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THE NATIONS IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

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Annotation. The article analyzes the use of the concept of "peoples" in the book of Psalms on the basis of the achievements of modern biblical studies regarding the features of the narrative nature of the books of the Old Testament.

Анотация. В статье анализируется использование концепта «народы» в книге Псалмов на основании достижений современной библеистики относительно особенностей нарративного характера книг Ветхого Завета.

Key words: theology, biblical studies, theology of the nation, theology of salvation.

Ключевые слова: теология, библеистика, теологии нации, теология спасения.

Introduction: recent Psalms studies and ‘Psalms matrix’

Since the book of Psalms consists of five smaller books (Book One: 1-41; Book Two: 42-72; Book Three: 73-89; Book Four: 90-106; Book Five: 107-150), traditionally in Jewish as well as in Christian theology this five-fold division was associated with the five books of the Pentateuch:

As Moses gave five books of laws to Israel, so David gave five Books of Psalms to Israel, the Book of Psalms entitled *Blessed is the man* (Ps 1:1), the Book entitled *For the Leader: Maschil* (Ps 42:1), the Book, *A Psalm of Asaph* (Ps 73:1), the Book, *A Prayer of Moses* (Ps 90:1), and the Book, *Let the redeemed of the Lord say* (Ps 107:2).⁴¹

The hypothesis of **David Mitchell** (that the Psalter can be read as containing an eschatological programme

⁴¹ William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 1.5; cited in Wilson, 200.

similar to the Zecharian one), for example, offers some support for the parallel between the five books of the Pentateuch and the five books of Psalms in the light of Israel's later history (though he admits that further research is needed to substantiate his hypothesis). According to him, if Book Two represents an exodus from the Exile, "then it accords well with the principal theme of the second book of the Pentateuch." If Book Three of the Psalms is levitical (because it consists of Asaph and Korah psalms), it therefore "accords well with the levitical and sacrificial themes of Leviticus." If Book Four describes Israel 'in the desert' among the nations, it "accords well with *Bemmidbar*." In addition, if Book Five represents the final ingathering to worship God at Sukkoth in Jerusalem, "that corresponds with that of Deuteronomy, in which Israel are about to possess the land and there serve and worship Yhwh at the appointed feasts."⁴²

Nevertheless, in the past twenty years Psalms scholars with their studies in the Psalter confirmed that its five-book division is a purposeful indication of *editorial organization* around Davidic Covenant and Throne. According to **Brian Toews**, for example, there is a particular chronological order in the book of Psalms: Book One and Two relate to David and Solomon; Book Three addresses Israel while the Exile was taking place; Book Four speaks about Israel in the Exile; and finally Book Five relates to the period of the Return from the Exile. Toews' argument is that many of the Old Testament books have a narrative structure. For instance, the books of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets narrate in chronological order from Creation to Exile. The Major Prophets also have a chronological arrangement – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. In the Minor Prophets, there is a general chronological order from pre-exilic to post-exilic prophets. Though Toews agrees that to see the chronological sequence in the Writings is difficult because of the placement of the book of Job, on the other hand, he asserts that there is a general movement from David and Solomon (Psalms-Ecclesiastes) to the Exile (Lamentations-Daniel), and to Post-exile (Ezra-Chronicles).⁴³

Gerald Wilson proposed that the purpose of the Psalter in its final form was to address the apparent failure of the Davidic covenant in light of the Exile, the Diaspora, and the oppression of Israel by the nations in the post-exilic era. Thus, Wilson suggests that Books

One through Three were compiled during the Exile or shortly after the Exile, and that their main concern was about the failure of the Davidic throne:

The Davidic covenant introduced in Ps 2 has come to nothing and the combination of three books concludes with the anguished cry of the Davidic descendants.⁴⁴

He then supposes that Books Four and Five were developed to answer that concern giving the message that God is Israel's King: even though the Davidic line has failed, Yahweh still reigns over his people. Therefore, according to Wilson, Books One through Three were arranged to document the failure of the Davidic covenant (Ps 89), while the purpose of the last two was to answer the problem documented by first three Books: Book One – Davidic Covenant proclaimed; Book Two – Davidic Covenant passed on; Book Three – Davidic Covenant failed; Books Four and Five – (1) YHWH is King, (2) refuge from exile is found in God, and (3) trust the Lord.⁴⁵ Since Wilson in his study (1985) paid attention more to the last two Books of the Psalter, Clinton McCann made a short investigation (1993) with regard to "Books I-III and the Editorial Purpose of the Hebrew Psalter" in order to cover that space.⁴⁶

