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HEARING PSALM 102 WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE HEBREW PSALTER

By Andrew Witt
November 2011

Introduction

As one commentator noted, Psalm 102 is a "complex psalm" with "a bewildering multiplicity of interpretations."[1] Its unwavering ability to elude historical critics is related to the psalm's unique structure and ambiguous speaker. Since Westermann, the psalm has usually been thought of as a fairly typical psalm of lament.[2] After the superscription (v. 1), it is composed of an invocation (vv. 2-3), a complaint (vv. 4-12), an assertion of trust (vv. 13-18), a vow of praise (vv. 19-23),[3] and a final section (vv. 24-29) which includes a second complaint (v. 24), petition (vv. 25, 29), and motivation/praise (vv. 26-28).[4] The difficulty throughout modern interpretation has been relating the middle "hymnic" section (vv. 13-23), a communal expression of hope in the restoration of Zion, to the enveloping "complaint" sections (vv. 2-12, 24-29), which focus on the afflictions faced by an individual suppliant.

Many attempts have been made to resolve this difficulty, some having more strength than others, but there has yet to be any significant treatment of the psalm using a canonical (holistic) approach. When considering the Psalter, the canonical approach proposes that "the ordering and placement of the psalms is not entirely random, but that the Book of Psalms has been shaped by the work of editors in order to emphasize the importance of certain theological themes."[5] The implications of this shift for interpreting individual psalms are significant, as Wenham explained,

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[1] Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary 21 (Waco: Word Book, 1983), 11.

[2] James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 323; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, Translated by Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 66-75.

[3] Although Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 66-67, does not think there is a vow of praise in the psalm.

[4] Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament*, JSOTSup 357 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 84.

[5] 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), 13.

"[If] the psalms have been arranged thematically, by title, and by keywords to form a deliberate sequence, it is imperative to read one psalm in the context of the whole collection and in particular in relationship to its near neighbors."[6] Prior to its inauguration in the work of Brevard Childs and Gerald Wilson,[7] psalm studies had concentrated principally on how historical settings either gave rise to an individual psalm, or provided a cultic context within which a psalm could be heard.

According to the canonical approach, these "historical settings" have been transcended by a new historical context: a psalm's literary position within the final form of the text.[8] That is, even though a psalm may have had an important cultic function in its original history situation (*Sitz im Leben)*, its placement within a particular literary context (*Sitz im Texte*) could give it a new function, one which may or may not be related to its former function. Jamie Grant explains,

> The net effect of the canonical reading of the Psalms is that each composition is now read within a literary context. . . .[The] Psalms are no longer to be read as the song book of Israel, they are instead to be read as a book like any other book of the Bible. Summarising, this means that each poem is influenced by the context within which it is found – either simply by its juxtaposition alongside a neighbouring psalm or neighbouring psalms, or by its inclusion in a collection such as the Song of Ascents, or by its placement and positioning within one of the five books of the Psalter. [9]

[6] Wenham, "Towards a Canonical Reading of the Psalms," in Bartholomew, Craig G., and Anthony C. Thiselton, eds., *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 347. Similarly, Robert Cole wrote, "The ordering and shaping of the collection casts the individual psalms in a new light…from what the individual poem expresses to a meaning implied by the final compilation, the latter becoming a single 'text'," in *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73-89)*, JSOTSup 307 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 10.

[7] Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

[8] Here one must take seriously the claims made by canonical scholars that the final form of the text is a monumental historical achievement. For instance, Christopher Seitz writes in *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 96-97, "By placing the prophets in their proper historical sequence and having introductions guided by his way of proceeding, it was impossible to see the propriety of the canonical form itself or to comprehend what kind of historical statement it was making on its own terms… [H]istorical approaches simply assumed that theirs was the only kind of approach meriting the term *historical* in the first place and that the canonical order was itself a factor devoid of meaning."

[9] Jamie Grant, "Determining the Indeterminate: Issues in Interpreting the Psalms," *Southeastern Theological Review* 1.1 (2010), 11-12.

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Other scholars have expressed similar sentiments, "The ordering and shaping of the collection casts the individual psalms in a new light…from what the individual poem expresses to a meaning implied by the final compilation, the latter becoming a single 'text'."[10]

Utilizing this approach, this paper will attempt to give Psalm 102 a hearing within its final literary context. To do this, it will first review how the psalm has been understood by earlier critical methodologies. This will be followed by an analysis of the psalm, through an analysis will first investigation into the identity of the speaker, as well as by identifying how the psalm functions within the context of the Hebrew Psalter.[11]

Critical Interpretations of Psalm 102

As the opening paragraph explained, the main difficulty of Psalm 102 throughout the modern period has been relating the hymnic portion of the psalm (vv. 13-23) to the enveloping complaint sections (vv. 2-12, 24-29). In the nineteenth-century, historical-critical scholars attempted to resolve the difficulties of the hymnic section by either deleting portions of the psalm,[12] or by arguing that the psalm was composed of two originally independent psalms, with additional glosses throughout.[13] Concerning the psalmist, many thought that one speaker, usually considered a leader in the community, spoke as a representative of, or on behalf of, the people.[14]

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[10] Robert Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73-89)*, JSOTSup 307 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 10.

[11] In terms of methodology, this paper attempts to follow the basic three-fold approach articulated in Gerald Wilson, "Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise," in McCann, *Shape and Shaping*, 50.

[12] Such as Ferdinand Hitzig, *Die Psalmen* (Leipzig: C.F. Winter, 1863-1865), who suggested the removal of vv. 26-28; or Emil Balla, *Das ich der Psalmen: Untersucht* (Götingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1912), 113ff., who suggested removing vv. 13-25.

[13] For the most representative, see C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1SS906, 1907); earlier, Duhm had also divided the psalm similarly in *Die Poetischen und Prophetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments: 2, Die Psalmen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1899).

[14] Justus Olshausen, *Die Psalmen* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1853), 392ff.; Julius Wellhausen, *The Book of Psalms: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1895). Hermann Hupfeld, *Die Psalmen* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1888), 73, was an exception, arguing that the prayer served as a model

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A late dating of the complete psalm was typically assigned, more often than not during the Maccabean period, with portions of the psalm dating to the late Persian period.[15]

In the twentieth century, with the introduction of Gunkel's form-criticism, scholars tended to dismiss the idea that the psalm was composed of originally separate compositions.[16] Instead, the majority view was that an original composition, which could have existed quite early, was later redacted within the exilic or early post-exilic period, in order to introduce communal elements into the psalm.[17] Here, vv.1-12, 24-25 were typically understood as an original individual lament that was later expanded through redaction to include the communal concerns of vv.13-23, 26-29. With wider agreement on this point, the focus began to fall on the identity of the psalmist.

