

Wisdom psalms? or Wisdom Psalter?

지혜 시인가? 지혜 시집인가?

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초록(Abstract)

본 소고는 시편의 소위 ‘지혜시들’을 다른 각도에서 이해하는 방법을 제시하는 것이다. 시편 학자들이 제안해온 ‘지혜 시편들’의 목록들을 종합적으로 재검토해 보면, 양식 비평이 제시했던 ‘지혜시’라는 독립된 장르가 가능한지에 대한 의문을 가지게 된다. 이 의문은 몇 개의 시편들만을 ‘지혜시’로 이해하게 하기 보다는, 오히려 좀 더 포괄적인 의미로 ‘지혜’의 영향을 받은 시들이라는 관점에서 개개의 시편들을 보게 하는 가능성을 열어주고, 이 가능성은 한 발 더 나가 ‘시편의 최종 형태’라는 문맥 안에서 시편의 지혜 주제를 이해할 수 있게 해준다. 지혜 문학의 형식적/내용적 특징을 가지고 있다고 여러 학자들에 의해 인정되어 온 소위 지혜 시편들의 수를 합하면 대략 시편 전체의 약 삼분지 일을 차지한다. 이것은 우리가 시편 전체를 지혜의 관점에서 읽을 수 있는 가능성을 지지해 준다.

시편의 최종 형태의 정황들에 대한 연구는 시편이 왕권도, 법정도, 성전도 없는 후 포로기의 상황에서 분투하던 백성들의 생존을 위해 수집되고 형성되었다는 사실을 보여준다. 시편을 통해 여호와와의 구원의 행적을 읊조리고 묵상하는 것이 이스라엘이 생존하도록 돕는 하나의 노선이었던 것이다. 시편에 나타나는 지혜 주제는 이스라엘로 하여금 여호와께서 자기 백성을 위해 행하신 일들을 기억나게 하기 위한 하나의 교훈으로서 제

시되고 있다. 따라서 이제 우리의 관심은 시편 안에 있는 ‘지혜시들’이 아니라 지혜 시집으로서의 시편 전체에 맞추어져야 한다.

This essay is to suggest a way to understand the so-called ‘wisdom psalms’ in the Psalter from a different angle. The synthetical reappraisal of the lists of ‘wisdom psalms’ proposed by Psalmic scholars raises a question of whether there is a ‘genre’ as such, rather opens a possibility of ‘wisdom-influence psalms’ in the Psalter, and then carries the possibility one step further to be interpreted in the context of ‘the final shape of the Psalter.’ The fact that the so-called wisdom psalms with formal and thematic characteristics suggested by scholars occupy more or less one third of the Psalter makes it probable to read the Psalms in light of ‘wisdom.’

The Psalms were collected and shaped for the survival of the people struggling with the situation of the postexilic period with no kingship, courts, and temple. Reciting and meditating on Yahweh’s salvific act through the Psalter was one way to help them survive. The wisdom motif in the Psalter was presented as an instruction to remind Israel of what Yahweh had done for His people. Thus what we are working on is not just ‘wisdom psalms’, but ‘wisdom Psalter’.

주제어 시편, 지혜시, 시편의 형태와 형성, 후 포로기, 양식비평, 정경비평
Key words: the Psalter, wisdom psalm, shape and shaping of the Psalms, postexilic era, form criticism, canonical criticism.

1. Introduction

The hypothesis of the existence of ‘wisdom psalms’ did not appear until H. Gunkel acknowledged a group of psalms in the Psalter which

he dubbed as “wisdom poetry” in his work published in 1933.¹⁾ In relation to the treatment of the criteria of ‘wisdom psalms’, an established result of Gattung-criticism,²⁾ one of the major problems is well expressed as following,

[T]he classification, ‘wisdom psalm’, is a rather questionable one, not as clearly definable as are hymns, laments, and other ‘types’. Yet certain psalms betray themes and characteristics of the forms that are popular in Wisdom Literature.

In other words, the proposal of ‘wisdom psalms’ as a distinct type is debatable, but the existence of a wisdom dimension in the Psalter is undeniable. How, then, can we identify the so-called ‘wisdom psalms?’ In what sense and what extent can we apply the significance of wisdom to the psalms

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- 1) H. Gunkel, & J. Begrich, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, Trns. by J. D. Nogalski (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998 [1933]), 295. Gunkel distinguished five main types of psalms, all of which had cultic origins: 1) hymns 2) communal complaint songs 3) royal songs 4) individual complaint songs and 5) individual thanksgiving songs in which ‘wisdom poetry’ failed to appear because the psalms do not properly fit the pattern of categorization he postulated. Kunts notes C. A. Briggs (1906) as one who for the first time appreciated the favour of wisdom in the Psalms. J. K. Kuntz, *The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel: their rhetorical, thematic, and formal dimensions*. In J. J. Jackson & M. Kessler eds., *Rhetorical criticism. Essay in honor of James Muilenburg* (PA: The Pickwick Press, 1974), 184., And S. Cheung also cites J. F. Bruch (1851) and O. Zockler (1867) as scholars calling a series of psalms as ‘gnomic psalms’ and ‘Chokmah psalms’ respectively. However, as Kunts admits, it is difficult to label them as ‘pioneer’ in Old Testament wisdom psalms research because of their “modest concern for the didactic material within the Psalter.” S. Chi-Chung Cheung, *Wisdom Intoned, A reappraisal of the Genre ‘wisdom psalms’* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 2.
- 2) Gunkel was convinced that comparative study of the poetry outside the Psalter was crucial to the study of the biblical psalms. For him, the basic subject of wisdom is ‘human life’, which is followed by ‘moral and religious meditation’ at a large stage, and a history of Israel’s religious literature must begin with a history of its forms. Therefore “genre research in the Psalms in nonnegotiable, not something one can execute or ignore according to preference.” See *Ibid.*, 3, 5, 293-295.

in the Psalter? This essay is to synthetically reappraise the lists of ‘wisdom psalms’ proposed by Psalmic scholars and to raise a question of whether there is a ‘genre’ (*Gattungen* in Gunkel’s term) of them, which rather opens a possibility of wisdom-influence psalms in the Psalter, and then carries the possibility one step further to be interpreted in the context of ‘the shape of the Psalter’. What follows is an attempt to seek answers to the above questions.

