

1.4. Four Different Approaches to Reading the Psalms

In order to determine how Luke approaches the Psalms, we will begin each chapter with a survey of different approaches to the psalm at hand. This survey will be divided into four parts: a historical reading, a cult-functional reading, a prophetic reading, and a canonical reading.

1.4.1. Historical Reading

The first approach assumes that the meaning of a psalm is to be found by considering the historical circumstances of the psalm's original author. That this was important in Second Temple Judaism is evidenced by the presence of historical background information in fourteen of the Psalm superscriptions.¹ Various interpreters in the history of Psalms scholarship have also sought historical situations for psalms that would illuminate their meaning.²

¹ Psalms 3; 7; 18; 30; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142.

² For early examples of the historical approach to the Psalms, see Diodore of Tarsus (died ca. 390), *Commentary on Psalms 1-51* (trans. Robert C. Hill; Writings from the Greco-Roman World 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005); Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428), *Commentary on Psalms 1-81* (trans. Robert C. Hill; Writings from the Greco-Roman World 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); and Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393-457), *Commentary on the Psalms, 1-72* (trans. Robert C. Hill; The Fathers of the Church 101; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000). Among the reformers, John Calvin is the most oriented toward this approach to the Psalms (see his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [trans. James Anderson; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949]). Later Aegidius Hunnius would criticize Calvin for bringing this approach to the messianic psalms (see the discussion of the debates between Hunnius and David Pareus in G. Sujin Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin: Sixteenth-Century Debates over the Messianic Psalms* [Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 103-124). Efforts to determine the historical circumstances behind a psalm predominate in the 17th through 19th centuries but are mostly replaced in the 1920s by cult-functional interests, though see the emphasis on historical circumstances in a few recent commentaries such as Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (trans. J. R. Porter; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

1.4.2. *Cult-Functional Reading*

The second approach assumes that the meaning of a psalm is to be found by considering the function that psalm served in the cult of Israel. This cult-functional approach arose in recent times out of the realization that the psalms originated in the cult and rarely give historical specificity.³ Obviously the Psalms were used in the cult in the Second Temple period, so one could expect a knowledge of the cultic use of the psalm to influence the meaning a first-century interpreter would find in that psalm.

1.4.3. *Prophetic Reading*

A third approach assumes that when certain psalms were written they were intended to be prophecies related to the future. Second Temple Judaism in general⁴ and Luke in particular⁵ viewed David as a prophet. Texts in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, at Qumran, in the New Testament, and in the *Targum Psalms* interpret a number of the psalms as prophecies of the future.⁶ This trend continues in Judaism until

³ See, e.g., Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Mercer Library of Biblical Studies; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998); trans. of *Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (4th ed.; Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 7.

⁴ 11QPs^a XXVII (David's Comps) says of the psalms and other poems of David, "all these he uttered through prophecy which was given him from the Most High." Mark 12:36 par. Matt 22:43 says David spoke Psalm 110 "in the Spirit," followed by *Barn.* 12:10, which explicitly says, "David prophesies." Josephus says God showed David "all things that were come to pass" and that David predicted things future (*Ant.* 8.108-109, referring specifically to Solomon's building of the temple but also to things still to come afterward). For more on David as a prophet in Second Temple Judaism, see James L. Kugel, "David the Prophet," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (ed. James L. Kugel; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 45-55, and Yuzuru Miura, *David in Luke-Acts: His Portrayal in the Light of Early Judaism* (WUNT 2/232; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 129-132. Both Kugel and Miura argue that the tradition that David is a prophet arises long before the beginning of the Christian era.

⁵ Acts 2:29-30; cf. Acts 1:16; 4:25.

⁶ 1 Macc 7:16-17; *Pss. Sol.* 17; 1Q16, pPs; 4Q171, pPs^a; 4Q173, pPs^b; 4Q174, Flor; 4Q177, Catena A; Mark 12:36 par. Matt 22:43; Acts 1:16; 2:29-30; 4:25; *Tg. Pss.* 18:32; 21:2, 8; 45:3; 61:7, 9; 72:1; 80:16; etc.

the eleventh century when Rashi encourages a shift from reading the messianic psalms prophetically to reading them historically.⁷ Various Christian interpreters have read the messianic psalms, especially Psalm 110, prophetically to this day.⁸

It is important in discussing the prophetic approach that we distinguish between the view that a particular psalm was intended to be read as a prophecy of the future and the more general view that a psalm can be rightly applied to a future situation. So Peter Craigie can refer to Psalm 22 as “a messianic psalm par excellence,”⁹ but this does not mean that Craigie reads the psalm as prophecy in the sense we are discussing here. For Craigie, the psalm itself did not demand a greater fulfillment, even though it later becomes apparent that Jesus fulfilled many of the psalms in a greater way than David ever did. Similarly the argument that the demise of the Davidic monarchy would naturally cause royal psalms to be reread as messianic does not qualify as a “prophetic” reading of the Psalms for the purpose of this study. Instead a psalm is prophetic if in its original context it demanded a prophetic interpretation.

