

## Chiasm in the Arrangement of Book 2

The arrangement of the psalms in Book 2 shows evidence of thematic development just as was evident in Book 1, although perhaps it is not as striking. After a brief overview of the psalms of Book 2, we will examine whether or not there is a chiastic structure to the ordering of the psalms in Book 2.

### Characteristics

The psalms of Book 2 are noted as being *Elohistic*, that is, the use of *Elohim* predominates over the use of *Yahweh* in reference to God. Book 2 also has many similarities to Book 3 (Psalms 73-89) – the Psalms of the Sons of Korah figuring prominently at the beginning of Book 2 with the Psalms of Asaph dominating Book 3. Both of them may have been a collection assembled for use during the exile in Babylon. This does not preclude the possibility that they were composed and collected much earlier, as I believe they likely were. It just means that they were finally collected and arranged during the exile.

### Authorship

Book 2 begins with 8 psalms attributed to the “Sons of Korah” (Psalms 42-49). The Sons of Korah were likely a Levitical choir made up of the descendants of Korah appointed by David to serve in the temple liturgy. There were three Levitical families from the three sons of Levi:

1. **The Korahites** who represented the Levitical family of Kohath, son of Levi. Their leader in the days of David was Heman (see Psalm 88 title), and Psalms 42-49; 84-85, 87-88 are attributed to them.
2. Asaph led the choir of **the Gershonites**. Twelve psalms are attributed to Asaph (50, and 73-83). The name “Asaph” means “collector”, so some scholars suggest that Asaph was not the composer of these psalms but rather the compiler of them.
3. Jeduthun (Ethan) led the choir of **the Merarites** (1 Chron 6:31-47). Three Psalms include in their title, “for Jeduthun” (39, 62, 77), although their authorship is attributed to others.

Psalm	Author
42-49	Sons of Korah (8 Psalms, although 42/43 is actually one Psalm that has been divided into two)
50	Asaph
51-65	David
66-67	“for the director of music”
68-70	David
71	unattributed (although it has much in common with Psalm 70 and may be a continuation of it, making it Davidic as well)
72	Solomon

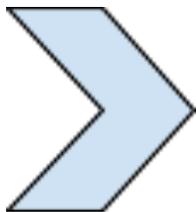
Arranged by author, Book 2 begins with eight psalms of the Sons of Korah, followed by one psalm of Asaph, another 18 attributed to David, 3 unattributed, and one “of Solomon”. Based on authorship alone, one possible pattern for the arrangement of psalms in Book 2 would be:

- 7 Psalms of the Sons of Korah (**Psalms 42-49**) (counting 42/43 as one)
- 1 Psalm of Asaph (**Psalm 50**)
- 21 Psalms of David (**Psalms 51-71**)  
(assumes the 3 untitled psalms are Davidic and 70/71 are actually one psalm)
- 1 Psalm of Solomon (**Psalm 72**)

The fact that Book 2 ends with the statement: “This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse” suggests (but certainly doesn’t prove) that the psalms of Book 2 were composed in David’s lifetime. Given the symbolic significance of the numbers 3 and 7, it’s possible the psalms were ordered with this in mind. At the very least, it helps one to remember the authorship of Book 2 by grouping them according to author.

### Thematic Arrangements of Psalms 42-51

There are also thematic connections among the psalms of Book 2. If one groups the first 7 Psalms, a chiasmic arrangement emerges with the Wedding Song of the King in the center:



- 42/43** – individual lament
- 44** – communal lament (God has abandoned us)
- 45** – Royal Wedding (the King and his Bride)
- 46** – communal trust (God is with us [in his city])
- 47** – God is the King who has ascended to his throne
- 48** – God dwells with us in Zion (in his city)

This arrangement leaves out the final psalm of the Sons of Korah, Psalm 49. However, it may be seen as a contrastive psalm in relation to Psalm 48. Psalm 49 is a wisdom psalm whose theme is one of woe to the rich who dwell in princely mansions in this life. For in their final rest, they will dwell in the grave. Their tombs shall be their homes. This is in contrast to the beauty of Zion where the godly dwell secure.

It is also possible that the first ten psalms of Book 2 (Psalms 42-51) may also form a thematic unit.



- A** **42/43** – Individual Lament
- B** **44** – Communal Lament
- C** **45** – Royal Wedding
- D** **46** – communal trust (God is with us [in his city])
- E** **47** – God is the King who has ascended to his throne
- D<sup>1</sup>** **48** – God dwells with us in Zion (in his city)
- D<sup>1</sup>** **49** – The rich will dwell in the grave
- B<sup>1</sup>** **50** – Communal Repentance (Asaph)
- A<sup>1</sup>** **51** – Individual Repentance (David)

In this analysis, the movement is from lament (both individual and corporate) to trust following the royal wedding (45). The king and his bride (understood in the New Testament as Christ and his church) take up residence in the royal city and the refrain is “the LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (46).” Psalm 47 then stands at the center of the chiasm as a hymn to God who has ascended and taken his rightful place as king over all the earth. His city rests secure (48), unlike the rich whose “tombs will remain their houses forever” (49). This is followed by a call for the community to repent (50), corresponding to the earlier communal lament (44). David’s prayer of repentance (51) corresponds to the individual lament that begins this group (42/43). One of the appeals of this approach is its similarity

to the first three chiasms of Book 1 which each place a hymn at the center of a chiasm (Psalms 8,19, and 29). Whether there are seven psalms in the chiasm (42-28) or ten (42-51), the turning point thematically is certainly the royal wedding of Psalm 45. This messianic psalm answers the questions raised in Psalm 44 – “Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? ...We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” The answer to this complaint of the community is that God has in fact come near as the messiah, God’s anointed, who has taken his people as his bride (45). His people dwell in his presence, in his city (46), as he reigns over all the earth (47).

