermeneutical introduction anticipates Davidic and messianic concepts throughout the entire Psalter. To be fair, Wilson argues that Psalm 2 is not part of the introduction to the Psalter, which will be dealt with below. Briefly, though, it is hard to dispute the evidence marshaled by Mitchell, Grant, Cole, and others. Especially noteworthy is Grant's discussion of conjunctive and disjunctive features that both link Psalm 1 and 2 and separate them from Psalm 3 (see *The King as Exemplar* 224–34). Notably, David appears in the superscriptions of several psalms in Books IV–V, most importantly Psalms 110, 132, and 144. As Mitchell notes, "David is unmistakably [*sic*] back on the throne" (*Message of the Psalter* 79). See also Grant (*King as Exemplar* 33–39) and David M. Howard (*The Structure of Psalms 93–100* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997] 201). There are also theological and historical concerns with Wilson's thesis, as Mitchell rightly notes. On these see Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter* 78–80; cf. 80 n.42, where he gives relevant literature that shows a continued hope in a return for David consisting of the OT, rabbinic material, Qumran material, and the NT; cf. 255–56, where he cites the Targum, Heb 1:6, Rev 1:5, *Gen. Rab.* on Gen. 49:8, all of which explicitly develop Psalm 89 in a messianic way.

⁵⁷ Gerald H. Wilson, "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 391–406. See n. 56 above for some of the previous criticisms.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 395.

⁵⁹ Furthermore, though there are parallels between Psalm 2 and 41, Wilson's thesis of "royal seam" psalms in Books I–III is already weakened by the lack of explicitly royal content in 41. See his *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* 208. See n. 56 above, where Grant's emphasis on disjunctive and conjunctive features points to Psalm 2 as an introductory psalm. That said, the royal theme that it sets forth does fit with the framing of Books I and II. Thus, Psalm 2 could be seen as functioning as an introduction and as a seam—a hinge.

⁶⁰ "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God" 395.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 397.

intimate relationship between Yahweh's throne/kingship and David's throne/kingship in Psalms 2 and 89.⁶² He says that the conclusion in Ps 132:17 that mentions David stops "just short of an unambiguous declaration of David's kingship," and that Psalm 132 "ultimately leaves the re-establishment of the broken covenant of kingship a question for future resolution."⁶³ This is hard to sustain, especially given the connections between Psalms 89 and 132.⁶⁴ Moreover, the psalm begins with a call to remember David (132:1), and after a rehearsal of David's vow (132:2–5) and a call to worship that forms the culmination of the Psalms of Ascent (132:6–9), the psalmist issues a negative petition not to turn away from the anointed one (in parallel with David) *for David's sake* (v. 10). The fact that Yahweh's own words conclude the psalm, echoing the first person rhetoric of the oracle of Psalm 89, stresses that, while Yahweh will sit enthroned in Zion, David will join him. This does not "[undermine] ... Davidic hopes."⁶⁵ Yahweh and David will reign together.

Regarding Psalm 144, Wilson argues that God is the one who gives strength to the king (v. 10), and so the focus is really on God, not David.⁶⁶ But this is exactly the point of Psalm 89—it is an expectant call for God to be faithful to his covenantal promises. Psalm 144, then, is also a canonical answer to the lament of Psalm 89, confirming the messianic expectations that are present in the latter. Wilson is right to point out that Psalm 144 affirms that Yahweh is the source of David's kingship (vv. 1–2); Yahweh is also the source of David's deliverance (v. 10), as Wilson points out, but that deliverance involves David back on the throne.⁶⁷ It is through David that the blessing of Yahweh is given to the people and to the nations (cf. 2 Sam 7:18–29).⁶⁸ There is no doubt that the focus is on God, but the question is does this mean that David no longer has a role?

⁶² Note also the qualities of the Davidic king's reign in Psalm 72 and the throne of Yahweh in the YHWH-*mālak* psalms (e.g. Psalm 97).

⁶³ "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God" 398.

⁶⁴ Despite Wilson's claim that the crown (קִרְיָהּ) does not necessarily refer to David, the reference to the "horn of David" (קִרְיָהּ) and the shining of "his crown" (קִרְיָהּ), both conjure up Psalm 89 in the reader's mind. In Ps 89:18 and 25, David is implicitly mentioned with the word "horn" (קִרְיָהּ), both with reference to exaltation by Yahweh. Though Psalm 132 uses a different word ("sprout" [צִמְחָה]) rather than "exalt" (רוּם), conceptually Psalm 132 is reiterating the promise of Psalm 89. In Ps 89:40, the psalmist laments the profaning of David's crown (קִרְיָהּ לְאַרְצֵי הַלְלָהּ). These are the only two occurrences of the word "crown" (קִרְיָהּ) in the entire Psalter and both have a 3ms suffix (though the LXX and Peshitta read a 1cs suffix), clearly establishing Psalm 132 as a response to Psalm 89. This makes it hard to see how Wilson could state that Psalm 132 "stop[s] just short of an unambiguous declaration of David's kingship" ("King, Messiah, and the Reign of God" 397). See also Bernard Gosse, "Le Psaume 132 nouvelle réponse au Psaume 89," in *Bible et Terre Sainte* (ed. José Enrique Aguilar Chiu et al; New York: Peter Lang, 2008) 97–104.