2. Reappraisal

Scholars have generally adopted three criteria to trace the wisdom psalms in the Psalter: form, content, and life setting (*Sitz im Leben*). K. J. Dell’s assertion is typical: “If we apply our criteria of form, content, and context [life setting], we find that many psalms contain wisdom forms, some wisdom content and some may have been devised or at least edited in wisdom circles”.³⁾ The results obtained from the application of these criteria were similar among scholars, but, as Whybray indicates, “the fact that no two of the lists [of wisdom psalms] are identical is significant”.⁴⁾ Furthermore, that no single psalm appears in all the wisdom psalms lists the scholars have suggested reinforces the improbability of a group of ‘wisdom psalms’ in the strict sense of genre.⁵⁾

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- 3) K. J. Dell, *Get wisdom, get insight: An introduction to Israel’s wisdom literature* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000), 64.
- 4) R. N. Whybray, *The social world of the wisdom writers*, In R.E. Clements, ed., *The world of ancient Israel. Essays in honour of J. A. Emerton* (London: Cambridge, 1989), 245.
- 5) Whybray investigated the lists of the wisdom psalms conducted by fourteen scholars, which showed that only Psalm 37 appears in the entire lists (*ibid.*, 244-245). But the psalm fails to appear in other scholar’s lists. See S. Chi-Chung Cheung, *op. cit.*, 188-190.

With respect to the form,⁶⁾ the major problem lies in the fact that many psalms described as ‘wisdom psalm’ can also be designated as other ‘types’ of psalms. R. B. Y. Scott rightly observed that “wisdom element...is combined with other features such as prayer, praise, and historical recital which have a different background in the religious tradition”.⁷⁾ Moreover, not every psalms that has the formal characteristic is designated as ‘wisdom psalm’.⁸⁾ At the same time, the fact that no two lists of the wisdom psalms proposed so far have been accord with each other brings us to wonder if the type of the wisdom psalms is viable. The fact that a type of a psalm can also belong to another type seems to have made scholars loose confidence in the existence of the wisdom psalms as a distinct type. Thus R. N. Whybray negates a possibility that there may be a genre of wisdom psalms, arguing that the so-called ‘wisdom psalms’ “have no distinctive forms of their own”.⁹⁾ Then we need to treat the situation somehow in a different way.

In my opinion, the problem seems to be caused by the attempt to understand

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- 6) The formal characteristics suggested as typical of wisdom are: 1) the ‘address-to-son’ form 2) admonition (‘saying’, ‘proverb’, ‘exhortation’) 3) instructional tone, e.g., the expression ‘teach the path of Yahweh’ 4) the **אֲשֶׁר־י** formula (the form of the beatitude) 5) impressive comparisons 6) numerical sayings 7) ‘better’ sayings 8) acrostic structure 9) simple comparison 10) vocabulary in relation to wisdom (**סֹדֵר מִרְעֵ, הוֹן, חִכְמָה**) 11) the adoption of wisdom stylistic forms (proverbs, rhetorical questions) 12) simile 13) autobiographical narrative and 14) other forms that are on the edge of the wisdom category (19:1-6, a hymn to the creator; 19:7-14, a meditation on the Torah)
- 7) R. B. Y. Scott, *The way of wisdom in the Old Testament* (NY: Macmillan Company, 1971), 192.
- 8) For instance, Psalm 2 and 33 have the **‘אֲשֶׁר־י’** formulae in 2:12 and 33:12, but they are regarded as a royal psalm and hymn respectively. Psalm 73 that is generally considered as ‘wisdom psalm’ fails to appear in other wisdom psalm lists because it has the prayer form of thanksgiving.
- 9) R. N. Whybray, *The wisdom psalms*, in J. Day, et al., eds., *Wisdom in ancient Israel*. Essay in honour of J. A. Emerton (Cambridge, 1995), 152.

the wisdom psalms as a distinct ‘type’, and to interpret them rigidly in ‘*either-or*’ mode, ignoring the possibility of ‘*both-and*’ mode. As E. Johnston suggested, this is to recognize that “even psalmic instructions are in some sense still psalms, or prayers to God”.¹⁰⁾ So Psalm 73 can be “both a wisdom psalm and a psalm of lament, trust, and thanksgiving”.¹¹⁾

A. R. Ceresko concurs with this when he says,

The wisdom redactors of the Psalter and authors of the wisdom psalms recognized an interest in and devotion to prayer as a further trait of the wise individual. First of all, the authors of these psalms picture themselves as uttering prayers (e.g., Ps 19:15;32:5;73:17,23-25,28;119). Second, they exhort the reader or listeners to pray-to “magnify the Lord” and “exalt his name”(Ps 34:4), because “this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles (Ps 34:7)··Finally the Psalter as a whole is presented by its authors as a book to be used for prayer and praise.