### Thematic Arrangement of Psalms 52-60

The next thematic group of psalms are the nine psalms, 52-60. All of these psalms are generally classified according to genre as individual laments (with the exception of Psalm 60 which is a communal lament). The following chart shows their relationship to one another based on the type of psalm (as indicated in the superscription – either a *maskil* or a *miktam*) and the identity of enemy the psalmist was facing. Based on the meaning of the Hebrew root words, a *maskil* may be a psalm of wisdom or teaching, and a *miktam* may be a psalm of distress (although interpretations of these words vary widely).

Psalm	Type	Enemy	Key Verse	Resolution
52 (Olive Tree)	Maskil (wisdom?)	Doeg the Edomite	8	I am like a green olive tree in the house of God
53 (Fool)	Maskil	The Fool (Nabal?)	6	O that salvation would come out of Zion
54 (Recoil)	Maskil	Ziphites	7	He has delivered me from every trouble
55 (Dove)	Maskil	A friend (Absalom or Ahithophel?)	23	But I will trust in you
56 (Tears)	Miktam (distress?)	Philistines	13	You have delivered my soul from death...that I may walk before God in the light of life
57 (Dawn)	Miktam	Saul (while in a cave)	11	Be exalted O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!
58 (Snakes)	Miktam	Unjust judges	11	Surely there is a God who judges the earth
59 (Dogs)	Miktam	Saul	17	You, O God, are my fortress
60 (Edom)	Miktam for teaching	Edomites	12	With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes

Each of these psalms has all the classic elements of lament – address, complaint, request, motivation, and confidence. Many of them also add some cursing (imprecations) as well. It seems to be a collection of psalms that came out of distressful situations in David’s life – whether it was his flight from Saul or his flight from Jerusalem during Absalom’s rebellion. In this arrangement, Psalm 55:23 stands at the center as something of a turning point, although all of the psalms have a bit of hope and trust either stated or implied. The last line of Psalm 55 stands alone poetically: “But as for me, I trust in you”, and it seems to sum up the psalmist’s response to the varied enemies he faces. This is also the point where the type of psalm changes from *maskil* to *miktam*. It is also significant to note that Psalm 53 is essentially the same as Psalm 14 (the former is Elohist, the later Yahwist). This begs the question, why was it duplicated in the final arrangement of the psalms? As Psalm 14, we noted that the psalm concluded the first chiasm of Book 1, corresponding to Psalm 1, framing the first 14 psalms with the genre of wisdom. As Psalm 53, in the context of the surrounding psalms of lament, the text in verse 6 includes this alteration from Psalm 14, “God scattered the bones of those who attacked you; you put them to shame, for God despised them.” This language is similar to the surrounding psalms as David prays for justice in regard to specific enemies.

### Thematic Arrangement of Psalms 61-72

A simple thematic outline of the last twelve psalms of Book 2 might be:

- David’s Prayers of Trust (61-64)
- Corporate hymns of praise (65-68)
- Lament turned to testimony and trust (69-71)
- A Coronation Prayer (The Glory of the Messiah) (72)

Moving from the laments of Psalms 51-60, the psalms that follow have a stronger theme of trust and confidence. The first four psalms of this group (61-64) to varying degrees are all psalms of trust, containing such memorable verses as, “lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe” (61:2b,3); “my soul finds rest in God alone” (62:1a); “because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings” (63:7); and “let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him!” (64:10).

The next group of four psalms are jubilant liturgical hymns of corporate praise beginning with Psalm 65, “Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion” (65:1) and followed by Psalm 66, “Shout with joy to God, all the earth!” (66:1). Psalm 67, while not attributed to David, is certainly consistent with the other liturgical psalms he composed. It was likely used in corporate worship as a prayer of blessing, with its refrain: “May all the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.” (67:3,5). This collection of four liturgical psalms comes to a resounding conclusion with Yahweh’s triumphant procession from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion in Psalm 68, concluding with the declaration, “You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!” (68:35).

The final four psalms of this group (69-72) may be seen as a recapitulation of the entirety of Book 2. Psalm 69 is an excruciating lament that is comparable to Psalm 22 in its depiction of the suffering of the psalmist. In fact, it is second only to Psalm 22 in its number of New Testament references to the crucifixion of Jesus. Like Psalm 22, this psalm concludes with a profound declaration of trust and worship. This is followed by the brief Psalm 70 and the lengthier Psalm 71. The former is a lament and the latter a continuation of the lament and an eventual vow of confidence. Taken together, the two psalms are a fitting testimony of God’s faithfulness in the life of David. For this reason, some scholars suggest that this was originally one psalm. Finally, Psalm 72 is one of two psalms attributed to the anointed son of David, Solomon. (The other is Psalm 127). Psalm 72 is a fitting conclusion to Book 2

which began with a lament (Psalm 42) and has as its conclusion, the coronation of the anointed one, the *messiah*. In Psalm 42, the psalmist asks, "Where can I go and meet with God?", and in Psalm 72, God ultimately answers, "I am with you as the messianic king." Psalm 72 describes the glory of the messianic king, embodied in the life and reign of Solomon. A millennium later, Jesus will say of himself, "One greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this psalm and the answer to the question of Psalm 42, "Where can I meet with God?" The answer is: "We do not meet him in a place. We meet him in a person."

*Works referenced:*

Tesh, S. Edward & Zorn, Walter D. *The College Press NIV Commentary: Psalms Volume 1*. (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999)