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## **Psalter and its Division**

### **Messianic Frame of the Psalter**

#### **Introduction**

The Psalter had an important place among the books of the Old Testament. In Judaism and throughout in the history of the Christianity, psalms have a key position in the chart of prayer. The Book of Psalms is unique among all the books of the Bible. This is the book of prayer in the Bible and it is exclusively prayer in poetic form and it contains no narratives or stories. Benedict XVI said “The Book of Psalms can teach people how to pray. These inspired songs teach us how to speak to God”. The Psalms are manifestations of the soul and faith, in which everyone can recognize and communicate the experience of a special closeness to God to which every man is called. Since the Jewish tradition refers to the Psalter as *Tehillim*, which means ‘praise’ in Hebrew, the Psalms are ultimately is a book of praise. (*Tehilim*) means songs of praise. Although this is the common title of the collection of the Israelite songs, not all of them, not even the majority of them, are songs of praise. Actually, it is lamentation or supplication that is the dominant feature of the psalms. The English name “psalm” derives from the Greek **ψαλμος**. The Vatican Codex of the LXX (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) has **ψαλμοι** (plural of **ψαλμος**.) as its title for the Book of Psalms. According to its meaning, the psalms are songs meant to be sung with the accompaniment of musical instruments. Luke uses the word “Psalms” referring to the Book of Psalms in his gospel as well as in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Lk 20, 42; 24, 44; Acts 1, 20, 13, 33). This term **ψαλμος** (psalmos) may be a more fitting title for all the Psalms together than *Tehilim*. “Psalter” is another name for the Book of Psalms. This English word comes from the Greek title of the Book of Psalms, in the Alexandrian Codex of the LXX. Psalter is not a random collection of Psalms, but a purposefully arranged book, suitable for literary analysis.

The New Testament implies that the form of the Psalter was fixed by the first century. The reference to ὁ βιβλος ψαλμῶν (the Book of Psalms) in Acts 1,20 suggests that the Psalter existed in a fixed form. According to Babylonian Talmud David himself had written many Psalms and had collected the work of the elders namely, Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, Asaph, sons of

Korah, etc. Ancient rabbinic sources provide proof that the rabbis considered the Psalter's lyrical arrangement to be deliberate.

### **Content of the Psalms**

Jews used the psalms in their prayer to Yahweh. It contains 150 Jewish prayer songs, expressing various human emotions and needs. While many of these songs are lamentations or supplications, others are psalms of thanksgiving, hymns of praise, etc. There are community psalms as well as individual psalms in the Psalter. To our great surprise we also find carefully composed psalms with superb literary style and perfection and the literary beauty of such psalms known as *acrostic* psalms can be enjoyed only in their original language, i.e. Hebrew. The Psalms ultimately point people towards Jesus. Many of the Psalms are attributed to David, the great King of Israel who, as the Lord's Anointed, prefigured the Messiah. In Jesus Christ and in his paschal mystery the Psalms find their deepest meaning and prophetic fulfilment.

### **Origin of the Psalms**

The book of Psalms had its origin as single poems, which were memorized and transmitted from generation to generation. Later on, they were collected as small groups. The evidence of the small collections is clear in the Psalter itself with one group of psalms using the name *Elohim* always instead of *Yahweh*, and others with predominant elements of lament or royal praises in them. The two common views regarding the origin of the psalms are 1) they are of private origin; 2) they are of cultic-priestly origin. While many of the individual psalms are of private origin, most of the community psalms seem to have a priestly-cultic origin. The events out of which psalms arose occurred in the lives of individuals or in the life of the nation, i.e. in harvest fields or on battlefields, in the wilderness or in homes. Nevertheless, the psalms originated in the context of worship. Each psalm had a long and extensive pre-history. Only after hundreds of years was it fixed in written form and included in the collection. It was first prayed and sung by various kinds of people. The process of liturgical shaping of the psalms took several generations and centuries. Historically some psalms may have originated as early as the pre-monarchical period.”