By understanding the wisdom psalms both as instruction and as prayer, these scholars somehow contribute to alleviate the tension, and give us a clue to treat the psalmic wisdom in a broader sense, that is, wisdom psalm with thanksgiving or thanksgiving psalm with wisdom character (i.e., psalm 73), wisdom psalms with torah meditation or torah psalm with wisdom character (i.e., Psalms 1, 19), wisdom psalm with hymnic prayer or hymn with wisdom character (i.e., Psalms 111, 112, 127, 128), and so on. With respect to the criteria of the wisdom psalms, they might

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- 10) E. E. Johnston, “*Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110*,” *BSac* 149 (Oct-Dec 1992), 25.
- 11) J. F. Ross, Psalm 73, in Gammie, et. al., eds., *Israelite wisdom. Theological and Literary Essays in honour of Samuel Terrien* (NY: Scholars Press, 1978), 170.

best be more correlated with thematic characteristics rather than formal ones. Dell maintains,¹²⁾

One problem with ranging wisdom psalms together on the basis of form is that the wisdom grouping is not really a form-critical category because the links tend to be **more thematic**¹³⁾ than formal. There are some wisdom forms, but few whole psalms can be designated wisdom on the basis of form alone.

However, the thematic approach was also found problematic”because of the difficulty of deciding what kinds of content are typical of wisdom literature”.¹⁴⁾ In reality, it appears to be almost impossible to single out comprehensive thematic criteria of the wisdom psalms. As Whybray diagnoses, “there is evidently a great deal of room for subjectivism here.”¹⁵⁾ In that sense, J. Day is quite right when he asks, “how many wisdom characteristics must a psalm possess before it may legitimately be so described [as a wisdom psalm]?”¹⁶⁾ Adding a ‘brand-new’ characteristic to the list simply means to join the club of ‘subjectivism’, while it is still necessary.¹⁷⁾

12) K. J. Dell, *op. cit.*, 65.

13) The **emphasizing** is mine.

14) *Ibid.*, 68. The following themes has been identified as the criteria of content: (1) instruction (2) theodicy (3) the contrast between the righteous and the wicked (4) the two ways (5) the problem of retribution (6) practical advice for conduct (7) the fear of Yahweh (8) the qualities of the righteous to be imitated (9) the Torah as a source of wisdom (10) exhortation to trust Yahweh (11) miscellaneous counsels pertaining to everyday (12) order in the world (13) the justice in God’s dealings with human beings, (14) life as the supreme good, and (15) confidence in wisdom to be taught.

15) R. N. Whybray, 1989, *op. cit.*, 245.

16) J. Day, *Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 54-55.

17) For example, most recently, after critical survey of the book of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, S. Cheung suggests three features as ‘representatives of wisdom literature’ to apply them to the Psalter to identify ‘wisdom psalms’: 1) a contentual focus on wisdom-related themes 2) a tone which is reflective of intellectualism 3)

What emerges from the question is real ambiguity, and, in fact, this ambiguity lies at the heart of the discussion of tracing the criteria of the wisdom psalms. How then do we treat the formal and thematic characteristics of wisdom that we cannot ignore in the discussion of the Psalter?

3. Wisdom-influenced psalms?

An attempt has been made to overcome the impasse that the formal and thematic approach encountered, by interpreting the psalmic wisdom under the umbrella of the idea of ‘wisdom-influence’. Although we cannot establish the category of the wisdom psalms in terms of form/content critical point of view, we can still recognize wisdom ‘flavor’ in the Psalter. R. E. Murphy’s comment is pertinent: “if there is no strict literary type that can be termed sapiential, then at least several psalms betray wisdom influence”.¹⁸⁾

This line of interpretation provides us with a kind of buffer zone to embrace the existence of the psalmic wisdom in the Psalter in an alternative way, that is, if there is no wisdom psalm in the strict sense, then at least there are *wisdom influenced psalms*. Along with the ‘both wisdom and other type psalm’s point of view, this understanding opens a possibility that we can use the term ‘wisdom psalm’ not as a sense of distinct type (genre) or theme (content), but as a broader sense of wisdom influence. While scholars differ to a considerable extent in their assessments of the formal and thematic features of psalmic wisdom, as far as the wisdom flavor is traced in a psalm, it could be argued that, no matter what type the psalm belongs to, it can be possibly considered as ‘wisdom (influenced) psalm’.

a didactic intention. *Ibid.*, 28.

18) R. E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 145.

Thus, from this point of view, a wisdom psalm with thanksgiving form (i.e., Psalm 73) or a lament psalm with wisdom flavor (i.e., Psalm 25) as such is to be called ‘*wisdom psalm*.’

According to J. Luyten, there have been more than fifty psalms which scholars have called ‘wisdom psalms’ somewhere in the Psalter.¹⁹⁾ H. G. Sim also observed the psalms that have been suggested to belong in whole or in part to the category of ‘wisdom psalms’ as follows: Psalms 1, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 24, 25, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 40 (19 psalms in book I); 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 62 (6 psalms in book II); 73, 78, 84, 86 (4 psalms in book III); 90, 91, 92, 94, 101, 104, 105, 106 (8 psalms in book IV); 107, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, 131, 133, 139, 144, 145, 146 (12 psalms in book V).²⁰⁾ If we allow these psalms to be ‘wisdom psalms’ at any late, then the number (49 out of 150) seems to be compelling. Most recently S. Cheung provides some sixty psalms fifty scholars designate at least more than once as wisdom psalms or wisdom-influenced psalms.²¹⁾ In terms of quantity’s point of view, more than

one-third of psalms in the Psalter seems to belong to the category of ‘wisdom psalms’, which is remarkable. These psalms, then, if not wisdom psalms in the strict sense, suggest “at least some influence from wisdom circles”.²²⁾

