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# The Future David of Psalm 101: Davidic Hope Sustained in Book IV of the Psalter

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**Abstract:** Since Gerald Wilson published *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, scholars have debated his proposal regarding the structure and message of the Psalter. Central to the debate is the role and status of the Davidic line in Books IV–V (Psalms 90–150). Many follow Wilson, arguing that the Davidic line and Davidic hope virtually disappear in these final two books. Others disagree, but they tend to emphasize royal and Davidic evidence within Book V. This paper explores the message and function of Psalm 101 within Book IV, arguing that its intra-book links, Davidic title, royal voice, lamenting tone, future orientation, inter-psalm allusions, and strategic placement make it a central psalm sustaining Davidic hope in Book IV. Therefore, the יהוה מלך psalms at the core of Book IV (93–100) do not elevate the reign of Yahweh only to castigate the line of David. The reign of Yahweh rather upholds the line of David, answering the suspicions of Psalm 89 where God was questioned because he had bound his visible earthly rule to the fallen Davidic throne.

**Key Words:** Psalms, Hebrew Psalter, Book IV, Gerald Wilson, canonical, David, royal psalm

## Introduction

In the last three decades, concentrated research on the canonical Hebrew Psalter has advanced the view that the Psalter bears an intentional structure.<sup>1</sup> Interpreters have explored the placement of individual psalms, pairs, sets, groups, collections, books, and multi-book sections. Many have attempted to discern organizational structures, theological perspectives, and connected themes across the Psalter.<sup>2</sup>

1. This article is adapted from David Gundersen, “Davidic Hope in Book IV of the Psalter (Psalms 90–106)” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 1–2, 146–85.

2. For the last century, see Thorne Wittstruck, *The Book of Psalms: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1994), 1:1–10. For the last few decades, see Howard’s multiple surveys of trends published over the last twenty years: David M. Howard, Jr., “Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State-of-the-Field Survey,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. C. McCann (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 52–70; “Recent Trends in Psalms Study,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. D. W. Baker and B. T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 329–68; and “The Psalms and Current Study,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and*

Some sense a narrative pulse within the Psalter.<sup>3</sup> Building on Gerald Wilson’s groundbreaking work, a company of scholars broadly agree that Books I–III form a Davidic shape.<sup>4</sup> Psalms 1–2 set the royal agenda, Davidic superscriptions fill Books I–II, and Books I–III are bound by royal psalms at their seams (Pss 2, 72, 89).<sup>5</sup> The trajectory moves loosely from the ideal king (Pss 1–2) through the life and sufferings of David (Books I–II) to a Solomonic coronation (Ps 72). The Psalter then darkens with the storm of exile (Book III), culminating in the apparent failure of the Davidic promises (Ps 89:39–52).

Those who sense this narrative trajectory, however, differ over the part Book IV plays. Book IV as a whole has been the subject of many studies,<sup>6</sup> while more focused

*Approaches*, ed. D. G. Firth and P. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 23–40. Kuntz has provided two surveys: Kenneth Kuntz, “Engaging the Psalms: Gains and Trends in Recent Research,” *CR* 2 (1994): 77–106 and Kenneth Kuntz, “Continuing the Engagement: Psalms Research Since the Early 1990s,” *CBR* 10 (2012): 321–78. Bruce Waltke and Willem VanGemeren each write autobiographically about their own journeys interpreting the Psalms: Bruce K. Waltke, “Biblical Theology of the Psalms Today: A Personal Perspective,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. A. J. Schmutz and D. M. Howard, Jr. (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 19–28; Willem A. VanGemeren, “Entering the Textual World of the Psalms: Literary Analysis,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. A. J. Schmutz and D. M. Howard, Jr. (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 29–48. Two relevant 2014 publications include William P. Brown, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, SBLAIL 20 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). A recent whole-Psalter analysis comes from O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015).

3. Some actually use the phrase “story line” (e.g., James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 277; Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *EBC*, ed. T. Longman III and D. E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 38).

4. Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

5. For Pss 1–2 as an introduction to the Psalter, see Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1-2: Gateway to the Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013); see summary in Robert L. Cole, “Psalms 1 and 2: The Psalter’s Introduction,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. A. J. Schmutz and D. M. Howard, Jr. (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 183–95.