### **Formation of the Book of Psalms**

The Biblical editors assembled the Psalms on the model of the Torah, organizing it into five books. First book: Ps 1-41, Second Book: Ps 42-72, Third Book: Ps 73-89, Fourth Book: Ps 90-106,

Fifth Book: Ps 107-150. A common explanation of this division is that these five books correspond in some way to the five books of the Torah (i.e., the Pentateuch). The idea here is to read Psalms 1-41 in conjunction with Genesis; Psalms 42-72 with Exodus; Psalms 73-89 with Leviticus; Psalms 90-106 with Numbers; and Psalms 107-150 with Deuteronomy. This was done probably as a five-fold response of the people of Israel to the five books of Moses in the Torah. Yahweh's words to the people of Israel came down to them in the form of five books, and they in turn spoke to God in response through five books of the Psalter.

### **Authors and Date of the Psalms**

Traditionally David is looked upon as the author of the psalms. Both Jewish and Christian traditions held on to this tradition of Davidic authorship of psalms. Though most of the psalms are titled as belonging to someone like David, sons of Korah, Asaph, and others, it is doubtful they are the real authors of those psalms. Yet, most of the psalms are anonymous and the Psalter editors mention no authors at the beginning of those psalms.

There is no unanimity among scholars in dating the psalms. They are coming from all the periods of the history of Israel from the monarchic age till the time of the final editing of the Psalter (probably in the third century BC). There are pre-exilic and post-exilic psalms in the Psalter. During exile more psalms were made as forms of prayer echoing the mood, emotions and needs of the time. The collection of psalms underwent several expansions, editions and additions, and finally towards the end of the Israelite history, the Psalter was given the final shape with 150 psalms in the Hebrew Bible.

### **Division and Numbering of Psalms and their Verses**

This is the only book in the Hebrew Bible which is not divided into chapters now. But it had been divided into five books (Ps 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150). As we have noted already, this can be recognized by the final doxology appended to each of these divisions. If we look While the MT has 150 psalms, the LXX has 151. The numbering of the psalms is not the same in the Hebrew and Greek versions.

MT <sup>1</sup> Pss	LXX <sup>2</sup> Pss
1-8	1-8
9-10	9
11-113	10-112
114-115	113
116	114-115
117-146	116-145
147	146-147
148-150	148-150
	151

Seeing this difference, we need not conclude one is better than the other. Both are ancient divisions, and both have merits and demerits. The LXX version keeping Ps 9 as a single psalm is better than its division into 9-10 in the MT. Similarly, Pss 114-115 are really two psalms as in the MT while they are taken as one in the LXX. One hundred and sixteen psalms of the Psalter have their own titles. Though they are part of the text in the Hebrew Bible, many translations do not include these titles in the text. They stand outside the text in the translations.

## Division of Psalms

### I. Torah based division of Psalms.

- i) 1-49 1st book
- ii) 42-72.
- iii) 73-89
- iv) 90-106
- v) 107-150

This division mirrors Pentateuch. Each section ends with a Doxology “praise be to the Lord...Amen”.

### II. Based on Names of God

Yahwistic      Elohist

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<sup>1</sup> Massoretic Text, i.e., the Hebrew text of the Bible with vowels prepared by the Jewish scholars known as Massoretes in the 7-8th centuries AD.

<sup>2</sup> LXX literally means 70. It stands for the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and it was made in the third century BC in Alexandria.

1-42                      43-89  
90-150.

### **III. Title based division.**

1. Psalms of David: 73 nos.  
    3-41; 51-65
2. Non-Davidic: Solomon's etc.  
    15, 24, 137
3. Asaf's Psalms  
    50, 73, 80
4. Sons of Korah  
    42-49, 84, 85, 87-88
5. Psalms of Ascends
6. Psalms of Moses.
7. Orphan Psalms: no titles  
    1, 2, 71, 136, 111-118 (Hallelu Psalms) great Hillel. 145-

**IV. Acrostic Psalm:** Written according to Alphabetic order- 9, 10, 119

### **V. Literary Style - Division**

1. Psalms of praise- 8, 117
2. Psalms of Laments- 13, 80
3. Psalms of Confidence - 11, 16, 23, 46, 121
4. Thanksgiving Declaration Psalms- 9, 136
5. Royal Psalms- 2, 18, 20, 21, 28, 44, 72, 101, 110, 132
6. Wisdoms Palms: Torah Psalms- 1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 119
7. Historical Psalms- 78, 105, 106
8. Enthronement Psalms / Zion psalms- 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122
9. Liturgical Psalms.