However, the question is to what extent the idea of wisdom influence applies to the psalms. Does it include only the forty-nine or some sixty psalms that betray the formal and thematic characteristics? The number still seems to be arbitrary and remains in subjective. Then, is there any possibility that the list can extend to the rest of the Psalms? In this regard, Ceresko has suggested a viewpoint that “the Psalter itself is clearly the product of the torah/wisdom teachers, and the final form of this collection of songs bears the stamp of their influence and intent”.²³⁾ If this is the case, there is a need for “looking for answers to questions such as who were these sages and what concerns did they have; what was their purpose in creating the literary productions they have left us. [And then]...one could study the Psalter itself, the Book of Psalms, *as the product of the sage’s work*”.²⁴⁾

This consequently requires us to examine the *Sitz im Leben* of the psalmic wisdom in the context of the Psalter as a whole, which is also closely related to the issue of authorial intention: What was the *purpose* of the editor(s) in creating the literary collections of the Psalter? Whybray notes,²⁵⁾

An explanation is required for the fact that these [wisdom influenced]

19) J. Luyten, *Psalm 73 and wisdom*, in M. Gilbert, ed. *La sagesse de l’ancien testament*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press), 4-81. He provided us with a lists of ‘wisdom psalms’ his predecessors suggested: 1, 9-10, 12, 14, 15, 36, 47, 49, 52, 53, 73, 91, 94, 112, 119, 127, 128, and 139 (Castellino, 1955); 1, 8, 9-10, 14, 15, 19, 24, 25, 32, 34, 37, 49, 52, 62, 73, 78, 90, 92, 101, 105, 106, 111, 112, 119, 127, 133, 139, and 145 (Deissler, 1963); 19B, 25, 32, 34, 73, 119 (Munch, 1937); 1, 18, 32, 73, 77, and 90 (Michel, 1960).

20) H. G. Sim, *Wisdom and Salvation History in the Wisdom Psalms*, (Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, Potchefstroom: North-West University, 2008), 64. The ratio of wisdom-influenced psalms to each book is as following: Book I (46%, 19/41), Book II (19%, 6/31), Book III (24%, 4/17), Book IV (47%, 8/17), and Book V (27%, 12/44). Among the candidates of Sim’s list, W.C. Kaiser, I. Engnell, and J. Luyten did not appear in the substantial list of Cheung’s list, all the psalms they dubbed as ‘wisdom psalms’(1, 19B, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 78, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, and 133) are one of the psalms appearing in S. Chung’s list.

21) S. Chi-Chung Cheung, *op. cit.*, 188-190.

22) A. R. Ceresko, *The Sage in the Psalms*, in J. G. Gammie & L. G. Perdue eds., *The Sage in Israel and the ancient Near East* (Eisenbrauns, 1990), 217.

23) *Ibid.*

24) The Italics are mine. *Ibid.*

25) R. N. Whybray, 1989, *op.cit.*, 246.

psalms now appear not in the setting of a wisdom book but in a collection of psalms which are now generally recognized as composed for use in worship.

In other words, what is the significance of the wisdom perspective to the Psalter? Why were the wisdom-influenced psalms included in the collection of prayers or why were the wisdom factors inserted into a certain type of psalms? What clue do these psalms give us in understanding the overall purpose of the Psalter?

4. The *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalter

J. K. Kuntz points out, “[T]he instructional intent of the [wisdom] poem may be obvious enough [in the Psalter], but it may not be at all clear just where that instruction was to have occurred”.²⁶⁾ Thus Murphy confesses that “it must be admitted that the precise life-setting of these [wisdom] poems eludes us”.²⁷⁾ A description of the life setting of psalmic wisdom seems to be difficult to establish because we do not know much about who composed or edited the collection of the Psalms. Scholars have suggested possible candidates such as ‘temple singers’ or ‘priests’ (Gunkel), ‘private learned psalmographer’ (S. Mowinckel), or ‘professional wise men of wisdom school’ (Kuntz, Perdue), but little progress was made along the lines. Thus J. L. Crenshaw asserts, “I do not see any profit in attributing such psalms to the sages when we know so little

about the authors and their social contexts”.²⁸⁾

Nevertheless, on the fundamental level, many scholars seem to share the idea that the Psalter in Old Testament tradition has been ‘sapientialized’ in the process of time.

D. C. Morgan pointed out that one of the most prominent features associated with wisdom tradition²⁹⁾ is its didactic intention.³⁰⁾ Crenshaw acknowledges the importance of didactic aspect in Israelite wisdom, and maintains that, “[I]n the literature preserved by sages, the dominant voice is that of a parent, usually the father. A father/teacher addresses a son/student in an endless series of imperatives, exhortations, and threats”.³¹⁾

In his research for the social world of the wisdom writers, Whybray provides us with a brief summary of views on ‘the origin of literary wisdom in Israel’ that appeared in the history: (1) tendency to see the postexilic period as the matrix of the wisdom literature (2) foreign-

28) J. L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 94.

29) ‘Wisdom’ means basically the “technical know-how of the agriculturist or the artisan or skilled warrior; or more vaguely, the skill and expertise of the professional counsellor, the wise man who was never at a loss in ticklish situation” R. A. F. MacKenzie, *Faith and History in the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 76. However when it comes to the understanding of the history of wisdom in Israel, it appears not simple. Goldsworthy observes four kinds of evidence of it: (1) the scattered wisdom sayings in the narrative literature of the Old Testament (2) wisdom books themselves (3) the relatively recently acquired knowledge of the wisdom literature of ancient Near East and (4) the wisdom influences or the non-wisdom books of the Bible. In the light of the observation, he suggests that wisdom might be refer: (1) a type of literature (2) certain kinds of educational activity or (3) a broadly intellectual activity. G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom: Israel’s Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995[1987]), 50-53.

