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Introduction

Issues of Life and Death in the Ancient Near East

There is no age or culture in which apprehension about death and what comes after is utterly lacking. Even in our modern era, TV shows such as "Paranormal State" and "Ghostly Encounters" prove that an interest in afterlife and immortality will always be a current topic. The problem with ghosts, however, is that they do not adhere to orthodox belief patterns. There is just no official accountability in ghostly culture. The shades tend to not cooperate with scientific experiments, nor do they show up in laboratory test tubes. They cannot be caught in a net or sucked into a container as in the movie *Ghostbusters*.

In the HB, particularly in the Book of Psalms, the Book of Job, and the Prophets, there are many references to *sheol,* the residence of all ghosts, the ancient Israelite version of the nether world of the ANE. Rather than offering a timeless, theological, systematic understanding of the afterlife, references appear to be contradictory. Does everyone go there or just the wicked? Is there a final glorious resurrection for the righteous or is the dust of *sheol* the resting place for all for eternity? Who rules in *sheol*—Yahweh or some foreign Lord of Death? Are the references to *sheol* a reflection of cultural beliefs, or were they dictated by God? In the ANE, including the HB, there are few explicit references to a blissful afterlife in heaven where the righteous spend eternity with

loved ones and their deity. Those HB passages that hint at immortality are balanced by others suggesting that a grim and dusty existence in *sheol* is the final fate for man and beast alike. The two men who were purported to have escaped death, Enoch and Elijah, did not linger in the earthly environs to describe or explain their new plane of existence.

A few tantalizing insinuations, one of which is found in Ps 49, suggest that there is a redemptive deliverance for the righteous from *sheol* by Yahweh, who will receive (take up) the believer to wherever Yahweh eternally exists. The psalm is excruciatingly vague, leaving us hungry for more explicit information. However, if read in the various contexts of the culture and literature of the times, Ps 49 takes on new dimensions and becomes more understandable. One such context is The Korahite collection of psalms, which appears have been written or edited together to function as a worship drama, reminding the righteous follower of God's faithfulness in delivering them from former crises. He gave them rain in its season, protection from enemies, and a blessed city and Temple. Psalm 49 and the Korahite Psalter may have been used yearly for the pilgrimage to Zion, perhaps during the harvest when one year ended and another began and the ground awaited the rain to aid in the next year's planting.

Another context to be applied includes Pss 16 and 73. Along with Ps 49, these psalms paved the way for a full-blown theology of resurrection and judgment day, which came full circle in the Talmudic and Apocryphal literature of the Second Temple era. The third important context involves Gen 1–3 and the culture of goddess and serpent worship. This surprising cultural insight from the early years of Israel's slow transition to monotheism sheds light on both early Genesis and Ps 49. Linguistic similarities between Gen 1–3 and Ps 49 suggest that the passages are connected somehow and that the message is similar: right living leads to eternal life and wrong choices pave the road to death.

Humans have always been preoccupied with the inevitability of death and the hope of immortality. Genesis 6:1–3 tells the story of a time when humans began to multiply on the earth, and violence erupted everywhere they went. Yahweh hated the violence, so he altered the biological clock that increases or diminishes longevity, bringing the human lifespan down to a mere one hundred twenty years. Today, many of us would be delighted to live so long. With modern advances in medical science and nutrition, that desire need not sound so elusive,

since there are people alive in the world today (2008) who are 110 years old or older.[1] Some of these centenarians live simple, rural lives with a healthy diet and plenty of exercise. Several people in Scripture are said to have lived a similar span of life: Moses died at 120; his brother Aaron was 123 at death; their sister Miriam was older than both. Other biblical claims from what we would designate as the Late Bronze Age include Levi, 137; Kohath, 133; Amram, 137 (Exod 6:16, 18, 20). Later claims include Jehoiada, 130 (2 Chron 24:15); Job, 140 (Job 42:16); Tobit, 112 (Tob 14:2); Tobias, 117 (Tob 14:14); and a reference to some life spans being 100 years (Sir 18:9). The writer of Ps 90 is not so optimistic, however, and offers seventy to eighty years as the outer range of human longevity (v. 10). He encourages people to count their years carefully and gain wisdom (v. 12) since all humans ultimately return to dust. "You sweep them away," the psalmist says. "They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers" (vv. 5–6). Psalm 90 has little to offer the seeker of answers about the afterlife and eternity. The plea of the psalmist, who felt discouraged and pummeled by life, is modest by comparison. Let us enjoy some of the life we live here and "prosper the works of our hands" (v. 17).