About twelve years ago, **John Walton** demonstrated a similar interest in taking the structural insights of Wilson and attempting to work them out in a coherent examination of the actual, individual psalms and their order within the various Books. Thus, he proposed that the book of Psalms was organized as a "cantata" around the theme of the Davidic Covenant. He sees Book One addressing David, Saul, and their conflict; Book Two – the time of David's kingship; Book Three – Assyrian crisis; Book Four – introspection about destruction of the temple and the Exile; Book Five – praise and reflection on return from the Exile and New Era. Pss 1 and 2 (whose theme is a vindication of the righteous and theocratic sponsorship of the Davidic King) are the introduction to the Psalter; and Pss 146-150 (which offer praise relating to themes of the entire Psalter) are the conclusion of the book of Psalms.⁴⁷

Therefore, taking into account Wilson's proposed approach, which was much supported by McCann and

⁴² David C. Mitchell. *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 252 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1997), 300-301.

⁴³ Toews, Brian G. *The Narrative Structure and Theological Design of the Psalter*. <http://www.ournet.md/~theology/psalter.htm> (6 May 2003).

⁴⁴ Gerald H. Wilson. *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 213.

⁴⁵ Wilson 1985, 209-28. See also the discussion in Nancy L. DeClaissé Walford, "Anzu Revisited: The Scribal Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter," *Word & World*

15, no. 3 (1995): 358-66; Michael LeFebvre. *The Shape of the Psalter*. <http://www.mlefebvre.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/psshape.pdf> (14 May 2003); David M. Howard, Jr. *Recent trends in Psalms Study*. http://www.bethel.edu/seminary_academics/gensem/dhoward/articles/FOTSPsalms2.htm (14 May 2003).

⁴⁶ J. Clinton McCann, Jr. *Books I-III and the Editorial Purpose of the Hebrew Psalter*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

⁴⁷ J. H. Walton, 'Psalms: A Cantata About the Davidic Covenant,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 1 (1991): 21-31.

further developed by Walton, I would presume the following 'Psalms matrix':⁴⁸

- Book One relates to Davidic Covenant proclaimed, and to the time of David's kingship, and his conflict with Saul.⁴⁹
- Book Two relates to Davidic Covenant passed on, and to the time of David's kingship until Solomon's accession to the throne.⁵⁰
- Book Three relates to Davidic Covenant failed, and to the time of the Assyrian crisis, when the exile was taking place.⁵¹
- Book Four relates to Israel in 'the desert', i.e. in the Exile, and is also an introspection about the destruction of the Temple and the time of Exile.⁵²
- Book Five relates to the time of the Return from the Exile, and represents the final ingathering to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. According to Wilson, Books Four and Five also proclaim that (1) YHWH is King, (2) refuge from exile is found in God, and (3) trust the Lord.⁵³

So, the editors of the Psalter shaped the Psalms in such a way that "takes the reader on a journey through the history of the nation Israel," and

...the Psalter celebrates the majestic reign of David, laments the dark days of oppression and exile, and rejoices in the restoration of the glorious reign of YHWH and the surety that ancient Israel would continue to exist as a viable entity in the ancient near east.⁵⁴

Thus, in this paper the author is going (1) to define the main themes⁵⁵ with regard to *the nations* in every Book of the Psalter, and (2) to see if those themes support *the concept of the editorial shape* of the Psalter.

Defining the main themes with regard to the nations

The Nations in Book One (Pss 1-41)

According to Wilson, Ps 1 represents a late editorial addition as an introduction to the whole Psalter. As a result, Book One begins with Ps 2.⁵⁶ Almost every psalm in this Book is ascribed to David with the exception of Pss 1, 2, 10, and 33.

Psalm 2 may be considered as an entry point into the theme of nations in the Psalter. Thus, in this psalm, the theme of royal considerations and especially of the institution of the Davidic Covenant (see 2 Sam 7-8) dominates:

The psalm throughout presents a positive evaluation of the Davidic covenant which is divinely instituted and continues to experience divine support. As such the psalm is admirably fitted for its function as

the introduction of the highly Davidic collection of psalms which follows.⁵⁷

As soon as David was made the king in Jerusalem, the kings of all the surrounding nations rose up against him: Philistia, Moab, Zobah, Syria, Ammon, Amalek, Edom. However, David defeated all of them. The psalm opens with the question about the rebellion of the nations: "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.'" (2:1-3) The response of the Lord to this rebellion is to laugh, because this rebellion poses no real threat to Him: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, 'I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.'" (2:4-6) In verses 7-9, Messiah declares what God has told about Him, the decree of the Lord: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Finally, God's exhortation to the rebellious nations is "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." (2:10-12) *Thus, God installed His king on Zion, and the nations gathered against Anointed One in order to break their chains. However, God laughed at them, and rebuked them in anger. Then He exhorted the nations to serve the Lord with fear, and proclaimed that blessed are those who take refuge in Him.*

