

Praise in Book II: Canonical Context

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Psalter, Book II, Elohist Psalter, Elohim, Yahweh, Zion, Maskil, David, Solomon, Lament

Abstract

Book Two of the Psalter (Psalms 42–72) serves as a distinct structural unit within the fivefold division of the Hebrew Psalter, mirroring the Mosaic Pentateuch. It is primarily characterized as the "Elohist Psalter" due to its overwhelming preference for the divine title Elohim over the personal divine name Yahweh, as demonstrated through parallel texts like Psalm 14 and Psalm 53. The narrative arc of Book Two moves intentionally from deep personal and communal laments over God's perceived absence toward divine presence in Zion, culminating in royal psalms and vibrant hymns of praise. Ultimately, this collection transitions from the prayer of an enfeebled King David to the prosperous reign of King Solomon, concluding with formal doxological markers.

Outline

I. Introduction and Canonical Context of Book Two

A. Fivefold Division of the Psalter

1. Parallel structure with the Mosaic Pentateuch (Torah)
2. Division of Psalms into five distinct books (Book I: 1–41, Book II: 42–72, Book III: 73–89, Book IV: 90–106, Book V: 107–150)
3. Doxological sign-offs and double "Amen" markers ending each book

B. Compositional Span and Collections in Book Two

1. Timeframe of development (~1000 BC to post-exilic period ~586 BC)
2. Sons of Korah collection (Psalms 42–49)
3. Asaph Psalm insertion (Psalm 50 paired thematically with Psalm 51)
4. Second Davidic collection (Psalms 51–70)
5. Solomon's psalm and sign-off (Psalm 72: "This concludes the prayers of David")

II. The Elohist Psalter (Psalms 42–83)

A. Divine Name Preferences and Statistical Shift

1. Minimal occurrence of Yahweh (27 times in Book II) versus Elohim (131 times)
2. Contrast with the rest of the Psalter (5:1 ratio favoring Yahweh)
3. Books I, IV, and V favor Yahweh (~6:1), while Books II and III favor Elohim (~6:1)

B. Comparative Evidence of Textual Shifting

1. Parallel texts in Psalm 14 (Book I) and Psalm 53 (Book II)

2. Systematic substitution of Yahweh ("LORD") with Elohim ("God") across identical verses

III. Macro-Narrative Flow of Book Two: From Lament to Praise

- A. Initial Laments and the Question of Divine Absence (Psalms 42–45)
 1. Psalms 42 and 43 formed as an introductory pair with repeated refrain ("Why are you downcast, O my soul?")
 2. Taunt of the enemy: "Where is your God?"
 3. Shift from individual petition (Psalms 42–43) to communal lament (Psalm 44: "we, us, our")
 4. Royal wedding psalm celebrating the king (Psalm 45)
- B. Divine Answer: Presence in Zion (Psalms 46–48, 51–55)
 1. Zion as the holy dwelling place of the Most High (Psalms 46–48)
 2. Expansion of God's reign from Mount Zion to all nations (Psalm 47)
 3. Continuation of the Zion motif through penitential and wisdom contexts (Psalms 51–55)
- C. Sacrifice, Sin, and Instructional Groupings
 1. Impotence of wealth in the face of death (Psalm 49)
 2. Divine self-sufficiency/aseity in worship (Psalm 50: "cattle on a thousand hills")
 3. True sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51)
 4. Grouping of Maskil psalms (Psalms 52–55) and connection to Jeremiah 9
 5. Grouping of Miktam psalms (Psalms 56–60)
- D. Culmination in Praise and Regal Succession (Psalms 63–72)
 1. Experience of God's presence in the sanctuary (Psalm 63)
 2. Hymns of praise resound (Psalms 65–68)
 3. Transition from enfeebled David (Psalm 71 / 1 Kings 1) to triumphant Solomon (Psalm 72 / 1 Kings 2–3)
 4. Concluding double praise, double "Amen", and subscription