Of course, the long-lived Bible characters are mentioned for the very reason that they were the remarkable exception to the rule. They lived in a world unpolluted by auto and factory emissions, and that purity of atmosphere may have supported a healthier ozone layer. During times of prosperity, their daily existence included exercise, whole grain emmer wheat and barley, olive oil, figs, honey, eggs, roast duck and goose, and vegetables stewed in savory spices, all grown in soil that was not as depleted of resources as our soil is today.[2] Their belief in the

1. In 2003 a report was published about a Chechnyan woman named Zabani Khakimova who was 124. She had seven great-great grandchildren, and was still living a mobile life in her home at the time of her death. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3110525.stm, July 30, 2003. Her death left three other women in the world who were 115. The Sacramento Bee reported on November 30, 2008 that one of those women, Edna Parker, recently died.

2. Num 13:23–25 describes the return of the spies sent out by Moses. It took two of them to carry a single cluster of Canaanite grapes, some figs, and some pomegranates. The name of the town of Eshcol was a memorial to that remarkable cluster of grapes. This wilderness moment, added to the phrase 'flowing with milk and honey,' depicts a fruitful land.

protection and blessing of God would reduce the stress of the possibility of immanent disaster. If they somehow avoided the depredations of famine, war, disease, wild animals, injury, and murder, they had ideal conditions in their environment to gather in a great harvest of years.

Nevertheless, the grim reaper had a full complement of methods to dispatch the mortal whose fate was more prosaic. Fields could be burned by enemies, villages could be raided by marauders, and towns could be overrun by a foreign host or even a determined group of brigands.[3] Men could be lanced, women raped, and babies thrown against the wall. The Israelite spies in Num 13:32 complained of a land with fortified cities and tall inhabitants, a land that "devours its inhabitants." The life expectancy in Egypt was thirty to thirty-five years as bodies were ravaged by arthritis, bone tumors, viral trachoma, parasitic tapeworms, hookworm, roundworm, and blood flukes.[4] Psalm 91 lists a host of dread fates that all humans feared: the snare of the fowler (a destructive trap, deception, or ambush), pestilence, plague, terror by night, the arrow that flies by day, and the destruction that wastes at noonday. Men were eaten by lions, women died in childbirth, children were bitten by snakes, and travelers were brutalized by brigands.

When times were good and food plentiful, the wealthy could anticipate a comfortable life. One could take enough bribes and foreclose on enough property to dine and sleep in luxury. Bones could wax fat and cheeks could bloom with health. Money loaned at high interest could pay for teak furniture with ivory inlay or servants to pour endless cups of wine. Sheets could be soft, imported clothing and jewelry exquisite, and music could soothe the soul. A wealthy person might come to think he or she could buy their way out of anything, forgetting that *sheol* (the grave) cannot be bribed, bought, or forestalled in any way. In fact, the only real certainty in life was the tomb. Such were the issues of life and death about which the psalmist ruminated as he laid fingers to the lyre and sang to the Korahite choir leader the "riddle" that we

3. The marauding Habiru took many cities in Canaan and on the Lebanon coast in a short space of time by cutting off supplies to a city. When townspeople were desperate for food and supplies, the invaders demanded that the inhabitants surrender their mayor. Thus they took Palestine city by city until the mayors were begging the Egyptian Pharaoh, whom they served, to come rescue them. Many did not survive to be rescued. See, for example, Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, 141 (EA 73) and 317 (EA 271).

4. *What Life Was Like on the Banks of the Nile*, 38.

designate as Ps 49. The wealthy lived in denial that they would die and leave their worldly possessions behind. Conversely, the poor felt that eternity was their only hope of relief. The author of Ps 49 reminds all men and women everywhere that death is inevitable and that all pride turns to ashes and worms. Estates are left behind. Death feeds on the corpse. What happens to the soul is the real thrust of the author's production and the theme of this present exploration. The author painted afterlife with the broadest of brushes. His focus was the pride of the rich, but hints at hope for the righteous. Because the unknown singer gives us scant information as to time and location of authorship and the theological culture which produced the psalm, the exact timeframe of his admonition may never be known.

