

“When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps 11,3): Psalms 3-14 as a Call to YHWH to Restore Order in a World Characterised by Social and Political Chaos and a Plea to the Righteous to Remain Steadfast

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ABSTRACT: The article examines the literary purpose of Psalms 3-14, suggesting that the editors aimed to highlight YHWH’s awareness of social and political chaos and his intent to restore order by judging evildoers. These psalms are presented as David’s supplications to YHWH during distress, engaging in dialogue with community members and opponents. The editors encourage the righteous to seek refuge in YHWH, remain faithful, and trust in his intervention. The cluster reflects the editors’ desire for YHWH to act as judge and king, saving the righteous. Through these psalms, the editors aimed to bolster the belief that YHWH’s dominion would triumph over chaos, providing hope and guidance to the faithful.

Key words: Psalms 3-14, literary purpose, social and political chaos, order, judgement, refuge, YHWH as king

1. Introduction: Psalms 3-14 as a Purposeful Collection of Psalms

There is a consensus that Pss 1-2 constitute the edited preamble¹ to the Psalter and that Pss 3-14 form the first of several edited “clusters” of psalms, which are all editorially connected to the preamble.² Psalm 8, which differs in tone from

1. For an overview of all the reasons why Pss 1-2 form the “entry portal” to the Psalter, see Wagner (2014: 66). Weber (2010a: 834-845) proposes that Pss 1-3 constitute the overture to the whole Psalter since each of the first three psalms involves a new theme and level of communication (see also Weber 2010b: 50-53).

2. Hossfeld and Zenger (1993: 12-15) distinguish four “Teilgruppen” (3-14; 15-24; 25-34; 35-41) in the first Davidic Psalter (3-41). See the detailed analyses of the clusters and the connections of single psalms and groups to Pss 1-2 by Barbiero (1999).

Pss 3-7 and Pss 9-14, is (or was, according to some interpreters) the centre of this first collection from Ps 3 to 14.³ The editors did not demarcate the cluster and the subgroups in it primarily to display their literary skills but to turn the Book of Psalms and smaller units within it into persuasive discourses. The purpose of such editorial work was to communicate with readers of these psalms. Although the psalms of the cluster are presented as prayers of “David,” they constitute “perlocutionary acts” and were assembled to influence the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the readers or listeners (see Austin 1962: 94-108). This article attempts to demonstrate that the cluster Pss 3-14 was designed to form such a persuasive discourse. To establish how an ancient text served as an instrument of communication, one could consider certain features:

its expression of reflections on experience and implicit encodements of, as well as possible explicit comments on, the natural and social orders external to the text; its expression of perceptions, ideas, beliefs, opinions, logical relations, self-interests, and ideology; and its expression of feelings, attitudes, expectations, wishes, and judgments [...] (Elliott 1993: 53)

The psalms of the cluster contain many explicit comments on society’s social and political disruption. The psalmist expresses his feelings, attitudes, expectations, wishes, requests, and judgements about these conditions and the instigators who were responsible for them. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment with social conditions are expressed in earnest supplications to YHWH to intervene to save the psalmist, judge the perpetrators and correct injustices. On the other hand, the psalms of the cluster also contain many instances of thanksgiving and praise for past interventions by YHWH, who had earlier saved the supplicant. Many psalms in the cluster further have a dialogical character, with the psalmist responding to (implicit) direct quotations from both the in-group and their opponents, while YHWH also speaks.⁴ Such quotations possibly reflect the

For the connections between the prologue and Pss 4 and 5, see further also Botha 2018a and 2018b.

3. Barbiero (1999: 88-92) considers Pss 8-9 as the new centre of the cluster. Hartenstein (2010: 232) thinks Pss 9-10 were inserted to form the new centre. Since Pss 9-10 originally formed one (acrostic) psalm, there would be an equal number of psalms before and after the centrepiece in Ps 8. The same happens in the cluster Pss 15-24, where Ps 19 forms the (dissimilar) centrepiece, and in Pss 25-34, where Ps 29 forms the (dissimilar) centrepiece. In the case of the third cluster, Pss 32-33 were meant to be read as one psalm. The psalms of the second and third clusters were arranged concentrically around the centrepiece, but this is not (obviously) the case in Pss 3-14 or 35-41. The first and last psalms of the first cluster (Pss 3 and 14) have, however, also been connected meaningfully through keywords. At the same time, Pss 3 and 7 and Pss 9 and 14 were given meaningful connections to demarcate them as subgroups of the cluster.

4. This dialogical structure is already present in Ps 2, where the rebellious intent of the “nations” and “peoples” is formulated in direct speech (without introduction). YHWH responds to this (v. 6) and the anointed joins in by talking about the investiture

current narrative when the cluster was compiled. The psalms are presented as prayers of “David,” in which YHWH is directly addressed, with the supplicant expressing frustration, hope, desperation, wishes, adoration, thanksgiving, and praise.

Since the historical figure of “David” is presented as the supplicant in these psalms, one can infer that those people who compiled the cluster wanted the readers to imitate “David’s” reaction to crises causing chaos in his life and emulate his faith and trust in YHWH as the king of the world. “David’s” words of address to the implied in-group and his opponents also provide teaching about YHWH and his relationship with humanity. Such teaching would help the readers to cope with their distress.

The contents of the cluster can be summarised as follows:

Psalm	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Complaints and descriptions of distress.	2-3		10	3, 4, 7-8	3			1-11, 13	2-3	2-3	2-3	
Quotations by fellow believers, opponents, and [YHWH].	3	7a						4, 6, 11, 13	1bc, 2, 3	5, [6]	5	1, [4]?
Declarations of Trust	4, 6, 7	4, 9b	13	9-11	2a, 9a, 10c, 11-14		8-10, 11, 14, 19	14, 17-18	1b, 4-7	8	6	6, 7b
Thanksgiving and reports of help	5, 6, 8cd	2b, 8	8	9-10			4-7, 16-17	16				5
Requests	8ab, 9b	2ac, 7b, 9a	2-4, 9, 10, 11-12	2-3, 5-6	2b-3, 7-8, 9bc, 10		14, 20-21	2b, 12, 15		2, 4-5	4-5	7a
Direct addresses to fellow humans		3-6		9					1-3			6
Wisdom Teaching		4	5-7, 10	[10]	15-17		8-10, 13, 16-18	3-11, 13	4-7	2-3, 6-7, 9		1-5
Declarations of innocence			[8]		4-6, 9c							
Praise	9a				18	2-10	2-7, 12, 15	16			6	

Table 1: Form-critical Elements in Pss 3-14

and YHWH’s promise of help (vv. 7-9). Wagner’s suggestion (2014: 73-74) that 2,3 constitutes the call from YHWH’s own people to be liberated from the nations is not convincing.

In Table 1, stichs, verse lines, or whole verses are typified in terms of the forms or syntactical constructions in them. Some pronouncements would be classified differently by other investigators. The same element could also sometimes be classified in two valid ways, such as a direct quotation that serves to enhance a complaint.⁵ The table is meant to provide a general profile of information contained in the cluster. Since Pss 3-7 are often described as a series of (originally unrelated) individual laments, the many declarations of trust, reports of previous help, and wisdom-infused analyses of societal problems are conspicuous. It is true, however, that there are more instances of praise in Pss 7-10 than in Pss 3-6. Psalms 10-13 also contain complaints and descriptions of distress, but there are too many declarations of trust and thanksgiving for help to describe the cluster as consisting of laments. Thanksgiving for having been saved is seen as a normal constituent of laments used in the cult, but in this cluster, they serve to prove to the audience that YHWH did respond to David's requests for help and that they could trust him to do the same for them.