It is possible that someone could expect the psalm to have fulfillment in the lives of both the psalmist and the Messiah (hence a historical and a prophetic reading). This is the position of John Calvin, who regards many messianic psalms as

⁷ For an argument that prior to Rashi’s influence Jews and Christians alike viewed the *literal* sense of messianic prophecies as being about the Messiah, see Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (NAC Studies in Bible & Theology; Nashville: B&H, 2010), 112-128.

⁸ For early examples see Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Psalms 1-81*, and Theodoret of Cyrus, *Psalms*. They and most Christian commentators up to the reformation see the literal sense of the messianic psalms to be the prophetic meaning. Martin Luther continues this trend (see his exposition of Psalm 2 in *Selected Psalms I* [vol. 12 of *Luther’s Works*; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955], 3-93). For later examples, see especially F. Delitzsch, *Psalms* (vol. 5 of *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; trans. Francis Bolton; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), and Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1973) and *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1975).

⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 202.

written by David about his own kingdom, but in the full knowledge that “his own kingdom [is] merely a shadow.”¹⁰

1.4.4. Canonical Reading

The final approach to establishing the meaning of the Psalms is to consider the canonical context. This approach gives authority to the redactor(s) of the Psalter, so that if, for example, they place royal psalms in prominent places because for them the royal psalms reveal what the Messiah will be like, then these psalms may take on a new emphasis or even meaning that the original psalmist had not intended.¹¹ A canonical reading functions at both a micro- and a macro-level.¹² At a micro-level, this reading understands certain psalms to be juxtaposed in order that one may answer questions raised by the other. This can draw out meanings that may have been latent in the psalm on its own. Furthermore a group of psalms can be collected together to emphasize a particular theme or idea. At a macro-level, this reading understands the Psalms to be a book with an introduction (Pss 1-2), a conclusion (Pss 146-150), and a main idea or ideas.

There is debate about how the introduction disposes the reader to understand the Psalter. Clearly the first two Psalms introduce the two main themes of the Psalter – torah and kingship.¹³ The fact that the Psalter is divided into five books, like the

¹⁰ Calvin, *Psalms*, 1:11.

¹¹ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 515-518.

¹² David M. Howard, Jr., “Recent Trends in Psalms Study,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 334.

¹³ W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms: Psalms I to CL* (rev. ed.; Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1965), 53; Gerald H. Wilson, “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 Press, 1993), 72; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen* (3 vols.; NEchtB; Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 1:8; Mattias Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters: Ein formgeschichtlicher*

five books of Moses, encourages many to think of the Psalter as a second torah and the call to meditate on the torah of Yahweh (1:2) as a call to meditate on the Psalms as instruction on how to live a blessed life.¹⁴ The intended effect of placing Psalm 2 alongside Psalm 1 is less certain. For some scholars Psalm 2 is in its place because it began an earlier Messianic Psalter, but the final form of the Psalter deemphasizes the Davidic king and calls instead for trust in the kingship of Yahweh.¹⁵ Other scholars argue

Ansatz (Forschungen zum Alten Testament; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994), 128, 237; Jesper Høgenhaven, “The Opening of the Psalter: A Study in Jewish Theology,” *SJOT* 15 (2001): 179-180; Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries* (2 vols.; Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008-), 1:7; Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 80; Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms* (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 34.

¹⁴ Childs, *Introduction*, 513-514; Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 204-207; James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 30-31; Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT 1/15; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996), 3; Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Academia Biblica; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 53-54; Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 60-72. Grant furthermore notes a “Deuteronomic agenda” in Psalms 1-2, which serves the Psalter as “a constant call to return to the fundamentals of the Hebrew faith, as presented in the Book of Deuteronomy” (*King as Exemplar*, 65).

¹⁵ Wilson notes that Psalm 89 laments the failure of the Davidic monarchy, and Psalm 90 (the only psalm ascribed to Moses) calls the people back to the one who has been their dwelling place long before the Davidic monarchy. He also notes that whereas Psalms 93; 95; 96; 97; 98; and 99 all either call Yahweh יהוה or state that Yahweh יהוה, the יהוה word group is *never* used of a Davidic king after Psalm 89 (*Editing*, 199-228, esp. 214-219; *Psalms—Volume 1* [NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], 115-116). Gillingham argues that the interest in the king in the final shaping of the Psalter is an interest in the *past*, not in the *future* (Susan E. Gillingham, “The Messiah in the Psalms,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* [ed. John Day; JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 209-237).