### **VI. Various Methodological Approaches**

There are three important approaches in the study of Psalms:

- i) the historical-critical approach, which is mainly based on **historical criticism**, i.e., reading the *text in its historical setting*;

- ii) the cult functional approach that principally focuses on **form criticism**, i.e., reading the *text in its life settings*;
- iii) the canonical approach which is chiefly grounded on **redaction or literary criticism**, i.e., reading the *text in its literary context*.

The analysis of the text applies the technique of analysing the ancient Hebrew poetry. The important terms of the poetical analysis and in the Hebrew poetical analysis are as follows.

- i) **Colon (sticho, verset):** is a rhythmic line (clause) of poetry.” A colon, which conveys a meaningful idea, is the basic unit of classical poetry. Very often, a colon comprises of a half of a poetical verse but in the long verses there can be more cola and a colon generally contain two to five words or accents.
- ii) **Verse or line:** the higher unit of the colon in the poetry is a verse. A verse can be comprised of monocolon, bicola, and tricola or even of tetracola. The grouping of two lines is called couplet and the grouping of three lines is a triplet and the literary unit formed of four lines is called quatrain.
- iii) **Strophe and Stanza:** the higher literary units of the verses in a poem are strophes and stanzas. “The stanza is a subunit with in a poem, and a strophe is a subunit within a stanza.”

The relations between the different units of the poetry are explored by identifying the Parallelism in the poetry. Parallelism describes the congruence (or lack thereof) of comparable elements in corresponding lines of Hebrew poetry. Other poetical devices that help the structural analysis of the poetry are Chiasm (symmetry) and inclusio (inclusion).

### **Messianic Frame of the Psalter**

Studies in the Psalms and the Psalter, suggests that there is a messianic frame in the Psalter. The proposed messianic frame includes the **Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89, 110, 132 & 144**. Psalm 2, is the corner stone of the messianic Psalms, indicate its relation to other Psalms in the proposed messianic frame. The literary structure analysis of the Psalms gives a concentric structure that climaxes the Messiah or his characteristics to every Psalm.

The discussions on the frame of the Psalter are based on two previous studies, namely the royal covenant frame of G. Wilson and the messianic frame proposed by A. Mello. Both of them have proposed a wisdom frame, which corresponds to the royal or messianic frame. Both of them suggests how the messianic frame significant and unique. A literary analysis of the Psalms of

messianic frame brings out the literary, thematic, structural and functional links among the Psalms of this frame. Further it reveals the messianic figure in the Psalter. Wilson's frame of the Psalter places Psalms 2; 72; 89; 144 into the royal covenant frame and Psalms 1; 73; 90; 107; 145 are in the wisdom frame. The wisdom Psalms are placed as a frame to the whole the Psalter. The double frame of the Psalter suggested by Mello has Ps 2; **45**; 72; 89; **110**; 144 in the Messianic frame, and Ps 1; 37; 49; 73; 90; 112 and 145 in the wisdom frame. There is a wisdom Psalm from each book of the Psalter. There is also a messiah Psalm each from the first three books. There is no inclusion of the messianic Psalm from the fourth book, but two messianic Psalms are included from fifth book. The corresponding relation between wisdom Psalms and messianic Psalms are clearer in this frame. Concerning the messianic frame Mello has added Ps 45 and 110 to that of Wilson. He justifies the addition of these Psalms.

