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Judgment for the Saints: The Justice of God in Psalms 3–14

Jerome Skinner

God's Justice and Psalm Interpretation

In his timely *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963), Martin Luther King stated, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”¹ Another voice, Abraham Heschel, well known for his philosophical thought and social activism, is known to have said that “the opposite of good is not evil, it is indifference.” These notions of justice, their universality and timeless ethical dimensions, hold true not only in a civic sense, but are also vital regarding the moral life of God’s people because they are ingrained in the Bible’s eschatological context.² In the Book of Psalms, the petitioner’s pleas are driven by his notion of justice: whom it comes from, what it is, why it is needed, and its implications. A brief investigation of Pss 3–14 reveals the theological perspective and practical implications of the links between God’s justice and the ethical life of his people as central to understanding eschatological justice. For the Psalmist, like the prophets, *moral life is tied to God’s role in human destiny*.

The ways in which the Bible addresses the subject of justice at times has had unsettling effects, especially when it comes to the Psalter. Proclamations of judgment, protestations of innocence, and curses of the so-called imprecatory psalms have drawn out various responses regarding their application for the Christian

1. Reprinted in David Howard-Pitney, *Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and 1960s: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 2004), 74–90.

2. Biblical justice was part and parcel of covenant living. The prophets utilize two key and enduring themes throughout their writings, “justice and righteousness,” as central in the establishment of the kingdom of God. Cf. Isa 1:21, 27; 5:7, 16; 9:7; 32:16; 33:5; Jer 4:2; 9:24; 22:3; 33:15; Ezek 45:9; Hos 2:19; Amos 5:24; Zeph 3:5.

life.³ In a world where secular, relativistic, and skeptical notions about justice confine and contort the biblical message, one must answer critical objections a cohesive ethic and at the same time, present a clear understanding of the objective nature of divine justice. The issue of biblical justice is of particular importance to biblical theology and needs to be addressed from the whole canon. The overarching backdrop of justice is expressed in the revelation of God's character and covenantal Lordship regarding righteousness and unrighteousness. Whether in its immanent or eschatological perspective, God's justice rests on the very nature of his sovereignty and character. God's role as the Supreme Judge is recognized in theological circles. In light of this, it behooves readers to ask how God's sovereignty relates to justice and its implications for the individual, the church, and the world's destiny.

The Psalter vividly portrays aspects of God's justice that correspond to and elucidate the prophetic and personal focus on judgment. Several significant studies have been done on the books of Daniel and Revelation, but to my knowledge, none has yet focused specifically on the Psalter's voice in the discussion.⁴ This lack can be attributed to, among other things, understandings of what "eschatological" means in Psalm analysis.⁵ Recent gains in Psalm studies make it necessary to revisit current assumptions.⁶ The recent focus on the structure of the Psalter has added another element to the discussion of the canonical voice of the Psalter. As David Howard Jr. notes, "a shift has taken place, and the prevailing interest in Psalms studies has to do with the question of the composition, editorial unity and overall message of the Psalter as a book, a literary and canonical entity that coheres with respect to its structure and message."⁷ The literary or canonical context has encouraged many in the field of Psalm studies to see the narrative-like quality of the Psalter.⁸

3. For several different views, consult J. C. Laney, "A Fresh look at the Imprecatory Psalms," *BibSac* 138 (1981): 35–45; John N. Day, "The Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics," *BibSac* 159 (April–June 2002): 166–86; J. G. Vos, "The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms," *WTJ* 4 (May 1942): 123–138; Roy B. Zuck, "The Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1957), 45–58.

4. Hans LaRondelle's book is the only book-length treatment of the Psalms to date from an Adventist author. Aside from the DARCOM series, more recent works include Richard M. Davidson, "The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," *JATS* 21/1-2 (2010): 45–84; Jiri Moskala, "The Gospel According to God's Judgment: Judgment as Salvation," *JATS* 22/1 (2011): 28–49; Idem, "Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of a Theocentric-Christocentric Approach)," *JATS* 15/1 (Spring 2004): 138–165; Zdravko Plantak, "For The Healing Of The Nations: Repairers of Broken Walls and Restorers of God's Justice," *AUSS* 48/1 (2010): 17–27.

5. Typically, the focus in the Psalms is Messianic.

6. For instance, see David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Books of Psalms*, JSOTSup Series 252 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

7. David Howard, "The Psalms and Current Study," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 24.

8. Gordon Wenham, "Toward a Canonical Reading of the Psalms," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew et al., SAHS 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006); Idem, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Songs Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); R. E. Wallace, "The Narrative Effect of Psalms 84–89," *JHS* 11 (2011): 2–15; Nancy deClaisé-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, JSOTSup Series 222 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); David M. Howard, Jr. "Review of Reading the Psalms as a Book by Whybray, Norman," *Review of Biblical Literature* (1998).

This study will follow the strategy of a narrative reading by tracing the storyline of God's justice in a small grouping in the Psalter. This narrative reading concentrates on the final form's structure. A structural view allows a broader articulation of a point, an example, and a worldview for thought, prayer, attitudes, and actions. To trace this throughout the whole book is not feasible here. A small sampling here serves as a springboard for a richer corpus of future works.

The question of style and structure is fitting to discuss here because the Psalmist uses them to instruct us to look at God's justice through its rich poetic tapestry for our personal growth in thinking and practical life of application. The ethical is draped in the emotive. The overtones of supplication, the verbose imperative pleas, and the direct designations of moral qualities are seen in rhythmic cadence, pithy proclamations, and the metaphorical nuances of everyday life.⁹ These literary aspects help us see patterns that express composite profiles of moral life. Structural analysis leads us to think about prayer, Christian life, and ethics in dialectical terms. The art of dialogue, the interfacing of semantics and syntax in comparing psalm with psalm followed by its theological application are now seen as a part of Psalm interpretation.¹⁰ Broadening the analysis to the psalms as groups, we can perceive the thematic parallels that emerge from the individual psalm. This method, more recently and readily seen in the works of Karl Fredreich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, J. Clinton McCann, Gerald Wilson, Eric Zenger, Frank Hossfeld and others, is termed a "concatenation" reading (cf. Figure 1) by those who study the structure of the Psalter. It refers to the adjacent reading of psalms expanding to the level of groups, collections, and books.¹¹

The dynamic interaction of psalms in groups, collections, and books help the reader to hear the 'socializing' effect of structure.¹² The cumulative effect of patterns grounded in linguistic and thematic parallels creates a heightened impact on

9. William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2002).

10. For an example of this approach see J. L. Mays, *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 27–29.

11. Gerald Wilson's approach in *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* is a significant paradigm shift in Psalm studies that utilizes a methodology from which conclusions are drawn that rest on the final form of the text and interrelationships of psalms within that final form. Hence, the structure of the final shape of the text is used as the hermeneutical foundation to derive the communicative significance through the concatenations of each collection and book division. A canonical reading of the Psalter allows the reader to observe the thematic development of linguistic content and theological emphases through reading the psalms in relationship to their surrounding neighbors. See Joseph P. Brennan, "Some Hidden Harmonies of the Fifth Book of Psalms," in *Essays in Honor of Joseph P. Brennan*, ed. R. F. McNamara (Rochester, NY: St. Bernard's Seminary, 1976), 126–58; idem., "Psalms 1–8: Some Hidden Harmonies," *BTB* 10 (1980): 25–29; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 250–258.

12. Branson Woodard Jr. and Michael Travers borrowed E. D. Hirsch's word that describes the process of generic affinities that "prepare a reader to respond appropriately to the text." Branson Woodard Jr. and Michael Travers, "Literary Forms and Interpretation," in *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary of the Old Testament*, eds. D. Brent and Ronald Geise Jr. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 37.

the reader.¹³ Rather than a full exposition of each psalm, this study shows three different ways to approach a concatenated reading: structural, lexical, and thematic. First, this study justifies a case for a reading of justice based on introductory themes in the Psalter through the structure. Then Psalms 3–7 are commented on looking at the points of their lexical correspondences. Finally, a brief analysis of Psalms 9–14 articulates the broad thematic topics that emerge from the analysis of Psalms 3–7.