The two psalms forming the frame around the cluster (3 and 14) demarcate the cluster's boundaries through shared keywords. Those repeated keywords also help to define the message the editors wanted to convey with the cluster. The significant keywords in Pss 3 and 14 are *אמר*, *אלהים*, *אין*, *עם*, *ישועה*, *יהוה*, and *קרא*. The final verses of the two psalms (3,9 and 14,7) were editorially inserted and linked through the keywords *ישועה* and *עם* and the collectivising nature of the two verses.⁶ They suggest that the cluster as a unit constitutes a supplication to YHWH to save and bless his people and restore their status as his elected ones. However, the repetition of the verb *אמר* in combination with the negative adverb *אין* and the noun *אלהים*, as well as the repetition of the verb *קרא* in the body of the two psalms, also seem to point to editorially intended and meaningful connections. *אמר* points to the pessimistic *saying* of the "many" in 3,3 that there *is no salvation* for the psalmist *in God* and to the foolish (and more radical) thought of the "fool" in 14,1 (*saying* "in his heart") that there *is no God*:

5. *Complaints* are often marked by interrogative particles (*מה*, *עד-מתי*, *למה*, *על-מה*, *עד-אנה*), but could also be simple descriptions of a state of affairs. *Quotations* in this cluster are almost all introduced by the verb *אמר*, but once in the cluster, it is formulated with "all his thoughts are" (*כל-מזמורתיו*, 10,4). Declarations of trust are sometimes addressed to YHWH and will then typically contain the personal pronoun *אתה* or a second person suffix but could also be expressed by referring to YHWH in the third person. Requests typically have imperatives or jussives. Wisdom teaching uses the categories of humans found in Proverbs and contains teaching about YHWH and his relationship to the world. It may sometimes be addressed to YHWH, as in Ps 5,5-7 or it may seem like a narrative about his actions regarding humanity. In this cluster, only Pss 8,9/10,11,12 and 14 have been described as "Wisdom Psalms" in the lists published by various authors (cf. Cheung 2015: 188-190). However, the editors left a clear wisdom stamp on Pss 3,4,5 and 7 as well. For more on this, see Gosse (2008: 57-59).

6. They refer to the people of YHWH (*עמך* in 2,9 and *עמו*, *יעקב*, and *ישראל* in 14,7), while the rest of the psalms in the cluster were composed from the perspective of an individual (Hartenstein 2010: 236).

(3,3) רבים אמרים לנפשי אין ישועתה לו באלהים
(14,1) אמר נבל בלבו אין אלהים

Hartenstein (2010: 237) interprets these connections as an indication that the collection's theme is about *the possibility of experiencing the saving power of YHWH*. Because of the second quotation, one may even say the cluster is about the seeming *absence of God in everyday life*.⁷ In answer to this theological question about YHWH's presence or absence, the two psalms, and thus the cluster, respond with an unequivocal answer: *There is salvation in YHWH* (3,8), and *there is a God since God* (אלהים) "is with the generation of the righteous" (14,5). The use of the noun "God" in this verse proves that this is a response to the thought of the fool in 14,1. אלהים is also used in 14,2, but there it is YHWH who looks down from heaven to see if there is anyone who seeks after "God." In a time of doubt about YHWH's ability to help in a crisis, the cluster thus proclaims that *YHWH is aware of the suffering of the righteous and ready to intervene on their behalf*. This proclamation is also explicitly formulated as a direct statement of YHWH in 12,6. Hartenstein (2010: 237) finds the phrase "YHWH is his refuge" in 14,6 to be the important confirmation of YHWH's ability to save in Ps 14. As explained above, I think the phrase "God is with the generation of the righteous" in 14,5 is more pertinent in this regard. This is, however, not to deny the importance of the theme of YHWH's serving as a refuge for the righteous in the cluster. Psalm 14,6, "a refuge" (מחסה), connects the end of the cluster to the end of the prologue in Ps 2,12, "to seek refuge" (הסה). The verb also occurs in 5,12; 7,2; and 11,1. The descriptions of "generation" (דור) in 12,8 and 14,5 refer to Prov 30,13 (see in this regard Botha 2012: 48). The atheistic pronouncement that there is no God in 14,1 refers to the (camouflaged Aramaic) pronouncement in Prov 30,1:

לא איתי אל לא איתי אל ואכל

"There is no God, there is no God, and I will prevail" (cf. Gosse 2008: 61). The form ואכל can also be interpreted as deriving from אכל (and יכל), thus, "I am exhausted" or "I am doomed"; literally, "eaten."⁸

The verb קרא also seems to be used to establish a meaningful connection between Pss 3 and 14 at the beginning and end of the cluster. It is used to point out the difference between the "righteous" and the "evildoers": The psalmist

7. Cf. also 10,4, אין אלהים. Wickedness is the direct result of the arrogant thought that there is no God.

8. Bremer (2020: 65) thinks (through a comparison with Ps 53,6) that the motif of the poor was secondarily inserted in Ps 14,6 by the editors. The whole psalm has strong connections to Prov 30, however, and the exploitation of poor people by evildoers is also referred to in Ps 14,4. For a comparison of Ps 14,4 with Prov 30,14, see the important investigation of Creach (1996).

cried aloud (קרא) to YHWH and received a response from his holy mountain (3,5), but the evildoers are identified in 14,4 as the people who *do not call* (קרא) upon YHWH and therefore think they can do as they like. A critical theme in the cluster is the question of the difference between the character and the fate of the “wicked” and the “righteous” (cf. 5,11-13; 7,10; 11,5; 14,4-5). This theme is a continuation of the description in Ps 1,1-6. Another important theme is the question of how YHWH’s followers should respond to a situation where the unscrupulous actions of wicked nations challenge YHWH’s kingship. This theme, in turn, continues the description in Ps 2.

Psalms 3 and 7 further demarcate a *subgroup* within the cluster, which should be read against the backdrop of the rebellion of Absalom. The headings of the two psalms indicate the context of the Absalom-rebellion, but there is also an extensive list of shared keywords within the two psalms (עם, איב, רשע, קום, יהוה, ישע, כבוד, מגן, ראש) serving to demarcate them as beginning and end. The repetition of these keywords implies that the subgroup should be read as a unit but also as part of the whole cluster since most of these keywords also occur in other psalms of the cluster. But the words מגן and ראש from this list do not appear elsewhere in the cluster, possibly indicating that they are important. With מגן, the psalmist acknowledges YHWH’s *protection* in 3,4 (“But you, YHWH, are a *shield* about me”). The same happens in 7,11: “My *shield* is with God, who saves the upright in heart.” Through the two verses, the psalmist thus also describes himself as one of the “upright in heart.” With ראש, the difference between David and his opponent (Absalom) is emphasised: YHWH is the one who “*lifts*” David’s *head* again in 3,4, but his opponent brought the *trouble* (עמל) he initiated on his “own *head*” and his “own skull” according to 7,17.⁹ The two verses thus define the theme of the restoration of the honour of the righteous and the appropriation of shame for the guilty. Together, Pss 3 and 7 argue that YHWH *does protect* the faithful (this is explicitly stated in 4,4) and *will see* to it that the wicked are *punished*.

The plea to YHWH to “please arise” (קומה יהוה), which occurs in 3,8, is also repeated in 7,7. This plea thus also connects the two psalms and serves to state that, since there is salvation for the righteous in YHWH, they must keep asking YHWH to intervene. However, this plea to YHWH to “arise” is not exclusive to the two psalms of the subgroup. It occurs another two times in the cluster (in 9,20 and 10,12), indicating its central importance for the whole cluster. The verb קום forms a series in the cluster since YHWH, after having been asked *four* times to “*please arise*,” eventually responds in Ps 12,6 by promising, “‘Because the oppressed are plundered, because the poor groan, I *will now arise*,’ says YHWH.” In response to what many people were saying about YHWH and his ability to save the righteous, the reader is urged, especially in the subgroup 3-7, to pray with “David” that YHWH should “arise” to intervene on their behalf and to believe that he will do so. From the whole

9. Cf. the use of עמל also in 7,15. Ps 10,7 and 14 also refer to this “trouble” caused by the “wicked.”

cluster, those who associate themselves with the in-group are assured that YHWH is aware of their need and ready to “place them in the safety” for which they long (cf. 12,6).