By far, the most common argument is that the speaker in the psalm was most likely a leader in an exilic or post-exilic community, praying on behalf of the people that their suffering might end and that YHWH might re-gather them to a restored Zion.[18] Dahood, and most recently McCann, have argued that this speaker was most likely a royal figure, but their evidence has been dismissed in several recent commentaries.[19] In allowing the psalm to have secondary relevance to the modern reader, many recent commentators also emphasize that the addition of

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for any afflicted person who wanted to pray, and that the psalm was intended for private, personal use, and not for public or liturgical use.

[15] Hitzig, *Die Psalmen*; Olshausen, *Die Psalmen*; Briggs, *Book of Psalms*.

[16] See Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 437.

[17] Hans Schmidt, *Die Psalmen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934), 184; Joachim. Becker, *Israel deutet seine Psalmen* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966), 43-45; Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien* (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1921-24), I:166; Brevard Childs, "Analysis of a Canonical Formula: 'It Shall Be Recorded For a Future Generation'," in Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, eds., *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990).

[18] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship: Two Volumes in One*, Translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004 [first published by Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962]), I:221. For him, such a prayer would have been appropriate at the festival of harves and year, the "enthronement" festival; see also James Mays, *Interpretation: Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994).

[19] Mitchell Dahood, *The Anchor Bible 17A: Psalms III, 101-150* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 10f. See Allen, *Psalms*.

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the superscription strongly suggests that the psalm has now been transformed for an individual supplicant, who can relate to similar times of suffering.[20]

Concerning the question of the psalm's interpretation, various proposals have been put forward. Early on, interpretation was largely dependent on its historical reconstruction. For instance, according to Briggs, the "appointed time" of verse 14 should be interpreted as follows: "A glossator repeats at the expense of measure...the time appointed for the fulfillment of the divine promises of her restoration. This is not the restoration from the Exile...but from the devastations of Antiochus before the Maccabean victories."[21]

In the twentieth century, two major trends can be noted. Both are important, and for the most part, are complementary. First, those who argue for a two-stage growth to the psalm often based their interpretations on why the later redacted elements were added, focusing on the cultic context of the redactor in order to reconstruct what his intent may have been. This can be seen in the comments below. A second trend has been on the literary features of the text, mainly in areas such as parallelism, dialogical analysis, and characterization.[22] Much of this was initially spurred on through the introduction of rhetorical-criticism by James Muilenberg, receiving further impetus in the 1980s through the work of Kugel and others.[23]

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[20] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, II:8-9; this was also the opinion of the earlier commentary by Hupfeld, cited above. Another less common argument is that the "afflicted" in the psalm is somewhat like a pseudonym for the entire community, so that the speaker in the psalm is actually the community speaking singularly through the voice of an "I". This view can be seen in Briggs, *Book of Psalms*, who argues that the עני of the title is a pseudonym, so that the author is writing in the person of afflicted Israel. Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 87, also suggestively asks if Zion could be the speaker in the opening complaint, as does David. C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 292.

[21] Briggs and Briggs, *Book of Psalms*, 320.

[22] For instance, two monographs in the *JSOT Supplement Series* have been very helpful: Steven J. L. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms*, JSOTSS 44 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); and Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock* (cited above). A recent dissertation from Nathan Maxwell (Baylor University) also makes an important contribution by tracing the concept of literary voice throughout the psalms of Book IV.

[23] James Muilenberg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969); James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale, 1981); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York:

Out of these newer discussions, the most satisfying interpretation is perhaps one that combines together elements of Kraus, Gerstenberger, and Weiser.[24] Kraus began by expressing his dissatisfaction with the easy adaptation of the earlier lament to later liturgical and communal use found in previous studies.[25] For him, the focus should be on how the prophetic elements could have entered the psalm, and to analyze this one must look to the psalm's historical situation in the cult. Dating the psalm to an exilic or early post-exilic period, Kraus suggests that the petitioner would have had nothing left to base his hope on, but instead prophecies about the future of Zion.[26] He wrote, "The individual petitioner in his affliction comforts himself, not with God's activity of the past, but with that of the future. His fate is completely embedded in the activity of God toward Israel."[27] Thus, the uniqueness of Psalm 102 is that it answers lament through prophecy, and not through an appeal to YHWH's character or his great saving activities of the past (cf. Psalms 77-78).

Gerstenberger further fills out this picture by providing a social and religious context for the psalm. He begins by stressing that the opening complaint (vv. 1-12) is reflective of personal anguish, but not communal suffering.[28] This is contrasted starkly with the urgent petition for the reconstruction of Zion, recounted in the second part of the psalm (vv.13-23). This section bases that petition on the love that the people had had for the city's ruins and their place amongst the nations.[29] For Gerstenberger, though, the reconstruction of Jerusalem had absolutely nothing to

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Basic Books, 1985); Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism: Revised and Expanded* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

[24] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, Translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978 [German], 1993 [English]); Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature: Vol. 15 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

[25] Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 283.

[26] *Ibid.*, 283.

[27] *Ibid.*, 287.

[28] Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part II*, 211.

[29] *Ibid.*, 212.

do with the preceding complaint from an individual sufferer.[30] He proposed that a connection might be made in verse 18, where the prayers of the destitute are mentioned. Even so, a gap still remained between the individual and communal concerns, and to bridge it Gerstenberger picked up a point made earlier by Weiser.

For Weiser, the solution was found by looking to the "setting and content of the cultic ceremony in the course of which the psalm was recited."[31] Drawing on the language of the psalm itself, he wrote:

> The essential theme of the cultic ceremony, the appearance of God before the cult community (v.[17]), at which his dominion and his salvation are revealed and realized afresh, is for the worshipper, too, the point at which he becomes assured that his supplications have been granted (vv. [18, 21]); this is a saving event to which he not only testifies in the midst of the congregation by word of mouth, reciting the words of the psalm, but which he also wished to be recorded in writing so that God may be glorified (v. [19]).

With the expansion of the psalm and the introduction of communal language reflecting the cult, current and future generations are able to participate in the saving character of the psalm. Importantly, for Weiser the present and future *participation in the ceremony* is what is able to transform lament into praise, based on the hope for a future, restored Zion. The point picked up by Gerstenberger, is that the traditional individual lament could be used and modified by later communities for their own purposes. He writes,

> Exilic- [and] post-exilic congregations used familial religious traditions to express their spiritual concerns. Suffering the pressures of their time and environment, the faithful of Yahweh in Jerusalem and the diaspora would take up in their services the forms of individual complaint, modify them for their purposes, and add to them liturgical expressions of trust, praise, hopes, and desires, in order to approach Yahweh in their assemblies.[32]

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[30] *Ibid.*, 212.

[31] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 653. Of which, Hannah's actions and prayers in 1 Samuel 1:9ff. are paradigmatic.