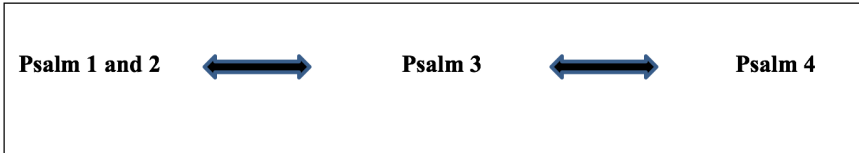


Figure 1. Concatenated or duo-directionality reading of Psalms.

Literary Context of Psalms 1 and 2 as Introductory to Psalms 3–14

The table below (Table 1) illustrates how a concatenated reading emphasizes comparative frames of reference on the contextual level. The blessed man in Ps 1 is best seen in the Messianic figure of Ps 2. The Messianic figure is typified in the portrait of the Davidic king when Pss 2 and 3 are compared. The Davidic king is typified in the accused man when comparing Pss 3 and 4. The comparisons and contrasts work primarily at the lexical level and secondarily at the thematic level. Yet, the role of the thematic subject in the psalms broadens as the theological language emphasizes the experience of the Davidic king and its implications for the relationship of the Davidic king to history, Yahweh’s covenant, and in its final form, the theology of the Psalter.

Table 1. Concatenated structural parallels of Psalm 3

	Psalm 1	Psalm 2	Psalm 3
Psalm Type	Untitled	Untitled	מזמור
Thematic subject	The Blessed Man	Messianic/Royal	Davidic King
Source of conflict	The Ungodly	Nations	Many . . . Enemies
Notation of authorship and collection	Untitled	Untitled	לדוד

13. This approach represents a reading strategy that, as Wilson states, is “another way to appreciate the ensemble that the ancient editors created and arranged in the Psalter.” Gerald Wilson, *Psalms: Vol. 1*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 237. Jon Paulien has seen this phenomenon in the book of Revelation which he calls ‘duo-directionality.’ Jon Paulien, “Looking Both Ways: A Study of the Duo-directionality of the Structural Seams in the Apocalypse” (paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Hebrews, General and Pastoral Epistles, Apocalypse of the SBL. Chicago, 19 November 1988).

Table 2. Literary Parallels between Psalms 3–14

Psalm	Genre	Crisis	Authorship/Collection
3* ¹⁴	Lament	Enemies-persecution	Davidic
4	Lament	Distress- men	Davidic
5	Lament	Enemies- deceit	Davidic
6	Lament	Enemies/Sickness- physical/spiritual	Davidic
7*	Lament	Enemies- falsely accused	Davidic
8	Hymn		Davidic
9/10	Thanksgiving/Lament	Enemies- nations	Davidic
11	Lament	Enemies- wicked	Davidic
12	Lament (communal)	Enemies- liars, boasters	Davidic
13	Lament	Enemies- the enemy, death	Davidic
14	Lament	Enemies- fools, evildoers	Davidic

By observing a larger corpus, the repetition of themes as special points of emphasis from the structural flow becomes evident. From this perspective, the nature of justice is understood in rhetorical modes where ethical predicates are based on the character and acts of God and man in relation to the two foci of the Psalter (Pss 1 and 2).¹⁵ Followed by a collection of laments, these two realities give the reader a sense of the significance of the concept of justice that follows.

The relationship between these psalms is well documented and needs little comment.¹⁶ What this shows is that what is given in general broad strokes in Pss 1 and 2 becomes specific and focused throughout 3–14 and the rest of the Psalter. More than just haphazard placement, there is a flow of thought regarding the impending end regarding the people of God. Here is where a broader reading of the Psalter sharpens one's understanding of the role of the Word of God in human destiny in Ps 1 and the function of the Messiah in God's plan for humanity in Ps 2.

14. * Indicates the presence of a Historical Superscription.

15. These two psalms are called the "doorways" to the Psalter and refer to the Word of God and the Messiah, respectively. Different designations for these two foci have been given, like *royal* and *wisdom*, or *kingship* and *Torah*. On the relationship between the two, see Gerald H. Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in *The Shape and the Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 81. On the methodological presuppositions that undergird a scholar's understanding of what constitutes a "Messianic" psalm, see Richard Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from all the Psalms* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2006), 21–30. I agree in the main with Belcher's analysis and will follow his main thrust in this article.

16. The links between Psalm 1 and 2 are clear on the lexical level, as well as in its use of imagery and puns and plays on words. In several articles, Phil Botha has noted several parallels and links between Pss 1 and 2: the lexical connections as well as in its use of imagery and plays on words. Phil Botha, "The Junction of the Two Ways: The Structure and Theology of Psalm 1," *Old Testament Essays* 4 (1991): 381–96; Idem, "The Ideological Interface Between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2," *Old Testament Essays* 18.2 (2005): 189–203; Idem, "Intertextuality and the Interpretation of Psalm 1," *Old Testament Essays* 18.3 (2005): 503–520. McCann noted, "At the beginning of Book I, Psalms 1 and 2 provide a literary context for reading Psalms 3–41 as well as for the Psalter as a whole." J. Clinton McCann Jr., "Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Hebrew Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, 103. Mays also noted, "Psalms 1 and 2 together elevate the paired topics of Torah and kingship of the Lord." James L. Mays, "The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, 16.

From one viewpoint, it is noted that “in the psalms that follow [1 and 2], the concern for the destiny of the righteous does not diminish. In fact, the vocabulary related to the righteous and their plight appears so frequently it draws constant attention to the subject.”¹⁷ As figure 2 points out, the types of crises are varied, yet there is a parallel pattern throughout where there is a residing tension between the temporal nature of the oppression of the people of God matched by calls for justice that are implored for the end of wickedness. Such a conviction in the Psalmist is built on a premise in which the trajectory of the character seen in actions is done and irritated by the wicked, the sinner, and the scornful, who are seen as the antithesis of covenant fidelity to God’s reign outlined in the Torah.¹⁸

Furthermore, God’s reign is expressly spoken of regarding his promise to David and his descendants. The Davidic dynasty, through the anointed figure, is God’s means to mediate justice throughout the world (cf. Pss 2; 110). A canonical reading of the Psalter clarifies that the cries for justice spoken directly to God are to be fulfilled through his designated mediator; the Messiah. The ethical expressions found in these laments that deal with the crisis of injustice are designations on account of one’s relation to the Messianic person, promise, and plan, and the Word of God. Jerome Creach noted that “when those within Israel do not act in accordance with God’s intentions, they become like the nations (such as Babylon) that oppose the Lord and the Lord’s anointed (Ps 2:1–3 MT) by undercutting the divine purpose that comes through Israel.”¹⁹ New Testament writers expressed a broad understanding of the work and roles of the Messianic figure of the Psalms. These included his suffering and royal dominion, as well as the roles he would serve as an anointed figure: prophet, priest, and king. These facets are brought out by the language used in the Psalms especially regarding atonement. These roles are spotlighted through a canonical reading of David’s place in the Psalter as a representative of Israel, who intercedes for the righteous, proclaims God’s will, as well as seeks the vindication of God’s character.

A close reading of Psalms 3–14 uncovers a repetition of words, phrases, and concepts that express a connection between the role of David and justice. Indeed, this grouping is held together by authorial, lexical, thematic, structural, and generic linkages.²⁰ Taken as a smaller collection,²¹ it becomes evident that there is a

17. Jerome Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2008), 1.

18. The focus on man in this collection keeps us connected to their ethical dimensions. Cf. Pss 1:1; 5:6; 7:12, 14; 8:4; 9:19; 10:18; 11:4; 12:1, 8; 14:2, where in most instances the commentary is negative.

19. Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*, 8. He also noted, “The righteous in the Psalms are those who have a right relationship with God and whose relationships with other people are governed by God’s expectations for human community,” 3. Clarification on how to understand the messianic role in the Psalms is needed. As Belcher has noted using Luke 24 as an approach to the Psalter, “The comprehensive nature of Jesus’ reference to the Old Testament is meant to demonstrate that all the Old Testament speaks of Jesus in some way, not merely those texts commonly accepted as ‘Messianic.’” Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms*, 32.

20. The present writer has tried to avoid commonalities of regular linguistic usage such as prepositions, conjunctions, and adjectives. Only those words which are semantically loaded and thematically relevant have been selected.

21. Pss 15–24 form a collection by the inclusion of entrance or processional liturgies. William Brown, “‘Here Comes the Sun!’ The Metaphorical Theology of Psalms 15–24,” in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. E. Zenger, BETL 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 259–277.

shift in the formal aspects of this collection between Psalms 3–7 and 9–14. Psalm 8 serves as a hinge psalm that brings the varied foci of each smaller unit together as shown below. Taking an all-inclusive view of the textual evidence, coincidence seems implausible. Editorial intentionality has been demonstrated from psalms to psalm and in groupings.²²

The laments or psalms of disorientation in Psalms 3–7²³ demonstrate familial resemblances of evoking God, affirming a problem (complaint), proclaiming one's faith, pleas/petitions, and a promise, pledge, or oath in doxology or ethical living.²⁴ Ethical life for the Psalmist does not operate in the abstract. He is aware of the dilemma, cognizant of the ways in which the plan of God is frustrated, and sensitive to the subtle nuances of how God deals with the various aspects of the exchanges between the righteous and the wicked. Rather than seeking to correct the crisis himself, the Psalmist uses prayer and poetic rhetoric as recognition of how these interactions ought to be sorted out.²⁵ Also, regarding generic parallels, the historical superscriptions serve as another basis for seeing the structure as intentional within this smaller unit. As structural indicators, they form an inclusio

22. Klaus Seybold noted that "the seventy-three psalms associated with David are not distributed at random throughout the Psalter, but rather they are ordered in groups and cycles," Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, trans. R. Graeme Dunphy (London: T & T Clark, 1990), 18. Claus Westermann noted that the "superscriptions to the Psalms identify several specific groupings." Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 257; David M. Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, *Biblical and Judaic Studies* 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997); Gordon Wenham, "Toward a Canonical Reading of the Psalms," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew et al., SAHS 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006). Brueggemann cautioned, "And we need not treat each separate psalm as an isolated entity to be interpreted as though it stood by itself. We may rather take up certain representative psalms that serve as characteristic and typical examples of certain patterns of speech, articulating certain typical gestures and themes of faith, and reflecting certain typical situations of faith and unfaith." Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 16.

23. On the patterns and paths of laments, see Hermann Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. J. D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 121–198; W. H. Bellinger, *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 44–73; Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 51–121; Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 53–70.

24. See Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 144. He called these particular psalms 'Songs of the Persecuted and Accused.' Other looks at the individual strophic structure of each psalm instead of Bullock's thematic reading. Cf. Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 94–102. Though there are reasons to take issue with Gunkel's worldview, his classification of psalm types is helpful in showing a phenomenon at work which may have influenced the editorial work of the book of Psalms.

25. The pattern of the Davidic king using intercession as a method to bring about God's plan as seen in 2 Chr 6 bears special importance on how NT writers understood one aspect of the Messianic/Christological nature of the Psalms. See Richard Pratt, "Royal Prayer and the Chronicler's Program" (ThD diss., Harvard University, 1987).

of history and memory as individual laments focusing on the theme of persecution and the plea for justice.²⁶

Noting a thematic flow, Geoffrey Grogan stated that “Psalms 3–7 all show the Psalmist seeking refuge from his foes in God.”²⁷ Both historical superscriptions in this grouping focus on a crisis where David is seeking shelter and, as shown below, the intervening psalms deal with God as a refuge in varied circumstances focusing on the judgment *for* the righteous and *against* the wicked. Psalm 3 is a lament of David as the victim of the doubts of the faithless (cf. v. 3), whereas, in Ps 7, he seeks to know if he has perpetrated injustice in his acts (cf. vv. 4–5). These two, both taken as relating responses to Absalom’s rebellion, frame responses that relate to the Davidic dynastic covenant and hence, the Messianic hope. Thematically, in this unit, the reader encounters both the awareness of the external forces that contribute to injustice and the introspective questionings of a sensitized conscience. The Psalmist was not seeking personal vengeance against someone as a sort of sordid reciprocity, but as a covenantal response to and refuge from the injustices of the antagonists within and without regarding the reign of God.²⁸

Keywords and themes that tie Psalms 3–7 to 9–14 meet in Ps 8. By moving from the specific to the general, Psalms 3–14 reverse the focus of Psalms 1 and 2, which look at the general man and move to the specific Messiah figure. As shown below, Psalms 3–7 focus on the confrontation of the Davidic king with threats to the Davidic covenant expressed in Ps 2.²⁹ Psalms 9–14 focus more on the worldwide judgment and the destiny of the righteous and the wicked articulated in Ps 1.

26. Jerome Skinner, “The Historical Superscriptions of Davidic Psalms: An Exegetical, Intertextual and Methodological Analysis” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016), gives a more detailed analysis of lexical, structural, thematic, and formal links. See also Patrick Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, 89–90; Idem, “Kingship, Torah Obedience and Prayer,” in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung*, eds. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 127–42. In Pss 3–7, the Psalmist faces the attacks of his enemies with God in a lament form. Each psalm deals with threats to Davidic kingship, the theme of danger, and God as a refuge (cf. Pss 5:12; 7:2).

27. Geoffrey Grogan, *Psalms*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 255. Wilson saw Pss 7–10 as a consecutive grouping which “provides new insights regarding psalm interpretation as a whole and regarding understanding of the specific message of the psalm,” Wilson, *Psalms*, 239.

28. Indeed, Gunkel noted the juridical aspect explicit in the lament genre, saying that “sometimes one can recognize that a *trial* and its proceedings can cause the complaint.” Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, 139.

29. In Psalm 3, the main issue is brought to focus by the use of the appositional phrase **בְּנֵוֹ** “his son.” This appositional phrase points to the dynastic expectation of sons following their fathers as kings, which is prevalent in the HB and ANE. So, the relationship between the psalm and the h/ss deals with kingship. The threat to kingship by acts of hostility or regicide is well attested in the HB and ANE literature. Cf. 2 Kgs 14:19; 2 Chr 22:5–12. ANE texts also exhibit this phenomenon. Cf. COS 1.76; COS 2.16; 2.37; *ANET* 287–288. Cf. Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1991), 205. In Psalm 7, there is a reference in 2 Sam 18:30–32 that uses the same grammatical construction **עָלָה + קָהָם** (“rising up against”) that is addressed regarding a strong connection between Pss 3 and 7, pointing to a threat to David’s kingship.