Psalm 9. Since the emphasis in this psalm is on Gentile enemies, it is possible to suggest that historically Ps 9 belongs to the time of 2 Sam 6-8. The dominant theme of this psalm is the judgment of God (vv. 3-8, 12, and 15-20) upon the hostile nations (vv. 5, 6, 15, 17, 19, and 20). In this psalm, David praises the Lord for His triumph over the nations. God has sat on His throne judging righteously (9:4). He has rebuked the nations and has blotted out their name forever (9:5). Then David announces that the Lord reigns forever, and has established His throne for judgment (9:7) in order to judge the nations with justice (9:8). After that, David calls to sing praises to the Lord and proclaim among the nations what God has done (9:11). Those nations that

⁴⁸ However, I recognize that this supposition demands further careful and thorough examination. Thus, this may be the aim of posterior studies.

⁴⁹ Toews, *The Narrative Structure*; Wilson 1985, 209-228; Walton, 24-25.

⁵⁰ Toews, *The Narrative Structure*; Wilson 1985, 209-228; Walton, 25-27.

⁵¹ Toews, *The Narrative Structure*; Wilson 1985, 209-228; Walton, 27-28.

⁵² Toews, *The Narrative Structure*; Walton, 28-29; Mitchell, 300-301.

⁵³ Toews, *The Narrative Structure*; Wilson 1985, 209-228; Walton, 29-30; Mitchell, 300-301.

⁵⁴ Walford, 364.

⁵⁵ In this paper there will be studied only those psalms where the words *goyim*, *ammim*, and *leumim* are used with regard to the nations.

⁵⁶ Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (1986): 88.

⁵⁷ Wilson 1986, 88.

forget God will return to the grave (9:17), and will perish from His land (10:16). The psalm ends with David's prayer to the Lord: "Arise, O Lord, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, O Lord; let the nations know they are but men." (9:19-20) *Thus, in this psalm David (1) says that the Lord will judge with justice those nations that do not submit to Him, and (2) calls to proclaim among the nations what God has done.*

Psalm 18 has an unusually full historical title: "Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." This sets the psalm somewhere between 2 Sam 6 and 11 – for it is inconceivable that vv. 22-24 were written after the time of his great lapse, and the allusions in the second half of the psalm to the northern tribes and Gentile enemies require that David be king in Jerusalem when writing these words. This psalm occurs also in its historical setting in 2 Sam 22 (chapters 20-24 form a miscellaneous collection of records not in chronological order). As David looks backward at his victory, he first points to God's enablement and preparation of him. He then reviews the actual victory over his enemies and God's part in it. Finally, the result of submission of the nations is also attributed to the power of God: "You have delivered me from the attacks of the people; you have made me the head of nations; people I did not know are subject to me." (18:43) After reviewing God's help, the victory and the results, David praises the Lord. Therefore, he concludes, as he began, with a doxology to the Lord, because He shows covenant loyalty to his anointed, especially to David, and to all who will sit on his throne: "He is the God who avenges me, who saves me from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from violent men you rescued me. Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O Lord..." (18:47-49) *Thus, God delivered David from the attacks of the nations, and made him the head of the nations (which applies also to Messiah). For this reason, he will praise the Lord among the nations.*

Psalm 22. The historical situation of this psalm involves David's full of suffering prayer when enemies attacked him. His sickness and bitter experiences at the time of the rebellion of Absalom may explain such kind of language, and the satisfying result of that terrible crisis. However, in such an interpretation of Ps 22, it is difficult to find specific meaning for many of the details. In this psalm, David shows his distress with the absence of God, but finds comfort from the relation of God to Israel in the past, proclaiming also that the Lord is "enthroned as the Holy One." Moreover, David is distressed with the attacks of his enemies (22:6-21), but praising the Lord in the second part of his prayer, he also finds comfort in that "all the end of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations." (22:27-28) *Thus, in this psalm David (1) proclaims that the Lord rules over the nations, and (2) predicts that all*

the nations will bow down before the Lord, i.e. they will worship Him.