6. M. D. Goulder, “Fourth Book of the Psalter,” *JTS* 26 (1975): 269–89; Klaus Koenen, *Jahwe wird kommen, zu herrschen über die Erde: Ps 90-110 als Komposition*, Bonner biblische Beiträge 101 (Weinheim, Germany: Beltz Athenäum, 1995); Jerome F. D. Creach, “The Shape of Book Four of the Psalter and the Shape of Second Isaiah,” *JSOT* 23, no. 80 (1998): 63–76; Hyung Jun Kim, “The Structure and Coherence of Psalms 89–106” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 1998); Erich Zenger, “The God of Israel’s Reign Over the World (Psalms 90–106),” in *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah and the Psalms*, trans. E. R. Kalin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 161–90; Gordon Wenham, “Rejoice the Lord Is King: Psalms 90–106 (Book IV),” in *Praying by the Book: Reading the Psalms*, ed. C. G. Bartholomew and A. West (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001), 89–120; James Todd Borger, “Moses in the Fourth Book of the Psalter” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002); Anthony Gelston, “Editorial Arrangement in Book IV of the Psalter,” in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: A Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. K. J. Dell, G. I. Davies, and Y. V. Koh (Boston: Brill, 2010), 165–76; Nathan Dean Maxwell, “The Psalmist in the Psalm: A Persona-Critical Reading of Book IV of the Psalter” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2007); Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBL 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Michael G. McKelvey, *Moses*,

studies have explored specific sections or themes within the book.<sup>7</sup> Yet interpreters continue to discuss whether David, so central early in the Psalter, disappears in Book IV.

## The Disappearance of David?

What happens to the Davidic promises in Psalms 90–106? Some see Book IV responding to the failure of the Davidic program (Ps 89) by returning to the Mosaic program and reenthroning Yahweh before an exiled people. David is minimized, Moses is promoted (90:1; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32), and Yahweh reigns as king (93–100). For Wilson, Book IV redirects Israel's hope away from the Davidic line and toward Yahweh as her royal refuge.<sup>8</sup> For Zenger, the “messianic” program of Books I–III yields to the “theocratic” program of Books IV–V.<sup>9</sup> For Wallace, Book IV emphasizes the Mosaic covenant over the Davidic covenant and the reign of Yahweh over the reign of David: “Davidic covenant can be set aside. David agrees that Moses is the authority, and David no longer rules. YHWH reigns!”<sup>10</sup> These scholars broadly agree that Book IV bends the direction of the Psalter from David to Yahweh through Moses.

## David in the Shadows?

But does the Davidic king disappear from Book IV as Yahweh takes center stage? Davidic superscriptions reappear in Book IV, beginning with a kingship psalm

*David and the High Kingship of Yahweh: A Canonical Study of Book IV of the Psalter*, GDB 55 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010); Bernard Gossé, “La Réponse des Ps 90–106 aux Ps 88–89 Quant à la Manifestation de l'Amour de Yahvé,” *ETR* 87, no. 4 (2012): 481–86; Sampson S. Ndoga, “Revisiting the Theocratic Agenda of Book 4 of the Psalter for Interpretive Premise,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. N. L. deClaissé-Walford, SBLAL 20 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 147–59.

7. David M. Howard, Jr., “A Contextual Reading of Psalms 90–94,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. C. McCann, JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 108–23; Johannes Schnocks, “Mose im Psalter,” in *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions*, ed. A. Graupner and M. Wolter (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 79–88; Jinkyu Kim, “The Strategic Arrangement of Royal Psalms in Books IV–V,” *WTJ* 70, no. 1 (2008): 143–57; EunMee Moon, “The Sapiential Reading of Psalms 107–18 in the Framework of Books IV and V of the Psalter” (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2008); Lindsay Wilson, “On Psalms 103–106 as a Closure to Book IV of the Psalter,” in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. E. Zenger (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010), 755–66; Krista Mourinet, “Moses and the Psalms: The Significance of Psalms 90 and 106 within Book IV of the Masoretic Psalter,” *CBW* 31 (2011): 66–79; Andrew Witt, “Hearing Psalm 102 within the Context of the Hebrew Psalter,” *VT* 62, no. 4 (2012): 582–606.

8. Wilson, *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 215. According to Wilson, Book IV responds to the failure of the Davidic monarchy in four ways: “(1) YHWH is king; (2) He has been our ‘refuge’ in the past, long before the monarchy existed (i.e., in the Mosaic period); (3) He will continue to be our refuge now that the monarchy is gone; (4) Blessed are they that trust in him!”