In his article, “A First Century C.E. Date for the Closing of the Book of Psalms?” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 28 (2000): 102-110, Wilson suggests that the final arranging of the Psalter, including the prefixing of Psalm 1 to the book, may have taken place in the time of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai after the first Jewish war (AD 66-70) in order to shift the focus of the Psalter from cultic celebration to individual meditation and from militant messianic expectation to reliance on God alone as king. As compelling as Wilson’s argument is, there are a couple significant problems with this view. First, most research on the Old Greek Psalter has pointed to a second-century or possibly first-century BC date for the translation (see, e.g., Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* [WUNT 2/76; Tübingen; J. C. B. Mohr, 1995], 39-45, and the essays by Natalio Fernández-Marcos, Arie van der Kooij, Tyler F. Williams, and Moisés Silva in Robert J. V. Hiebert, Claude E. Cox, and Peter J. Gentry, eds., *The Old Greek Psalter: Studies in Honour of Albert Pietersma* [JSOTSup 332; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001]). One would need to propose that the changes made by Johanan ben Zakkai would have been reflected not only in the Hebrew, but also in the Greek, and not only in Jewish circles, but also in Christian circles. Second, the juxtaposition of Psalms 1 and 2 in 4Q174, Flor, suggests that the two were already read together long before the time of Johanan ben Zakkai. For a defense of the finalization of the Psalter around 200 or 190 BC, see Hossfeld

that the juxtaposition of Psalms 1 and 2 lead the reader to view the Messiah as the exemplar in living out Psalm 1¹⁶ and the one who ushers in the eschaton, when the blessing of the righteous and the perishing of the wicked finally become a reality.¹⁷ The fact that there is an inclusio around Psalms 1 and 2 as well as the shared language and themes between the two (see chapter 2) suggest that the latter view is more likely in line with the intention of the final redactor.¹⁸

It is not only the introduction of the Psalter that informs how we read the Psalms. As one reads the book, the general movement from petition (Books I-III) to praise (Book V) leads the reader to emphasize worship of Yahweh amidst the trials of life as a key message of the Psalter.¹⁹ Furthermore, a number of scholars have highlighted the fourth book as the “editorial center of the Psalter” and therefore understood the “Yahweh

and Zenger, *Psalmen*, 1:9. Hossfeld and Zenger also raise the possibility on page 10 that 1Q30 already refers to five divisions of the Psalter, though the scroll is too fragmentary to tell if the reference is to the Psalms or to the Torah.

¹⁶ Ivan Engnell, “‘Planted by the Streams of Water’: Some Remarks on the Interpretation of the Psalms as Illuminated by a Detail of Ps. 1,” in *Studia orientalia Ioanni Pedersen septuagenario A.D. VII id. nov. anno MCMLIII a collegis discipulis amicis dicata* (Haunia: E. Munksgaard, 1953), 85-96; William H. Brownlee, “Psalms 1-2 as a Coronation Liturgy,” *Biblica* 52 (1971): 321-336; Robert Cole, “An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 98 (2002): 79-80. Grant, *King as Exemplar*, 67; Patrick Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann, Jr.; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 91.

¹⁷ Høgenhaven, “Opening,” 174-180; James Luther Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 10; David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 87. Cole, “Integrated Reading,” 78-79.

¹⁸ The fact that royal psalms are found in Books IV and V suggest that human kingship is not being deemphasized. Indeed, Psalm 2 points to the Messiah as being the instrument through which God’s kingship is realized on earth. As Grant says, the presentation of the king as one dependent upon Yahweh in Psalm 2 “was intended to enhance, rather than diminish the reader’s appreciation of him, because dependence upon Yahweh is a characteristic to be cultivated rather than a weakness according to the Dtr worldview” (*King as Exemplar*, 59).

¹⁹ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen; Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 250–58; Walter Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon,” *JSOT* 50 (1991): 63–92. Hossfeld and Zenger note that the Psalter was likely originally referred to as תְּפִלֹּת (Ps 72:20), but that by the end of its development it was referred to as תְּהִלִּים (*Psalmen*, 1:5).

reigns” motif to be central to the message of the book as a whole.²⁰ Each of these insights has the potential of impacting the way a reader understands the Psalms.

²⁰ Wilson, *Editing*, 215; cf. Futato, *Interpreting*, 86-88. Similarly, Hossfeld and Zenger argue that the final form of the Psalter sets “die eschatologische Zielperspektive der universalen Königsherrschaft JHWHs in den Vordergrund” (*Psalmen*, 1:51).

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