[32] Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part II*, 214.

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As with Weiser, the archaic individual lament (vv.1-12) was transformed during the exilic or early post-exilic period to include hymnic and prophetic elements. The psalmist, not deriving any comfort or assurance by looking into the history of salvation, looks into the future, and is able to transform the individual concerns of the lament into liturgical expressions of praise, hope, and trust.[33] In this way, "suffering members were comforted, and common hopes for restoration were kindled in one and the same assembly."[34] If one includes the superscription in this discussion, the applicability of the psalm to any afflicted and weary supplicant would also enhance this interpretation greatly, allowing today's reader to also participate in the psalm's saving character.[35]

Though this solution is quite helpful, and offers a cogent explanation of the redactional history of the psalm, from a canonical perspective it still fails to account for the psalm's full interpretive context. For instance, the goal of redaction criticism, demonstrated well in the solutions of Kraus and Gerstenberger, is to "reconstruct the historical context of the redactional editor in order to determine both the conscious intention of the author as well as those unintentional sociological forces which influenced his interpretation."[36] As Childs notes, such criticism usually "assumes an etiological concern, that is, on the basis of a current problem in the exilic community the biblical author is thought to have resolved the tension by adjusting the received tradition in order to bring it into conformity with the present historical reality."[37] With Psalm 102, the problem noted above was the suffering of the people and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple within the Babylonian exile. Finding no hope in the present

[33] Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 284.

[34] Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part II*, 214.

[35] Cf. John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3: Psalm 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 146-162.

[36] Brevard Childs, "Analysis of a Canonical Formula: 'It Shall Be Recorded For a Future Generation'," in Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, eds., *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 363.

[37] *Ibid*., 363.

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circumstances, the redactor focused on the future restoration of Jerusalem and universal worship at Zion in attempting to overcome his suffering, expressed using an earlier individual lament. By participating in the drama of its recitation, fellow exiles and future generations of Israelites were also able to reflect on the saving character of the psalm.

The canonical approach contrasts with this by not focusing on the redactor's intentions, but on the effect redactional shaping has on the text's witness.[38] That is, a canonical approach insists that one must focus more broadly on the effect editorial shaping has had on the text's witness.[39] This shaping is felt from both macro- (Psalm 102's placement within the latter half of Book IV) and micro- (Psalm 102's own redactional history) levels of editorial activity.

Concerning internal, micro-redaction, one observes something that Gerstenberger neglects; namely, that the psalm's final form assumes an audience which is broader than its original hearers (or in Gerstenberger's case, participants). This comes to the fore in verse 19, which reads, "Let this be written for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be born may praise YHWH." The psalm, though perhaps originally including a participating audience, in its final form was designed to help move a future generation towards the praise of God. Thus, an important distinction exists between the two approaches. In a cult-critical reading, transformation is related to the *participation of the community in the cult*; but for compositional criticism the *transformation is for a future generation*, awaiting the fulfillment of YHWH's promises. As Terrien noted in his commentary, "This is written *now* for its being read *then*."[40] Such a view is aided by the consideration of external, macro-factors of redaction.

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[38] *Ibid.,* 363.

[39] Brevard Childs, "Analysis of a Canonical Formula: 'It Shall Be Recorded For a Future Generation'," in Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, eds., *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 363.

[40] Terrien, *The Psalms*, 698.

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Regarding those factors, the focus is on the literary role Psalm 102 plays in the overall movement and message of the book as a whole. Though we are not quite there yet, this paper will argue below that Psalm 102 plays quite a critical role in moving the Psalter forward from the questions plaguing its past (cf. Ps. 89), towards a future where they may continue to hope in the restoration of Zion and to be re-gathered for worship. Turning now to the interpretation of the psalm, the paper will first investigate the question about the psalmist, or speaker, in Psalm 102.

The Speaker in Psalm 102

As has been observed, the question of speaker in Psalm 102 has been an important one in virtually all previous commentary. Throughout the modern period, the question of speaker in Psalm 102 has generally been answered with one of two possibilities. In the nineteenth century, the dominant view was that the psalm was originally written for the leader of the community, possibly even a kingly figure, to be recited before the people. Scholars in the twentieth century have all but dismissed this idea, positing instead that the superscription points to the democratization of the psalm for any common sufferer. What follows is a reevaluation of the idea that a royal figure – specifically, a Davidic royal figure – could be the implied speaker.

Superscription Evidence of the Speaker

Looking solely at superscriptions, one notices that while Psalm 102 is anonymous, it appears between two psalms ascribed to David (101; 103). Given that the king is clearly recognized as the speaker of Psalm 101, the notion that the same king could be speaking in Psalm 102 cannot be dismissed out of hand. In fact, their juxtaposition makes this likely.[41] This is partly due to the similar concerns of each psalm, but is also related to their combined function within Book IV.

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[41] See the discussion by David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 291-292.

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As Clinton McCann, has observed, Psalm 101 is best heard as the complaint of a kingly figure who has vowed his loyalty to YHWH and wants to know when he will appear to him (101:2).[42] The placement of the psalm so late in the Psalter, however, raises the question about its function. That is, given that Psalm 89 suggests that the Davidic covenant has failed and that the monarchy has disappeared, why would any royal psalms appear in Book IV? McCann writes, "Assuming the placement is not simply haphazard, one can respond that in its current literary setting, the royal complaint in Psalm 101 is a response to the destruction of the monarchy, as are Psalms 90-100."[43] Psalm 101 responds by imagining the voice of a future king asking for the monarchy to be restored, and vowing his loyalty to YHWH. Here, the question in 101:2 ("When will you come to me?"), asks when that restoration would occur. If that is the case, a similar appeal may be present in Psalm 102, since the restoration of Zion would also mean the restoration of the seat of the monarchy (cf. Ps. 2).

Although no explicit quotations or allusions can be observed between 102 and 103, there are several lexical and thematic connections. Thematically, the opening verses of Psalm 103 seem to recount a situation quite opposite to, but in resonance with, the concerns of Psalm 102, "Bless YHWH, O my soul, and forget not his benefits; who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (103:2-5). The affliction of the supplicant in Psalm 102, recounted in the opening lament, as well as the final petition for his descendants to dwell securely in the presence of YHWH, resonate well with

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[42] Clinton McCann, *Psalms*, New Interpreter's Bible IV (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 1081.
[43] McCann, *Psalms*, 1081.