Psalm 33 is a liturgical song of praise to God. There is no superscription to this psalm. Its original occasion is unknown; however, it seems to be an event of national deliverance. The psalm offers to praise the Lord for two basic reasons: He is the Creator (33:4-11), and He is the Redeemer of Israel (33:12-19). *Therefore, the author calls upon the earth to "fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him." (33:8) He also proclaims that the Lord foils the plans and the purposes of the nations, but His plans and purposes stand firm forever through all generations (33:10-11).*

Thus, these are the main themes with regard to *the nations* in Book One: **(1)** Their rebellious plans will be destroyed by the Lord (Pss 2:4-5; 9:5, 17, 20; 33:10-11); **(2)** The nations are subdued to Davidic King (Messiah) (Pss 2:8; 18:43-45); **(3)** The Lord rules over the nations (Pss 2:8; 22:28); **(4)** The nations will be judged by the Lord (Ps 9:8, 19); and **(5)** The Lord will be praised among the nations, and all nations will worship the Lord (Pss 9:11; 18:47-50; Ps 22:27-28).

The Nations in Book Two (Pss 42-72)

Book Two represents an extension of the first Davidic collection rather than an independent collection (see Ps 72:20). It opens with Korah psalms (42-49), followed by Asaph's psalm (50). Pss 51-65 are Davidic, as are Pss 68-70. Book Two ends with Ps 72, which is ascribed to Solomon, and concludes with doxology.

Psalm 44 is a national lament after defeat in battle. Since it is a unique assertion of national fidelity, it may come from the kingdom of Judah, which as a nation did not break covenant with the Lord until very late in its history. The psalm is composed of three parts, each, in its own way, providing a ground for the appeal for help: God's past actions as a basis for current confidence (44:1-8), the lament (44:9-22), and concluding prayer (44:23-26). *Thus, in this psalm the author laments that the Lord scattered the nation "among the nations," and have made it "a byword among the nations." (44:11, 14)*

Psalm 45. This royal psalm celebrates and praises the king on his wedding day. Perhaps it was a poetic call to the chosen people to fully enter into a covenant with its God, its spouse. God made himself present through His Davidic King (Messiah), anointed by Him (v. 8). Israel is party to the divine marriage, followed by all the nations who accept the revelation of God and salvation. It begins with lavish praise for the royal bridegroom (45:1-9). The counsel for the bride follows the praise (45:10-15), and the prediction of a blessed future follows the counsel (45:16-17). *Thus, the wish "let the nations fall beneath your feet" is a part of the praise for Davidic King (Messiah) (45:5), and in the end of psalm there is a prediction that "the nations will praise" Davidic King (Messiah) forever (45:17).*

Psalm 46. The author praises God as the sure defense of Israel. This psalm is also one of those that recall the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah (Is 36-37). *There are two references to the nations in this psalm: (1) before God, "nations are*

in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts” (46:6); (2) God “will be exalted among the nations” and “in the earth.” (46:8-10)

Psalm 47 is a celebration of the universal reign of Israel's God. It has been classified as an enthronement psalm, which celebrates Lord's universal reign (as Pss 93, and 95-99).⁵⁸ The author calls all nations to rejoice in the Lord of Israel: “Clap you hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.” (47:1) God “subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet.” (47:3) Proclaiming the enthronement of the Lord, the psalmist calls to praise God: “For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted” (47:7-9). *Thus, this psalm proclaims God's reign over the nations, and the assemblage of the nations to Him as God's people.*

Psalm 56. David's song of trust is ascribed to his visit to Gath (1 Sam 21:10). This psalm is framed by an urgent appeal to God (56:1-2), and an expression of assurance (56:12-13). The main body of the prayer is found in verses 3-11. David makes complaints against his enemies: “all day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to harm me. They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life.” (56:5-6) *He then appeals to God: “On no account let them escape; in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.” (56:7)*

Psalm 57 is similar to the preceding one except that it is more triumphant. The superscription says that it was written “when he [David] fled from Saul into the cave.” The psalm divides into two sections each ending with the same refrain “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.” (57:5, 11) First, David prays to God for deliverance (57:1-5). *Then he praises the Lord for deliverance, and says that he will praise the Lord “among the nations”, and will sing of Him “among the peoples.” (57:6-11)*

Psalm 59. According to the superscription, this song is David's prayer for deliverance “when Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him.” (1 Sam 19) This psalm consists of two sections. First, David prays to God for deliverance calling upon Him: “O Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors... But you, O Lord, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations.” (59:1-9) In the second part, David praises the Lord for deliverance naming Him as “fortress,” and “refuge.” (59:10-17)