Could the writer of the psalm have been a woman? It is unlikely, but certainly possible. Female songwriters were not unknown in either ancient Israel or the broader Near East. Deborah's song comprises all of Judg 5, and Hannah's psalm is recorded in 1 Sam 2. One of the oldest songs ever recorded was written by a priestess from Ur named Enheduanna. She edited a collection of hymns and wrote a hymn of her own in the twenty-third century BCE. Her hymn to Inanna was reminiscent of David's pleas for help and vindication. She was history's first female author.[5] Female singers were also a regular feature of Mesopotamian temple practice. Ezra 2:65; Ps 68:25; and 1 Sam 18:7 describe women participating in festal and temple worship services or creating songs that celebrate contemporaneous events. Ezra 2:65 records two hundred male and female singers who returned from Babylon with the Judean captives. Lastly, the story of Judith ends with a psalm, allegedly written by the Second Temple heroine. If the psalmist was a woman, however, her work might go unacknowledged, be partially suppressed, or be ascribed to a male author. In Exod 15:1–18 Moses is said to have sung the Song of the Sea, but 15:19–21 reads:

> When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

5. Leick, *Mesopotamia*, 26, 120–22.

> "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

Verse 21 has suggested to some scholars that Miriam was the true author of the Song of the Sea.[6] When victories were celebrated in ancient Israel, it was the women who danced with their tambourines and sang the praises of the conquering general (1 Sam 18:6-9).[7] Although female authorship of Ps 49 is a distinct possibility, for the sake of simplicity the remainder of the present work will utilize male personal pronouns in referring to the psalmist.

Definition of Terms

The terms 'cult,' 'cultic,' and 'cultus' do not refer to a false or exotic religion, but rather to that aspect of the religion of Israel that is ritualistic rather than ethical, rational, or relational. The term 'critical' stands for 'analytical' rather than an attempt to criticize biblical passages. For example, form criticism in the Psalms is a means of analyzing the text through the study of genre or literary type (lament, thanksgiving, narrative, etc) which suggests the purpose of the individual psalms. Rhetorical criticism would be a study of how the author of a passage used literary tools to formulate his argument to make it an effective piece of literature.

There are many 'variants' in the different versions of the HB. A variant may be a different word used or a phrase that is added or dropped. Words may be the same but in different eras they were spelled differently. The message is essentially the same, but a detail in the narrative may be different. 'Redactors' (editors) and scribes make the final decisions as to what is left out of the canon and what is added for the sake of clarity. Some redactors may also have been authors, but in general authors and redactor/editors are different individuals or groups.

6. For an exposition on Miriam's contribution to the Song of the Sea see Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," 14–25, 34; for a Dead Sea Scroll fragment with a lost song of Miriam and fragments with songs by other women see Brooke, "Power to the Powerless," 62–65.

7. For a discussion of terracotta figures of women playing hand drums in Iron Age Israel and the ANE, see Meyers, "Of Drums and Damsels," 16–27; see also Wright, "Music and Dance," 217.

Addressing the Historical Process

The academic trend today in biblical studies is to avoid theological issues that deal with a belief in the miraculous. Academic restraints almost require a spiritually neutral approach.[8] Although biblical characters were not perfect and had the capacity to commit egregious acts in the name of their God, a holistic approach to the motivations and goals of biblical writers and redactors must take seriously *their* belief in the supernatural. Their worldview included at least two different fates for deceased mortals, one for the righteous and one for those deserving divine justice. Belief in some form of afterlife was ubiquitous in the ANE. One trend today is to dismiss any genuine spiritual sensitivity and to substitute ambitious motivations seen in the marketplace today.

It also is important to recognize that their theology sometimes changed and coalesced over time. There is a danger of pulling passages out of context as if one statement represents what all believed in all eras. Theologians often describe doctrines as being formulated to meet some social or political agenda. Scholars who share the biblical characters' and authors' belief in supernatural possibilities seem to have lost much of their voice in the academic community. There is the impression that to express a more traditional liturgical solidarity with the psalmists is academically retroactive or prosaic. However, D. C. Mitchell's *The Message of the Psalms: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* and several of Walter Brueggemann's works have successfully addressed the spiritual issues that consumed the ANE from the viewpoint of those who take the non-material, paranormal, eternal world for granted. Whether one personally relates to the worldview of the biblical author or not, we need to let their words reflect their own world and mindset, which may greatly conflict with our own.