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these opening lines in 103. Indeed, one might say that 103 recounts the praises anticipated by the hymnic portions of Psalm 102 (vv. 16, 19, 22-23).[44]

Beyond this thematic connection, a few catchwords may have intertextual significance, but will only be noted in the footnotes. The first of these catchwords is *škh* ("forget"), which occurs in 102:5 ("I *forget* to eat my food") and 103:2 ("*forget* not all his benefits"). In Psalm 102, this verse occurs in the middle of the psalmist's complaint, where he is so sick with suffering that he forgets even to eat. In Psalm 103, the opposite is stated, as the psalmist reminds himself to not forget YHWH's benefits, which includes renewing one's youth. It does not take much imagination or creativity to see the potential relationship between YHWH's benefits in 103 and the provision of bread in 102 (cf. 104:14). A second possible catchword is *rḥm* ("to have pity, mercy, or compassion"), which occurs in 102:14 ("You will arise and *have pity* on Zion"), 103:4 ("...who crowns you with steadfast love [*ḥsd*] and *mercy*"), and 103:13 ("As a father *has compassion* for his children, so YHWH *has compassion* for those who fear him"). Here, the potential connection between these occurrences is the relationship between YHWH having pity on Zion (102), and also having compassion for his children (103). Admittedly, these two words are quite common in Biblical Hebrew, and even in the Psalter, but given the thematic connections between the two psalms, and their immediate juxtaposition, they have the potential of providing an even closer reading between the two texts.

Given these lexical and thematic links, an integrated reading of the two psalms would suggest that Psalm 103 is to be read as a response to the lamentation of 102, perhaps even a theological explanation of 102.[45] In any case, the above discussions illustrate that a close

[44] McCann, *Psalms*, 1091.

[45] Hyung Jun Kim, *The Structure and Coherence of Psalms 89-106* (Dissertation; University of Pretoria, 1998), 393. This reading gains further impetus from the fact that several previous psalms identified as "prayers" are followed by psalms which seem to provide theological explanation or comment (eg. 17-18, 86-87).

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connection exists between Psalm 102 and its neighbors, such that the latter's ascription to David raises the possibility that a royal figure could be heard as speaking in Psalm 102 as well.

Moving within the superscription of 102, there are also several indications of a royal speaker, beginning with the superscription. The psalm opens with the clause, "A prayer [*təpillāh*] of an afflicted one [*'ānî*]." Upon researching the relevant terms here, a few observations should be highlighted. First, with *təpillāh* . Though one might be tempted to think it is an abundantly common lexeme in the Psalter, it occurs only 32 times, in only 21 psalms; that is, less than one-third of the collection.[46] Of those, only five are in superscriptions (17:1; 86:1; 90:1; 102:1; 142:1). In three of these, the prayer is identified with David (17:1; 86:1; 142:1), and in one, with Moses (90:1). A second observation is that the term also appears in the postscript of Psalm 72, "The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are ended" (v. 20). Though on some level this may indicate that all the Davidic psalms prior to that point were also considered "prayers"; at the same time, it specifically identifies them with David, a royal figure. Taken together, these two observations, at the very least, increase the likelihood that the prayer of Psalm 102 belongs to a Davidic king.

The other key term in the superscription is *'ānî* ("afflicted one"), a word used 31 times in the Psalter. When it occurs, the *'ānî* are often those who know that they are unable to save themselves and must depend on YHWH for help against their enemies.[47] The enemy may not always be a physical one, but can also refer to illnesses or even social and economic concerns. Thus, the term can be rendered as "affliction," but it can also carry the notion of "poor" or "needy." When looking at the occurrences of this word when it focuses on affliction, outside the psalms of David, the only other psalms which identify a *speaker* (in either the superscription or

[46] Of its 32 occurrences, תפלה occurs four times in Psalm 102, and twice in Psalms 17, 66, 86, 88, 109, and 141. This reduces the explicit reference to "prayer" to only 21 psalms, less than a third of the collection.

[47] James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 35.

body of the psalm) as *ʿānî* are Psalms 88 and 102.[48] Though this may only be a coincidence, further comments below will show that these two psalms share much in common, and that they both may very well have a kingly figure as their speaker.

Evidence of the Speaker within Psalm 102

The parallels between the lengthy invocation of Psalm 102 and other psalms of lament have been noted for quite some time. In fact, nearly every clause finds a parallel: "when he is faint and pours out his complaint before YHWH" (77:4; 142:3-4; 143:4); "hear my prayer" (4:2; 39:13; 54:4; 84:8; 143:1); "do not hide your face" (27:9; 69:18; 143:7; c.f. 13:2; 44:25; 88:15; 89:47; 104:29); "in the day of my distress" (59:17; 69:18; c.f. 20:2; 37:39; 50:15); "incline your ear to me" (31:3; 71:2; c.f. 10:17; 17:6; 45:11; 84:9; 86:1; 88:2); "in the day I call" (56:10); "answer me quickly" (69:18; 143:7).

Although one must be careful to not read into these parallels too much, since they may only be part of the vocabulary of invocation, several patterns are noteworthy. First, nearly every parallel occurs in a Davidic psalm. Granted, most of the individual laments in the Psalter are Davidic, but if such is the case, then the likelihood for a royal speaker in Psalm 102 cannot be dismissed.[49] Second, several psalms include more than one clause in common, and even though genre formulae may be an explanation, further investigation reveals there may actually be intentional allusion between Psalm 102 and 69:18; 77:4; and 142:3-4. As an example, one can see similar motivations for prayer between Psalms 77 and 102. In the former, the psalmist makes

[48] Though references to עני, or about how YHWH cares for עני may occur outside of Davidic psalms, only Psalms 88 and 102 take up the voice of one. Within the Davidic psalms, the psalmist identifies himself as an afflicted one in eight psalms: 22:25; 25:16; 34:6; 40:18; 69:30; 70:6; 86:1; and 109:22. Thus, eight of the ten psalms with an "afflicted" speaker are explicitly Davidic (royal).

[49] Briggs, *Book of Psalms*, 318, noted that these parallels were "a mosaic of terms of supplication...not because of a lack of originality in the poet, but because he desired to use the familiar terms of the Davidic prayer book for this day of humiliation and prayer for national deliverance." This is suggestive of purposeful imitation and intertextuality on the part of the author.

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his complaint to YHWH in order to call him to remembrance, so that he might act on Israel's behalf by recalling his former love for the nation.[50] In the latter, the psalmist reminds YHWH that the "appointed time" had come for him to be gracious to Zion, and by implication, Israel.

A third observation is that a large concentration of these parallels is located within Book III (77:4; 84:8, 9; 86:1; 88:2, 15; 89:47). When expanding the possibility of intertextuality to the rest of Psalm 102, this concentration of lexical and thematic links with the Book III increases, particularly with Psalms 86, 88, and 89.[51] For instance, within the superscription and opening invocation of Psalm 86, the only Davidic psalm in Book III, Psalm 102 shares six lexical terms. Both are identified as "prayers" (*təpillāh*) of "afflicted" psalmists (*'ānî*), and ask for YHWH to "incline" his ear (*nṭh*) and "answer" him (*'nh*).

