

**THE FUNCTION OF ‘HOPE’ AS A LEXICAL AND  
THEOLOGICAL KEYWORD IN THE PSALTER:  
A STRUCTURAL-THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
FIVE PSALMS (PSS 42–43, 52, 62, 69, 71)  
WITHIN THEIR FINAL SHAPE  
CONTEXT (PSS 42–72)**

Name of researcher: Christine M. Vetne  
Name of adviser: Jiří Moskala, PhD  
Date completed: March 2015

The shape and message of the Psalter has been of central interest for many Old Testament scholars during the last thirty years. At the core of shape scholarship stands the issue of hope. Often this is related to what is commonly considered a major hope-shift in the Psalter, which moves its focus from hoping in the Davidic covenant (Books I–III) to hoping in God (Books IV–V). However, when considering the shape and message of Book II, there is evidence that these two hopes coexist, side by side, as also seen in the introduction to the Psalter (Ps 2).

This dissertation analyzes the nature and function of hope within the shape of Book II. Hebrew lexemes for hope are located in five psalms equally distributed within Book II (Pss 42–43, 52, 62, 69, 71), suggesting a deliberate arrangement of “hope.” An analysis of the meaning of hope and related synonyms (chapter 2) is followed by a consideration whether “hope” forms a structural and theological keyword within these five psalms (chapter 3). This is determined to be the case for four of the five psalms, leaving Ps 69 as a final supporting psalm within the extended conclusion of the book (Pss 69–72). The central and final step is to consider if and how these five Hope Psalms fit within the wider context of Book II. Each of the thirty psalms in Book II are analyzed as to their shape function within the book (chapter 4). This analysis reveals that these Hope Psalms not only structurally divide the Book into three main divisions (Pss 42–51, 52–61, 62–72), but also thematically introduce them. For example, the first section appears to locate the initial hope (Pss 42–43) within an eschatological context of God’s eternal kingdom (Pss 46–48), which ultimately fulfills the psalmist’s hopes and longings. Several lexical links between these sections seem to support this linkage. At the center of the book, there is a climactic crisis, at which point all past hopes and securities are destroyed (Ps 55). This second section portrays a great cosmic war going on between the Messiah and the antagonist introduced in the second Hope Psalm (Ps 52). Hope is particularly required as a response to this climax, and as a necessary aid for perseverance, as also emphasized in the following psalms, which employ two synonyms of trust and refuge. The third section also describes the eschatological kingdom of God, and echoing the first section, is introduced by a similar Hope Psalm in

which the psalmist encourages himself to hope, and finds comfort in hope as he faces difficulties.

In conclusion, the shape of Book II appears to be very deliberately designed to promote hope in its various aspects. Human aspects involve not only self-encouragement to hope in the midst of severe trials, but also to connect hope with God's act of bringing about deliverance. The Messiah plays a significant role in the realization of this hope. His role is two-fold: To bring hope to Israel (1) through a unique marriage union with his bride, Israel (Ps 45), and (2) through his sufferings, which intricately connect human destinies to him (Ps 69). God's role is also portrayed as redeeming man from death (Ps 49) and carrying the load of the people (Ps 68). Structurally, these acts of God and his Messiah function as theological reasons and justifications for the possible entry of humankind into the eschatological kingdom of God. This is demonstrated in the way they create bridge-frames around the first eschatological vision (Pss 46–48). Without these, the distance and rejection felt in Pss 42–44 would have continued. Human response to these hope acts of God include wisdom (Ps 49), reformation (Ps 50) and repentance (Ps 51)—all of which enable humans to enter this future hope. This implies, however, that only those who accept this global call, and follow the set requirements, can enter into the eschatological hope portrayed in Book II. The shape of Book II closely relates hope to this future restored relationship with God, which takes place in the very presence of God. Thus, hope is therefore a deep longing for God's presence, and as Ps 42–43 adds, a deep desire to praise God's name. It is towards this that Book II (and the Psalter as a whole) also moves.