Psalms 8 forms a “*hinge*” between subgroups 3-7 and 9-14. It formulates the correct relationship between God and humanity in contrast to what is described in the surrounding groups (Hartenstein 2010: 237). People who recognise their dependence on YHWH proclaim his majestic name. They know themselves to be powerless, like babies and infants. It is through them that YHWH “established” his strength.¹⁰ Janowski (2020: 164) points to Isa 14,32b, a post-exilic reception of Isa 28,16, which states that “YHWH has founded (יָסַד) Zion, and in her the afflicted (עֲנִיִּים) of his people find refuge.” This founding of the temple (cf. Isa 28,16) is closely related to YHWH’s founding of the cosmos (Janowski 2020: 164). The “strength” of YHWH in Ps 8,3 thus serves as a defence which has the firmness and invincibility of Zion.

Those who deny the majesty of YHWH turn themselves into opponents and enemies of YHWH (8,3, cf. Craigie and Tate 2004: 107). If we accept that Pss 9-10 originally were one acrostic psalm, there would be an equal number of psalms before and after Ps 8 as the centrepiece. Psalms 9-10 were possibly inserted somewhat later into the cluster to form a (new) focus for it (Hartenstein 2010: 253-254).¹¹ However, the editors established strong connections between Pss 7, 8 and 9, while Pss 9 and 10 have different close connections. Previous research attempted to classify the psalms diachronically and to identify the re-interpretation of the earlier ones in the later ones.¹² This attempt seems counter-productive. The psalms were possibly rather meant to be read and reread in a synchronic, linear way as a coherent discourse responding to a particularly problematic situation.¹³ Hartenstein (2020: 238-239) also notes a stronger theo-

10. According to Barbiero (1999: 91), the “poor” people of Ps 9 are represented as “kings” in Ps 8, in contrast to the “mighty” (9,20) who correspond to the “enemy and avenger” of 8,3. This is evident from the fact that YHWH’s “strength” (יָצַח, 8,3) is contrasted to certain humans’ endeavour to establish their own “strength” (יָצַח, 9,20).

11. Barbiero (1999: 88-92) considers Pss 8-9 together as the centre of the cluster, with Ps 8 having close thematic ties with Ps 1 and Ps 9 with Ps 2, so that Pss 8 and 9 form a diptych like Pss 1-2.

12. Hossfeld and Zenger (1993: 14) think Pss 3-7 and 11-14 are (late) pre-exilic psalms which originated independently from one another. They were elaborated in the late exilic or early postexilic period and Ps 8, probably composed by the editors, was added and all of them edited to constitute a cluster. Hartenstein (2010: 239) says that Ps 8 formed a kernel around which the pre-exilic (Pss 3-7) and postexilic (Pss 11-14) subgroups were assembled. In my view, it is rather a case of the whole cluster having been assembled and edited in a later phase, with all of them being given close connections with the prologue.

13. I refer to the view that the acrostic Psalm 9-10 was added much later and would constitute a new theological centre. According to Hartenstein (2010: 232), Pss 9-10 were composed to be inserted into the cluster to provide “eine abschließende Leserleitung für Ps 3-14...” Hartenstein (2010: 258) thinks that Pss 9-10 provided a

provided through the *knowledge* that “God is with the generation of the righteous” (14,5) and that YHWH remains the refuge of the poor despite efforts to shame their “counsel” (עצה, 14,6). The “counsel” taken by the psalmist in their soul (עצה, 13,3) was thus not in vain.¹⁷ The crisis is not entirely resolved in Ps 14, but the psalmist is not left without hope either.

“Knowledge” and “knowing” plays an important role in the preamble and the first cluster. It is a wisdom theme, also visible in the prayer that YHWH would “lead” the psalmist in his righteousness and “make” his “way” straight before the psalmist in 5,9. The difference between the happiness of the righteous and the wicked is that YHWH *knows* the road of life of the righteous persons (1,6). The in-group must *know* that YHWH sets a godly person apart for himself (4,4). Those who put their trust in YHWH, are the ones who *know* his name (9,11). When he executes judgement, YHWH makes himself *known* (9,17). YHWH must let the heathen nations *know* that they are mere humans (9,21). The evildoers *do not know* with whom they have to cope when they eat up YHWH’s people as they eat bread and do not call upon YHWH (14,4). Chaos in society is, therefore, the result of a lack of knowledge about YHWH and his dealings with humanity.

2. *The Intended Effect of the Cluster of Psalms 3-14*

More than one answer is possible to the question of what the purpose of the cluster was. Nevertheless, the clear thematic and keyword connections between Pss 1-2 and the cluster’s psalms,¹⁸ as well as the interrelatedness of the cluster members, provide one hermeneutical key for discovering their designed effect. Like Pss 1-2, Pss 3-14 were edited or composed using a wisdom perspective.¹⁹ Psalm 1 demonstrates how the road of life of wicked people who follow sinful counsel ends in chaos (like chaff being blown away by a wind, like a road disappearing in the wilderness). The life of a righteous person who embraces the Torah of YHWH, in contrast, is ordered and successful since YHWH cares for them as a group. Since the righteous people delight in the Torah, studying it day and night, they produce their fruit *on time*. In Ps 2, the scope shifts to the international situation. Those nations who do not accept the rules of life of

17. These are the only two instances of עצה in the cluster, and they also refer to the “counsel” of the wicked in Ps 1,1, forming inclusion between Pss 1 and 14.

18. Cf. Wagner (2013: 68-69 n. 21).

19. According to Gosse (2008), the editing of the first Book of Psalms was influenced very much by Proverbs, especially Prov 30,1-14. It focuses on the position of people who were exploited by powerful, rich people in the postexilic period. See also Gosse (2019: 544-555) in this regard, further Botha (2018) for the influence of Prov 16,16-19 on Ps 5 and Botha (2012) for its influence on Ps 12. With Cheung (2015: 21), I can affirm that “wisdom psalms” come in graded degrees of membership, identifiable by a wisdom-oriented constellation of elements appropriate to its communication goal.

YHWH plan to rebel against his rule (as set out in his חק) and the authority of his anointed. All nations are invited to be wise and accept YHWH's authority, but chaos in the form of destruction waits for those who persist in rebellion.²⁰ The cluster Pss 3-14 then explains the enmity between the righteous and the wicked (the internal rebels within YHWH's people who cause social chaos) and the tension between the heathen nations (the rebels who cause chaos on an international scale) and YHWH.

*The core belief expressed in the cluster is that YHWH's dominion and order will triumph over the social and political chaos experienced at the time of the compilation of the cluster.*²¹ It is this *chaos* to which the psalmist refers in Ps 11,3 when he says that the foundations (שְׁתוּתָה)²² are "overthrown" or "destroyed" (נִפְּלָה *niph'al*). He refers to the foundations of society and, in this psalm, specifically to the attacks of the "wicked" (רְשָׁעִים) on the believers, the righteous. In Ps 11,5, he describes the out-group as the people who "love violence." YHWH set everything in order, but rebels, identified as the "wicked" and "heathen" nations, disregarded this order and now attempt to overthrow YHWH's rules (cf. Ps 2,1-3, where the גּוֹיִם and לְאֻמִּים are mentioned as the potential rebels). In Pss 3-14, the "wicked" from Ps 1 are described as the "enemies" (אֹיְבֵי in 3,8; 6,11; 7,6; 8,3; 9,4, 7; 13,3.5) and "opponents" (צָרָר in 6,8; 7,5.7; and 8.3) of the psalmist (or YHWH) and as "rebels" (cf. מָרָה, "to be recalcitrant, rebellious" in 5,11). They rebel against YHWH's authority. They, in association with the rebellious nations from Ps 2, the גּוֹיִם, cause chaos through their treacherous and criminal actions, arrogance, greed, and atheistic belief that YHWH is absent, ignorant of their doings, or unable to help the righteous believers.