Similarly, the superscription of Psalm 88 begins with the phrase, "of/for the piercing of the afflicted one."[52] "Affliction," in fact, is a common theme in Psalm 88, occurring four times (88:1, 8, 10, 16). Robert Cole notes that its close connection with Psalm 86 might suggest that "the lament of 88 is an extended description of the affliction in 86," such that each should be interpreted as coming from the same Davidic figure.[53] In fact, Psalm 102, as a "prayer of an afflicted," might also be extending this dialogue. Its lexical links with Psalm 89 seem to affirm this possibility.

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[50] Mitchell, *Message*, 106.

[51] Beyond those listed above, 13 more lexical links between 102 and 86 include: day (*yôm*; 86.3, 7; 102.3, 4, 9, 12, 24, 25), to call (*qr'*; 86.3, 5, 7; 102.3), voice (*qôl*; 86.6; 102.6), to lift (*nś'*; 86.4; 102.11), to arise (*qûm*; 86.14; 102.14), to show favor (*ḥnn*; 86.3, 16; 102.14, 15), to serve or servant (*'nd*; 86.2, 4, 16; 102.15, 23, 29), to fear (*yr'*; 86.11; 102.16), nation (*gôy*; 86.9; 102.16), name (*šēm*; 86.9, 11, 12; 102.16, 22), to see (*r'h*; 86.17; 102.17), way (*derek*; 86.11; 102.24), and deed (*ma'ăśeh*; 86.8; 102.26). Personal research found 14 common words between 88 and 102, seven of which may have importance: prayer (*təpillâ*; 88.3, 14; 102.1, 2, 14), to hide (*str*; 88.15; 102.3), day (*yôm*; 88.2, 10, 18; 102.3, 4, 9, 12, 24, 25), to incline (*nṭh*; 88.3; 102.3, 12), to call (*qr'*; 88.10; 102.3), to remember (*zkr*; 88.6; 102.13, 14, 18), and to recount (*spr*; 88.12; 102.22). Kim, *Structure*, 234ff., noted 35 common words between 90 and 102.

[52] Mitchell, *Message*, 258. Cole, *Shaping and Message*, 167.

[53] Cole, *Shape and Message*, 168, 169-170.

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The most important of these links with 89 is the use of *qṣr* and *yôm* (89:46; 102:24) to describe how YHWH has "cut short" the "days" of the speaker.[54] This link between the two psalms has also been noted for by earlier commentators, especially since these are the only two occurrences of *qṣr* in the Psalter with the meaning "to cut short." Both psalms also share lexical concerns with "taunting enemies" (*ḥrp* and *ʼōyēb*; 89:52; 102:9), YHWH hiding his face (*str*; 89:47; 102:3), the destiny of "descendants" (*zeraʻ*; 89:5, 30, 37; 102:29), and suffering "servants" (*ʻebed*; 89:4, 21, 40, 51; 102:15, 29). As McCann notes,

> In Ps 89:46 the voice of an apparently deposed Davidic king inquires how long God will hide his face and be angry. The king then asks God to remember his own (and human) transience (89:47-48) and to remember the taunts of his enemies (89:50-51). These similarities [to Psalm 102] may be coincidental, but they increase the likelihood that the individual voice in Psalm 102 should be heard as a Davidic king, albeit a deposed one, or at least that the individual complaint in Psalm 102 be heard in relation to the exile.

These comments draw together much of what has been noted above in relating Psalm 102 to both its near neighbors (101; 103) and to the psalms at the end of Book III (86; 88; 89).

In summary, the two strongest parts of the argument for a Davidic king speaking in Psalm 102 would be its close affiliation with Psalms 89 and 101. When combined with the other evidence, this paper concludes that the figure of a Davidic king is likely speaking in Psalm 102. Having made this identification, we can now turn to explore the literary function of Psalm 102 in its present literary context.

The Literary Context of Psalm 102

The literary role of Psalm 102 hangs in the balance of its function within Book IV's response to the questions posed by the closing psalms of Book III. In order to better understand that role, this paper will first discuss the important relationship between Books III and IV.

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[54] McCann, *Psalms*, 1088.

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In Gerald Wilson's initial and subsequent works, he has often highlighted the importance of the royal psalms in the shaping of Books I-III (Pss. 2, 41, 72, 89). In particular, he noticed that Psalm 2 has an introductory role, while Psalms 41, 72, and 89 are the final psalms of the first three books in the Psalter. He suggests that when read in sequence they contain a progression of thought regarding kingship and the Davidic covenant.[55] On the one hand, he detected that there is a strong positive relationship between Psalms 2, 41, and 72. He wrote, "[The] covenant which YHWH made with David (Ps 2) and in whose promises David rested secure (Ps 41) is now passed on to his descendants in [a] series of petitions in behalf of 'the king's son' (Ps 72)."[56] On the other hand, moving through Book III to Psalm 89, he found a very different perspective.[57]

In the first place, Wilson observed that in Psalm 89 the Davidic covenant is viewed as something that had been established in the distant past, "then you had spoken in a vision" (v. 20). Secondly, he noted that the psalm was concerned with the eternality of the Davidic covenant, "His line will endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me" (v. 36; cf. vv. 4, 29). This has strong resonance with the Davidic promises in 2 Samuel 7, but also with Psalms 2 and 72. His third observation was that the covenant was viewed as broken and failed, "But you, you have cast off and rejected; yes, you have been most angry with you anointed one. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust" (vv. 39-40). And last, he observed that even though the covenant had been apparently abandoned by YHWH, hope remained that YHWH would yet remember the covenant and uphold the descendants of David, "Remember, YHWH, how your servant is scorned" (v. 50).

From these observations, Wilson concluded that at the end of Book III the picture of the Davidic covenant is "one of a covenant remembered, but a covenant *failed*. The Davidic

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[55] Wilson, *Editing*, 209.
[56] *Ibid*., 211.
[57] *Ibid.*, 212-214.

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covenant introduced in Ps 2 has come to nothing and the combination of three books concludes with the anguished cry of the Davidic descendants."[58] This bleak picture of the Davidic dynasty, combined with a general sense of longing to understand the purposes of YHWH marking all of Book III,[59] has led many psalm scholars to suggest that the overall editorial agenda of the Psalter is related to the fall of the Davidic monarchy and questions related to the future of the nation. Several of these questions, taken from Psalms 89 and 85, include: had David been forsaken forever (89:49)? How long would YHWH delay (89:46-47)? And, why is YHWH still angry with Israel (85:5-7)?[60]

From a literary perspective, the remaining books in the Psalter (Books IV-V) provide the answers to these questions. Book IV begins by returning to two important parts of Israel's heritage: God's servant, Moses (90:1), and the theme of the wilderness wandering, or exile.[61] As Tate has commented, "The Moses-wilderness themes in these psalms suggest very strongly that the collection reflects the 'wilderness' of the exile and post-exilic periods."[62] By returning to Moses, the editors of the Psalter remind its readers that the covenantal promises extend back beyond David, to the time of the patriarchs and Moses.