With regard to Psalm 45, it is in a key position. It is the centre Psalm of the first block of *Koraite* Psalms (Ps 42-49). Goulder argued that Koraite Psalms are Psalms of festival, and Psalm 45 was sung on the first day of the festival, whereas Ps 42-44 are pre-festal songs. The prevailing theme in Ps 42-44 is the request and lament for the deliverance. The Psalm 45 has the key position of the Koraite Psalms, which seemed to be placed intentionally. Psalm 45 presents the Messiah whose reign is forever. Psalms 46-48 are praises of YHWH for his defense. The Koraite block concludes with one wisdom Psalm (Ps 49).

Psalm 110 is the hub Psalm of the fifth book of the Psalter. Besides occurring in the middle of the seven Psalms (Ps 107-113), Psalm 110 joins two different groups of Psalms together. The prevailing trend in Psalms 107-109 is a cry for deliverance, whereas Psalms 111-113 overflow with praise for YHWH, who has given deliverance. While Psalms 107-109 depict YHWH's people in distress and their cries for deliverance. Psalm 107 is a thanksgiving for the deliverance from distress. Psalm 108 and 109 are request for deliverance. Psalms 111 and 113 are Psalms of praise and Psalm 112 is a Torah Psalm. Psalm 110 assures that YHWH will give victory to his people, and Psalms 111-113 record praise for YHWH who is able to deliver his people from their enemies. Psalm 110 provides an answer to Israelites' cries for deliverance and a reason for YHWH's people to praise him. Furthermore, Psalm 110 precedes the jubilant Halleluyah group Psalms 111-117. This also suggests the messianic theme is the central purpose.

Wilson's Covenant Frame did not take into account the covenant hope that is well expressed in Psalm 110. Mello's frame clearly presents that the Psalm 110 retakes the messianic hope. Thus,



it is reasonable to add the Ps 45 and 110 in the messianic frame because Ps 45 links the beginning of the second book and Ps 110 relinks the messianic hope that collapsed in the fourth book.

### **A New Proposal of The Frame of The Psalter**

After considering both Wilson’s and Mello’s proposal of the double frame of the Psalter and accepting basically their suggestion of the frame, a further addition of Psalm 119 to the wisdom frame and Psalm 132 to the messianic frame, are considered. Psalm 119, is the most important wisdom (Torah) Psalm in the Psalter. Psalm 119, is intentionally placed in between the collection of Halleluya Psalms (111-118) and Psalms of ascent (120-134). Thus Psalm 119 is in a key position. Psalms 132, a messianic Psalm, also stands in a key position. It is placed at the end of the Psalms of ascent.

Psalm 132 is the key Psalm of the micro group of Psalms 130-134 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> section of the *ascent Psalm*. According to Loren D. Crow the original Psalms in the collection of Psalms of ascent are Ps 120 and 123-131. Psalm 132 seem to have found its place there only after the redaction. The differences of the Psalm 132 from other Psalms of this group support the idea that the Psalm is a result of redaction process. Psalm 132 is longer than all other Psalms of this group. The step parallelism is not found in this Psalm. There is no repeated phrase in this Psalm, which is a characteristic of the Psalms of ascent. Thus Psalm 132 has an intentionally placed position. Therefore, is reasonable to add Psalm 132 to the redaction frame of the Psalter.

Wisdom Psalms- 1 37 49 73 90 119 145

Messianic Psalms- 2 45 72 89 110 132 144

In this proposed frame, the Psalms are not only from every book of the Psalter, but it associates all the important collections of the Psalter.

### **Messianic frame of Ps 110**

#### **Literary Structure**

1 לְדוֹד מְזֻמּוֹר ' A

נֶאֱמַר יְהוָה לֵאדֹנָי // שָׁב לִימִינִי

2 : עַד־אֲשִׁית אֲבִיבָהּ // הַדָּם לְרִגְלֶיהָ B

3 : מִטֶּה־עֶזְבֶּהּ // יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן // רְדֵה בְּקֶרֶב אֲבִיבָהּ

: עֲמֹה נִדְבַת בְּיוֹם חֵילָהּ // בְּהַרְרֵי-קִדְשׁ מִרְחֵם מְשֻׁחָר // כָּטַל יִלְדֹתֶיהָ