The editors felt the need for YHWH to restore social and political order.

20. Barbiero (1999: 42-44) points out the parallel between Ps 1 and the prehistory narrated in Gen 1-11 and between Ps 2 and the history of Israel in Gen 12 to Deut 34. In each case, the first part of the "diptych" concerns humanity's endeavour to attain happiness and success and the second part the history of Israel, its holy city, and the rebellion of the nations against its king. Israel becomes a paradigm for humanity, so that wisdom and prophecy, creation and election belong together.

21. This is merely a different perspective of Hartenstein's (2010: 239) view that the theme of the composition is "YHWH as God of justice and faithfulness which represent the two royal functions of judge and saviour" (my summarising translation of the German).

22. The noun is the masculine plural form of שֵׁת, which probably comes from the stem שִׁית, "foundation, basis." The verb שִׁית plays an important role as keyword in the cluster: Enemies are "set up" all around the psalmist (3,6); YHWH has "put" everything under the feet of mankind (8,7); YHWH must "put" the heathen nations in fear (9,21); YHWH promises to "place" the poor and plundered person in the safety for which he longs (12,6); and the psalmist asks how long he will have to "take" counsel in his soul (13,3). The verb is thus connected to the establishment of order and attempts to overthrow it.

They experienced theological dissonance: If YHWH is the supreme king²³ of the world, why does he tolerate arrogant insurrection into his rule? How should the faithful deal with this situation? In response to the theological crisis experienced by the remaining faithful, they devised this cluster to bolster the belief that YHWH's dominion and order would triumph over the social and political chaos which caused hardship to the faithful worshippers of YHWH. This cluster of prayers by "David" would teach the members of the in-group how to pray and what to believe.²⁴

In the editors' mind, the disruption of society represented a return to primordial chaos. The imagery of YHWH's conflict with the sea was historicised in terms of his suppression of the enemies of Israel and even the enemies of the individual psalmist in the case of "David" (cf. Ps 18,17-18).²⁵ In Ps 2, the inhabitants of the world are divided into two groups of people: The "wise" (שָׂכֵל) *hiphil*, 2,10) who allow themselves to be disciplined (יָסַר *niphal*, 2,10) by accepting YHWH's universal reign, people who take refuge in him (בָּחַסוּ בַּיְהוָה, 2,12), and over against them, the rebels whose planned uprising is ridiculed because YHWH reigns from heaven and will destroy the rebellion through his anointed (Ps 2,1-9).²⁶

The cluster thus begins by dramatising the story of Absalom's rebellion against David (Pss 3-7). In Pss 3-7, "David," the anointed king, YHWH's agent in maintaining social and political order, unexpectedly faces the disgrace of an internal rebellion led by his son (3,1). How does he handle this, given YHWH's promises in Ps 2 about suppressing chaos and establishing YHWH's universal rule? YHWH had promised that those who sought refuge in him would be blessed (2,12). In Pss 3-7, "David" displays great humility and resilience. He holds on to the belief that YHWH would protect the faithful (cf. the use of the keywords מָגֵן, "shield," in 3,4 and 7,11; "shield," צָנָה, in 5,13, and בָּטַח, "trust in, safety" in 4,6.9; in the second subgroup also in 9,11 and 13,6). YHWH would eventually crush all opposition (cf. רָעַע and נָפַץ in 2,9; נָכַח and שָׁבַר in 3,8; also שָׁבַר in 10,15; further אָבַד *piel* in 5,7 and 9,6 and *qal* in 9,4.7.19 and 10,16). But "David" knows that it is only through YHWH's abundant steadfast love that he

23. "David," who is called (as the anointed one) "my king" by YHWH in Ps 2,6, addresses YHWH as "my king and my God" in Ps 5,3. In Ps 10,16, the psalmist declares that "YHWH is king forever and ever; the nations have perished from his land." The suffix conjugation אָבַדוּ refers to the eschatological promise of Pss 1,6 and 2,12, but also to the verses repeating this important keyword in 5,7; 9,4.6.7 and 19. The wicked and heathen nations have been punished but will be destroyed completely in the future.

24. This view of the purpose of the cluster is in line with Zenger's view of the purpose of Ps 4 (Zenger 1990: 394-395). Although the psalms of the cluster are presented as prayers of "David," the illocutionary purpose was to exhort and persuade the readers.

25. Mabie (2008: 50).

26. The stem חָסַח is a very important keyword which connects the end of the prologue (2,12) to the end of the first subgroup (7,2) and the end of the first cluster (מָחַסָה in 14,6). See also Barbiero (1999: 186).

would be able to enter YHWH's presence again (5,8). Although he is the anointed of YHWH and considers himself to be a righteous and innocent person (7,3-5,9) he seeks refuge in YHWH (7,2; cf. 2,12). According to the cluster, "David" thus encouraged his circle of supporters to stay true to this belief despite growing scepticism and agnosticism as described in Pss 3 and 4. "David's" words of exhortation and reprimand would thus exhort the in-group members during the editors' time.

By reading and rereading the cluster, the in-group members could follow "David's" example of how to pray. They would heed his repeated confessions of faith that YHWH is capable and willing to protect the righteous, intervene and restore order. He was not absent as the sceptics said, but present in heaven (2,4; 11,4; 14,2). He was simultaneously present in Zion (2,6; 3,5; 9,12; 14,7), and with his oppressed followers, the "righteous generation" (14,5). "David" was saved by YHWH and could therefore thank him for the salvation (שׁוּעָה in 3,9; in the second subgroup also in 13,6 and 14,7), so it is not necessary to doubt YHWH's presence or ability to restore order and bless his people (3,9; 5,13; see also 14,7).

The rebellion of Absalom is resolved in Ps 7. According to this psalm, Absalom eventually brought disaster onto his "own head" (7,17). This idea of retribution by the own doing of the wicked is repeated in Ps 9,16-17. It was also hinted at in 5,11. "David" was saddened by the death of his son, but he was innocent of his being killed. Absalom brought disaster onto himself, but this is part of YHWH's judgement (cf. 9,17). David consequently announced his desire to praise YHWH for his righteous judgement at the end of Ps 7 (7,18). Psalms 8 and 9 constitute that praise.²⁷ "David" persisted in putting his trust in YHWH and was able to offer him praise even in the face of death, thus utter chaos, as it is described in Pss 6 and 13. After Ps 8, the chaos-causing actions of the internal rebels, the "wicked," remain in focus, but *international* social disorder caused by rebellious nations becomes the central concern.

The word רָשָׁע occurs once each in Pss 3,8 and 7,10, then three times in Ps 9, five times in Ps 10, three times in Ps 11, and once in Ps 12.²⁸ The "heathen nations" (גוֹיִם) are, however, only encountered in Ps 9 (five times) and then once in Ps 10. The other (less rebellious) nations (לְאֻמִּים) are mentioned in Pss 7,8 and 9,9 as witnesses of YHWH's judgement and the subjects of that judgment—but a judgement which is qualified as being executed "with uprightness." Although "David" is still the suppliant in Pss 9-14, the focus now shifts from the individual to the suffering of the in-group. It is no longer the psalmist's concern alone, as in Pss 3-7. The in-group as a whole is now under attack. They are described with words referring to the oppression of powerless Jews in the

27. Comparison of Ps 7,18 with 9,2-3, in any case, shows that Ps 9 continues the praise announced in Ps 7,18. They share five keywords: יָדָה, יְהוָה, זָמַר, שָׂם, and עָלִיוֹן.