30) D. C. Morgan, *Wisdom in the Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 130.

31) J. L. Crenshaw, *Education in an Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (NY: Doubleday, 1998), 281.

26) J. K. Kuntz, *The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel: their rhetorical, thematic, and formal dimensions*. In J. J. Jackson & M. Kessler eds., *Rhetorical criticism. Essay in honor of James Muilenburg* (PA: The Pickwick Press, 1974), 216.

27) R. E. Murphy, “A consideration of the classification, ‘wisdom psalms’”. *VT*, (IX.1963), 161.

dominated royal court or wisdom school as the matrix of the Israelite wisdom literature (3) a gradual process of nationalization, a process which extended well into the postexilic period (4) folk wisdom as the matrix of the wisdom books in the Bible (5) oral and short wisdom sayings as the matrix of individual sayings in Proverbs (6) institutional education in the royal school as the matrix of wisdom literature (7) general authorship of wisdom materials beyond the scribal profession.³²⁾

While these seven views are mainly associated with the wisdom books of the Old Testament, especially with Proverbs, one thing in common among these views is to highlight the postexilic period as a matrix of Israelite wisdom. The assumption that Psalm 90 dates as early as the time of Moses and Psalm 137 does as late as a postexilic, and Psalm 126 is a song sung by pilgrims from the Babylonian exile imply not only that the psalms had been written over a long period, but also that the final collection of the psalms belongs to the postexilic period.³³⁾

The individual psalms in the Psalter that arose out of the pre-monarch covenant community and out of the Davidic kingdom, and in the course of history, came to be related to the situation where Israel found herself in the postexilic period.

According to H. Guthrie, wisdom “is implicit in the thought and vocabulary of the Old Testament, but did not provide the motifs for Israel’s enunciation of her faith in the pre-monarchical or Davidic

periods”.³⁴⁾ In the process of time, with an upheaval caused by the Philistine incursion into Palestine, wisdom became, with the Mosaic covenant and ancient Near Eastern cosmology, a formative element of biblical theology.

Furthermore, the corruption of the Southern Kingdom and the subsequent turmoil of exile led the people of Israel to expect the future messiah, but the expectation was repeatedly frustrated, which brought people in the postexilic era to expect certain *instruction* from Yahweh for understanding such an ambiguous historical situation. Guthrie states that, “[I]t was as a mythos for such an ambiguous historical situation that the wisdom motif, an element of the culture of which she [Israel] had been and was still apart, came to be appropriated by Israel...Exilic and postexilic Israel found a visible theological idiom in the traditions of wisdom”.³⁵⁾ However, since whether the Psalter was finalized by the postexilic period as it is or not is still a live issue,³⁶⁾ we need to turn to more concrete evidence, that is, the text itself.

In this regard, N. L. deClaisse?-Walford keenly recognizes, “we cannot know the precise historical processes behind the formation of the Hebrew Psalter, but we can study its hermeneutical logic”.³⁷⁾ By focusing on

32) Whybray, 1989. *op. cit.*, 229-235.

33) K. Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*. Trans. by R. G. Dunphy (Edinburgh:T&T Clark, 1990), 4. After working from comparing the text of the psalms to a Qumran manuscript (11QPs2) and the Septuagint, Seybold concluded, “As for the compiling of the Hebrew Psalter, we may assume that this collection of hymns and prayers belongs to the period of the second Jerusalem temple. But here too, it is difficult to say anything more precise and concrete. We are thrown almost onto internal criteria”.

34) H. H. Gurthrie, *Israel's Sacred Songs: A Study of Dominant Themes* (NY: Seabury, 1966), 177.

35) *Ibid.*, 179.

36) It was generally held that the collection of the Psalter was finalized by the end of the First century BC. P. W. Flint, *The Dead Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (Brill, 1997), 14. But there has been a consensus that the final books of the Psalter were still in a state of flux as late as the first century BC to the first century AD. See G. H. Wilson, King, *Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter*. In P. W. Flint & P. D. Miller, *eds.* The Book of Psalms (Composition & Reception, 2005), 393-394.

37) N. L. deClaisse?-Walford, *Reading from the beginning: the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Waco: UMI, 1995), 71.

‘internal logic’ embedded in the text of the Psalter, we can disclose the intention of the final collection of the Psalms.

5. The intention of the final collection the Psalter

Since B. Childs’ canonical approach to the Psalter, a number of scholars have argued for the evidence of the shape and shaping of the Psalter as ‘internal criteria’, maintaining that “the purposeful placement of psalms within the collection seems to have given the final form of the whole Psalter a function and message greater than the sum of its part.”³⁸⁾ This indicates that we cannot escape the hermeneutical aspect of the text in approaching the issue of the life setting of psalmic wisdom. I maintain that the individual psalms in the Psalter had originally been composed in their own particular *Sitz im Leben*, but in the process of time they were intended to other purpose that we could call a ‘hermeneutical shift’ in Childs’ term.³⁹⁾ Ceresko also argues,⁴⁰⁾

The composition [of the Psalms] therein, once the words by which Israel spoke to God in praise, thanksgiving, and supplication, have now become the Word of God to Israel, the means by which God reveals himself and his will to his people, especially to those trained and able to use the Book faithfully and wisely.