4 נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחַם // אַתְּהִי־פֹהֵן לְעוֹלָם X  
 עַל־דְּבַרְתִּי מִלְכִי־צֶדֶק // : אֲדַנִּי עַל־יְמִינֶךָ

מְחַץ בְּיוֹם־אָפוֹ מְלָכִים: // \* יָדִין בְּגוֹיִם מְלֵא גִוִּיּוֹת מְחַץ רֹאשׁ // עַל־אֲרָץ רַבָּה B<sup>1</sup>  
 מִנְחַל בְּדָרְךָ יִשְׁתָּה // עַל־כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ A<sup>1</sup>

In the text of the BHS, Psalm 110 has 7 verses, which are separated with the main disjunctive accent silluk. Considering the main disjunctive accent ‘atna, all the verses are divided into two, The long verses (vv. 1. 2. 3. 4. 6) are further divided considering the disjunctive accents ‘רַיִן הַלְּ and ‘אֲבַר. Thus, we have 20 cola in this poem. The 20 cola are divided into 5 strophes:

- I v. 1, tetracolon;
- II vv. 2-3, hexacolon;
- III vv. 4-5a, tetracolon;
- IV vv. 5b-6, tetracolon;
- V v. 7, bicolon.

The divisions into strophes are based on the theme of the strophe.

**First strophe (v. 1)**

נֹאֵם יְהוָה לְאֲדֹנָי // שָׁב לְיְמִינִי  
 : עַד־אַשִׁית אִיבֶיךָ // הָלֵם לְרַגְלֶיךָ  
 The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand,  
 while I make your enemies your footstool.

The first strophe, which is a couplet of two bicolon, presents the oracle of YHWH who appoints Adoni- נֹאֵם יְהוָה לְאֲדֹנָי . The cola of the first strophe are parallel with the final assonance of the cola. The first two cola end with the suffix of first personal singular נִי (v. 1a // v. 1b) and the other two cola end with the suffix of second personal singular with plural nouns יך (v. 1c // v. 1d). Thus, the unity of the strophe is parallel in pattern of colon aa<sup>1</sup> bb<sup>1</sup>. The main figures (YHWH, Adoni, and the poet and enemies) of the psalm are introduced in this strophe.

**Second Strophe (Vv. 2-3)**

מִטָּה עֲזָךְ // יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן // רֹדֶה בְּקִרְבֵּי אִיבֶיךָ :  
 : עֲמֹךְ נִדְבַת בְּיוֹם חֵילֶךָ // בְּהַרְרֵי־קִדְשׁ מִרְחֹם מִשְׁחָר // כְּטֵל יִלְדֶתֶיךָ  
 The rod of your might// the LORD extends your strong rod from Zion// Have dominion over  
 your enemies!  
 Yours is princely power from the day of your birth// In holy splendor before the daystar// like  
 dew I begot you.

The second strophe, which is a couplet of two tricolon, has YHWH's commission to Adoni to conquer the enemies and reference to the day of power. The final assonance of the first and third colon of couplet are parallel with the suffix of the second personal singular  $\eta$  (v. 2a // v. 2c) and (v. 3a // v. 3c). The second colon of each line is parallel with the synonymous terms  $\eta$  and  $\eta$ . Thus there is the literary unity of the strophe in colon pattern aba // a<sup>1</sup>b<sup>1</sup> a<sup>1</sup>.

### Third Strophe (Vv. 4-5a)

נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם // אֲתָהּ פֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם  
עַל־דְּבַרְתִּי מֶלְכִי צֶדֶק // אֲדַנִּי עַל־יְמִינָהּ

The LORD has sworn and will not waver: //“You are a priest forever //  
in the manner of Melchizedek”// At your right hand is the Lord

The third strophe, the centre of the poem, is a tetracolon, which includes a couplet of two bicolon. The strophe is a remembrance about the covenant of YHWH. In this tetracolon the cola of both couplets are parallel with their assonance of the final words. The two cola of first line ends with the same sound ( $\eta$ ) and the two cola of the second couplet ends with similar sound ( $\eta$  and  $\eta$ ). Thus, the strophe has the literary unity in the pattern of the final assonance of the cola aa<sup>1</sup>bb<sup>1</sup>.

