DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE POOR IN PSALMS 2-89

W. DENNIS TUCKER, JR.
dennis_tucker@baylor.edu
George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, Waco, TX 76798

Within the last two decades, the shape and shaping of the Psalter has received significant attention. Although the more traditional forms of historical-critical research on the Psalter continue to yield valuable insights, there are new questions emerging concerning the shape of the Psalter. The primary focus of this study is the shape of Pss 2-89—often cited as Books I-III in the Psalter. This study suggests that the language of the poor expressed in these psalms recasts the ideology present in this collection. The language of kingship expressed in Pss 2-89 becomes democratized—the call for social justice and renewal of society, which is typically reserved for a king, is transferred to the people.

Beginning with Gerald Wilson’s work on the editing of the Hebrew Psalter, there has been a general consensus concerning the shape of Books I-III. Wilson argued that in Pss 2, 72, and 89, there is a pro-

---


2For example, the significance of the form-critical approach has been reinforced through the recent works of Erhard Gerstenberger (Psalms, Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry [FOTL XIV; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988]; Psalms, Part 2 and Lamentations [FOTL XV; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001]).
gression of thought concerning kingship and the Davidic covenant. According to Wilson, Ps 2 introduces kingship, Ps 41 indicates that the promises made to David are secure, and Ps 72 suggests that these promises are now passed on to the descendents of David. The glory of the Davidic covenant, however, quickly fades in Ps 89, with the psalmist announcing the failure of that covenant. Yet as Wilson has noted, Ps 89 does express the hope for the restoration of the Davidic line and the nation as a whole. Central to this line of argumentation is that the royal psalms are intended as historical references to the kings of Israel and Judah—they are not as Childs has argued, "a witness to the messianic hope which looked for the consummation of God's kingship through his anointed one."

Such reading takes seriously the psalms that appear at critical junctures in the first three books, but it may not exhaust all the possible meanings. Based upon evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as his observations related to editorial technique, Wilson has clearly demonstrated that Books I-III appear to be an earlier collection to which Books IV and V were appended later. If Books I-III did appear as an earlier collection apart from Books IV and V, then I would like to propose another reading for that collection, one that offers a different interpretation of the royal psalms that appear at the editorial seams, namely Pss 2, 41, 72, and 89.

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{3}}\text{Gerald Wilson, The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter, 209.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{4}}\text{Ibid., 211-214.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{5}}\text{Gerald Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," JSOT 35 (1986): 91.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{6}}\text{Brevard Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 517.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{7}}\text{Wilson, Editing of the Hebrew Psalter, 63-90. See also J. A. Sanders, The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1967), and more recently, Peter Flint, The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll and the Book of Psalms (Leiden: Brill, 1997).}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{8}}\text{Although there are other royal psalms within the first three books of the Psalter, those at the seams appear to suggest a redactional intent. The cumulative effect generated by the redactional schema may influence the interpretation of the royal psalms that appear within the collection—but such an issue is beyond the scope of the present inquiry.}\]