Seen typically as an important turning point in the Psalter, the relationship between Psalms 89 and 90 is a significant one.[63] Moses' prayer begins by strongly affirming YHWH's covenant faithfulness and eternality, "O YHWH, you have been a refuge to us in every

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[58] *Ibid*., 213 (emphasis is Wilson's).

[59] In general terms, Book III teaches the reader that YHWH had become angry with Israel because of its wickedness (73; 80-81), and had brought judgment upon Zion (74). Though hope remained for a restored city (87), the apparent death of the king (88) puts into question the state of the Davidic house. A more in-depth investigation and summary of the movement and message of Book III is in Robert Cole, *Shape and Message*.

[60] J. Clinton McCann, "Books I-III and the Editorial Purpose of the Hebrew Psalter," in McCann, *Shape and Shaping*, 104.

[61] In fact, there is a strong Mosaic flavor to all of Book IV. Beyond his prayer in Psalm 90, he is mentioned six more times by name (99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32), and there are also several meditations on the Torah (traditionally "the book of Moses") which close out the Book (Pss 104-106).

[62] Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 530.

[63] David Howard, "A Contextual Reading of Psalms 90-94," in McCann, *Shape and Shaping*, 110. The following discussion utilizes much of Howard's work.

generation...from forever until forever, you are God" (90:1-2). From here, the psalm places a strong emphasis on the frailty of humanity (vv. 3-12), and in particular, on their capacity to sin (v. 8). As Howard noted, "The problems that humans have are not so much due to God's unfaithfulness or whim, but to their sins."[64] This resonates strongly with the Davidic covenant theme of Psalm 89, where YHWH spoke of how the sinfulness of the Davidic line would be punished, "If his sons forsake my *torah*, and do not walk in my judgments; if they violate my decrees, and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with a plague" (vv. 31-33). For Moses, the key is not to ask YHWH to be faithful, but for humanity to learn to number its days because of its sin, and so obtain a wise heart (90:12).

The remainder of the prayer turns into a lament, similar to the end of Psalm 89. It begins by asking YHWH to turn his favor and steadfast love back towards his people (vv. 13-17).[65] This resonates well with the promise of YHWH in 89, "But my steadfast love I will not take away from him; I will not betray my faithfulness" (v. 34). In this way, the lament in Psalm 89 was focused largely on the delay in YHWH's fulfillment of his promise to the house of David. The correlation between the end of Psalm 90 and the end of Psalm 89 forms a nice bridge between the bleak outlook of 89 and the positive affirmations of YHWH's sovereignty and steadfast love which mark the rest of Book IV.

Moving beyond Psalm 90, scholars have had a hard time sensing an overall structure to Book IV. Wilson argued that there are two major blocks of psalms: the YHWH-reigns psalms (93, 96-99) and the Davidic collection (101, 103-104).[66] Building off Howard's observation that

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[64] Howard, "Contextual Reading," 111.

[65] Note the fantastic turn of phrase compared with 90:3.

[66] Gerald Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in McCann, *Shape and Shaping*, 75-76.

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Psalms 95 and 100 form an enveloping structure around the YHWH-reigns psalms,[67] he proposes a somewhat confusing network of interlocking frames that bind the book together. Howard, however, proposes a more simple structure, dividing the book into three parts: Psalms 90-94, 95-100, and 101-106.[68] However one divides Book IV, all scholars seem to agree that the heart of its response to Psalm 89, and perhaps even the heart of the entire theology of the Psalter, is in the enthronement psalms (93, 95-100).

Within these psalms, the main declaration is that "YHWH reigns" (93.1; 96.10; 97.1; 99.1)! Throughout them, the reader is to recognize and celebrate YHWH as king (96:7-10). The grouping opens with Psalm 93, a psalm which decidedly changes the tone away from the wisdom and refuge motifs of Psalms 90-92, and towards the joyful recognition of YHWH's kingship. This tone continues throughout Psalms 95-100, highlighting numerous elements of YHWH's reign. Here, YHWH is praised as the ruler over all gods (95:3; cf. 97:7, 9), over all the world and its elements (93:3-4; 95:4-5), and over all the nations and their inhabitants (99:2; 96:3, 10). He reigns from his holy throne (93:2; 99:5, 9) in Zion (97:8; 99:2), a throne established on righteousness and justice (97:2).[69] Howard summarizes the section as follows:

> The central affirmations of YHWH's kingship and sovereignty have been reiterated numerous times. Likewise, YHWH's activities on behalf of his people and activities against the nations are displayed prominently, though the nations themselves are called in Psalm 96. The message of the section is that YHWH can be trusted, even in the face of adversity (Psalm 94). There is hope for his people. Psalm 100, in its brief compass, affirms this trust in YHWH, the worldwide scope of his sovereignty, the particular relationship he has established with Israel, and Zion, the place where all this is centered.[70]

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[67] David Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93-100* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 166.
[68] Howard, "Contextual Reading," 123.
[69] James Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 14-15.
[70] Howard, *Structure*, 181.

This brings the discussion to the final grouping of psalms in Book IV, 101-106. Having already traced the general tone of Psalm 101 above, this paper is ready to comment on 102's function. This will be done as we walk through the psalm itself.

The Literary Function of Psalm 102

As this paper has concluded above, the superscription and opening invocation of the psalm provide substantial grounds for understanding the speaker of Psalm 102 an afflicted king, that is, an imagined future Davidic king, as in Psalm 101. The opening invocation (vv. 2-3), as well, contains familiar expressions of distressed prayer, which are typical of a Davidic lament.

In the first complaint section (vv. 4-12), the supplicant's distress is described in terms of his own afflictions (vv. 4-8), and in reference to those who caused them (vv. 9-12). In the former, several key metaphors paint the picture of one who is suffering both inwardly and outwardly. He is like a lonely bird of the wilderness, without rest and keeping watch throughout the night (vv. 7-8). In the latter, as in Psalm 101, the royal figure is waiting for YHWH to come to him, but here, the psalmist voices his complaint that it is YHWH who has lifted him up and thrown him back to the ground (v. 11).[71] The familiar taunts of his enemies are also heard (v. 9), and he sees death on the horizon (v. 12; cf. vv. 23-24). In the final line of the complaint, the supplicant repeats that he "withers like grass" (vv. 4, 12), a phrase also used in Psalm 90 in reference to man's transience. From a literary perspective, this could be a sign that the Davidic speaker is learning to number his days, as Moses had recommended (90:12).