What more vital issue could be raised than the idea of eternal redemption? The mystical family of Korahites were, in a sense, custodians of the hope of a future redemption for the soul from *sheol*. The author of Ps 49 was expressing that familiar perception with a graphic satire, cloaked in a "riddle," associating the theme with the wisdom genre of literature. The spiritual status of those who trust in their own wealth and power will in the end be no better than that of a beast. They will miss

8. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, 84, calls this trend "methodological atheism," citing a discussion in Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 179–85.

the opportunity that God avails to avoid the gloom of *sheol*. Because Ps 49 was written in tandem with a psalter describing a trajectory of pilgrimage, it is more easily understood if read in conjunction with the whole Korahite Psalter (Pss 42–49 and 84, 85, 87, 88). Other contexts, such as the narrative history of the Korahite clan, ANE burial practices, ANE beliefs regarding the nether world, linguistic comparisons with other psalms and biblical passages, intertestamental literature, and rabbinic writings also broaden our understanding of the psalm.

The discussion at hand will consider cultural and literary concepts of afterlife in the ANE, which spanned Bronze Age Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, Ugarit, Iron Age Israel, and Second Temple/rabbinic Judea. It will be important to look closely not only at each word related to 'afterlife, 'immortality,' and 'redemption' in the context of Ps 49, but also at the broader context of the Korahite Psalter in order to enrich understanding of a psalm that leaves much unsaid. The Korahite Psalter is a group of psalms nested in Books II and III of the Psalter. The headings include the phrase, 'for the Sons of Korah.' The headings of Books I–III often refer to the era of the United Monarchy.

The current literature on Ps 49 has neglected or only lightly touched upon several important features, including its conceptual and literary relationship with Ps 73, its linguistic parallels with the creation narrative in Gen 1–3. The topic of pilgrimage and restoration theology as reflected in the Korahite Psalter has been dealt with enthusiastically in a few works, but the conclusions of each author vary and raise as many questions as they answer.[9] Such works foster a hunger for more reflection and research. Whether at the academic level or the emotional, we must ask, could the author have believed in a blissful afterlife, a bodily resurrection, and a Day of Judgment? A better question might be, in a world as primitive and superstitious as the ANE and environs, is there any way they could not at least hope for such redemption? Is this a message of poetic and theologically coded words? If the message of Ps 49 is so important, why was it written as a riddle with its significance controversial and opaque? Perhaps if we could mount a time machine

9. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, actually sees this movement and elaborates upon the idea of pilgrimage in great depth. However, his conclusions are based on the premise that a good deal of the narratives and the genealogies may be dismissed as propaganda and fiction. Therefore the question of the psalmist and pilgrimage is here revisited.

and step off into the author's era, we would encounter as much controversy and diversity then as we have now.

In any study of Ps 49, there is a need for a translation that is understandable and which accords with the developing Israelite theology of afterlife. Second, we strive for an enriched, holistic understanding of the author's intention, his background, and his mindset by examining several related literary and historical contexts which affect trends in the Korahite Psalter. A third goal will be to establish a linguistic and conceptual link between the psalm and other biblical passages that deal with life and death (such as Ps 73 and Gen 1–3).[10]

Ancient Near Eastern writers graphically depicted frightening and dreary concepts of the afterlife in their literature. The author of Ps 49 reiterates some of those ideas, warning all humankind that the wise and the arrogant rich are destined for the same fate. Yet, for some unexplained reason, he does not expect to share that fate. The question we wish to explore is, why, and what did he expect? Definitive proofs and formulated answers are unavailable with the literary and archaeological data available today, but a study of the psalm in the context of the times can excite the imagination and help the reader to understand what he might have been thinking when he wrote his opaque riddle.

The present study proceeds with a survey of the current state of scholarly investigation into Ps 49 and how it fits into the bigger picture of ancient Hebrew and Near Eastern afterlife concepts. Sources are abundant on all aspects of the psalm, including the Korahite narrative, translation, structure, relationship to Wisdom Literature, authorship, meaning of the word *sheol,* afterlife according to the surrounding political states, and development of the whole concept of redemption and judgment.

General Outline

Chapter 3 addresses the narrative of the Korahite clan, their roots in the Pentateuch, and their duties as singers, musicians, and gatekeepers in the later Temple liturgy. The Korahite Psalter has unique character-

10. As will be seen (chapter 6) there is much literature comparing Pss 16:10; 49:15; and 73:24. However, there is a special affinity between Pss 49 and 73 that warrants an expanded treatment.

istics that suggest a unity of purpose and of theological perspective. Supported heavily from the research of David Mitchell,[11] this section argues that the hope expressed by the author of Ps 49 is part of a greater body of belief and expression resident in the Korahite family ever since the Sinai wanderings when their ancestor Korah was allegedly destroyed in a rebellion against Moses. It has been argued that Pss 43–49 are a northern psalter for cultic use in the city of Dan during the fall festival. The authors of the psalter may have been northerners, but their loyalty may still have been to Shiloh in pre-monarchial days and to Zion in the tenth century and later.