⁶⁵ Wilson, "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God" 397.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 398.

⁶⁷ This could be over Israel or over the nations, depending on how one understands the variant in v. 2.

⁶⁸ See Walter Kaiser Jr., "The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity" in *The Law and the Prophets: OT Studies in Honor of Oswald T. Allis* (ed. John H. Skilton; Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974) 298–318.

As for Psalm 110, Wilson argues that the presence of the verb *רָדָה* (rather than *מָשַׁל* or *רָלָה*) indicates the psalmist has in view the creation mandate rather than strictly kingly rule.⁶⁹ But there are royal motifs in the divine mandate of Genesis 1, so this does not mitigate against an “overtly kingly context” at the beginning of Psalm 110.⁷⁰ Also, Ps 110:4 has links to 89:33–36, as Wilson points out, that bring Psalm 110 into dialogue with Psalm 89, also providing an answer to the lament. Yahweh’s promise has continual relevance; the covenant is not broken and has not failed.⁷¹

To be fair, Wilson does see a messianic component to the final shape of the Psalter, but the role of David is “*down-played*.”⁷² But his argument that Books IV and V respond to Psalm 89’s depiction of the broken and failed covenant should be reconsidered in light of the the analysis in this article and the work of other scholars.⁷³ The covenant cannot be broken or have failed if David comes back to the throne. Also, David was always supposed to be Yahweh’s just and righteous vice-regent; that this was not true historically does not change the original intention of David’s royal status in the OT or in the Psalter. All in all, Psalm 89’s emerging messianic hope anticipates and is filled out in Books IV and V.

IV. PSALM 89 AND THE PROPHETS

When considering Psalm 89’s role in the broader context of the entire OT, there are two passages that immediately come to mind. Both Isa 55:1–5 and Jer 33:14–26 offer a response to the lament of Psalm 89; both seem to confirm the

⁶⁹ Wilson, “King, Messiah, and the Reign of God” 399.

⁷⁰ See Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) 56–62. Furthermore, even in a casual reading of Psalm 110 the royal motifs leap off the page. Words like “scepter” (*מִטָּה*) and phrases like “at your right hand” (*עַל־יְמִינֶךָ*), not to mention the explicit mention of “kings” (*מְלָכִים*) and “judging the nations” (*דִּין בְּגוֹיִם*) and the battle imagery of vv. 6–7, all point to an “overtly kingly context.”

⁷¹ Wilson argues that the reference to Melchizedek brings in priestly language, but Melchizedek is a *king-priest*. He is right to link *רָדָה* with the unexpected reference to the priest Melchizedek because of the priestly connections of the divine mandate of Genesis 1 as well (“King, Messiah, and the Reign of God” 399–400). But the royal motif is not absent. Additionally, in accordance with Kim’s observation that Psalms 111–118 provide an array of doxologies following the return of the Davidic king in Psalms 108–110, the very first doxology following Psalm 110 affirms that God both remembers his covenant and ordains his covenant in perpetuity (111:5, 9). Together these seem to respond to Psalm 89, affirming the messianic hope (cf. Jinkyu Kim, “The Strategic Arrangement of Royal Psalms in Books IV–V,” *WTJ* 70 [2008] 143–57, esp. 155).

⁷² “King, Messiah, and the Reign of God” 401 (italics his). He argues that in the final form of the Psalter as we have it now David as “king” (*מֶלֶךְ*) dissipates, while David as “anointed one” (*מְשִׁיחַ*) and “servant” (*עֶבֶד*) rise (404). This is problematic because of the close connection of David and messianic thought in the OT (cf. Block, “My Servant David” 17–56).

⁷³ See n. 56 above. See also David C. Mitchell, “Lord, Remember David: G. H. Wilson and the Message of the Psalter,” *VT* 56 (2006) 526–48, esp. 533–37, where he provides a gracious, though incisive, critique of Wilson’s “King, Messiah, and the Reign of God.”

messianic hope for which has been argued in Psalm 89 here.⁷⁴ Both of these texts also have verbal and thematic links to Psalm 89.