Justice here is not an abstract principle; it is acclaimed in association with God's sovereignty (Pss 9:7–8; 10:16–18).³⁰

The analysis below shows that it is in Ps 8 where several foci are brought together. First, reflections on creation mark out true sovereignty regarding God and man. That relationship is described using mixed metaphors and diverse imagery, but the correlation of king and vice-regent is evident throughout. Second, man's role as outlined in Ps 8 describes the jurisdiction and subjects of dominion. For the Psalmist, it is in creation that the Word of God and Messianic connection converge and establish God's justice as a universal principle. Third, without creation ethics is relative, judgment is subjective, and eschatology loses its "restorative" focus. Psalm 8 stresses God's role as Sovereign,³¹ so ethical life is grounded in a common origin and subjection to the governance of God. Justice is rooted in God's character and divine design as the objective basis for evaluation, and eschatology is built on protology.³²

Structurally, it is significant that this hymn of creation (Ps 8) that sets forth humanity's proper role in God's creation design is surrounded by laments of how morally debased humankind has become.³³ The connection between creation and justice regarding God's sovereignty is the focus on his name/character. This notion can be seen in the nuances brought out in connection with God's name where Ps 8 brings the two smaller sections together.³⁴ His name is worthy of praise in relation to his power, but also in relation to his care. The Psalmist proclaims

30. Versification follows the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible (HB) unless otherwise indicated by ET (English translation). The Psalter contains proclamations about God's nature in relation to justice (cf. Ps 119:149, 156 to see examples of God's relation to justice in terms of His acts). In the broader structure expressed here, examples can be utilized in a dialectic form as a model that articulates the nature of justice in relation to God. Through images, metaphors, and language in poetic style, examples elucidate an understanding that enables readers to find their way around the concept. Justice is exemplified by the activity of God because it is part and parcel of his being. God operates in ways consistent with who he is. Abstractions by themselves do not deal substantially with the ethical objective. From the Psalmist's perspective, the activity of the wicked is judged in relation to the Person, word, will, and activity of God and his directives as Sovereign. This point is further supported by the first usage of justice (משפט) in Genesis 18:19 where it is used in a relational and ethical way dealing with God's election of Abraham to carry forward the work of the covenant mission.

31. Pss 3:5; 4:4, 9; 5:3, 13; 6:5, 9, 10; 7:2, 7–14; 8:2, 4, 7–9; 9:5, 6, 12, 17; 10:14, 16; 11:4; 12:6; 14:2.

32. Philosopher Daniel Robinson noted that the three fundamental issues of philosophy are the problems of knowledge (metaphysics, epistemology), of conduct (ethics), and of governance. Daniel Robinson, *The Great Ideas of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., The Great Courses Video Lecture series (Chantilly, VA: Teaching Co., 2004), <http://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/great-ideas-of-philosophy-2nd-edition.html>. Through the series, he traced humankind's philosophical wrestling with these three notions. The Psalmist seems to have something to say that addresses the foundation of these three concerns. The Word of God addresses the issue of knowledge, and conduct, and the role of the Messiah figure addresses God's plan for His governance in the hearts of men.

33. This thought was original to me and I later found support for this in Belcher's work *The Messiah and the Psalms*.

34. Cf. Pss 5:12; 7:18; 8:2, 10; 9:3, 11. M. G. Easton noted that "justice is not an optional product of his will, but an unchangeable principle of his very nature." M. G. Easton, "Justice of God," *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893). Cf. Pss 7:9, 12; 9:5, 9, 20; 10:18. See the lexical connections between Pss 7–9 below. It is no coincidence that the NT uses this psalm by and about Jesus to support the references to Him as the Son of David (Matt 21:16) and as having complete dominion over all creation (1 Cor 15:27; Heb 2:6–8).

that God denounces or passes sentence on injustice every day (7:12).³⁵ As the previous parallel line states, the perfect, righteous Judge detects the motives of man and holds them accountable for those motives and actions (cf. vv. 13–17) in light of His character and *hesed* he makes available. Considering man’s failure to appropriate his given dominion according to God’s original creation design, a new rule, a new type of dominion is needed to return man to the original creation design and that is found in the work of the Messiah figure outlined in Ps 2. Notice that humanity’s destiny is associated from the beginning of the Psalter with their relation to God’s anointed.³⁶

The Semantics of Justice: Lexical Parallels in Psalms 3–7³⁷

Table 3. Lexical parallels between Psalms 3–4 (MT)

Psalm 3	Lexical Links	Psalm 4
3:2	צַר	4:2
3:2	רִבּוֹב	4:8
3:3*	רַבִּים אָמְרִים	4:7
3:4	כַּבְדִּי	4:3
3:5	קִרְאָה + עֲנֵה	4:2, 4
3:6	שָׁכַב + יִשָּׁן	4:9
3:8- Hiph Impv/1cs	הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי	4:9 Hiph Impv/1cs

* In both chapters, the phrase “many are saying” is followed by a statement of distrust.

The main issues outlined in Ps 2 are grounded in a historical incident in Ps 3. Indeed, 2 Samuel 14–16 gives vivid expression to the antagonism against the Lord’s anointed, David. When first encountering these laments, the reader is arrested by the variety of crises.³⁸ In Ps 3, the Psalmist moves from crisis (vv. 2–3) to trust (vv. 4–9), emphasizing the point of distress as the multitude of enemies and God’s support as the source of protection. The historical superscriptions³⁹

35. Cf. Ps 121:3. Wilson noted that “the psalmist’s hope and claim are that Yahweh is constantly overseeing human affairs and declaring *mišpat*. His case will not slide by unnoticed but will receive the attention it deserves.” Wilson, *Psalms*, 192. This notion of judgment need not be seen in a negative light. Jerome Creach outlined several reasons why this focus is healthy for the church and can establish what he called a “constructive understanding of divine judgment.” Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*, 12.

36. This reference is understood as a Messianic psalm that points beyond any historical Davidic ruler in Israel’s monarchy. The universal scope of the psalm in its content and placement make it clear the no king lived up to that divine-design. New Testament writers pointed to Christ as the Son of David who fulfilled the task of setting forth God’s glory while restoring the divine design for humanity through his life.

37. The Tables list the verses where the lexical links occur according the versification of the MT because the historical superscriptions are taken as originally part of the text. Readers should reference the Tables to see parallels and to compare the verses.

38. The type of crisis can be summed up as the relationship of the Psalmist to God, to the “other,” and to himself. The Psalmist can be the victim or the perpetrator. God can be (as seen through the eyes of the Psalmist) the Judge, Savior, or Perpetrator. The “other” is seen primarily as the enemy, though at times the Psalmist questions whether he has done wrong to the other. Those crises can be mental, spiritual, physical (material) seen through false accusations, illness, or physical attacks.

39. Peter Craigie noted that “in summary, the parallels indicate a close link between the psalm and David’s flight from Absalom, but the significance to be attached to the parallels could be interpreted in a variety of ways.” *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., WBC 19 (Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 73.

clarify that the anointed one's foes need not be those outside God's people.⁴⁰ The correspondence of the (צַר) enemy/distress in both psalms points out that whether it is the perpetrator (in v. 3-noun) or the effect (in v. 4-adjective) the result is the same, the Psalmist feels confined by a historical entity.

The parallels with Ps 4 highlight the themes of the enemies' speech. In Ps 3, the probing is external, about the Psalmist, whether the God is present within the corridors of hope (v. 5), whereas in Ps 4, it is internal to the enemies' perception of their situation (v. 7).⁴¹ In both cases, the questions evince distress concerning the justice of God. In both instances, the pattern of call (i.e. plea) and response (עֲנֵה + קִרָּא) elicits parallel statements of trust. In Ps 3, the trust is associated with God's locale, his holy hill, which could be a metonymy for sovereignty.⁴² This connects the readers back to Ps 2, where God says he sets his anointed (v. 6). The Messianic overtones stand out here because the response of the nations is tied to a destiny which points beyond the scope of the reign of David or Solomon (vv. 1–2).⁴³ The Psalmist is assured of justice because of God's authority over all creation (v. 4). In Ps 4, the outcome of trust is associated with God's righteousness, the cause being God's vindication. These themes of God's throne and righteousness are continuously linked throughout the rest of this collection (Pss 7:8; 9:4, 8), and it is in Ps 2 where the connection between these two is first seen. The assurance of the triumph of the Davidic king in Ps 2 is expressed in the outcomes in subsequent psalms (Pss 3:9; 4:9; 5:13; 6:10, 11; 7:8; 9:20, 21; 10:17, 18; 12:8; 13:6; 14:7). Now the Psalmist is secure because of God's intervention; he can lie down and sleep (שָׁכַב + יָשָׁן).