28. It clearly serves as one of the keywords demarcating the subgroup Pss 3-7. The related noun רָשָׁע is used in 5,5, but the centre of gravity of occurrences (86%) is in Pss 9-12. רָשָׁע also occurs once in 10,15.

post-exilic period:²⁹ the “poor” or “afflicted” (אביון in 9,19 and 12,6; עניים in 9,13; 10,2.9.12 and 17), the “oppressed” (דך in 9,10; 10,10 and 18),³⁰ the “fatherless” (יתום in 10,14 and 18); the “powerless” or “helpless” (חלכה in 10,8.10 and 14).

These descriptions are not used in Pss 1-7 because it would not make sense in the context of David’s conflict with Absalom.³¹ But the suffering of the poor is linked directly to the actions of the “wicked” in Ps 10,2-15. The “heathen nations” (גוים) are instead the ones who *enable* the “wicked” and “evildoer” to cause havoc in YHWH’s land (10,15) and cause terror in the hearts of the powerless (10,18). It thus describes a situation where foreign rulers neglect to care for the rights of powerless people.

Psalm	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
The wicked רשע	רשעים		רשע		רשעים		רשעים רשע (2x)	רשע (5x) רשע	רשעים (2x) רשע	רשעים		
Heathen nations גוי							גוים (5x)	גוים				
Peoples לאם					לאמים		לאמים					
People, nations עם	עם שחו [עמך]				עמים		עמים					[עמי] [עמו]
The poor אביון							אביון			אביונים		
The wretched or oppressed ענו and עני							עני עניים (2x) עניים	עני (3x) עניים		עניים		עני
The oppressed דך							דך	דך				
The fatherless								יתום				

29. For a detailed discussion of the role of Pss 9-10 in the theology of the poor in the Psalms, see Bremer (2016a: 339-343).

30. See Bremer (2016b: 168-170) for a semantic analysis of דך in the Hebrew Bible. His analysis of the occurrence of the roots דכא and דכה in the Hebrew Bible leads him to conclude that there is a high (although not exclusive) connection between the two roots and violence (Bremer 2016b: 176). In Pss 9-10, it is closely related to the semantic field of the “poor,” and to physical violence. In his words, “the noun דך both refers to a kind of poverty and to violence of physical kind” (Bremer 2016b: 177).

31. The absence of these references to the poor in Pss 3-7 is sometimes used to infer that those psalms are pre-exilic individual laments referring to various situations of distress (Hossfeld and Zenger 1993: 14). Some of those psalms may have had a pre-exilic origin, but in their present form they also refer to the postexilic situation of injustice and poverty caused by the heartless actions of wicked people (cf. Ps 4,6-7).

יתום												
The unfortunate								הלכה (2x)				
הלכה								הלכאים				

Table 2: The Wicked, the Heathen Nations, Other Nations, and the Disadvantaged in Pss 3-14

Within the thanksgiving offered in Ps 9, there is a reminder to YHWH about the rebellion of the heathen nations and the social upheaval it causes. The enemies, the wicked, and the heathen nations are said to have been punished. Therefore, the psalmist, “David,” insists that YHWH has not forsaken his oppressed followers (9,13.19). The “peaceful” nations (עמים) should be informed about his wondrous deeds (9,12). The wicked will be snared in their own plans and will return to Sheol (9,17-18). Nevertheless, there is still the call to YHWH to bring the raging nations under control: “Put them in fear, YHWH, let the heathen nations (גוים) know they are but human (אנוש)!” (9,20-21). This call refers to the description of humanity (אנוש and בן־אדם) as having been made “just a little less than God” in Ps 8,5-6.

There is a *crescendo* of distress with the actions of the wicked and evil-doers in Pss 9 and 10. The psalmist accusingly asks YHWH why he stays so remote and hides in times of stress (10,1). The psalmist reconfirms his faith and trust in YHWH in Ps 11, but the chaos caused by arrogant rebels continues in the call to YHWH to intervene in Ps 12. Psalm 13 is, like Ps 6, another low point of desperateness, again referring to the possibility of utter chaos in death (cf. the use of מָוֶת in both 6,6 and 13,4) with the light of the eyes beginning to disappear (6,8 and 13,4). Nevertheless, the psalmist insists that YHWH has heard his plea in Ps 6,9. He also expects to again shout with joy over YHWH’s salvation in Ps 13,6. The sudden switch from distress to trust in both psalms serves as a confirmation of “David’s” faith. It is intended to encourage the in-group of the editors. Psalm 14 describes the foolish thoughts of the atheist, which leads him to believe that he will go unpunished. Despite the “dark question” about YHWH’s postponement of justice in Pss 10-14 (see Hartenstein 2010: 238), the cluster ends with confirmation that the rebels will be “terrified”³² because YHWH is with the righteous generation; he *is* the place of refuge of the oppressed (14,5-6; cf. Ps 2,12). When YHWH intervenes, chaos in the form of coals, fire, sulphur, and scorching wind will disrupt the world of the wicked, while the upright will enjoy his presence (11,6-7; 14,5; cf. 1,3-4.5-6). This promise of judgement to come is a repetition of what was described in Ps 1,4-6, with the wicked being “scattered” like chaff by the wind, and in Ps

32. This fear (פחד), which will overtake them, confirms the promise in Ps 2,5 that YHWH will terrify (בהל *piel*) the rebels. In Ps 6,3 and 4, the psalmist himself experienced this terror (בהל), thinking that YHWH is disciplining him in “anger” (6,2). But he confesses at the end of the psalm (6,11) that it is his enemies who will be terrified (בהל *niphal*). The life of the righteous should be characterised by a healthy respect for YHWH, but not fear (cf. 4,5).

2,9, with the “breaking” and “dashing to pieces” of the rebellious parts of the world.

Table 3 provides an overview of keywords occurring more than once, which refer to the out-group and some of their offences versus the righteous and some of their virtues.

Psalm	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Enemy איב	איבים			איבים	אויב	אויב	אויבים אויב				איב (x2)	
Opponents צורר				צוררים	צורר	צוררים		צוררים				
Pursue(rs) רדף					רדפים רדף							
The arrogant, be arrogant הלל			הוללים					הלל				
The evildoers פעלי און			פעלי און	פעלי און								פעלי און
Deceit מרמה			מרמה					מרמה				
Evil און					און			און				
Evil רע			רע		[רע] ³³ רע			[רע] ³⁴ רע				
Flatter(ers) חלק			יחליקון							חלקות (2x)		
Trouble עמל					עמל (x2)			עמל (x2)				
Violence חמס				חמס					חמס			
Seek refuge in חסה ב			חוסי בך		בך חסיתי				ביהוה חסיתי			
The faithful חסיד		חסיד								חסיד		
The righteous צדיק			צדיק		צדיק (x3)				צדיק (x3)			צדיק
The upright in heart ישרי-לב					ישרי- לב				ישרי- לב ישר			
Seek (YHWH or God) דרש							דרשים					דרש

Table 3: The Opponents and Their Transgressions versus the Upright and their Virtues

The psalmist in this cluster is aware of his own moral inadequacies. This is clear from the attitude of humility and requests for YHWH to act with grace and compassion (חנן is used in this sense in 4,2; 6,3; and 9,14). It is not because of

33. This instance of “evil” does not refer to the deeds of the wicked.

34. This instance of “evil” refers to adversity which the wicked thinks will never affect him.

his righteousness that he hopes to come into YHWH's presence, but through the abundance of YHWH's steadfast love (חסד, 5,8). He also bases his requests for help and his trust in YHWH on YHWH's steadfast love (6,5; 13,6). He may be deserving of YHWH's rebukes and discipline, but merely asks that this should not happen in YHWH's anger (אף) or wrath (המה, 6,2). YHWH's anger (אף) should be reserved for those who rebel against him (2,5.12; 6,2; 7,7). Although he denies wronging (עול בכף) his friend (7,4), the accusations of arrogance and hubris on the part of the wicked (לל III, 5,6; 10,3; מרה, 5,11; גבה אפו, 10,4; גבר *hiphil*, 12,5) indicate that humility is considered one of the critical characteristics of the upright faithful. The psalmist's attitude is one of bowing down before YHWH in awe (5,8).