As Heim points out, Isa 55:1–5 and Psalm 89 have several connections between them.⁷⁵ Thematically, both texts emphasize the continuing significance of the Davidic covenant. Both passages appeal to Yahweh's uniqueness and power to substantiate their argument of the restoration of the Davidic covenant (cf. Isa 41:12–31; 51:9–11; Ps 89:6–19).⁷⁶ Specifically, “the everlasting covenant” (בְּרִית עוֹלָם) and “the certain mercies of David” (חֶסֶדִי דָוִד הַנֶּאֱמָנִים; author's translation) in Isa 55:3 are “close echoes”⁷⁷ of Ps 89:2, 25, and 50. Clearly there are links between Isa 55:3 and Ps 89:29 (cf. לֹא אֶשְׁמֹר-לוֹ חֶסֶדִי וּבְרִיתִי נֶאֱמָנָה לוֹ [Ps 89:29] and מִיָּמֵינוּ חֶסֶדִי דָוִד הַנֶּאֱמָנִים וְאֶכְרַתָּה לָּכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם חֶסֶדִי דָוִד הַנֶּאֱמָנִים [Isa 55:3]).⁷⁸

The invitation of Isa 55:1–5 is given to the “servants of the Yahweh” from 54:17.⁷⁹ The invitation promises life and blessing, specifically within the context of the Davidic promise (55:3). Childs notes, “In the light of [the background of Psalm 89], the use of the Davidic tradition by Second Isaiah receives its special role. The prophet takes up the selfsame promise, but he has reinterpreted it in a strikingly new fashion.”⁸⁰ Childs has it mostly right here; yet perhaps better than a *new* interpretation, it is a *clarifying* interpretation, where the point of clarification is the “extension” of the promise given to the servants of Yahweh,⁸¹ with David's universal rule providing the “rubric” for the servants of Yahweh.⁸² As Heim argues, Isa 55:1–

⁷⁴ Note the methodological considerations outlined in n. 5 above. Both Broyles and Schultz have defended the notion that other texts in the canon can help clarify or enrich an interpretation given the intertextual fabric inherent in the OT. Additionally, Broyles notes that “many laments and complaints in the Psalms, which have no answer there, are answered in the Prophets” (“Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon” 160). Schultz helpfully points out that where there is a strong sense of textual roughness there is often an intertext that can help bring clarity to this roughness (“Intertextuality, Canon, and ‘Undecidability’” 28–29). In the case of Psalm 89, the rough link of the lament with the previous sections in the hymn and the oracle encourage the reader to seek ways to bring coherence to Psalm 89.

⁷⁵ “(God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89” 307, though see generally 306–14.

⁷⁶ These passages from Isaiah 40–55 are relevant for Isa 55:1–5 because a number of scholars have rightly argued that Isa 55:1–5 forms a climax and conclusion to the argument of the entirety of chaps. 40–55 (e.g. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* [O'IL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001] 433). The conclusion of chap. 55 also contains a description of Yahweh's uniqueness and faithfulness (55:8–13). This strengthens the observation made by Heim.

⁷⁷ This is Heim's description (“(God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89” 307).

⁷⁸ Childs, *Isaiah* 435.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 434.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 435.

⁸¹ The word “extension” is deliberately used in light of Heim's argument (“(God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89” 309–13). Most commentators refer to the transfer of the promises to the people (e.g. Childs, *Isaiah* 435). But this seems to downplay the fulfillment of the promise to David. And given the historical development of messianic thought, any notion of the fulfillment of the promise to David that does not include David is flawed. Moreover, Heim has persuasively shown that what is envisaged here in this passage is nothing short of the restoration of the Davidic covenant with an intentional clarification of its original intention, namely that faithful Israel was to participate with David as mediators of blessing to the nations. See also Kaiser, “The Blessing of David” 298–318.

⁸² See Peter J. Gentry, “Rethinking the ‘Sure Mercies of David,’” *WTJ* 69 (2007) 279–304. Gentry takes the genitive in v. 3 to be a subjective genitive. For a defense of the objective position see H. G. M. Williamson, “The Sure Mercies of David: Subjective or Objective Genitive?,” *JSS* 23 (1978) 31–49.

5 is “the divine answer to the open question of Psalm 89 that is bound to hang in the air until Judah’s restoration as a monarchy is accomplished”⁸³—but with a twist. The servants of Yahweh are called to be mediators of God’s rule to the nations according to the pattern established by God for David as his king and with David back on the throne. This brings clarity to Psalm 89: the covenant has not failed; David will return.