9. Zenger, “Psalms 90–106,” 161.

10. R. Wallace, *Narrative Effect of Book IV*, 94.

(101) that follows the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms (93–100). David appears again heading the celebratory Psalm 103. Sandwiched between is the unattributed Psalm 102, suggesting that 101–103 be viewed as a Davidic triad.<sup>11</sup> Davidic titles then open, punctuate, and close Book V (108–10, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138–45). Psalm 110 is ascribed to David and evokes previous royal psalms (2, 72, 89), while Psalm 132 pronounces the permanence of God’s firm covenant with David.

Lindsay Wilson challenges the false dichotomy that David’s line and Yahweh’s kingship are mutually exclusive (Psalm 2 alone undoes the dichotomy by presenting the messianic king as Yahweh’s ruling representative). So rather than discounting the Davidic promises, Book IV shows that “any future Davidic kingship can only be possible if Yahweh’s prior claim of kingship is upheld.”<sup>12</sup> McKelvey interprets a Davidic voice in Psalms 101–104 as evidence that a Davidic hope remains even in Book IV.<sup>13</sup> Creach and Dempster, foreshadowing the argument in this paper, highlight the importance and position of the royal Psalm 101 as it follows the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms.<sup>14</sup>

## Psalm 101: Thesis and Overview

Nestled in the foothills of the majestic יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series (93–100), Psalm 101 marks a thematic junction as Book IV descends from the high peaks of divine kingship. What is the role of this royal Davidic psalm directly following the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series and leading into the next section of Book IV? In this paper I explore the message and function of Psalm 101 within Book IV and argue that its intra-book links, Davidic title, royal voice, lamenting tone, future orientation, inter-psalm allusions, and strategic placement make it a central psalm sustaining Davidic hope in Book IV. Thus the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms do not elevate the reign of Yahweh only to castigate the line of David. The reign of Yahweh rather upholds the line of David, answering the suspicions of Psalm 89 where God was questioned because he had bound his earthly rule with the (now) fallen Davidic throne.

## General Placement of Psalm 101

Psalm 101 signals a shift within Book IV. Disjunctive structural elements separate Psalms 93–100 and Psalm 101. But conjunctive thematic elements signal a strong complementary relationship between the cosmic reign of Yahweh and the grounded

11. Witt, “Psalm 102,” 590–96. McKelvey views Pss 101–104 as a “Davidic collection” (McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 192–93).

12. L. Wilson, “Psalms 103–106,” 766.

13. McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 309–22.

14. Jerome F. D. Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2008), 107–8; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 199 (see 199n14).

declaration of David. Thus structural discontinuity meets thematic unity as Yahweh's globalized theocracy meets David's localized monarchy. The discontinuity (treated first) and the continuity (treated next) become evident when moving outward from the core of the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms (96–99).

### The יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ Core in Psalms 96–99

Howard calls Psalms 95–100 the “heart” and “core” of a “concentric tripartite arrangement” in Book IV: 90–94, 95–100, and 101–6.<sup>15</sup> Although 93–100 form a slightly broader collection, 95–100 rise to a peak while 96–99 stand at the summit of Book IV heralding the universal reign of God. Psalms 96 and 98 share the same incipit: the doxological summons to “sing to Yahweh a new song” (שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁיר חֲדָשָׁה) (96:1; 98:1). Psalms 97 and 99 likewise share their own incipit: the doxological proclamation that “Yahweh reigns!” (99:1 ;97:1). Clearly these alternating incipits are purposefully placed, creating a rhythmic effect: “Sing a new song—Yahweh reigns! Sing a new song—Yahweh reigns!”

### Inclusio in Psalms 95 and 100

These central יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms (96–99) are framed by Psalms 95 and 100.<sup>16</sup> The bookends are built of lexical, thematic, and structural connections. Howard notes 15 shared lexemes between Psalms 95 and 100. Eight are “key-word links” shared primarily between 95:6b–7c and 100:3b–c, six are “thematic word links,” and one is an “incidental repetition” (see Table 1).<sup>17</sup>

15. David M. Howard, Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, BJS 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 166.