For example, the opening verse of Psalm 1, which is generally considered

as ‘wisdom psalm’, quietly contradict the general expectation that the Psalter is a prayer/praise book. The tone of the psalm is not just a response **to** God, but also an instruction **from** God. This is the first hermeneutical impact on readers at the gate of the Psalter. Then the wisdom influenced psalms played an important role in the process. In this regard, Morgan argues, “[I]n their final canonical form, it is clear these particular [wisdom] psalms have been integrated into the cultic worship and life of Israel.”⁴¹⁾ J. L. Kugel goes further to assert,⁴²⁾

To imagine psalms of praise and petition in their original setting is an important part of any attempt to define the Psalter’s spirituality, but it is not all. There came a time (or, rather, times) in Israel’s history when the givens of that setting changed, and the conventions and words of psalmody acquired willy-nilly anew significance and status.

G. T. Sheppard argues that the wisdom perspective played an important role in a particular point of time, maintaining,⁴³⁾

At a certain point in the development of OT literature, wisdom became a theological category associated with an understanding of canon which formed a perspective from which to interpret Torah and prophetic traditions. In this sense wisdom became a hermeneutical construct for interpreting sacred Scripture.

38) J. C. McCann Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 7. See also J. C. McCann Jr., Books I-III and the Editorial purpose of the Hebrew Psalter. In J. C. McCann, ed. *The shape and shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield: JSOT Supplement series 159, 1993), 93-107.

39) B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 513.

40) A. R. Ceresko, *op. cit.*, 217-218.

41) D. C. Morgan, *op. cit.*, 125.

42) J. L. Kugel, *Topics in the History of the Spirituality of the Psalms*. In A. Green, *ed.* *Jewish Spirituality: from the Bible through the Middle Ages* (NY: Crossroad, 1988), 129.

43) G. T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct: a Study in the sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 13.

When, then, was the particular time of ‘at a certain point?’ As indicated above, it is the postexilic era. As Kugel succinctly argues, major change in understanding the Psalter happened around the postexilic period:⁴⁴⁾

That conquest [of the Babylonians] and exile in themselves certainly constitute the next great step in the history of Israel’s psalmody, as in all aspects of her cultural life. In regard to the Psalms, this is as much as to say that some of the “spiritualizing” approach to the Psalter which so much of modern psalms scholarship has aimed at unraveling began in the postexilic(or even exilic) period.

Given these understanding, it can be accepted that the Psalms were edited around the postexilic period to instruct the ancient Israel who were struggling with the matter of survival. The fall of Jerusalem to Babylon revoked the Israel’s belief that God rules over the world. Israel found herself in a situation where her identity as a chosen people was challenged. Under the circumstances of the dispersion and afterwards, the Psalms functioned not merely ‘as the hymn book of the second Temple’, but also as ‘didactic wisdom materials’ for the people of Israel in such a distressed situation.⁴⁵⁾

deClaisse?-Walford understands the Psalter as a story and maintains, “[T]he story of the Psalter is YHWH’s instruction to the postexilic community, in which the people can find answers to the questions ‘who are we?’

and ‘what are we to do?’⁴⁶⁾ She then urges us to read the Psalms as followed,⁴⁷⁾

We may read the Book of Psalms, then, as a contributing part of the story of the survival of ancient Israel. It celebrates the reigns of David and Solomon in books 1 and 2; laments the dark days of oppression during the divided kingdoms and the Babylonian exile in book 3; and looks forward to and rejoices in Israel’s restoration to the land and in the reign of YHWH as king in books 4 and 5.

Psalms 1, 2, 3, 41, 42, 72, 73, 89, 90, 106, 107, 145, and 146-150 were chosen to support her argument because for her “the beginning psalm of each of the Psalter’s five books is a key indicator for the shaping of the text”.⁴⁸⁾ Psalm 1 as a wisdom psalm encourages the reader to enter the story of the Psalter, to delight in it, and to meditate on it through the voice of wisdom; In Psalm 2, a royal psalm, we are introduced to Yahweh as our king sitting on the throne; Psalm 3 as an individual lament introduces us to the subject matter of Book I, that is, the dark days of Babylonian reign. Then the psalm “brings to mind king David, but it pushes its hearers beyond David to the new realities of postexilic life”;⁴⁹⁾ By beginning with the אֲשֶׁר־ formula, Psalm 41 brings the reader back to the Torah, the instruction, at the beginning of the Psalter; Psalm 42 as an individual lament urges the reader not to be discouraged within their present despair but to put the hope unto Yahweh; As a concluding psalm of Book II, Psalm 72, a royal psalm attributed to Solomon, brings to the minds of its readers/hearers who experienced the failure of Israel

44) J. L. Kugel, *op.cit.*, 130.

45) For example, psalm 78 with its sapiential quality and its recital of the historical traditions “shows how Israel’s foundation story can be used for teaching.” (J. L. Mays, *Psalms Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994) 29. In this psalm, the story of God’s salvific actions in history is used for Israel to survive the distressed postexilic situation.

46) N. L. deClaisseé-Walford, *op. cit.*, 127.

47) *Ibid.* 99.

48) *Ibid.* 72.