Chapter 3 also addresses the general content and structure of the Korahite Psalter, how the psalms relate to one another, to the Elohistic Psalter (psalms preferring the name Elohim), to the Dead Sea Scroll Psalters, to their use of the name of God, their reference to *sheol,* and their use of the iconographic language of theology. The chapter includes a look at the historical background of the KP such as dating and contextual themes. Subheadings probe the relevance of the superscriptions, priestly belief in the power of inspired worship, the cultic purpose of personal lament, and the historical context of Zion, Jerusalem, and the Temple. Psalm 49 is difficult to date; an easier task is to trace the trajectory of its message from temporal disaster to eternal triumph, which is the ultimate end of pilgrimage.

Chapter 4 leads the reader through the individual psalms of the Korahite Psalter as a pilgrim in ancient Israel might view them. Geologic features, the culture of pilgrimage, theological themes, and emotional reactions are discussed.

Chapter 5 provides a new translation of Ps 49 and its relationship to Wisdom Literature in general. The text of the psalm is considered by several linguists to be hopelessly corrupt, making the translators' task difficult and subjective. Many scholars have emended the Hebrew until the psalm is basically rewritten. Extensive emendations, however, can distort the psalm beyond recognition. Others allow for exotic meanings that leave the reader perplexed. Leaning heavily on excellent research that has gone before, a sensible translation can resolve these difficulties. The psalm had to have made sense to the people of its day. What is incomprehensible to us today would not impress an ancient reader.

11. Mitchell, "'God Will Redeem,'" 365–84.

If the resulting message would be considered heretical compared to the mainstream theology of the past, the proposed resolution is most likely incorrect because the keepers of the literature would preserve that which was approved. One important and controversial passage in Ps 49, dividing even the best linguists and published versions, is v. 14c. This study will call for the restoration of the phrase "the upright will rule over them in the morning."

Chapter 6 will examine the ANE concepts of afterlife as expressed in their literature. Intriguing comparisons and contrasts exist with the corpus of afterlife concepts in biblical Israel. The question of whether Ps 49 refers to post-mortem afterlife is highly controversial in the academic world, as is the definition of the "redemption" hoped for by the psalmist. Two approaches are necessary to answer that question. In Part One the etymology of the word *sheol* is examined. In Part Two, an archaeological assessment of Late Bronze and Iron Age burial practices will demonstrate that a belief in life after death was common in the ANE. Sub-headings include a survey of practices in Egypt, Ugarit, and Mesopotamia as well as syncretistic customs in Israel. Apostasy in Israel enraged the prophets, particularly Isaiah, who used words like a graphic artist to describe the disappointment and spiritual death awaiting those who subscribe to Canaanite practices.

Chapter 7 offers a fresh examination of the developing perception of afterlife in the Hebrew culture and a possible connection between the wording and thought world in Ps 49 and Gen 1–3. Parallel themes of life and death, rule and beast, man and Adam, etc. reside in both works. So many are the affinities that there may be a dependence of Ps 49 on the message of Gen 1–3. That discussion will then transition into a study of ANE icons of goddess, gardens, snakes, and a man and a woman. The question is asked whether Gen 1–3, which lacks the usual ANE mythic monsters, is written with other familiar mythic iconography in mind in order to inveigh against the ubiquitous worship of goddesses and serpents. The goddess-tree of life theme is specifically associated with Asherah worship.

The chapter also examines the similarities between Pss 49, 73, 16. Psalms 73 and 49 will be related to the creation narrative in Gen 1 and 2, in which humans are exalted above the beasts of the earth. The psalmist turns that concept around in what is almost a comical but tragic satire against the arrogant rich and those opposed to *Elohim*.

These godless ones are ironically as helpless and brutish as the beasts that cannot speak or reason. Psalm 16 is allegedly Davidic and contains a rejection of ancestor worship as wickedness. It converges with Pss 73 and 49 in hinting at a hope of individual immortality.

Two more sections explore the concept of resurrection in the Hebrew Bible and how that developing doctrine became explicit in the exilic and post-exilic era of Israel's history. The Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and several rabbinic writings explicitly convey the hope of Judgment Day and resurrection. Finally, a brief discussion of Zoroastrianism demonstrates the necessity of further academic study regarding the certainty of shared concepts in the Persian/Iranian religion and the exilic portions of the Hebrew Bible. Justice cannot be done to the topic in this particular study, but similarities are noted and areas of further research are suggested.