In both psalms, the use of imagery that describes the reasoning behind his confidence is given. In Ps 3, the Psalmist envisages God's protection through the metaphor of a shield (v. 4) and in Ps 4, he reflects on the light of God's face by a citation to the Aaronic covenant blessing (v. 7).⁴⁴ Taken together, nascent in the complaints and pleas of these psalms is the question of justice surrounding the promises of God. The threat to dynastic fulfillment for David and the threat to God's people's future revolve around covenant promises to establish righteousness through the Davidic line and God's protection as seen in Deut 28:1–14 and 2 Sam 7:1–17. The inference here is that the plea is reasonable and legitimate because the people of God are faithful to the covenant Lord and his Torah. For the Davidic king and those faithful to the covenant, the answer to queries of God's justice regarding his promises is answered in the affirmative.

40. Wilson posited that "the conflict here is between different interpretations of the faith rather than between believer and unbeliever." Wilson, *Psalms*, 148. Craigie wrote that "the dubious help of doubters can sometimes be as dangerous as the arrogant words of enemies!" Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 81.

41. J. L. Mays proposed that in Ps 3, the "central theological issue of the prayer is what many are saying about the petitioner... It discloses the true significance of the hostility." J. L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 52. If this assessment is indeed correct, it may serve as a reasoning for the editors placing Ps 4 adjacent to it to highlight the statements of the enemies.

42. Goldingay, noting the connection with Ps 2, stated that "if the king utters this plea, the reference to Yhwh's holy mountain will take up the fact that Yhwh did install him there (2:6)." John Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3 vols., BCOTWP (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 1:111–112.

43. For a canonical analysis on the subject, see Eugene H. Merrill, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif," *BibSac* 150 (1993): 51–61.

44. This imagery is taken from the Aaronic benediction in Num 6:24–26 as another nod to the covenant notion of justice.

Table 4. Lexical parallels between Psalms 4–5 (MT)

Psalm 4	Lexical Links	Psalm 5
4:3	כֹּזֵב	5:7
4:4 (adjective)	חֲסִיד	5:8 (noun)
4:1, 6	צָדִק	5:9
4:8 (noun)	שִׁמְחָה	5:12 (verb)

Where Ps 3 focused on the quantitative impact of disbelief, Ps 4 articulates the qualitative shades of wickedness. Psalm 3 focuses on the speech of the wicked (v. 3), and Ps 4 focuses on the nature of that speech (v. 3). Compared with Ps 5, which communicates God’s response to false testimony, Ps 4 conveys the wicked person’s relation to it and why God’s response is what it is. In fact, they love it (v. 3). Instead of meditating on the Torah, they embrace a deceptive mindset and manner. As Wilson noted, taken in a more technical religious sense of imploring deity, “seeking lies” can be a “disparaging reference to false/foreign gods.”⁴⁵ Here, then, injustice relates to operating out of a false system of belief which may not only be false, but also syncretistic.

Psalm 4 highlights the contrasts between the righteous and the wicked through covenant terms. The godly (חֲסִיד) exemplify the qualitative aspect of loyalty to God and man and are characterized by fulfilling their obligations to their established covenant relationship as the response to God’s justice.⁴⁶ The righteous are the objects of God’s *hesed*. Psalm 5:8 focuses on the consequences of God’s covenant love: access. Those who are “set apart,” who live a life of doxology, are contrasted to those previously described who cannot stand in God’s presence because they live lives of injustice.⁴⁷ Hans-Joachim Kraus, making the connection between 4:4 and 5:8, stated, “The benevolent favor of Yahweh reveals itself in a real act of grace and reception (in Ps. 4:3 [4] the real act is the turn to salvation taking place in the verdict of God).”⁴⁸

In Ps 4:6, the Psalmist urges the unrighteous to right their wrongs by offering

45. Wilson, *Psalms*, 154. Others have noted this point. Cf. Craig Broyles, *Psalms*, NIB (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 52–53; Grogan, *Psalms*, 47.

46. A חֲסִיד is one who does what is right in God’s eyes and remains faithful to God (cf. Pss 12:1; 18:25; 31:23; 37:28; 86:2; 97:10). Willem A. VanGemeren noted that the Psalmist is “set apart by the Lord, who has bestowed on him his steadfast love, confirmed to him by covenant (v.3; cf. 2 Sa 7:15a).” VanGemeren, *Psalms*, EBC 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 109. Cf. Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: a Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, ITC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 27. Rather than the common word for *set apart* (בָּדֵל), the Psalmist uses a term (פָּלֵה), that, coupled with the covenant designation, point to a distinction based on the presence and juridical activity of God. Comparing usage in other contexts, Keil and Delitzsch defined this word as “to make a separation, make a distinction Exod. 9:4; 11:7, then to distinguish in an extraordinary and remarkable way Exod. 8:18, and to show Ps. 17:7, cf. 31:22, so that consequently what is meant is not the mere *selection* (בְּחֵר), but the remarkable selection to a remarkable position of honour.” Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 68.

47. Wickedness is connected to injustice here for two reasons: 1) because people are the object of the evil deeds, which makes the action relational and 2) evil here is described as a way of life, which connects the reality that deception and greed color their actions.

48. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 155.

sacrifices of righteousness (צדק).⁴⁹ Wilson noted that “in view of the psalmist’s earlier description of Yahweh as “God of my righteousness” (v. 1), the “right [*sed-eg*, right/righteous] sacrifices required of the opponents are to be understood as acknowledgments of ‘the justice proceeding from Yahweh’ – the reaffirmation of covenant obligations to God.”⁵⁰ Both psalms close on a high note of expectation and rejoicing for God’s just dealings with humanity.

Table 5. Lexical parallels between Psalms 5–6 (MT)

Psalm 5	Lexical Links	Psalm 6
5:3 (verb)	פלל	6:10 (noun)
5:4	שמע + קל	6:9
5:6	פאלי און	6:9
5:8	חסד	6:5
5:9	שוררי	6:8

The psalms move from the life of the righteous to the life of the wicked. The connections between Ps 5 and Ps 6 focus mainly on prayer, the characteristics of the righteous and the wicked, and God’s relation to both classes. In Ps 5, the Psalmist appeals for God’s response as the true Sovereign of all creation through prayer (פלל) and sacrifice on account of his suffering where his faith is expressed in waiting. On the notion of prayer, Wilson noted that “He calls on God to hear not only the clearly articulated and verbalized pleas but also to attend even to the inarticulate murmuring of an agonized soul.”⁵¹ In Ps 6, the Psalmist has the assurance that God does indeed hear and acts on his behalf. That assurance is further supported by the assertion that moves from God will hear (שמע + קל) in Ps 5 to God has heard in Ps 6.

Inclusive of four descriptive terms of the wicked,⁵² a case is mounted in Ps 5 for the need for God “to hear,” to intervene against the workers of iniquity (פאלי און). Not simply occasional slights or misdeeds, their actions are character flaws where acts, words, and motivations are played out in human interactions with no repentance. In Ps 6, the Psalmist appeals to them to turn away from him (v. 8). Yahweh hears and gives the Psalmist confidence that the destiny of the wicked is in his arena, and the Psalmist need not infuriate the tension by continued association. This turning is not one of a proud condemnation, but the response of assurance because the Psalmist identifies his situation as the result of God’s grace (חסד), and not any innate moral superiority. Beyond the implication of survival, the Psalmist prays for life (v. 4). The imperatives (v. 5) here suggest a complete renewal: grace, healing, returning, rescue, and salvation. The bestowal of God’s grace is fully restorative in its eschatological sense when the presence of death no

49. The phrase used in Deut 33:19 seems to focus on the response of the people for blessings they receive.

50. Wilson, *Psalms*, 157–158.

51. Wilson, *Psalms*, 165. The root of הגיג found in Pss 1 and 2 (הגרה) is used for meditation in the positive sense in Psalm 1, but in the negative sense of plotting in Psalm 2. In Ps 5, it is taken as positive as a meditative prayer which associates the Davidic king with Psalm 1.