Jer 33:14–26 likewise can be read as a response affirming the messianic hope of Psalm 89.⁸⁴ The two texts are connected by similar vocabulary: references to the perpetual nature of David’s throne and seed (כֶּסֶף and זֶרַע) in verses 17 and 22, respectively (cf. 89:37); “covenant” (בְּרִית) in verses 21 and 25 (cf. 89:29, 35); the verb “to break” (פָּרַר) in verse 21 (cf. 89:34); the phrase “David my servant” (דָּוִד עַבְדִּי) in verses 21 and 26 (cf. 89:4, 21); and the conceptual overlap between the references to the sun and moon in Ps 89:37–38 and day and night in Jer 33:20, 25.⁸⁵ It is this last connection that is most intriguing. The psalmist declares that David’s throne will be continually established by Yahweh much as the sun and the moon are continually established by Yahweh (89:37–38). Jeremiah expresses the same thing in the form of a conditional: if Yahweh’s covenant with the day and night can be broken then his covenant with David can be broken (33:20–21). The implication is clear, namely that the Davidic covenant is as firmly established as the daily cycle of day and night.⁸⁶ This is confirmed by the immediately following declaration: “As the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister to me” (33:22). This is an intentional echo that combines the Davidic and Abrahamic promises with the addition to the reference to the Levitical priests.⁸⁷ It is important to note that this promise also occurs in the context of an invitation to call upon Yahweh (33:3).⁸⁸ Just like Isaiah, Jeremiah promises the continuing significance of the Davidic dynasty to his people by inviting them to engage Yahweh in relationship. This is exactly the same as Psalm 89: the psalmist continues to hope for the fruition of the messianic promises given to David—a hope that is rooted in Yahweh’s character as a faithful king and the certainty of his promises—and engages Yahweh in relationship as evidenced in the act of lament. Jer 33:14–26 responds

⁸³ Heim, “(God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89” 313.

⁸⁴ Note that this entire pericope is not found in the LXX. For a defense of its genuineness see Jonathan F. Grothe, “An Argument for the Textual Genuineness of Jeremiah 33:14–26 (Masoretic Text),” *Concordia Journal* 7 (1981) 188–91. Full treatment of this text-critical issue is beyond the scope of this article, but since the method of this article is rooted in the canonical and intertextual issues of the MT, the assumption of its authenticity is warranted.

⁸⁵ Note as well that Jer 33:15 (אֶצְדֵּקָה צֶמַח לְדָוִד אֶצְמִיחַ) [“I will cause for David a righteous branch to sprout”] has connections to Ps 132:17 (אֶצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן לְדָוִד) [“There I will cause a horn to sprout for David”]; cf. Jer 23:5.

⁸⁶ The same concept is repeated a few verses later in vv. 25–26.

⁸⁷ The reference to the Levitical priests falls beyond the scope of this article. What is important to note here is the continuing significance of the Davidic dynasty.

⁸⁸ Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC 27; Dallas: Word, 1995) 170, 175.

to this lament and reiterates the ongoing significance of the Davidic promise and its messianic hope.⁸⁹

V. CONCLUSION

This article has argued for a messianic reading of Psalm 89. Its canonical function reveals that the messianic hope is the foundation for the lament; the cognitive dissonance between the promise and the delayed fulfillment has led to the lament. But the hope still stands. The final form of Psalm 89 indicates that the hymn and oracle shape the interpretation of the psalm. The hymn celebrates Yahweh as the unique and powerful king who guarantees the promise. The oracle, which rehearses the ongoing relevance and perpetual nature of the promise, is certain because of the character of Yahweh. He is faithful and so the promise is sure. Additionally, I argued the hymn and the oracle anticipate the answers found in Books IV and V, which again celebrate the kingship of Yahweh (further guaranteeing the promise) and reiterate the hope for David, picking up key terms and themes from Psalm 89 and portraying David back on the throne. The Prophets (Isaiah and Jeremiah in particular) also build on the tradition of Psalm 89, confirming the messianic hope and the eternal promise to David. Overall, it has been shown that Psalm 89 does not depict a broken or failed covenant, but encourages a messianic hope, a hope for the return of David, even in the midst of lament. The loss of the Davidic monarchy is only temporary; and the promise to David and the resulting blessing this brings to God's people and the nations is sure. Their hope is rooted in Yahweh's high kingship, as Wilson and others have shown. But Yahweh will restore David, and it is in David that God will bring about blessing to the nations (cf. 2 Sam 7:18–29).

⁸⁹ Heim has pointed out that the messianic hope of Psalm 89 is also addressed in the NT in Rev 1:5. There Jesus is described as “the faithful witness,” “the firstborn of the dead,” and “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” This intertextual interplay shows that Jesus is the answer of Psalm 89 (“The (God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89” 316–21). He is the faithful witness, the guarantee of the “Lord’s adherence to his oath (v. 35). Yahweh has not lied to David. His covenant still stands, now renewed, to be consummated in Christ’s glorious return as foretold in Revelation” (320). He is the firstborn of the dead, which is informed by the parallel in 89:28. The title “highest of the kings of the earth” and the reference to overcoming death find their significance in the apparent overcoming of the death of the king in 89:49 (320–21). In other words, Christ is the king of kings, the sovereign one whose resurrection confirms his sovereignty. He is the universal ruler, the one who has international influence as the Lord’s “*racarius dei*” (321).