### Fourth Strophe (Vv. 5B-6)

מָחַץ בַּיּוֹם־אֲפֹ מְלָכִים: \*// יָדִין בְּגוֹיִם מְלֹא גְרוֹת  
מָחַץ רֹאשׁ // עַל־אֲרֶץ רַבָּה:

He crushes kings on the day of his wrath// He judges among the nations,  
He hath completed the carcasses// Hath crushed the head over the mighty earth.

The fourth strophe (vv. 5b-6) is a tetracola, which includes a couplet of two bicolon. The strophe presents the themes related to the second strophe. Here we have reference to YHWH's day of wrath and Adoni's conquering of the enemies. The unity of the strophe is seen in the parallel structure of the cola in the strophe. The first two cola of both line of the couplet begin with the same verb  $\eta$  and the object of this verb is the enemies, which are presented in the couplet by the two different terms ( $\eta$  and  $\eta$ ). The indirect object of the verb,  $\eta$ , is also stands for the parallel colon. The first two cola of the couplet are parallel. The last two cola of the couplet are also parallel. The term  $\eta$  in the second colon of the first line is parallel with the term  $\eta$  in the second colon of the second line. Thus the cola of the strophe are parallel in the pattern ab a<sup>1</sup>b<sup>1</sup>.

### Fifth Strophe (v. 7)

מִנְחַל בְּדָרֶךְ יִשְׁתֶּה // עַל־כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ:

He shall drink of the brook in the way// therefore shall he lift up the head.

The fifth strophe (v. 7) is a bicolon, which express the victory of Adoni. The unity of two cola is found in its parallel structure of two cola with imperfect form of the verb (יָרִים and יִשְׁתָּה) in both cola. Here Adoni is appointed by his actions.

### **Literary Structure of the Psalm**

A YHWH appoints the Adoni

B YHWH commissions Adoni to *conquer the enemies* on day of forces.

**X YHWH established the covenant**

B' YHWH *conquer the enemies* for Adoni on day of wrath

A' Adoni is appointed on earth

### **Conclusion**

The first (v. 1) and fifth (v. 7) strophes (A A') are linked with antonymous parallel terms רָגַל and שָׂאֵף. The second (vv. 2-3) and fourth (vv. 5b-6) strophes (BB') are linked with the synonymous and the phrases. The third strophe (X) is the centre of the poem, which the Psalmist desired to highlight. Thus the whole poem has a concentric chiasmic structure as A B X B' A'. The strophes of the poem are united also thematically. The first strophe and the last strophe have the theme *YHWH who appoints Adoni*. In the first strophe, we have the oracle and in the last strophe the fulfilment of the oracle. In the second strophe, YHWH commissioned Adoni to conquer the enemies on the day of forces and its counterpart. The fourth strophe presents YHWH who conquers the enemies on the day of wrath. The central strophe presents the covenant of YHWH.

Ancient studies of Psalms considered Psalms as Davidic origin. The literary critical studies brought out the opinion that the hymns of the Psalter are purposefully organized. The redaction of the Psalter is based on the Davidic character. The study on the term Messiah has shown that the Davidic character and Messianic hope is very much related. Therefore, the Davidic covenant frame of the Psalter is to be understood as a Messianic Frame of the Psalter. The Psalms of the proposed messianic frame together with the wisdom frame link not only the five books of the Psalter, but also it stands a stitching frame for all the important major collections of the Psalter. The "psalms 'mediate' to us the voice of Jesus, for through them we learn to understand that He is God, unapproachable in His holiness and yet full of condescension, and that at the same time He is man, forlorn and abandoned, and yet exalted beyond all understanding. The Psalter from early times won for itself a firm place in Christian worship and liturgy. Church followed the precedent of the synagogue in using the book of psalms as a prayer book. By her use of the psalms the Church declares that she belongs to the people of Israel and by concluding them with the Trinitarian doxologies she makes it clear that it is no more Jewish but Christian prayer.