This, in fact, is exactly what happens at the beginning of the second part of Psalm 102, as the psalmist makes a contrast between his own transience (v. 12) and the eternality of YHWH

[71] Some, who identify Israel as the speaker in the psalm, find in this language an image of God taking Israel from the land and casting them into exile.

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(vv. 13, 25-29).[72] As Wilson points out, several close connections between 102 and 90 come to the fore: the transient nature of man (102:4, 12; 90:5-6, 9-10); a contrasting view of the eternality of God (102:13, 25-27; 90:1-2, 4); the wrath of God poured out because of mankind (102:10-11; 90:7-8); and the hope that the descendants of the psalmist would "dwell secure" (102:29; 90:7-8).[73] In Psalm 102, these connections are put within the context of YHWH's eternal enthronement (*yšb*), a theme already established in Psalms 93-100 (cf. Ps 99:1). Using a second emphatic *'th*, the psalmist begins his assertion of trust by expressing his sure hope that YHWH would arise and take pity on Zion.

In Book IV, the concept of YHWH taking pity is expressed using two close synonyms, *rḥm* ("to have pity") and *nḥm* ("to have mercy"). Forming an inclusio, *nḥm* appears twice in Book IV. Its first appearance is near the end of Psalm 90, where Moses cries out, "Have pity on your servants" (90:13)! The latter occurrence is in 106:45, where the psalmist proclaims that YHWH "remembered his covenant and had pity." Together these might be taken as an enveloping response to Psalm 89 that YHWH's anger will not last forever; he will one day have pity on Israel. In Psalm 102, the hope that YHWH would arise and have that same sort of mercy on Zion is based on the fact that the "appointed time has come" (v. 14).

Of all the intertextual links with Book III, the reference to the "appointed time" (*mô'd*) is one the most important in assessing Psalm 102's literary function. Though a very common word in the Hebrew Bible (occurring over 200 times), within the book of Psalms it only occurs five times (74:4, 8; 75:3; 102:14; 104:19). Out of these, only two references have in mind a specific "appointed time" when YHWH would act (75:3; 102:14). As Delitzsch has noted, when used in

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[72] Note Howard's comments, *Structure*, 182, "While Psalm 101 echoes Psalms 92 and 94, Psalms 102 and 103 echo Psalms 90-91, particularly Psalm 90. The transience of human life is again a theme in 102 and 103, in contrast to God's eternality. YHWH's anger is seen again, and yet his forgiving nature and his commitment to his people remain."

[73] Wilson, *Editing*, 218.

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prophetic texts, *mô'd* is a "standing expression for the appointed time of the final judgment."[74] In this respect, Psalm 75 uses it to "declare that God will right the pillars of justice in the earth."[75] When seen within the literary setting of Book III, such a declaration has great correspondence with its use in Psalm 102. As Cole writes,

> "[A] righteous and yet despondent individual first appears in Psalm 73, responding directly to the promise of a just and peaceful kingdom in 72. He complains that in fact the very opposite conditions of 72 were now prevailing, to the point that God's people have joined the wicked. This is followed in 74 by a lament of the community whose temple and city have been destroyed. By their own words in 74, the community identifies the wicked of 73 as Israel itself, and the judgment revealed to the speaker of 73 as that suffered by the nation. . . .Psalms 75 and 76 are divine responses to this call declaring that a time of righteous judgment has been reserved and that peace will be established. Specifically, 75 promises in answer to 74 a time (unspecified) chosen for divine judgment, in which the wicked of 73 will be cut down.[76]

My argument here is that by repeating the term in Psalm 102, the speaker directly responds back to YHWH that the time for judgment, referenced in 75, had now come.[77] Text-critically this would also help to explain the existence of the third line of the tricolon in 102:14, one identified as a gloss in BHS and early critical scholarship.[78]

In his vision, the psalmist further grounds his claim for YHWH's rising up and taking pity on Zion by noting that YHWH's servants delight and cherish even the ruins of the great city. Linking back to Book III, this view of Zion is paralleled to the destroyed Zion of Psalms 74 and 79. For instance, in 102:20-21, YHWH is seated in heaven, and looks down "to hear the groans of the prisoner [*lišmōa' 'enqat 'āsîr*], and release those condemned to death [*ləpattēaḥ bənê*

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[74] Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 504. See also Habakkuk 2.3; Daniel 12:27. Both he (Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 643) and Alexander, *The Psalms*, 441, note that its use in Psalm 102 is parallel to the use in Psalm 75:3.

[75] Cole, *Shape and Message*, 43.

[76] Cole, *Shape and Message*, 231-32.

[77] Some may object that this lexical link is too far removed from Psalm 102 to be legitimate. While it is true that the farther removed from each other the apparent links are, the less likely they are to be significant, other factors must also be considered, such as the rarity of the term in question or its occurrence in structurally-prominent points in the text. When all the connections back to Book III are considered, the idea that a link could exist between Psalms 75 and 102 is strengthened considerably.

[78] Briggs, *Psalms*, 320. It is important to recognize that the second line in the verse also asks for YHWH to act, but without the loaded eschatological term. The third line, then, is unnecessary, and needs explanation.

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təmûtâ]." This is paralleled earlier by 79:11, which asks, "Let the groans of the prisoners come before you [*tābô' ləpānêkā 'enqat*]...reprieve those condemned to death [*hôtēr bənê təmûtâ*]." Again, Psalm 102 seems to be interacting with verses from Book III. In Psalm 79, the psalmist envisions the destruction of YHWH's enemies, and the establishing of justice in Jerusalem. As noted above, the psalm begins with the scene of a destroyed Zion, with YHWH's faithful servants left dead as food for wild beasts in the streets of the city (79:1-2). The people have become the scorn of the nations, and the psalmist wants to know how long YHWH intends to stand by and watch this all happen (vv. 4-5). By calling for the appointed time in 102:14, the afflicted king is asking YHWH to finally arise and have mercy on Zion.[79] Notably, the same sentiments are also expressed in Psalm 80:15-20; 82:8; 83:10-19; and 86:14-17.

The return to Zion pictured in the hymnic section of 102 (vv. 19-23) is one that also resonates with many other places in the Psalter, as well as in exilic and post-exilic prophecy in general (ie. Isa 2:2-4). For, in 102, the psalmist not only envisions a future where the captives of Israel return to Zion, but also that "the peoples/nations gather together, and kingdoms, to worship/serve YHWH" (v. 23; cf. v. 16). McCann notes, "While the hope expressed in vv. 13-18 alludes to the exodus, the vocabulary of vv. 13-18 also is reminiscent of the way Isaiah 40-55 anticipates the return from exile, and the return of the exiles is even more clearly in view in vv. 19-23."[80] The specific emphasis on the nations is an important part Second Isaiah's vision (Isa. 49:6-13, 22-23), but it is also present at the close of Book III. There, in Psalm 87, Israel's typical enemies are all said to acknowledge YHWH, "I will bring to memory Rahab and Babylon as

[79] A further parallel which deserves to be noted is that this scene, of YHWH looking down from heaven to the groans of his people, echoes the Exodus narrative, when Israel was surrounded by the Egyptians before the banks of the Reed Sea (Exo 14:24). In Psalms 79 and 102, the psalmist is perhaps using that same imagery to envision a new kind of exodus for the people of Israel. The expectation is that newly released prisoners, who were sentenced to death, would be able to return to a restored Zion, forever recounting the praises of YHWH.