Background Information

A brief glance at a few general works on the Psalms and psalter organization will offer a better foundation for a close look at the several layers of historical and theological context of the KP, including the origins of the Korahite clan. A comprehensive annotated bibliography is beyond the scope of this limited work. The conglomerate nature and the specialized organization of the Book of Psalms requires stepping back and looking at the larger picture. Scholars like P. Flint and J. Sanders find strong support for the premise that the Book of Psalms as a whole, and the smaller segments of it, were deliberately arranged by the final redactors to make them more meaningful and effective.

An excellent article concerning the transmission of the Psalms literature is by Peter Flint, "The Book of Psalms in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls" (1998). It is a compendium of little-known facts about the scrolls, some of which are reviewed below:

- The DSS include forty Psalm scrolls or manuscripts that incorporate psalms. Thirty-seven were found in eight locations at Qumran. Two were found at Masada and one at Naḥal Ḥever (454).

- Of one hundred fifty psalms in the MT, twenty-four are missing from the DSS, probably due to deterioration. Of Pss 1–89, nineteen are missing. Of Pss 90–150, five are gone (455).
- There are many variants in the phrasing and the organization.
- "Qumran Psalms Hypothesis": James Sanders published the Large Psalms Scroll in 1965. He felt that it reflects an early psalter and was canonical but still 'open.' Sanders argued that Pss 1–89 closed when the Essenes left Jerusalem. After that, Pss 90–150 continued to grow and develop until the second half of the first century CE.
- A chart of variances between DSS and MT shows that Books I–III, comprising Pss 1–89, were much more stable than 90–150, both in arrangement and in text. Book III was the most stable (460). Flint sees two distinct phases of book development, with 1–89 (the books that contain the entire KP and Elohistic Psalter) being the earlier works and 90–150 comprising the later works (458).
- The original DSS editors believed that David wrote close to four thousand psalms for a variety of liturgical purposes, four hundred songs, and four songs for making music over the stricken, and that they were all given by prophecy.
- Superscriptions are attested from the earliest MSS onwards.

Erhard Gerstenberger contributed an excellent chapter on Psalms in *Old Testament Form Criticism* (1974). He recites in considerable detail the history of Psalms research which includes several of the more radical theories put forth by the giants of Psalms studies. Regarding the use of psalms in cultic service, Gerstenberger reminds the academic community that we still lack much information about the festal services in ancient Israel and calls for restraint in the clamor of controversy and speculation. Considering that the annual festival with pilgrimage is oft cited in KP studies, his advice is apropos. The topic of Ps 49 and its possible festal background has invited radical textual emendations and theories. He followed that work with a two-volume set: *Psalms, Part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (1991, originally published 1988), and *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* (2001). Gerstenberger dates the

completion of the Psalter to sometime during the Persian or Hellenistic periods, 500–200 BCE, when much of Israelite worship took place away from the Temple. The smaller collections he locates earlier in history. In the 'later pre-exilic' era he lists the Asaph (78–83) and the first Korahite collections (42–49). The Elohistic collection (42–89) and the Davidic collections he places in the exilic era. Since he views all headings as later scribal additions, his era chart does not answer the question of which psalms he would assign to the tenth-century services under David, the alleged instigator of the music, and under Solomon. Gerstenberger's emphasis, however, is not the specific author, date, or event that inspired the psalm, but the social background and development which is "the matrix of all life situations."[12]

Gerald H. Wilson, in "The Shape of the Book of Psalms" (1992), rehearses the evidence for the deliberate editing and shaping of the five books of the Psalms such as author designation, genre, discontinuity of genre between books, and doxology. Wilson's linguistic study concludes that the latest psalms, some dating from the second century BCE, are found in the last third of the Psalter.[13] The final redaction of the Psalter is the work of sages who have released the psalms from the 'historical moorings' in order to infuse it with timeless application and power.

The list of works pertaining to a study of the Psalms is vast. However, the above works offer several premises: The psalms are deliberately and highly organized, a modicum of common sense and restraint will result in more understanding than a great body of wild speculation, Psalms study of the twentieth century was innovative and fruitful in our understanding, the DSS have much to offer in a greater understanding of the biblical psalms.

12. *Psalms 1*, 33.

13. Wilson, "Shape," 132; se also, Hurvitz, "Linguistic Criteria," 74–79.