52. Ps 5:5, 6 characterize the evil people as (1) the boastful, (2) evildoers, (3) those who speak lies, and (4) the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

longer threatens.⁵³ In its depleting character of draining life, death is associated in a way with the work of his enemies (צוררי). Psalm 5 portrays the need for God to lead because the destination is life and harmony with God's way, and as in Ps 1, the Psalmist knows that the way of the wicked will perish. Even physiological imagery where the Psalmist associates the wicked with death (inward parts as destruction, an open throat as a grave) is used (v. 10).

Table 6. Lexical parallels between Psalms 6–7 (MT)

Psalm 6	Lexical Links	Psalm 7
6:2	באפך	7:7
6:5	ישע root	7:2, 11
6:5	חלץ	7:5
6:5, 11	שוב	7:8, 13, 17
6:6	מות	7:14
6:6	ידה	7:18
6:8	צוררי	7:5, 7
6:9	און	7:15
6:9	פעל	7:14
6:11	איב	7:6

In comparing Psalms 6 and 7, the tension of life and death and destiny continues, but the focus shifts here to God's justice in judgment as the answer to moral evil. A cursory reading might make one assume that judgment is done with anger (אף), as modern readers understand being mad. However, in other places in the Psalms, it is associated with divine disgust for sin and the impact of judgment.⁵⁴ Thus, anger is perspectival of the Psalmist's notion of how the negative consequences of God's judgment appear. It is the imagery of volcanic heat, an extremely explosive activity, that can erupt into destruction.⁵⁵ The cry for mercy from God's wrath brings the reader back to the tension between life and death (מות/ישע), for in death, there is no remembrance or praise (6:6, ידה), which are synonymous with life (cf. 150:6). In death, man is incapable of relating to God. In Ps 7, death, in the form of God's weapons of warfare, is seen as an enemy to those who do not repent (v. 13, 14). This death must be more than all humanity's lot, for it is the result of

53. The phrase עדי־מתי, "how long," in its immediate historical context, refers to the Psalmist's plea for deliverance from his situation. However, in broader terms, it points to an unresolved end of sin and its effects, a traditional refrain in penitential literature. It is familiar from the Psalms (6:4; 79:5; 80:5; 90:13) and the Prophets (Isa 6:11; Jer 12:4) and recurs in apocalyptic literature (4 Ezra 6:59). Brueggemann commented, "Israel fully anticipates that the God of its core testimony must and will act decisively to intervene and transform unbearable circumstances. But the intervention and transformation are not on the horizon—hence the question. The question is not a request for information or a timetable. It is a restless insistence that amounts to a reprimand of Yahweh, who has not done for Israel what Israel has legitimately expected." Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 319.

54. Cf. Ps 18:16. Notice in Ps 18:8 the association with volcanic activity. Commenting on its use in Psalm 6, Wilson stated that "the two parallel words for 'anger' and 'wrath' suggest anger that is hot and poisonous in its intensity. Wilson, *Psalms*, 178.

55. Note in Psalm 6 how the Psalmist associates the impact of God's anger to the waves of chaos (v. 7). William Brown noted that "the psalmist envisions his bed submerged in a pool supplied by his tears. The second verb (*msh*) means to 'dissolve, melt,' as in the case of ice (cf. 147:18)." Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 118.

the judgment. The rest of the comparisons in these psalms continue to express the life/death tension which brings us to Ps 8.

Table 7. Lexical parallels between Psalms 7–8 (MT)

Psalm 7	Lexical Links	Psalm 8
7:5, 7	צָרַר	8:3
7:6	אָרַץ	8:2, 10
7:10, 13, 14	כּוֹן	8:4
7:18	שֵׁם	8:2, 10
7:6	כְּבוֹד	8:6
7:6	אֹיִב	8:3

As noted earlier, Ps 8 plays a pivotal role as the pivot point between Psalms 3–7 and 9–14 and brings the two foci together. The **כְּבוֹד**,⁵⁶ and **שֵׁם**,⁵⁷ respectively one's glory and name or character/reputation, in their thematic import and varied contexts come to an apex in the creation hymn of Ps 8.⁵⁸ This psalm brings out more fully what exactly is involved only in part in each preceding psalm. Psalm 8 also helps the reader put into context the succeeding psalms, the tension of life and death. Up to Ps 8, the editor's organizing theme concerns the antagonist's attitude and action against the righteous, who are stated emphatically to be the glory of the Lord (3:4). In subsequent psalms, the honor or reputation of the Lord and the antagonists are the main emphases where God judges all and destiny is expressed (Pss 8:2, 10; 9:3, 6, 11; 14:5).

The tone shifts from describing the characteristics of the righteous and wicked to describing God's response to both entities.⁵⁹ Seen in its most immediate context of looking back at Ps 7 and forward to Ps 9, it is important to see that, inserted between these judicial laments, is a hymn of creation, of life.⁶⁰ Psalm 7 ends and Ps 8 begins by dealing with exalting the name of the Lord while moving from judgment in Ps 7 to creation in Ps 8. As Ps 8:17 closes on the exaltation of God's name, Ps 9:1–2 opens by exalting God for his wonderful deeds, which include Creation, and moves forward into another judgment context (cf. vv. 3–20) where the Psalmist vows to sing of the name of the Lord. The reader may ask why a creation hymn is placed here. In the lexical and thematic correspondence from texts outside the Psalter that deal with glory, a consistent pattern emerges from

56. Cf. Pss 3:4; 4:3; 7:6; 8:6.

57. Cf. Pss 5:12; 7:18; 8:2, 10; 9:3, 6, 11; 14:5.

58. These words are associated throughout the Psalter as well as the whole HB. Cf. Pss 29:2; 66:2; 72:19; 79:9; 96:8; 102:15; 115:1; Isa 59:19; 1 Chr 16:10, 29.

59. Consider that there are 61 indictments, in 29 verses, of the wicked person in Pss 9–14. Cf. Pss 9:5, 16, 17; 10:2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18; 11:2, 5, 6; 12:2, 4, 7, 8; 14: title-1, 3, 4, 5, 6. Many of the indictments are predominantly in two forms: 1) why God judges them and 2) the result of God's judgment. God judges the wicked because they are arrogant (10:2). The result of God's judgment is that they perish, their name is blotted out forever (9:5), they are snared in the work of their hand (9:16; 10:2), and they return to Sheol (10:17).

60. The lexical and thematic parallels are apparent. Cf. Pss 7:9; 9:9 (דָּיָן), 7:7; 9:5, 17 (מִשְׁפֵּט), 7:9, 18; 9:5, 9 (צַדִּיק).

the text about the themes of creation, judgment, and salvation.⁶¹ More frequently, the passages that deal with the name of God are about God's role as Sovereign and Vindicator and man's role and responsibility as an image-bearer of God.⁶² In Pss 3–14, the understanding of justice encompasses humanity's relation to God as Sovereign and Creator, to humanity as co-image-bearer, and creation as the landscape upon which those relations traverse. These are all associated with life in the present. Where these themes intersect is in their relation to man's purpose in Creation: to live in harmony with the character of God. Thus, injustice is not an abstraction, but a tangible rebellion against God's created order; its association is with death. This also reveals the reality that the people of God are subject to suffering in their role of image-bearers and oppression is the destruction of the expression of that image as has been outlined in Psalms 3–7.⁶³

According to the Creation account (Gen 1–2), humanity's rule is relational, not hierarchical (cf. 1:26–28; 2:24).⁶⁴ Psalm 8 tells the reader that mankind was given “glory and majesty,” a phrase usually reserved for God (cf. Ps 145: 5, 12). This privilege, weighed in its manifold expressions, is to be doxological and service-oriented and not like the manipulation of power structures. This climactic focus grounded in several references to man, in general, makes it clear that justice and judgment are based on God as Creator and his purposes and plans for creation. The phrase “son(s) of man,” used in varied contexts in this small grouping, has a common theme of expressing the finite, the limited, and the created.⁶⁵ Juxtaposed