16. Howard, *Psalms 93–100*, 138–41. See also Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, trans. L. M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 462; J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in vol. 4 of *NIB*, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 1061, 1077; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 535; Howard N. Wallace, *Psalms*, RNBC (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 157.

17. Howard, *Psalms 93–100*, 138–41. Table 1 is adapted from Howard's information.

**Table 1. Shared lexemes in Psalms 95 and 100**

“Key-Word Links”		
95:1, 3, 6; 100:1, 2, 3, 5	יהוה	Yahweh
95:5, 7; 100:3 (2x)	הוא	he
95:3, 7; 100:3	אללהם	God
95:5, 6; 100:3	עשָׁה	make
95:7; 100:3	אֶנוּ	we
95:7, 10; 100:3	עַם	people
95:7; 100:3	מֶרְעֵתָה	pasture
95:7; 100:3	צָאן	sheep
“Thematic Word Links”		
95:1, 2; 100:1	רוֹעֵךְ	make a joyful noise
95:1; 100:2	(הַרְגֵּן)	shout for joy
95:2; 100:1, 4	תְּהִלָּה	thanksgiving
95:6, 11; 100:2, 4	בָּרָא	come/enter
95:10; 100:5 (2x)	דָּרְיוֹר	generation
95:4; 100:1	אָרֶץ	earth
“Incidental Repetitions”		
95:10; 100:3	יְדַעַת	know

The inclusio framing Psalms 95–100 is formed primarily with the mirrored sections in 95:6b–7c and 100:3b–c. These sections share a cluster of lexical links (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Inclusio framing Psalms 95–100 in 95:6b–7c and 100:3**

Psalm 95:6b–7c	Psalm 100:3
<sup>6b</sup> let us kneel before <u>Yahweh</u> , our <u>Maker</u> ! <sup>7a</sup> For <u>he</u> is our <u>God</u> , <sup>7b</sup> and <u>we</u> are the <u>people</u> of his <u>pasture</u> , <sup>7c</sup> and the <u>sheep</u> of his hand.	<sup>3a</sup> Know that <u>Yahweh</u> , <u>he</u> is <u>God</u> ! <sup>3b</sup> It is he who <u>made</u> us, and we are his; <sup>3c</sup> <u>we</u> are his <u>people</u> , and the <u>sheep</u> of his <u>pasture</u> .
<sup>6b</sup> נִבְרָכה לְפָנֵי יְהוָה עֲשֵׁנו <sup>7a</sup> כִּי הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ <sup>7b</sup> וְאֶנוּ עַמּוֹ מֶרְעֵתָה <sup>7c</sup> וְצָאן יְהוָה	<sup>3a</sup> דָעַו כִּי־יְהוָה הוּא אֱלֹהִים <sup>3b</sup> הוּא־עֲשֵׁנו וּלְאֶנוּ <sup>18</sup> <sup>3c</sup> עַמּוֹ וְצָאן מֶרְעֵתָה

Hossfeld and Zenger rightly argue that the Israel-specific description in 95:6b–7c is universalized in 100:3. The nations, like Israel, are created by Yahweh, so they too belong to him as “his people” and “the sheep of his pasture.”<sup>19</sup> Thus the initial

18. “The *ketiv* of MT reads וְאֶנוּ אֶנוּ, ‘and not we (ourselves),’ but the *qere* reads וְאֶנוּ אָנוּ, ‘and we are his’” (Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 533). Both readings have good external support. Tate concludes that אָנוּ is emphatic (“indeed”) rather than negative (Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 533–34). Howard more persuasively argues for לוּ for contextual reasons (Howard, *Psalms 93–100*, 92–94).

19. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 494. McCann agrees: “Psalm 100 wants us to know that God is shepherd both of God’s people and of the whole cosmos” (McCann, *Psalms*, 1079).

invitation, “Make a joyful noise to Yahweh, *all the earth*” (כָּל־הָאָרֶץ) (100:1), summons the entire earth to worship the God of Israel.<sup>20</sup> These bookends join to declare that the God who reigns over the cosmos and the nations is the maker and shepherd of Israel (95:6b–7c), and the God who covenanted with Israel is maker and shepherd of the nations (100:3). These tender tones (95:6b–7c; 100:3) also complement the towering center (96–99) so that the king who shakes the earth also shepherds the nations.