Psalm 66 is a song of thanksgiving, although the occasion for it is unknown. The psalm was probably written by a king who had experienced deliverance from an enemy nation. In verses 1-4, God's mighty works are acknowledged by the nations: “All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name.” (66:4) The author also proclaims that the Lord “rules for ever by his power, his eyes

watch the nations—let not the rebellious rise up against him,” (66:7) and calls the nations to “praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard.” (66:8)

Psalm 67 was probably a prayer used in the communal worship of Israel. The psalmist prays for God's saving ways to be known to all the nations: “...your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the people justly and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.” (67:2-5) Thus, “the point of blessing to Israel is in order that Yahweh's ‘way’ and ‘saving power’ (ys) will be known among the nations. Israel offers to be a case study, so that the nations may know of Yahweh (v. 2) and may join in ‘thanks’ (ydh).”⁵⁹

Psalm 72. According to the superscription, this psalm is “of Solomon.” Though “it remains unclear whether the psalm is ‘by,’ ‘to,’ ‘for’ or even ‘concerning’ Solomon,”

...the whole psalm functions as David's attempt to transfer the blessings of his covenant with Yhwh to his descendants... So the covenant which Yhwh made with David (Ps 2) and which serves as the source of David's assurance (Ps 41) is now passed on to his descendants in this series of petitions in behalf of ‘the king's son’ (Ps 72).⁶⁰

It also speaks about the millennial reign of Davidic King (Messiah): “all kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him,” (72:11) and “all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.” (72:17)

Thus, we may define these themes with regard to *the nations* in Book Two: (1) The nations will praise and worship the Lord, and the Lord will be praised among the nations (Pss 45:17; 46:10; 47:1; 57:9; 66:4; 67:2-5; 72:11); (2) The nations will gather together to the Lord (Ps 47:9); (3) The Lord rules over the nations (Ps 47:8; 65:7; 67:4); (4) The nations are subdued to Israel (Ps 47:3); (5) An appeal to the Lord to punish the nations (Pss 56:7; 59:5); and, finally (6) All nations will be blessed through Davidic King (Messiah) (Ps 72:17).

The Nations in Book Three (Pss 73-89)

Book Three begins with an Asaph collection (Pss 73-83), followed by the Korah collection (Pss 84, 85, 87, 88). There is also an insertion of Davidic psalm (Ps 86). The Book concludes with a psalm ascribed to Ethan (Ps 89).

Psalm 79 is a national prayer for God's forgiveness for Israel and for his destruction of the nations that have so cruelly destroyed it in the Exile. Asaph, first, describes the sin of the nations (79:1-4), then he acknowledges punishing hand of God on Israel, and that its punishment was deserved. In the psalm, it is also recognized that the nations acted out of hatred for Israel (“O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance...” (79:1)), and disdain for its God: “Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge

⁵⁸ James Muilenburg, “Psalm 47,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63 (1944): 235-56.

⁵⁹ Brueggemann, 500.

⁶⁰ Wilson 1986, 89.

you, on the kingdoms that do not all on your name... Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'" (79:6, 10). Thus, in this psalm Asaph appeals to God that He would pour out His anger on the nations, which do not know Him, to avenge his servants, and "to pay back into the laps of our neighbours seven times." (79:12)

Psalm 82. In this psalm, Asaph calls upon the Lord for a judgment on unjust rulers and judges since God has the power to judge all nations: "Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance." (82:8)

Psalm 83. The historical occasion for this psalm is unknown, because the books of neither Kings nor Chronicles record such an extensive confederacy against Israel. It could be that some of the nations were just merely passive supporters of others. *The whole psalm of Asaph has the theme of judgment of the nations, calling upon God to destroy all the nations that oppose Him and His people, as He destroyed other nations in the past.*

Psalm 86. In this psalm, it is anticipated that the nations will join to Israel in praise of the Lord: "all the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God." (86:8-10) "This anticipation is in the context of an assertion of Yahweh's incomparability, which all nations must recognize soon or late."⁶¹

Psalm 89 is a prayer that mourns the downfall of the Davidic dynasty (2 King 24?). Faced with that the Lord had abandoned the king, the author appeals to God's Covenant to David as its basis. According to Wilson, "it seems perfectly suited to express the exilic hope for the restoration of the Davidic kingship and the nations."⁶² The psalm also affirms that Messiah, a descendant of David, will sit on David's throne. The psalmist praises the Lord for His faithfulness and love in establishing the Covenant (89:1-4). He then praises God for His great works done for those who trust Him (89:5-18), and repeats to the Lord all of the promises He made to David in the Covenant (89:19-37). In the last part of the psalm, David laments that the promises of the Covenant have been forgotten since the king is afflicted and defeated (89:38-45). He then prays for the Lord to remember His oath to David, finishing the psalm with the following words: "*Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O Lord, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one. Praise be to the Lord for ever.*" (89:46-52)

Thus, there are two main themes with regard to the nations in Book Three: (1) An appeal to the Lord to

judge the nations (Pss 79:6: 82:8; 83); and (2) All nations will worship the Lord (Ps 86:9; 89:50-51).