3. *The Social and Theological Problems Addressed in the Cluster*

The editors were concerned over various signs of rebellion against YHWH, which caused chaos within society:

- There was a growth in the number of rebellious opponents (cf. the use of רבב in 3,2; רב in 3,2.3; 4,7 and 5,11; גמר חסיד in 12,2; אין גם־אחד in 14,3).
- There was scepticism among the in-group (cf. the use of אין ישועתה in 3,3; מִי־יראנו טוב in 4,7; and the תאות ענוים in 10,17).
- The upright people were shamed (3,4; 4,3; 7,5; 14,6).
- The in-group found pessimistic pronouncements attractive (4,3-4; 11,1.3).
- Some in-group members were openly pessimistic (4,8; 6,7-8) and fearful (3,7; 4,9; 11,1).
- The criminality of wicked people, evildoers, and arrogant rebels (5,5-6; 6,9; 10,2-3; 12,5; 12,9) seemed to increase unchecked.
- Lying, murder and deceit were common (5,7.10; 10,8-10; 11,2; 12,3).
- There seems to have been animosity among YHWH's people (7,5).
- YHWH's intervention seemed to be delayed (7,7-8; 9,10-11.13.17.19-21; 10,1.11-15.17-18; 12,4; 13,2-3).
- There was no distinction between the wicked and the righteous (5,5-8.11-12; 7,10; 10,4-7; 11,5-7).
- Powerless, upright people were exploited and oppressed (10,8-10; 12,6; 14,4.6).
- There was outspoken atheism (10,4; 14,1).

All these things were manifestations of chaos: doubt, scepticism, enmity, danger, accusations, a lack of morality, criminal exploitation of the weak, murder, a lack of trust in YHWH, critical questions about YHWH's existence and presence and his willingness to help combat chaos gave rise to a feeling of general despair. A similar lament about turmoil in society and outspoken criticism of YHWH's seeming ignorance of it is heard in Ps 94. The psalmist of Ps 94 uses the same arguments found in this cluster: YHWH will not abandon his

people but intervene as a judge by bringing their evil plans over themselves.

The psalmist thus felt that the foundations were being destroyed (11,3). Destruction of the social order is highlighted using the verb כּוֹן (“to be steadfast, sure”). It is used eight times in the cluster. The psalmist describes the speech of the out-group as אִין נכּוֹנָה, “nothing reliable” in their mouths (5,10). In the next verse, they are said to have “rebelled” (מָרָה) against YHWH (Ps 5,11). Rebellion implies that everything seems to become unreliable. However, the same verb, כּוֹן, is also used to describe YHWH’s re-establishment of order (see below).

Various *quotations* in the cluster are witnesses to the problem of chaos in society and the world and the expression of doubt about YHWH’s ability to save. These quotations are marked with the keyword אָמַר:

- “Many are *saying* ‘there is no salvation for him in God’” (3,3).
- “There are many who *say*, ‘Who will show us some good?’” (4,7).
- “(The wicked) *says* in his heart, ‘I shall not be moved ... I shall not meet adversity’” (10,6).
- “(The wicked) *says* in his heart, ‘God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it’” (10,11).
- “Why does the wicked ... *say* in his heart, ‘You will not call to account?’” (10,13).
- “(The arrogant) who *say*, ‘With our tongue, we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?’” (12,5);³⁵
- “Lest my enemy *say*, ‘I have prevailed over him’” (13,5).
- “The fool *says* in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (14,1).

Beat Weber (2016: 191-267) has compiled an extensive list of the verses in the Psalms where direct speech of and to opponents are found. He describes the seven psalms within the cluster 3-14 where such citations are found (Pss 3; 4; 10-14) as a centre of gravity of occurrences (Weber 2016: 254). In his view, it is expected in laments since such quotations from opponents enhance the depictions of distress in those psalms (Weber 2016: 254). They serve to intensify the dramatic quality of the prayers, bring about presence and authenticity, and rob the power of the intended evil actions by opponents (Weber 2016: 263). Hyperbole, irony, mockery, dissociation and defence against aggression and arrogance, warning, and self-encouragement could also be involved (Weber 2016: 264). Without denying these functions, it should be stated that these psalms are presented as prayers of “David” but that they constitute ideological texts.³⁶ They

35. By using the keyword אָדוֹן, it is pointed out that the arrogant wicked impose themselves into YHWH’s position, who is addressed as אֱדוֹנֵינוּ in Ps 8,2 and 10.

36. In the words of Elliott (1993: 52), “Ideology is understood here not in the reductionist (Marxian) sense of ‘false consciousness’ or ‘the dominant ideas of (only) the dominant class’, but as a cognitive and strategic feature of all self-conscious groups and classes and their textual productions. Thus, ideology is understood as ‘an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values, not necessarily true or false, which reflects

were devised to combat offensive views and strengthen the orthodox position of the editors. They are texts that were intended to convince and persuade. The quotations probably reflect arguments with theological dissidents or the disturbing narrative of the period.

Chaos in society is demonstrated by the increased moral degradation and growing doubt about YHWH's ability to notice and intervene to stop the oppression of the weak. Rebellious speech plays a significant role in this: Lying (כזב in 4,3 and 5,7), flattering (הלל in 5,10; 12,3,4), deceiving (מרמה in 5,7 and 10,7), and arrogantly boasting talk (הלל in 5,6 and 10,3; שפה in 12,3-5). The mouths (פה in 5,10 and 10,7), throats (גרון in 5,10), and tongues (לשון in 5,10; 10,7; 12,4,5) of the wicked evildoers posed a deadly danger.

Psalms 14,3, with the exclamation that no one does good, is reminiscent of Gen 6,5: that YHWH saw that the wickedness of humanity was great on earth and that every intention of the thoughts of their heart was only evil continually. There is a return to the chaos of the time before the flood.

The problem of YHWH's seeming absence or inactivity is highlighted through the repetition of אין as in "there is *no salvation* in God" (3,3), there will be "*none* to deliver" (7,3), "there is *no God*" (10,4; 14,1). The negative particle לא also indicates the arrogant thoughts of the wicked: "I shall *not* be moved"; "I shall *not* meet adversity" (10,6); "(God) will *not* call to account" (10,13).

Death is the ultimate chaos, the ultimate expression of chaos for the human realm (Mabie 2008: 52). Beyond the gates of Sheol, there is no praise for God. Thus, no proper human life is possible. This is a real threat to the psalmist (Pss 6; 13), but death is also the destiny of the wicked and the heathen nations. The speech of the rebellious people is also associated with death: Their throat and mouth resemble a grave, and this opening in their faces is thus reminiscent of death as the ultimate expression of chaos (5,10; cf. also 10,7).

4. *The re-Establishment of Order Envisaged by the Editors*

The prologue (Pss 1-2) speaks of both order and chaos. The person who finds delight in the Torah of YHWH experiences stability in their life, but those who associate with the wicked will experience chaos (1,3-4.5-6). In Ps 2, stability is guaranteed by YHWH's decree that his anointed will rule, and chaos threatens the recalcitrant ones.³⁷ The editors attempted to answer the question, "How did 'David' react to the growing chaos affecting his life?" They used the psalmist's confessions of faith and expressions of praise to inspire readers to reconfirm their faith in YHWH's sovereignty: He was the psalmist's *king*; he is *king*

the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time in history'. All biblical texts are "ideological" texts in this sense.