61. For a more in-depth look at this concept in the Psalter, see Jerome Skinner, “The Locust and Activity of *קָבוֹד* [Glory] in the Psalms” (unpublished Sanctuary Class paper, Andrews University, Spring 2011, available upon request). Psalm 4:3 speaks of man's glory regarding his position of kingship. Gerald Wilson stated that glory here has been understood in two ways—human dignity or—the Psalmist's God, Yahweh. Wilson, *Psalms*, 153. Goldingay argued, “Subsequent lines will suggest that v. 2 refers to Yhwh's honor rather than the suppliant's. Yhwh is Israel's (106:20; Jer. 2:11) and thus the one the suppliant honors.” Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:120. This insight does not conflict with the fact that the Psalmist is referring to the defamation of his position, which Yahweh has given (Ps 3:4). Glory here parallels a contrast with what is empty and false. Davidson noted that “his—honor (*kābōd*; cf. 3:3), his standing in the community is under threat. He is being subjected to—shame, humiliation at the hands of those who—love vain words and seek after lies.” Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship*, 23. Contextually, “if this refers to the rebellion in Absalom's time (see introductions to Ps 3 and 4), the allusion most obviously would be to the fact that David was being robbed of his kingly dignity and reduced to virtual beggary and extreme want.” Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. and electronic ed.; Logos Bible Software (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1978; 2002), 3:639. Psalm 21:6 also alludes to honor by describing the reality of how Yahweh's salvation affects him. (Pss 62:7; 112:9; 149:5). Psalm 7:5 can be called a psalm of judgment/vindication.

62. For a more in-depth look at this concept in the creation narrative, see Jerome Skinner, “Roles and Rulership in Genesis 1” (Old Testament Theology Class paper, Andrews University, 2010, available upon request). In that paper, I noted that “the Creator and created describe the relationship between God and man, and the rulers and the ruled describe the relationship between man (in the image of God) and the creation.” Thus, the notion of dominion is not just a matter of power but of relationship and service as expressing the image of God.

63. McCann made the point that, in the juxtaposition of Psalms 4–7 to 8, “the ‘glory and honor’ of humanity (Psalm 8) are not incompatible with the distress, trouble, and weakness of humanity portrayed in Psalms 4–7.” J. Clinton McCann Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 60–63.

64. Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 22–35. A central point is that both male and female were made in the image of God as co-rulers (Gen 1:27, 28).

65. Cf. Pss 4:3; 8:5; 11:4; 12:2, 9; 14:2.

to man's description, it is the name of God and his glory as the eternal Creator that distinguishes him from the creature and holds a man responsible in relation to his justice in a creation context (cf. vv. 3–4).⁶⁶ The structure of Ps 8 points this way as the interplay between heaven and earth points the reader back and forth between these two poles.⁶⁷ The attitude and actions of the antagonist are a denial and frustration of the image-bearing purposes of God. Thus, the “curses” are not curses typically understood in modern day vernacular, but are cries of the heart for God to restore what is being attacked, i.e., the glory and majesty of God as Creator.

The links between Pss 8 and 9 express the connection between creation, justice, and ethics. Meredith Kline captured this phenomenon by noting,

Nuclear to the divine Glory is its official-functional aspect: it is the glory of royal-judicial office. In the Glory, God sits as King. This official royal glory comes to formal-physical expression in theophanic radiance; in the Glory, God is enthroned in majestic robes of light. There is also an ethical dimension to the Glory: the foundations of the cloud-veiled throne are justice and righteousness, and fidelity and truth go before it in royal procession (Pss 89:14; 97:2). It is a throne of holiness (Ps 47:8) and the enthroned King of glory is ever acclaimed as “holy, holy, holy” by the multitude of the heavenly host (Isa. 6:3).⁶⁸

Table 8. Lexical parallels between Psalms 8–9 (MT)

Psalm 8	Lexical Links	Psalm 9
8:2, 10	שם	9:3, 6, 11
8:3	אויב	9:4, 7
8:4	כון	9:8
8:4	ראה	9:14
8:5	אנוש	9:20, 21
8:5	זכר	9:7, 13
8:7	שיית	9:21

Moving into Psalms 9–14, lexical parallels are reduced in quantity, but the focus becomes sharper when looking at the thematic content. Structurally, these psalms are held together by a cache of terms that runs throughout and focuses on similar concepts including the judgment of God, the work of the wicked and the heart condition, and the verbal proclamations/testimony of the righteous and the wicked.

Justice for the Saints: The Thematic Perspective of Psalms 9–14

The thematic narrative of Psalms 9–14 is still grounded in the lexical parallels of adjacent psalms as Tables 9–13 show.

66. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, “Creation in the Image of the Glory-Spirit.” *WTJ* 39.2 (1976): 250–72.

67. David Dorsey suggested an abba chiastic structure (vv. 2a, 2b–5, 6–9, 10 MT) followed here. David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 177.

68. Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, repr. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 1999), 27.

Table 9. Lexical parallels between Psalms 9–10 (MT)

Psalm 9	Lexical Links	Psalm 10
9:6, 16, 18, 20, 21	גוי	10:16
9:2	לב	10:6, 11, 13, 17
9:16, 17, 18	רשע	10:2, 3, 4, 13, 15 (*2)
9:4, 6, 7, 19	אבד	10:16
9:11, 13	דרש	10:4, 13, 15
9:13, 14, 19	עני	10:2, 9, 12
9:5, 8, 17	משפט	10:5
9:5, 8, 12	ישב	10:8
9:13, 18, 19	שכח	10:11, 12
9:6, 8	עולם	10:16
9:20, 21	אנוש	10:18

Table 10. Lexical parallels between Psalms 10-11 (MT)

Psalm 10	Lexical Links	Psalm 11
10:2, 3, 4, 13, 15 (*2)	רשע	11:2, 5, 6
10:6, 11, 13, 17	לב	11:2
10:17	כון	11:2

Table 11. Lexical parallels between Psalms 11-12 (MT)

Psalm 11	Lexical Links	Psalm 12
11:2, 5, 6	רשע	12:8
11:4	בני אדם	12:9
11:2	לב	12:3

Table 12. Lexical parallels between Psalms 12-13

Psalm 12	Lexical Links	Psalm 13
12:2 (verb)	ישע	13:6 (noun)
12:2 (adj.)	חסד	13:6 (noun)
12:3	לב	13:3, 6
12:6	שית	13:3
12:9	רום	13:3

Table 13. Lexical parallels between Psalms 13-14

Psalm 13	Lexical Links	Psalm 14
13:5, 6	גיל	14:7
13:3, 6	לב	14:1
13:6	ישועה	14:7

Psalms 9–14 pick up the theme of man and image bearing and its far-reaching claims inclusive of a worldwide scope. The personal and private now broadens to the corporate and universal. The line that runs through all these psalms is the focus on the heart (לֵב). By comparing man's actions with the divine design (creation covenant), injustice is seen as a tangible denial of, a going beyond the boundaries of, and a frustration of God's purposes of creation. Wilson noted that

the psalmist's experience of oppression at the hands of the wicked is a result of the 'enoš gone wrong—an abuse of the power and authority given to humans by God in Psalm 8. This divinely given power has been misdirected because of an arrogant and prideful misunderstanding of how and why humans are to exercise that power.⁶⁹

These psalms paint the picture of God's attitude towards righteousness, which he loves, and wickedness and the inner character of people regarding violence and evil. From the Psalmist's perspective, the only answer to the dilemma is the God of justice. "The book of Psalms presents many moods in dealing with aspects of the justice of God. A dominant note of the Psalter is the celebration of Yahweh's kingship over creation, and his exercise of justice is acclaimed in association with this sovereignty."⁷⁰ Here it is noted that juridical activity is associated with kingship in the spatial context of the heavenly sanctuary. In the Psalter, the heavenly sanctuary is the epicenter of God's judicial activity: his throne (9:4, 7; 11:4).