Psalms 95 and 100 also pair up thematically through their eager invitations to worship. Four worship-words occur in both psalms: רֹעֵךְ (“make a joyful noise” in 95:1, 2; 100:1), רְנֵנָה/רַנֵּן (“shout for joy” in 95:1; 100:2), תָּהָדָה (“thanksgiving” in 95:2; 100:1, 4), and בָּאֵן (“come/enter” in 95:6, 11; 100:2, 4). These festive liturgical orders calling Israel and the nations into the temple courts help Psalms 95 and 100 encase Psalms 96–99.

## Davidic Collection in Psalms 101–104

Descending from the soaring peaks and stratospheric praise of Psalms 93–100, Book IV turns to David. Several interpreters sense a Davidic triad in Psalms 101–103 or a Davidic collection in 101–104.<sup>21</sup> The Davidic superscriptions of Psalms 101 and 103 exert a magnetic effect on each other. Together these two Davidic and first-person psalms sandwich the first-person Psalm 102.<sup>22</sup>

The triad structure (101–103) and the collection structure (101–104) are both warranted based on the hinge-role played by Psalm 104. Psalm 104 is positioned differently in different scholarly reconstructions, but it refuses this either-or by masterfully facing both ways: linked verbally with 103, concluding a Davidic collection (101–104), and linked thematically with 105–106, introducing a hymnic conclusion (104–106).<sup>23</sup> Psalms 103 and 104 are bound by their shared incipit and conclusion: “Bless Yahweh, O my soul!” (35 ,104:1 ;22 ,103:1). But 104 is also bound with 105 and 106 by their shared hymnic features and their shared closing invitation: “Praise Yahweh!” (הִיְשָׁלֵחַ) (104:35; 105:45; 106:48; cf. 106:1). Thus

20. Kraus agrees that the entire earth is summoned in 100:1, but associates 100:3 with Israel (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, trans. H. C. Oswald [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989], 274).

21. McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 169; Zenger, “Psalms 90–106,” 183–86; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, trans. L. M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 28, 37; Jamie A. Grant, “The Psalms and the King,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. D. Firth and P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 109; Howard N. Wallace, *Psalms*, RNBC (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 157–58. Howard does not describe 101–103 or 101–104 as Davidic, but he does identify 101–106 as a collection with 104–106 as its conclusion (Howard, *Psalms 93–100*, 182).

22. Witt concludes, “Psalm 102 should be heard as a meditative response of an afflicted Davidic king to the questions of the apparent failure of the Davidic covenant and YHWH’s delay in returning his steadfast love to his people” (Andrew Witt, “Hearing Psalm 102 within the Context of the Hebrew Psalter,” *VT* 62, no. 4 [2012]: 604).

23. Allen independently notes this dual role played by Ps 104 (Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, WBC [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002], 4).

Psalm 104 faces both ways, linking a Davidic collection (101–104) with a hymnic history series (104–106).<sup>24</sup>

### **Summary: Structural Disjunction Between Psalms 93–100 and 101**

The structural and thematic unity woven through Psalms 93–100 and especially 95–100 is tied off before Psalm 101 as a new series begins (101–104). Several threads slip through, but disjunction generally marks the relationship between the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms and Psalm 101 (Table 3 illustrates the minimal linkage).

**Table 3. Shared lexemes in Pss 100 and 101<sup>25</sup>**

Verse	MT	Translation
100:1	מִזְבֵּחַ	psalm
101:1	מִזְבֵּחַ	psalm
100:5	אַמְנוֹתָה	his faithfulness
101:6	בְּנָאָמְנִי	upon the faithful
100:1	הָאָרֶץ	(all) the earth
101:6	אָרֶץ	(in) the land
101:8	אָרֶץ	(in) the land
100:2	בָּאוּ	come
100:4	בָּאוּ	enter
101:2	תִּבְואָה	will you come
100:1, 2, 3, 5	יְהוָה	Yahweh
101:1, 8	יְהוָה	Yahweh
100:5	חֲסִידָה	his steadfast love
101:1	חֲסִיד	steadfast love
100:3	דִּעָן	know
101:4	אָדָעַ	I will know
100:3	עָשָׂנוּ	he made us
101:3	עַשְׂתָּה	the work
101:7	עַשְׂתָּה	who practices

First, the bright bookends framing Psalms 95–100 signal closure (95:6b–7c and 100:3b–c). Psalm 101 clearly does not belong to the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series but starts its

24. This intricate linkage between Pss 103, 104, and 105 may help explain why some interpreters see Pss 101–106 as its own collection (see Jean-Luc Vesco, *Le Psautier de David: Traduit et Commenté*, LD [Paris: Cerf, 2006], 2:928; Howard, *Psalms 93–100*, 181–82; Sampson S. Ndoga, “Revisiting the Theocratic Agenda of Book 4 of the Psalter for Interpretive Premise,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. N. L. deClaissé-Walford, SBLAIL 20 [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014], 155).