49) *Ibid.* 106.

the covenant Yahweh made with David in 2 Samuel 7, which “anticipates the overwhelming cry of the lamenting questions in Psalm 89”;⁵⁰⁾ Psalm 73, the opening of Book III, reminds again the readers of the exilic situation and the demise of ancient Israel, and encourages ancient Israel to survive through centuries of its historic past; In Psalm 89 as another royal psalm, “the volume of lament seems to have overpowered the confidence expressed at the beginning of the Book. Psalm 89 ends in lament, without the expression of confidence in Yahweh that is normally found in the psalms of lament”;⁵¹⁾ Psalm 90, the only Mosaic psalm as the opening psalm of Book IV, reminds the reader of the beginning of the Psalter (Yahweh’s kingship in Psalm 2) and of the Exodus from Egypt, indicating “the whole fourth book of the Psalter is dominated by the person of Moses”;⁵²⁾ As the closing psalm of Book IV, Psalm 106 requests Yahweh to save Israel, celebrating the kingship of Yahweh; Psalm 107, the beginning of Book V, answers to the request of Israel at the end of Psalm 106, that is, celebrating deliverance from the exile in Babylon; Psalm 145, as a wisdom influenced psalm and as “the overture to the final movement of the Psalter”;⁵³⁾ confirms that Davidic kingdom is everlasting and Yahweh’s dominion endures through all generation; Psalms 146 through 150 as the grand final of the Psalter urge the people of Israel to praise Yahweh for His kingship and His salvation.

Two things should be noted about what deClaisseé-Walford is attempting

50) *Ibid.* 117.

51) *Ibid.* 127.

52) *Ibid.* 158. In Book IV, *Moses is referred to seven times* (90:1; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32), while he is mentioned only once outside of Book V (see *Ibid.* 154).

53) see J. L. Mays, *Psalms Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press 1994b), 439.

to do here. First, she attempts to read the Psalms as a story from the beginning to the end. To discern the story from Book I to Book V, the first and the last psalms, seam psalms, of each book were selected and examined. For deClaisseé-Walford, the Psalms are a story of salvation to instruct the postexilic Israel to continue to survive in a world they no longer controlled. Second, she endeavors to demonstrate this from a hermeneutical point of view. In other words, there is a hermeneutical logic inherent in the texts of the Psalter. deClaisseé-Walford’s treatment is striking in that she reads the entire Psalter as a story, and the main strong point of her argument lies in the fact that the arrangement of the psalms plays an important role to relay the story line. Furthermore, her treatment gives us a context in which we can see the Psalms in terms of ‘instruction’ for the postexilic Israelite community rather than in terms of mere ‘cultic material’. The story of the Psalter demonstrates that, in the process of time, the Psalms became a didactic book rather than a hymnbook for the second temple period.⁵⁴⁾ W. H. Bellinger’s comment is compelling:⁵⁵⁾

The instruction in the Psalms centers on the honest dialogue between creator and the created that is at the heart of the life of faith. Placing this wisdom psalm [Ps.1] as the introduction to the Psalter helps readers view the Psalms as having significance for the life of faith beyond the text’s original cultic setting...[O]ther kinds of psalms include wisdom elements (e.g., Pss 14; 26; 36) allow the community to apply these texts broadly to the pilgrimage of faith. Wisdom texts, then, are integral in determining the final shape of the Psalter.

54) D. C. Morgan, *op. cit.*, 130.

55) W. H. Bellinger, *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praise* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990), 129.

These scholars have provided us with a clue of *general* relationship between wisdom and the final shape of the Psalter, but they seem to fail to demonstrate a *specific* connection of the Psalter to the phenomenon of psalmic wisdom. In other words, we need to demonstrate how the psalmic wisdom relates to the overall significance of the Psalter: Have the wisdom psalms been carefully fitted into the framework of the Psalter to form an integrated one or have they been scattered in the Psalter at random so as to simply imply wisdom influence? Ceresko suggests three ways of examination of the instructional character of the Psalter,⁵⁶⁾ and D. Bergant summarizes them as follows:⁵⁷⁾

First, it has canonical significance as a book consisting of a wide variety of psalms, all of which, in this final form, serve as a means of meditation on life. Second, the specific wisdom psalms both explain and support the kind of behaviour that is expected of the believer, whether ancient or contemporary. Third, the presence of wisdom motifs in psalms that do not fall under the wisdom category adds a didactic dimension to the entire collection.

According to G. H. Wilson, the final canonical purpose of the Psalter is to call people to meditate on the ‘Torah’ rather than cultic use.⁵⁸⁾ He attempted to connect this insight to the issue of the wisdom psalms in the Psalter, arguing that the last two books (Book IV and V) of the Psalter are framed by the concerns of wisdom (Pss. 90, 107, 145), while the other three books (Book I, II, and III) are shaped by a ‘royal covenantal frame’

56) A. R. Ceresko, *op. cit.*, 217-230.

57) D. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: a Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 53.

58) G. H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 207. K. Seybold, *op. cit.*, 15.

(Pss. 2, 72, 89).⁵⁹⁾ Then, in the final analysis, he concludes,⁶⁰⁾

The shape of the canonical Psalter preserves a tense dialogue (or a dialogue in tension) between the royal covenantal hopes associated with the first two-thirds of the Psalter and the wisdom counsel to trust YHWH alone associated with the final third. In conclusion it seems apparent that wisdom has had the last word as demonstrated by the wisdom shaping of the covenantal Psalms 2 and 144 as well as the primary positioning of Psalms 1 and 145 in the final frame.

Wilson is remarkable in that he sees the whole Psalter from the wisdom perspective, which deserves the attention. One effect of Wilson's understanding of the Psalter in terms of ‘wisdom frame’ is that it gives us a possibility of considering the Psalter as a wisdom book. This is more attractive when the idea (wisdom frame) is associated with the context of the postexilic situation that deClaisse?-Walford has observed. The idea is almost revolutionary given the little credit that has given to the wisdom psalms in the discussion surrounding the Psalter. However, as we have seen, if it is considered that about 50 psalms in the Psalter are wisdom-influenced psalms, the argument seems not to be impossible.

The weakness of his treatment, however, lies in the fact that his concern has focused on only four psalms (Pss. 1, 90, 107, 145) that, according to him, function to indicate the wisdom frame of the Psalter. What about other psalms that are located in significant positions of the Psalms? For example, how should we understand the first or last psalms of the book I to III in Wilson's framework of wisdom? Do these psalms also support Wilson's argument?