37. According to Weber (2001: 54), the teaching of YHWH is the "inner" stability given by YHWH to his people, the kingdom the "outer" stability.

forever (5,3; 10,16).³⁸ YHWH's eternal kingship implies that the order he instituted would remain forever. According to Ps 10,16, it goes hand in hand with the disappearance of the heathen nations (גוים) from his land. YHWH's kingship is also used in the YHWH-*malak* psalms to confirm the restoration of order: In Ps 93,1 and 96,10, his kingship goes together with the world's stability. In Ps 99,1, his kingship implies that the peoples must tremble, and the earth must quake. His control over the waters of the Reed Sea is also closely associated with his kingship, according to Exodus 15,18-19. If YHWH is the eternal king, order will be restored.

Hartenstein (2010: 241) remarks that the cluster is distinguished by its *discursive character*. In-group members, enemies, and even a representative "fool" make direct statements expressing doubt or denial about YHWH's involvement in human affairs (3,3; 4,7; 10,6.11.13; 11,1; 12,5; 13,5; 14,1). In turn, the psalmist responds with positive assertions about YHWH's presence, protection, awareness, and willingness to act.³⁹ Hartenstein (2010: 241) notes that such statements often have the theme of recognition of the *truth* about God (sometimes marked using the verb ידע as in 4,4, cf. 9,21 and 14,2), further also an acknowledgement of the *falseness* of human doing.

The purpose of such discursive interjections, even when the psalmist addresses YHWH, is to convince the audience that YHWH *is* active, able to protect, present, and willing and ready to judge. The psalmist says YHWH looks for insight (משכיל) in humanity (14,2), in line with what Ps 2,12 requires. Examples of such aphoristic confessions in the cluster, demonstrating its persuasive function, are:

- "You, YHWH, are a shield about me" (3,4).
- "You have struck all my enemies on the cheek; you have shattered the teeth of the wicked" (3,8).
- "Salvation belongs to YHWH" (3,9).
- "YHWH has set the godly apart for himself" (4,4).
- "You have put more joy in my heart than when they have ample wine and bread" (4,8).
- "You, YHWH, make me dwell in safety" (4,9).
- "You bless the righteous, YHWH; you cover him with favour as with a shield" (5,13).

38. In the first Davidic Book of Psalms (Pss 3-41), YHWH is further called "king" in Pss 24,7.8.9 and 10 (מלך הכבוד); and 29,10 (מלך לעולם).

39. In Ps 4,3, the psalmist accusingly addresses the בני איש of turning his כבוד into shame. It is quite possible that he uses the words "sons of man" to address the "mighty" in his society (based on the contrast of the poor and the rich in Ps 49,3; cf. Bremer 2016a: 337), but כבוד refers to his own honour and is not a reference to YHWH as Bremer asserts. The use of the term in 3,4 and 7,6 demonstrates that the righteous had to contend with public shaming.

- “YHWH has heard my weeping, heard my plea; he accepts my prayer” (6,9-10).
- “YHWH judges the peoples” (7,9).
- “How majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens” (8,2, cf. 8,10).
- “YHWH sits enthroned forever” (9,8).
- “YHWH is a stronghold for the oppressed” (9,20).
- “YHWH has made himself known; he has executed judgement” (9,17).
- “YHWH is king forever” (10,16).
- “YHWH hears the desire of the afflicted and will strengthen their heart” (10,17).
- “YHWH is in his holy temple; his throne is in heaven, his eyes see, he tests humanity” (11,4).
- “YHWH tests the righteous, but he hates the wicked” (11,5).
- “YHWH is righteous, he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall see his face” (11,7).
- “YHWH will keep us and guard us against this generation” (12,8).
- “YHWH looks down from heaven on humanity” (14,2).
- “YHWH will restore the fortunes of his people” (14,7).

No one can argue effectively against such authoritative assertions by the psalmist, identified as “David.” Janowski (2020: 163) points out that the “mouth of babies and infants” in Ps 8,3 should be interpreted within the context of the evil perpetrated through the *mouths* of the evildoers in the cluster. Their mouths serve to articulate their inner intention of destruction, their throats which are like an open grave, their tongues which flatter (5,10). The mouth of the wicked is filled with cursing, deceit, and oppression and mischief and iniquity lurk beneath his tongue (10,7). In this way the “mouth,” the destructive speech of the one who lies (4,3; 5,7; 7,15), the one who denies the existence of God (3,3; 4,7), and the enemy (5,10) forms an antithesis to the “mouth” of the babies and infants of 8,3 (Janowski 2020: 163). Whatever they articulate constitutes an authoritative quality against everything the enemy achieves with their lying and defamatory speech (Janowski 2020: 164).

Interpreters have noted the day-night rhythm in the cluster (especially in Pss 3-7) early on. It is important to note that this reflects the endeavour to overcome chaos by embracing the order of YHWH. In Ps 1,2, it is stated that the righteous are characterised through their meditating on the Torah of YHWH “day and night.” Night is associated with terror and chaos, but the Torah represents YHWH’s order in life.⁴⁰ Chaos is thus conquered through YHWH’s rules for life. The tree, planted next to channels of water, which gives its fruit *at its time* in Ps 1, is a wisdom metaphor for success and order.

In Ps 2,1, the rebellion of the nations (who are “meditating” on vain

40. Even during the night, remembering YHWH’s Torah provides counsel. Cf. Ps 16,7. The Torah is also a light on the path of life (Prov 6,23).

thoughts instead of on the Torah) attempts to overthrow YHWH's order. The "bonds" and "cords" they plan to cast away are metaphors for YHWH's Torah, his rules for a successful and harmonious life. According to Ps 2,4-5, this rebellion is answered by YHWH's ridicule and anger, and order is said to be restored based on the קה, the "decree" which YHWH announced in Ps 2,7. In Ps 3,6, the psalmist confesses: "I *lay down and slept*; I woke again, for YHWH sustains me": The uncertainty and chaos of the night are thus overcome by trusting in YHWH's support.

In Ps 4,5, the psalmist exhorts members of his in-group: "Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your *beds* and be silent." Thus, overcome frustration and chaos through meditation. In Ps 4,9, the psalmist says: "In peace, I will both *lie down and sleep*; for you alone, YHWH, make me dwell in safety." The danger of the night with its chaotic threats and fear of those threats can be overcome through YHWH's guarantee of order and safety.

In Ps 5,4, the psalmist says: "YHWH, in the *morning* you will hear my voice; in the morning I will set it out for you and watch." This is not necessarily the preparation of a sacrifice but the orderly presentation (אָרַךְ) of the psalmist's problem with a chaotic society, and it indicates his patient waiting for YHWH's answer. Impatience encourages chaos.

In Ps 6,7, the psalmist laments: "Every night I flood my bed with tears, I drench my *couch* with weeping." The low point of despair is reached during the night with its ominous symbolism of chaos.

In Ps 7,12, the psalmist can confirm: "YHWH is a righteous judge and a God who feels indignation *the whole day*." YHWH is not unaware of the threat of chaos; he is ready to judge.⁴¹

Psalm 8 forms part of the series: The psalmist wonders over the orderly arrangement of stars in the *night sky*.⁴² Amid the threat of chaos, there is a clear sign of YHWH's order.⁴³ Even on earth, YHWH arranged an orderly hierarchy, having conquered the sea (symbolised by the reference to the "ways" of the sea in Ps 8,9) and putting humanity in charge of all. This contrasts the chaos humanity causes by arrogantly transgressing into YHWH's domain.⁴⁴ This chaos should be rectified through YHWH's judging the wicked and the heathen nations.⁴⁵ Humanity continually risks using its elevated position arrogantly

41. Hartenstein (2010: 246): "In Ps 7 wird JHWH also im Sinne der Jerusalemer Tempeltheologie als aktiver Garant der Weltordnung gezeichnet, dem das (paradigmatische) Schicksal des Einzelnen entscheidend wichtig ist..."