The People's Role as *Image Bearers*⁷¹

The people of God can be seen in two ways when it comes to the justice of God: an active and a passive role. Actively, in indirect agency, those in positions of authority or with positions of influence are to "use their power and influence to seek justice and equity, defending those in society who have no access to power and representation: the widows, orphans, needy, weak, and so on."⁷² It is in this way that, for those less fortunate, the image of God can be nurtured and protected from the onslaughts of indifference. What is of import in the use of these descriptive terms is that it provides a rhetorical mode of ethical dialogue that allows suffering to speak, to hear the truth from the voiceless and powerless. Structurally, in most of these laments, the Psalmist uses motivation as a rhetorical device. That is, the Psalmist pleads his case as in court trials giving reasons for the intervention sought. As W. H. Bellinger noted "All expressions look toward the purpose of the psalm—to persuade God to deliver."⁷³ Based on previous revelation, the Psalmist and, in this grouping, the people of God are justified in seeking God's protection from an oppressor (Pss 5:4; 6:23; 10:18; 11:2), judicial vindication against unjust

69. Wilson, *Psalms*, 241–242.

70. J. Davies, "Theodicy," in the *Dictionary of Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2008), 811.

71. Words of the people of God are descriptive regarding their moral character. The lexical range encompasses the active and passive roles of those in the realm of God's justice which can be seen even in the use of the same word. Cf. צַדִּיק (Pss 5:3; 7:10, 12; 11:3, 5, 7; 14:5).

72. Wilson, *Psalms*, 242.

73. Bellinger, *Psalms*, 59.

accusations (Ps 7:6, 8, 11),⁷⁴ and even social justice as it relates to the plan and purposes of God as outlined in the Bible, a pivotal issue in the Torah and for most of the prophets.⁷⁵

Passively, the oppressed, defenseless members of society (10:18) are the beneficiaries of judgment. Psalm 2:8–12 makes it clear that a righteous kingdom will be established through the Messiah. More than just one's civic or socio-economic status of having no recourse against the aims of the perpetrators of injustice, what the Psalmist has in mind here as the defenseless are those who need the intervention of the Messianic king to establish true righteousness. Given the inherent nature of assaults (slander, lies, and false testimony; cf. Pss 3:2; 5:5; 6:8; 7:14; 10:7; 12:4), the Psalmist makes it clear he was not primarily dependent on political structures and social movements to right wrongs and saw the claims of divine justice beyond the judicial precedents of secular courts. The nature of injustice here is covenantal, religious. "Since Yahweh is the eternal righteous king, he will take the side of the weak, defenseless, and oppressed in society against the wicked so that the one 'who is of the earth [i.e. is mortal and of limited power and authority], may terrify no more' (10:18)."⁷⁶ This statement can be taken in an eschatological sense that points back to the two destinies marked out in Ps 1. The major focus is that the oppressed and downtrodden have no recourse to establish eternal justice and right wrongs beyond the confines of time and space. Moreover, one gets a sense that even in situations where they could, it would only be temporal, limited, and personal. This was true historically for the majority of Israel, even with a theocratic nation, and for the majority of God's people today, for in both cases, the source of oppression comes not just from those who have the resources and power to use to their advantage, but also in a deeper sense, those who say in their hearts, "There is no God" (cf. 14:2).

From the abundance of designations, the enemy of righteousness is not necessarily those outside the covenant community.⁷⁷ The discussion on exactly who the enemy is has concentrated on two main offenders: (1) those in the covenant community, including the post-exilic Jews and the faithless and (2) those outside the covenant community, including foreign powers. Within these groups, it is observed that there are even broader designations. However, as noted earlier, the issue at hand is not relative; that is, one cannot simply apply psalmic language to anyone who annoys or even antagonizes on a personal level, though that is not out of the realm of injustice. The objective criterion for distinguishing between the just and unjust, the righteous and the wicked, is their relationship to the authority of the Davidic king and the Word of God. What is clear is that the Psalmist's use of moral terminology is grounded on a covenantal foundation. Two points bring this out more clearly: (1) the descriptions of the antagonist and (2) and their attitudes and action towards God and man. The descriptions are of a

74. Mic 7:9.

75. Mic 3; 6:9–7:6. See works like Jeffries M. Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15*, SBLDS 136 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Julie Woods, "The West as Nineveh: How Does Nahum's Message of Judgement Apply to Today?" *Them* 31.1 (October 2005): 7–37.

76. Wilson, *Psalms*, 235.

77. See Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*, 7.

qualitative nature, seen in adjectival and participial designations: “wicked” (Pss 3:8; 7:10, 15; 34:22), “boastful” (Ps 52:2), “enemy/foes” (Pss 3:2, 8; 7:6; 18:4, 18, 38, 41, 49; 54:7, 9; 56:3, 10; 59:2, 11; 60:13, 14) “workers of iniquity” (Ps 59:2), and speaker of “lies” (Pss 7:15; 52:5).

The Tension of Justice: Crying for Justice by Living for Justice

Throughout these psalms, there is a consistent pattern of the plot. Though not in a specific paralleled order in these laments, statements of trust, questions of presence, appeals to justice, reasons for distress, the character of the wicked, the righteousness of God, and God as a refuge are evident. In a collective sense, all these factors convey something about the nature of justice. Moreover, each of these can be traced through this small collection to get a broader perspective of the justice of God and the ways in which that central theme addresses each of those factors. The language of justice from the Psalmist’s perspective goes far beyond punitive justice, but has to do with human destiny. The appeals for God to act are not from a vengeful heart, but a deep commitment to God’s covenant promises, especially in relation to 2 Samuel 7. They are prayers that God will act in harmony with his previous word and his eternal purposes for humanity.

To come back to the notion of indifference, the very nature of these psalms argues against passive acceptance of injustice (cf. Ps 11:1, 2). The Psalmist does not resign himself to accept the activity of evil as a given with no recourse. In the book of Psalms, the Psalmist resorts to divine intervention, rather than political maneuvering, yet the ways God answers those cries for intervention are in many cases manifested in historical circumstances of the times. Many psalms of thanksgiving make this point evident. By juxtaposing these laments in Book 1, the editor conflates several psalms that portray a deep sense of divine justice to give voice to this central theme of Israel’s and the church’s thinking and acting. The appeals to God are set in temporal ways. Connected to the notion of time and justice in Adventism’s understanding of Daniel 7–9 is the Psalter’s parallel focus on the eschatological nature of injustice and God’s vindication of his people. The Psalmist asks “How long?” *ad mottai* until God acts (6:4, cf. Ps 13).

Destiny of the Nations

The Psalms give a comprehensive view of the destiny of the unrighteous which focuses on their personhood (annihilation), their plans and ambitions, and the end to their destructive actions (*lex talionis*) (Pss 9:4, 6, 7; 10:16; 11:6). Final destruction (9:5) is expressed as the ultimate destiny of the wicked. For example, it is the destiny of the enemies of righteousness (9:4), the wicked (9:6–7), and the godless nations (10:17). The Psalter presents the multifaceted nature of justice where the particular and personal judgments precede and anticipate the universal and corporate. By seeking justice, the people of God must learn to be just people. The ethical is not just an ideal, but a lived and shared experience of image bearing through the work of the Messiah and guided by the teachings of the Torah. For the Psalmist, judgment for the saints is not solely a matter of being the beneficiaries

of God's grace and justice, but it is how that grace and justice pervade the sense of justice and judgment of the saints in their praying, thinking, and living. Faith in God's justice for the Psalmist is active. That the passive resignation of the Epicurean has no place in the life of faith is the cry of the Psalter.