The Nations in Book Four (Pss 90-106)

According to Mitchell's idea of the eschatological programme⁶³ in the Psalter, Book Four is distinguished by wilderness themes, because it repeatedly refers or alludes to Moses and the wilderness wanderings. Thus, he suggests that the editors of the Psalter by Book Four may have represented the Exile. Examining Pss 90-106, he pays particular attention to themes of wilderness exile and ingathering, and to issues of guilt and forgiveness, because they naturally occur in the context of national punishment.⁶⁴ Therefore, within the psalms of this Book Mitchell sees a progression of thought "from sin through repentance to forgiveness, from despair to expectation of a new world order, from exile to ingathering." Thus, as he suggests, this depicts that "the eschatological exile referred to in Zech. 13.7-14.2."⁶⁵

According to Wilson, Books Four and Five are later additions to the earlier unit comprised by Books One through Three.⁶⁶ As he further suggests, these Books are intended "as the 'answer' to the problem posed in Ps. 89." In particular, Book Four is the "editorial 'center' of the final form of the Hebrew Psalter." Therefore, the primary answer of Book Four is that the Lord reigns:

(1) YHWH is king; (2) He has been our "refuge" in the past, long before the monarchy existed (i.e., in the Mosaic period); (3) He will continue to be our refuge now that the monarchy is gone; (4) Blessed are they that trust in him!⁶⁷

Psalm 94 recognizes the fact that revenge belongs to God. It is an appeal to God as "Judge of the earth." The author called upon the Lord to avenge the righteous and to destroy those who oppress His inheritance: "Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? Does he who disciplines nations not punish?" (94:8-10) In the end of the psalm the author also expresses the confidence that God's justice will prevail: "But the Lord has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the Lord our God will destroy them." (94:22-23) According to Howard, this psalm

serves as an appropriate hinge between the early part of book 4—which raises many questions about life's purpose and God's relationship with his people—

joyfully to an eschatological Feast of Sukkoth" (Mitchell, 297).

⁶⁴ Mitchell, 272.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 295.

⁶⁶ Wilson 1986, 92.

⁶⁷ Wilson 1985, 214-15.

⁶¹ Brueggemann, 499.

⁶² Wilson 1986, 91.

⁶³ After examining the Psalms of Asaph and the Songs of Ascents, Mitchell suggests that "they can be read as depicting two different kinds of gathering to Zion: the former depicts Israel gathering and threatened by gathering hostile foes; the latter depicts them gathering

and the middle part of the book, in which unfettered praise of Yhwh the king breaks forth.⁶⁸

Psalm 96 is a call to all nations to give glory to the Lord as the only God of all the earth. According to Mitchell, this psalm “intentionally evokes the events of the exodus.”⁶⁹ Brueggemann perceives in this psalm the theme that concerns the nations as Yhwh’s partner:

Yahweh is king, and so the nations are under promise. Yahweh is king, and so the nations bear a blessing. Yahweh is king, and so the nations live in covenant under command. Yahweh is king, and so the recalcitrant nations are scattered.⁷⁰

“Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (96:3); “For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (96:4-5); “Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns.’ The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity” (96:10); “He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth” (96:13).

Psalm 98 is a call to celebrate the righteous reign of the Lord, “for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.” (98:1-3) God also “will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.” (98:9)

Psalm 99. In this psalm, the author encourages all to praise the Lord because of His holiness and because He answers the prayers. In the beginning of the psalm, the author calls the nations to acknowledge that the Lord is God: “The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. Great is the Lord in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy.” (99:1-3) Mitchell denotes also that

...this psalm’s reference to the desert generations seems to be similar to that of Psalm 95 in warning the psalmist’s contemporaries that while God will ultimately forgive the nation, he will also punish their misdeeds, presumably in the desert exile.⁷¹

Psalm 102. The superscription of this psalm identifies it as “a prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the Lord.” It is also one of the traditional penitential psalms, which may have been used for the whole community. In this psalm, there is a prediction that “the nations will fear the name of the Lord, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory.” (102:15-16) “So the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion and his praise in

Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Lord.” (102:21-22)

Psalm 105. In this psalm, the author praises God for His love for His people. Thus, the psalm is the exhortation for Israel to worship and trust in the Lord, because He kept all his promises to Abraham. In the beginning of the psalm, the author calls: “Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.” (105:1) According to Mitchell, “the desert theme and the related exodus theme reoccur in Psalm 105, which celebrates God’s gift of a land to Israel and the deeds of power by which he gave it.”⁷²

Psalm 106 continues the theme of Ps 105: although God was faithful to Israel (Ps 105), Israel was not faithful to Him (Ps 106). Thus, it is a confessional psalm, in which the author recalls the rebellions of Israel against God, and God’s punishment for them. These sins had brought Israel to the ultimate penalty of the Exile (“Therefore the Lord was angry with his people and abhorred his inheritance. He handed them over to the nations, and their foes ruled over them”(106:40-41)), therefore the author prayed for deliverance of Israel from the captivity: “Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people to say, ‘Amen!’”(106:47-48) Mitchell denotes that “this psalm, the Psalter’s most comprehensive and sustained confession of Israel’s national guilt, forms a fitting conclusion to the latter-day exile.”⁷³

Thus, there are five main themes with regard to the nations in Book Four: (1) The Lord scattered Israel among the nations (Ps 106:27, 41); (2) An appeal to the Lord to avenge upon the nations for Israel (Ps 94); (3) An appeal to the Lord to gather Israel from the nations (106:47); (4) The nations will be judged by the Lord (Pss 96:10, 13; 98:9); and (5) The Lord will be praised among the nations, and the nations will worship Him (Pss 96:3, 7; 99:2; 102:15, 22; 105:1).

The Nations in Book Five (Pss 107-150)

Within this Book, there may be detected a few small collections: Pss 113-118 traditionally associated with the Passover; the Pss of Ascents 120-134; the Hallel Pss 146-150.

Psalm 108 seems to be a conflation of two other psalms – 57:7-11 (108:1-5), and 60:5-12 (108:6-13) – with a few changes. It is a praise of God’s concern for His people and a prayer for help. David says that he will praise the Lord “among the nations,” and will sing of Him “among the peoples.” (108:3)

Psalm 110 is undoubtedly the messianic psalm of the Psalter. It is frequently quoted in the New Testament in reference to Christ. Like Ps 2, it has the

⁶⁸ David M. Howard, Jr., “Psalm 94 among the Kingship-of-Yhwh Psalms,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 668.

⁶⁹ Mitchell, 288.

⁷⁰ Walter Brueggemann. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 495.

⁷¹ Mitchell, 290.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 294.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 295.

marks of a coronation psalm, composed for use at the coronation of a new Davidic King. God proclaims that Messiah will rule in the midst of his enemies (110:2), He will also “*crash kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.*” (110:5-6)

Psalm 113 is a celebration of the high dignity of God and His condescension to the poor. This is the first psalm in the collection of the Hallel psalms (113-118), which were sung at the great nationwide festivals of Israel such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The author calls on God’s servants to praise Him proclaiming, “*The Lord is exalted over all the nations.*” (113:4)

Psalm 115 is a praise of the one true God as opposed to false idols who blesses His people with life and love. The nations say, “Where is their God?” (115:2), and the author answers, “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men...” (115:3-8) *Thus, the author calls on God to vindicate His honor among the nations and invites all people to trust in the Lord, not in idols.*

Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm in the Psalter. *The nations are invited (and expected) to join Israel in praise:* “Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love towards us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever” (117:1-2).

Psalm 118 completes the collection of the Hallel psalms. *It is a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies:* “All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off. They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off. They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off.” (118:10-12)

Psalm 126 was most likely composed after the Exile because it celebrates the restoration to Zion: “When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.” (126:1) In Israel’s perception, the actions of the Lord are so compelling and so overwhelming that the nations will want to join Israel in praise, on the basis of actions done for Israel.

...the confession of the nations concerning Yahweh (v. 2) is symmetrical to Israel’s own confession of Yahweh, but it is given *prior* to Israel’s confession.⁷⁴

“Then it was said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy” (126:2-3).

Psalm 135 is a call to praise the one true God. It is framed with Hallelujahs at the beginning and end of the psalm. The basis for praise is *God’s greatness in that He struck down many nations in order to give their land as an inheritance to Israel* (135:8-12), and that He is greater than all gods: “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men...” (135:15-18)

Psalm 148 is comprehensive in its call for all creatures to praise the Lord: “*Praise the Lord... kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children*” (148:11-12).