25. The purpose of Table 3 is to demonstrate the paucity of shared lexemes rather than their prevalence. Further, “keyword correspondences to the preceding Psalm 100 occur at distinct points

own. Second, Psalm 101 draws attention by bearing the first Davidic superscription since Psalm 86, the first explicit Davidic mention since Psalm 89, the first Davidic superscription in Book IV, and the first authorial superscription since Psalm 90. Third, the dramatic collapse of the Davidic kingship in Psalm 89 backdrops the sudden reappearance of a new royal Davidide in Psalm 101. Fourth, the hallowing and heralding of Yahweh's kingship throughout Psalms 93–100 heightens the effect of a sudden Davidic entrance. Fifth, Psalm 101 stands out as the only royal psalm—dealing with a human king—in Book IV of the Psalter. Sixth, the first-person singular voice in Psalm 101 marks a noted change from Psalms 93–100. Before Psalm 101, the only first-person utterances (from a psalmist) occur in Psalms 91, 92, and 94. These six disjunctive elements signal a shift between Psalms 93–100 and the psalms that follow.

### **Caveat: Thematic Conjunction Between Psalms 100 and 101**

Despite these disjunctive elements, several thin threads slip through, lightly binding Psalms 100 and 101. (1) Both are titled מזמור ("psalm"; 100:1; 101:1), a musical notation used only 4x in Book IV. (2) Psalm 101 begins as Psalm 100 ends: praising the permanence of Yahweh's חסד ("steadfast love"; 100:5; 101:1). (3) Psalm 100 begins with the command to sing, Psalm 101 with the commitment to sing. Psalm 100 implores the nations to "make a joyful noise" (הריעו, 100:1) and enter God's presence "with singing" (ברננה, 100:2), and David answers the invitation: "I will sing" and "I will make music" (אשירה, 101:1). (4) Psalm 100 summons all the earth to make a joyful noise "to Yahweh" (100:1) (ליהוָה). David then makes music "to you (תְּךָ, 101:1), O Yahweh." (5) Both psalms present a comprehensive vision: Psalm 100 begins with "all the earth" (כל-הארץ, 100:1) summoned to praise Yahweh while Psalm 101 ends with "all the wicked" (כל־רשע) and "all the evildoers" (כל־פעריא און) destroyed from the land and city (101:8). (6) Psalm 101 is a human royal psalm following a series of divine royal songs. This divine-human juxtaposition is not surprising considering this common dynamic in the psalms (Pss 2, 72, 89, 110, 132). (7) Psalm 101 expresses a strong commitment to comprehensive justice which follows (and applies) the coming justice of Yahweh trumpeted throughout 93–100. (8) Psalm 101 uses temple-approach language to describe the ideal person who can enter Yahweh's presence in response to the invitations in 95–100 (95:2; 96:8; 99:5, 9; 100:2, 4; cf. Pss 15:1–5 and 24:3–4 in 101).<sup>26</sup> I will explore some of these conjunctive themes in more detail below.

and have altogether different subjects" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 16).

26. I owe this final observation to Vesco, *Psautier*, 2:928.

## Psalm 101: Superscription, Structure, Content, Themes

This section examines the Davidic superscription, intricate structure, royal voice, and lamenting tone of Psalm 101. Each aspect helps form the distinct message of this psalm which shapes and sustains Davidic hope in Book IV.