[80] McCann, *Psalms*, 1087.

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those who know me; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush; each of these were there" (v. 4). This should be seen as yet another instance of Psalm 102's interaction with Book III.

Another important part of the literary function of this section has to do with the referent of *zō't* ("this") in verse 19a. Brevard Childs argues that the "this" of verse 19a is the word of promise cited in the psalm (vv. 16-18).[81] Allen disagrees with him, arguing that it refers to the "record of God's saving work after the promise had been fulfilled."[82] For him, the main purpose of making a record was to preserve the memory of God's work for later generations. Thus, nothing prophetic is being recounted here at all. The problem with this view, however, is that from the beginning of verse 13 the perspective has been on the future. The psalmist is calling out for YHWH *to act*, to rise up, not reminiscing on how YHWH has already acted. Moreover, the closing section of the psalm returns to an individual lament, which would have been highly unlikely had the saving activity already occurred.

Moving to the final section, it has been noted that it is made up of a complaint (v. 24), followed by petition (v. 25, 29), and motivation/praise (v. 26-28). The afflicted king is still drained of strength, complaining of shortened days. The strong contrast between the eternality of YHWH and the ephemeral life of mankind is again present, reflecting the strong resonance between Psalm 90 and 102, with the complaint echoing the complaint of the speaker of Psalm 89. The final petition of the psalm also resonates with Psalm 90, as noted above.

Conclusions

Earlier critical approaches to the Psalter may have made important insights concerning an individual psalm's use prior to its placement in the canonical text. However, they largely failed to consider how its juxtaposition with other psalms and its placement within the larger book

[81] Childs, "Canonical Formula," 361-363.
[82] Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 21.

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might have affected its meaning. By recognizing the literary context of the psalm within the unfolding dialogue between Books III-IV, this paper concludes that Psalm 102 should be heard as a meditative response of an afflicted Davidic king to the questions of the apparent failure of the Davidic covenant and YHWH's delay in returning his steadfast love to his people.

In the psalm, this king envisions a future which begins with an appointed time of judgment for YHWH's enemies and ends with a new kind of exodus: the ingathering of his servants and the nations to a rebuilt Zion. The connections made with various psalms in Book III throughout Psalm 102 also illustrates that its complaints, petitions, and assurances are all part of its way of continuing the dialogue started in that Book. As such, Psalm 102, alongside 101, represents an important *literary* turning point in the Hebrew Psalter.

Together, these psalms give voice to an imagined future Davidic king, who responds confidently to the exilic crisis that faced Israel.[83] In Psalm 101, this king expressed his loyalty to YHWH, committing his kingship to the establishment of justice. This attitude strongly resonates with the concerns of Psalm 72, and also emphasizes those aspects of his kingship which prior Davidic kings had failed to attain (89:31-33). He also wanted to know when YHWH would come to him (101:2). Psalm 102 picks up on these themes, this time allowing the reader to further appreciate the affliction which this king faced, and out of which, expresses his hope for the future restoration of Zion and the people of YHWH.

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[83] McCann, *Psalms*, 661-62, provides a short summary of this "exilic" crisis: "To be sure, the exile was a historical event that began with the deportation of Judeans to Babylon in 597 BCE, continued with the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 by the Babylonians, and lasted until 539 when Cyrus permitted the Judean exiles in Babylon to return to Palestine. But in a broader sense, the exile was a theologian problem, and it represented an ongoing theological crisis well beyond 539." He continues, "Although some of the exiles returned to Palestine after 539, and although the Temple was rebuilt by 515, things were never really the same as before. . . .The loss of the monarchy was...an ongoing theological crisis that made it necessary for the people of God to come to a new understanding of God and of their existence under God. When the commentary refers to the exile, it means primarily not the historical event but the ongoing theological crisis." And finally, "The shape of the Psalter indicates that its editors intended the psalms to participate in the theological dialogue that resulted in new perspectives on both divine and human sovereignty and suffering."

The psalm also prepares the reader for the psalms to come. Book IV ends with four psalms which closely meditate on the Pentateuch. Here, Psalm 103 is a reflective meditation on the steadfast love of YHWH, which was first revealed to Moses after the incident with the Golden Calf (Ex. 34). Psalms 104 and 105 continue by reflecting on YHWH as the Creator from Genesis 1-2 (Ps 104), as well as his faithfulness throughout Israel's history (Ps 105). Psalm 106 closes the group by showing Israel that time and again they had refused to take refuge in YHWH, suggesting that in order to be gathered back into Zion, the people must cry out for YHWH's pity (106:44-45), giving thanks to his great name and glory (106.47). If the earlier observation was correct in understanding Psalm 103 as a kind of response to the claims made in 102, then what direction do 103-106 take the claims made in 102?

To begin with, it is interesting that 103-106 remind the reader much of earlier "historical" psalms, such as 77 and 78. As such, they seem to illustrate quite well what the psalmist envisions in Psalm 1 as "meditating on the Torah of YHWH night and day." Secondly, since 103 is a psalm of David, it seems to put this series of psalms at the end of Book IV in the mouth of "David." This, then, is not just any Israelite meditating on the acts of YHWH throughout Israel's past, but a Davidic figure – most likely the Davidic figure who has been speaking in Psalms 101 and 102. This Davidic figure initiates the response to YHWH envisioned by 102, one in which the rest of Israel was to follow: the people must respond like this "David" in order to be gathered back to Zion.

Recalling the psalms in the first half of Book IV, it can now be seen how Psalms 101-102 form a literary hinge upon which the answers to exile are given in Book IV. Without Psalm 102, there would not be decisive turning point in the Psalter between the lamenting questions posed by Book III and the strong affirmations of YHWH's faithfulness and steadfast love for his people

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in Book IV. Considering the importance of Book IV in the shape and message of the entire book, the declaration of the king in Psalm 102 may even be the hinge upon which the Psalter can finally turn from lament into praise.[84]

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[84] Cf.Terrien, *Psalms*, 22-24. He is right to note how Psalms 73 and 90 are two structural pivot points which redirect the overall literary dialogue of the Psalter. But within Book IV, Psalm 102 is the literary hinge.