

Praise in Book II of the Psalms: Three Characters (King, Petitioner, Enemy)

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Abstract

This resource examines the dynamic interaction among three primary characters in Book II of the Psalms (Psalms 42–72): the Divine King, the suffering petitioner, and the hostile enemy. It grounds this study within canonical and historical contexts, including the five-book structure of the Psalter and the editorial characteristics of the Elohistic Psalter. The narrative structure demonstrates how the aggressive actions of the enemy drive the vulnerable petitioner to cry out for divine intervention, prompting the sovereign King to deliver and judge with righteousness and steadfast love. Ultimately, this divine rescue transforms the petitioner's deep lament and emotional distress into public vows of praise, sacrifice, and community worship.

Outline

I. Canonical and Historical Context of Book II of the Psalms

A. The Five-Book Structure of the Psalter

1. Matching the Five Books of Moses (Mosaic Torah)
2. Division of Book II (Psalms 42–72)
3. Editorial development over 400 years from David to the Exile

B. Literary Formats and Collections in Book II

1. Sons of Korah collection (Psalms 42–49)
2. Second Davidic collection and transitional Psalms (Psalms 51–70, 71–72)
3. Specialized groupings: Maskils (Psalms 52–55), Mikhtams (Psalms 56–60), and Hymns (Psalms 64–68)

C. The Elohistic Psalter Features

1. Preference for Elohim over Yahweh in Psalms 42–83 (approx. 6:1 ratio)
2. Comparison of parallel texts: Psalm 14 (Yahweh) versus Psalm 53 (Elohim)

II. The First Character: The King (Divine and Human)

A. The King Metaphor in Old Testament Theology

1. The primary Old Testament metaphor for God as Sovereign King

2. Comparison with New Testament "Father" metaphor
3. Covenantal framework (Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Davidic) established by the King

B. Roles and Actions of the Divine King

1. Defender and protector of the vulnerable (orphans, widows, the needy)
2. Judge who executes justice (Mishpat) and righteousness (Zedek)
3. Defeater and subduer of hostile enemies

C. Reinterpreting Psalm 23 through Royal Imagery

1. Integration of shepherd imagery with Royal Near Eastern kingly metaphors
2. Seamless connection between shepherd guidance and royal banquet host

D. The Spatial Dimension of Royal Rule

1. Reign centered in Zion, the Holy Mountain, and City of the Great King
2. Expansion from Zion to universal rule across the entire earth

E. Royal Attributes of God

1. Hesed (steadfast, covenantal love) and Emet (faithfulness/truth)
2. Derivative protection metaphors: Rock, Fortress, Refuge, Strong Tower

III. The Second Character: The Petitioner / Psalmist

A. Identity and Spiritual Disposition

1. A needy individual crying out in distress, lament, and longing
2. Intimate thirst for the living God (Psalms 42 and 63)

B. The Emotional Range of the Psalmist

1. Distress, depression, and spiritual anxiety under enemy taunts
2. Deep angst from betrayal by close personal friends (Psalm 55)
3. Experiencing raw feelings of abandonment, shame, and mortality

C. The Movement from Lament to Hope and Praise

1. Internal dialogue urging hope in God ("Why are you downcast, O my soul?")
2. Remembrance of past worship and procession to the sanctuary
3. Vows to offer freewill sacrifices and public praises upon rescue

IV. The Third Character: The Enemy

A. Metaphorical Descriptions of the Hostile Forces

1. Ravenous wild beasts and lions with sharp teeth
2. Venomous snakes and cobras
3. Prowling wild dogs roaming the city at night

B. Moral and Behavioral Characteristics

1. Trust in personal wealth rather than God
2. Deceitful speech, lies, slander, and boastful evil
3. Treachery, hypocrisy, and disregard for divine instruction

C. Aggressive Actions Against the Petitioner

1. Devising plots, traps, snares, and nets for the righteous

2. Continuous taunting, mocking, and attempting to devour the suffering
3. Inflicting shame, scorn, and persecution

V. Synthesis: The Dynamic Mechanism of Praise in Book II

A. The Triadic Interplay

1. The Enemy attacks, plots against, and mocks the Petitioner
2. The Petitioner laments, cries out, and seeks refuge in God
3. The Divine King intervenes, rescues the Petitioner, and judges the Enemy

B. The Foundation of Praise

1. Praise as a direct response to divine rescue and answered prayer
2. Historic parallels: Exodus deliverance and creation as foundational grounds for worship
3. Fulfillment of vows in the assembly, testifying to God's salvation