42. Cf. also Barbiero (1999: 92).

43. Cf. the connection between the order in the movement of the sun and the proclamation of creation during night and day with the Torah of YHWH in Ps 19, another hymn inserted as the centre of a cluster of psalms.

44. Hartenstein (2010: 247): "Der Mensch ist mächtig, aber zugleich bedarf es der Einsicht, dass er sein 'Herrschen in den Grenzen der Schöpfung' ausübt."

45. Cf. the parallel between day/night and peace and order in society in Is 45,7 (Mabie 2008: 47). Humanity was created to be a little less than God (Ps 8,6), but the psalmist prays in Ps 9,20-21 that humanity (אָנִישׁ) should be prevented from becoming

against fellow human beings and YHWH.⁴⁶

YHWH's faithfulness, righteousness, and justice are the foundations of order. These values are confirmed throughout the cluster. "Righteousness" (צדקה) is mentioned in 5,9 and 11,7, and צדק in 4,2; 7,18; 9,5 and 9,9. "Uprightness" (מישרים) is mentioned in 9,9; YHWH's "steadfast love" (חסד) in 5,8; 6,5; and 13,6. The purpose of these affirmations is to strengthen trust in YHWH's willingness to intervene in the social chaos.

Because he is a righteous judge, there are repeated calls to YHWH to judge (שפט) the wicked (7,9; 9,20; 10,18), but also confirmations that he already did so in the past and will do so again, for example with דין in 7,9 and 9,9. Both the confirmations that he does so and the requests for YHWH to judge, establish connections to the prospect of judgement announced in Ps 1,5-6 (cf. משפט in 1,5; 7,7; 9,5.8.17; and 10,5). In line with the theological position implied in Ps 1,5-6, the wicked bring disaster on themselves, although YHWH, as the upholder of order, is the judge who brings this about in righteousness (cf. 9,16-17, where YHWH is described as the judge between two pronouncements about the heathen nations and the wicked bringing judgement on themselves). The wicked who think YHWH's judgements (משפטים) do not concern them (10,5) thus make a grave mistake (see the rhetorical question הלא ידעו in 14,4).

The cluster confirms that YHWH "abhors" the deeds of the wicked (expressed with לא הפץ in 5,5; שנא in 5,6 and 11,5, and תעב *piel* in 5,7) but "blesses" (ברך *piel* in 5,13) and "covers" (עטר, 5,13) the righteous with his delight. This serves as a confirmation of Pss 1,1 and 2,12.

In addition to the calls to YHWH to "answer" (ענה in 4,2 and 13,4), "return" (שוב in 6,5 and 7,8), "arise" (קומה יהוה in 3,8; 7,7; 9,20 and 10,12), "wake up" (עור II in 7,7), and "not forget" the oppressed (10,12; 13,2), there are also confirmations that YHWH *has* "answered" (ענה in 3,5), *is* "aware" (9,13; 12,6), *is* "watching" (10,14; 11,4; 14,2), *is* "testing" (with בהן in 7,10; 11,4-5; with שקף *hiphil* in 14,2), *is* "hearing" (שמע 4,4; 5,4; 6,9.10; 10,17), and *is* "preparing" his judgement seat (שב and כסא in 9,8; cf. 9,5 and 12), intent on restoring order and "eradicating" (אבד *piel* in 5,7; 9,6; cf. also the use of אבד *qal* in 9,4 and 10,16) chaos because he does *not* "abandon" those who seek him (9,11), "thinks" of them and does *not* "forget" the call of the oppressed (9,13.19). The upright will thus see his face (11,7). These affirmations confirm that some members of the in-group expressed critical views in the time of the editors since

"strong" and the heathen nations frightened so that they would know they are mere humans.

46. Because Ps 8,3 uses the two enemy descriptions that dominate in Pss 3-7, Ps 8 offers a creation-theological deepening of Pss 3-7 (Hartenstein 2010: 248). Psalm 9 identifies the two groups which are mentioned in Ps 8,3 further: The "babies" and "infants" are identified in Ps 9 as the "oppressed" (9,10), the "afflicted" (9,13), the "needy" and the "poor" (9,19); while the "foes," "enemy," and "avenger" are identified as the (heathen) nations in Ps 9,21, the ones who must be made to know that they are only human. The oppressed ones are royalty in YHWH's eyes; the arrogant oppressors are his enemies (cf. Barbiero 1999: 91).

they were intended to counter such critical pronouncements.

There is an emphasis on the fact that YHWH is in heaven (and in Zion), ready to take the judgment seat (9,8-9; 11,4; 14,2.5). Judgment has already begun: The wicked plans of evil people return on their heads, confirming the deed-result connection of righteous judgement (7,16-17; 9,16-17; cf. 10,2). Some heathen nations have already been wiped out (9,6-7). This confirms a righteous order which will again be established eschatologically. The wicked and the heathen nations will return to Sheol (9,18).

The readers should, therefore, pray like “David”: Threatened by chaos, doubt, and suffering, “David” nevertheless always referred to YHWH’s past acts of salvation. The verb *ישע* (3,8; 6,5; 7,2; 12,2) and the noun *ישועה* (3,3.9; 9,15; 13,6; 14,7) play a central role in the cluster. Salvation implies the restoration of order for the psalmist and YHWH’s people.

Restoration of order is also indicated with *כּוּן* (*polal*): “Establish”: “Let the wicked come to an end but *establish* the righteous” (7,10). In the same way, YHWH has also set the moon and stars *in place* (8,4). The *polel* of *כּוּן* is also used in the meaning of “prepared”: “YHWH *readied* his bow” (7,13); and in the *hiphil*: “he has *prepared* his weapons” (7,14); then again in the *polel*: “YHWH has *established* his throne,” (9,8), and in the *hiphil*: “YHWH will *strengthen* the heart of the afflicted” (10,17). YHWH’s acts of establishing order counter the chaos caused by those who rebel against him.

In contrast to corrupt human speech, the affirmation of YHWH’s “pure” speech also signifies the restoration of order (12,7). Against the arrogant and treacherous mouths of the wicked, YHWH uses praise from the mouth of powerless people to establish his strength (8,3). The use of the verb *יסד* (to “found, establish, lay foundations”) in this regard is significant as an antonym for the “destroying” (*הרס*) of the foundations in Ps 11,3.

The call to YHWH to “arise” (*קוּמָה יְהוָה*) forms a refrain in 3,8; 7,7; 9,20, and 10,12 (mentioned above). This series ends when YHWH responds in 12,6, “Now *I will arise* to place him (the poor and the needy) in the safety for which he longs.”

Psalms 8 demonstrates how nature is a model of order and beauty, with some enemies of God acting as incursions of chaos into this order. Those ignorant of YHWH’s special care for the weak and oppressed ignore his “crowning” of all people with royal dignity as instruments of his rule. They impose themselves on YHWH’s position and thus become his enemies. YHWH will consequently re-establish the order of creation by answering these rebels through “weak” humans. He uses the proclamation of his power against the arrogant mouths of the wicked through the *mouths* of babies, the weakest of humans. The arrangement of material in the cluster, with Ps 8 in the centre, is itself an evocative expression of order.

5. Conclusion

The cluster of Psalms 3-14 constitutes a collective plea to YHWH to restore order in the political and social chaos experienced in the post-exilic period. “David” demonstrated the value of trust in YHWH, seeking refuge in him alone. He was saved from the threat of chaos in his private and official life in various manifestations. YHWH’s victory over chaos in nature is still visible in the display of the glory of his name in creation. Order will, therefore, be restored when YHWH returns in glory to judge the nations, condemn the guilty, and bless his people. The readers are implicitly and explicitly exhorted to stay true to their beliefs, keep faith in YHWH, and trust him to restore order. He will stay true to his righteous character and steadfast love (דָּוָד in 5,8; 6,5 and 13,6) to destroy chaos, restore order, and bring joy and prosperity to those who know his name, trust in him, and seek refuge in his strength.

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