Psalm 149. The uniqueness of this psalm when compared to the previous one is the basis it presents for the praise of God. It is a *call for praise because of the honor, which God has given to His people, and for enabling them to perform revenge on the nations.* “May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the Lord.” (149:6-9)

Thus, there are three main themes with regard to *the nations* in Book Five: (1) The Lord will be praised among the nations (Ps 108:3; 117; 126:2; 148:11); (2) The nations will be judged by the Lord (Pss 110:6; 113:4); and (3) The nations are subdued to the Davidic King (Messiah) (Ps 144:2).

Conclusion: the nations with regard to ‘Psalms matrix’

The results of this short study with regard to *the nations* may be summarized in the following table, which is divided into two sections: (1) proposed “Psalms Matrix,” and (2) the main themes with regard to *the nations*.

⁷⁴ Brueggemann, 500.

Books of the Psalms: “Psalms Matrix”	Book One relates to Davidic Covenant proclaimed, and to the time of David’s kingship, and his conflict with Saul.	Book Two relates to Davidic Covenant passed on, and to the time of David’s kingship until Solomon’s accession to the throne.	Book Three relates to Davidic Covenant failed, and to the time of Assyrian crisis, when the exile was taking place.	Book Four relates to Israel in ‘the desert’, i.e. in the Exile, and it is also an introspection about the destruction of the Temple and the time of Exile.	Book Five relates to the time of the Return from the Exile, and represents the final ingathering to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. According to Wilson, Books Four and Five also proclaim that (1) YHWH is King, (2) refuge from exile is found in God, and (3) trust the Lord.
The themes with regard to the nations in the book of Psalms	The Lord will be praised among the nations, and all nations will worship the Lord				
	The nations will be judged by the Lord	An appeal to the Lord to punish the nations		The nations will be judged by the Lord An appeal to the Lord to avenge upon the nations for Israel	
	The nations are subdued to Davidic King (Messiah)	The nations are subdued to Israel			The nations are subdued to Davidic King (Messiah)
	The Lord rules over the nations				
	The rebellious plans of the nations will be destroyed by the Lord				
		The nations will gather together to the Lord			
		All nations will be blessed through Davidic King (Messiah)			
				The Lord scattered Israel among the nations	
				An appeal to the Lord to gather Israel from the nations	

A short analysis of the table

(1) First of all, it is important to note that the theme of *praise of the Lord by the nations* runs through all five Books of the Psalter. Hence, in spite of Israel’s historical situation, the authors of the psalms along with David proclaim that (a) *the nations will praise the Lord*, (b) *the Lord will be praised among the nations by His servants*, and (c) *the nations will worship the Lord*. (2) The second theme, which runs through all five Books, is *the judgment of the nations*. In Books One, Four and Five it is stated that *the nations will be judged by the Lord*, whereas in Books Two and Three there is an appeal to the Lord *to punish the nations*, as well as in Books Four and Five there is an appeal to the Lord *to avenge upon the nations for Israel*. (3) It is quite

interesting to note that the theme of *subdual of the nations* to Davidic King is found only in Books One (the time of David’s kingship), and Five (the time of the Return from the Exile), and *subdual of the nations to Israel* is present only in Book Two (the time of David’s kingship until Solomon’s accession to the throne). However, the theme of *subdual of the nations* is absent in Books Three and Four (the time of Assyrian crisis and the Exile). (4) The theme of God’s rule over *the nations* is explicitly present only in Books One and Two. However, it is implicitly present as well in many other Psalms with regard to Israel’s enemies. (5) There are also five themes, which appear against the background of a certain Book. For instance, Book One speaks about *the destruction of the rebellious plans of*

the nations by the Lord. It runs against the background of Davidic kingship. (6) The themes of *the nations gathered together to the Lord*, and *all nations blessed through Davidic King* run against the background of Davidic later kingship until Solomon's accession to the throne. (7) It is also essential to note that the themes of *scattered Israel among the nations* and *an appeal to the Lord to gather Israel from the nations* are found in Book Four, against the background of Israel in 'the desert,' i.e. in the Exile.

Thus, do the themes with regard to *the nations* support *the concept of the editorial shape* of the Psalter? Based on this short study of *the nations in the book of Psalms* it is possible to answer this question with "Yes." However, this study demands also a further careful and thorough investigation of such synonyms as *enemies*, *foes* and others used with regard to *the nations*.

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