59) G. H. Wilson, *Shaping the Psalter: a Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms*. In J. C. McCaan, *ed.*, *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield: JSOT. Supplement Series 159, 1993), 80.

60) G. H. Wilson, *Ibid.* 81.

I maintain that if the Psalter is to be read in light of a wisdom frame, we need to extend our attention further to the whole Psalter. In this regard, it is noteworthy that books I, III, and IV of the Psalter end with a psalm that has the אֲשֶׁר־ formula (Pss. 41, 89, 106).

In the case of the Book V, Psalms 144 and 146 have that interjection, making Psalm 145 sandwiched in between these two psalms. Of course, as Kuntz (1974:197) points out, “it is not possible to claim that the reader inevitably step into the precincts of wisdom whenever he confronts the אֲשֶׁר־ formula in the Psalter” because some psalms with the אֲשֶׁר־ formula offer the formula without a sapiential intent. Nevertheless, it is difficult to escape the sense that the אֲשֶׁר־ formula is “undoubtedly a sapiential keyword, and that this interjection “introduces, punctuates, and sometimes accentuates the apex of a psalm or even terminates its movement from topic to disparate topic, which all found in Proverbs or in Job.”⁶¹⁾ If so, the אֲשֶׁר־ formula can serve to reinforce the wisdom frame proposed by Wilson, and to make it possible to allot Psalms 41, 72, and 89, psalms that have never been described as wisdom psalms, to that category.

In dealing with the wisdom motif in the context of the Psalter, I suggest that the arrangement of the psalms should be taken seriously. Recent scholarship has already confirmed ‘the five-book division of the Psalter, ‘two distinct segments of the Psalter’ (Psalms 1-89 and 90-150), and ‘an introduction and a conclusion’ “as purposeful indications of editorial organization.”⁶²⁾ In other words, while it is true that the Psalms are separate entities, at the same time, the sequence of the individual psalms arranged

in the book is important for their understanding. Due to the fact that the Psalms are a collection of 150 individual poems, however, it would not be possible to fit each psalm to a story line in a strict sense. As Wilson admits,⁶³⁾

It is clear that the 150 psalms were not composed to function specifically in their present literary context. Certainly they were selected for that purpose from the vast wealth of hymnic compositions (now lost to us) that were originally developed for and employed chiefly in the ongoing worship of Israel. It is far from clear to me, however, that editors concerned to develop and communicate a theological message through the arrangement of the psalms would have selected compositions for relatively minor, even frivolous elements...

Thus, to endeavor to find thematic development between adjacent psalms from the first psalm to the end only results in manipulation and circular reasoning. As deClaisse?-Walford demonstrated above, however, a hermeneutical logic can be discerned along the story line from one Book to the next. Each psalm is encapsulated with a purpose within the arrangement of the Psalter. As it has been maintained repeatedly, main purpose of the Psalter is to instruct people to be wise enough to survive the postexilic circumstances. If so, that purpose should be embedded in the arrangement of the Psalter one way or another. The reappraisal of the categorization of the wisdom psalms dealt with in this article does not claim to have discovered a comprehensive set of criteria for the wisdom psalms. What the reappraisal does seek to do is to understand psalmic wisdom flavour in the process of shaping of the Psalter. What it seeks to demonstrate is that given the postexilic situation where Israelite

61) S. Terrien, *Job as a sage*, in J. G. Gammie & L. G. Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Eisenbrauns, 1990), 55.

62) G. H. Wilson, 1993. *op. cit.*, 72-74. See also G. H. Wilson, 2005, *op. cit.*, 395-405.

63) G. H. Wilson, 1993. *op. cit.*, 44.

people struggled with their identity as God's chosen people, the collection of the Psalms in its final form is a more wisdom-cantered work than has generally been recognized.

6. Conclusion: Wisdom Psalter

The most distinctive contribution of this treatment lies in its idea that every psalm in the Psalter can be read from a wisdom point of view. Three things should be noted as a conclusion for this treatment. First, the formal and thematic characteristics associated with wisdom motif suggested that at least one third of the Psalter could be regarded as wisdom-influenced psalms. Second, the Psalms as a whole can be considered as a story, which makes it possible for us to read them from the beginning to the end along the storyline. The story of the Psalter is one of survival of the postexilic Israel, where the didactic intention of wisdom was exercised and eventually integrated into the corpus of the Psalms. The circumstances of the postexilic period, in which there were no king and court, suggest that Israel's key to survival in the ancient Near East was to remind people of their identity as God's chosen one and of Yahweh as their king. Third, the wisdom-influenced psalms at the 'seams' of the Psalter (pss. 1, 90, 107, and 145) show that the Psalter was framed by wisdom motif. Moreover, the psalms 41, 89, and 106 with the **אשרי** formula make it more probable to understand the Psalter in terms of a wisdom frame. The range of the wisdom psalms has expanded from several psalms (as 'distinct type') to almost fifty psalms (as 'wisdom-influenced psalms'), then finally to all the psalms (as 'wisdom-framed Psalter'). As Mays asserts, "All psalms have a pedagogical potential."⁶⁴ Under the circumstances of the postexilic period, the Psalter as a whole

was edited to instruct Israel to be wise good enough to survive. This understanding enables us to treat the Book of Psalms in terms of wisdom motif. Thus what we are working on is not 'wisdom psalms', but 'wisdom Psalter'.

64) J. L. May, *The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation*. In J. C. McCaan, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield: JSOT. Supplement Series 159, 1993), 18.

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