### Davidic Superscription

Both the MT and LXX entitle Psalm 101 “a psalm of David” (לְדָוִיד מְזֹבֵחַ, Τῷ Δαυὶδ ψαλμός).<sup>27</sup> This Davidic superscription is the first since Psalm 86, the first explicit mention of David since Psalm 89, one of only three authorial titles in Book IV, and one of only two Davidic titles in Book IV. In light of the book-ending doxology closing Book II (“The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended”), the solitary Davidic psalm in Book III (Ps 86), and the dramatic collapse of the Davidic kingship in Psalm 89, the natural question arises: *Who is this “David”?* At this point in the structure of the Psalter, the original David has seemingly exited the stage (Ps 72), and the Davidic line has allegedly suffered an irrecoverable blow (Ps 89). Further, the figure in Psalm 101 is not reigning but appears to be waiting in the wings. I will revisit his identity after examining the psalm’s structure, royal voice, content, themes, and inter-psalm connections.

### Intricate Structure

Interpreters propose many different structures for Psalm 101.<sup>28</sup> Allen concludes that vv. 1–5 display personal “praise, plea, and testimony,” and vv. 6–8 explain the king’s expanding “circles of influence.”<sup>29</sup> Kselman observes a chiasm in vv. 3–7 (see Table 4). He divides the psalm into an introduction (vv. 1–2), the voice of the king (vv. 3–5), an oracle from God to the king (vv. 6–7), and a conclusion (v. 8).<sup>30</sup> Most interpreters see the main division coming between vv. 4 and 5 or vv. 5 and 6, along with a progression from personal and private concerns to public and political matters.<sup>31</sup>

27. Psalm 101 is numbered 100 in the LXX.

28. See overview in Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 9–10.

29. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 10.

30. Kselman takes an unusual view as he attributes vv. 6–7 to Yahweh and not David (Kselman, “Psalm 101,” 45–62; cf. Michael L. Barré, “The Shifting Focus of Psalm 101,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. P. D. Miller, Jr. and P. W. Flint, VTSup 99 [Boston: Brill, 2005], 206–7).

31. See discussion below for these interpreters. The introductory vv. 1–2 will be discussed below, but they are not sharply divided from the rest of the psalm.

**Table 4. Chiasm in Ps 101:3–7<sup>32</sup>**

MT	Verse	Translation
לְגַדֵּעַ עִינֵּי	v. 3a	<i>before my eyes</i>
דָּבָר	v. 3a	<i>report</i>
עֲשָׂה	v. 3b	<i>work</i>
עִינִים	v. 5b	<i>eyes</i>
עִינֵּי	v. 6a	<i>my eyes</i>
עֲשָׂה	v. 7a	<i>does</i>
דָּבָר	v. 7b	<i>speaks</i>
לְגַדֵּעַ עִינֵּי	v. 7b	<i>before my eyes</i>

McCann rightly argues that the lexical repetition cycling through Psalm 101 displays a complexity that defies a simple linear structure. “The complexity suggests that the structure moves on more than one level” because “the frequent repetitions move in several directions.”<sup>33</sup> Jacobson agrees: “To emphasize one structure in this psalm, one must emphasize some data while ignoring other data. While there are many repetitions, they do not shake out cleanly into any discernable pattern.”<sup>34</sup> I follow the majority of interpreters who see two broad divisions (vv. 1–4 and vv. 5–8), leaving room for intricate overlap due to the lexical repetition throughout the psalm.<sup>35</sup> I further analyze structural and thematic movements in the following section.

## Royal Voice

Interpreters taking various approaches are unified in hearing a royal voice in Psalm 101.<sup>36</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger summarize the main form-critical views which all fall into royal categories: a royal vow for a coronation ritual, a declaration of royal innocence in a temple entrance liturgy, or a declaration of royal intentions. The psalm seems tinged by the plaintive question in v. 2, but the song is clearly royal in content and theme. This royal orientation is clear even without the superscription, but “the attribution to David confirms the interpretation of the body of the psalm as

32. Adapted from John S. Kselman, “Psalm 101: Royal Confession and Divine Oracle,” *JSOT*, no. 33 (1985): 47.

33. McCann, *Psalms*, 1082; cf. Phil J. Botha, “Psalm 101: Inaugural Address or Social Code of Conduct?” *HTS* 60, no. 3 (2004): 728ff.

34. Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 741–42.

35. Allen and McKelvey both mention this majority view (Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 9; McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 170n1).

36. The general consensus is mentioned by Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 277; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 7; Helen A. Kenik, “Code of Conduct for a King: Psalm 101,” *JBL* 95, no. 3 (1976): 391; and Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 431. For examples, see Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, vol. 5 of *EBC*, ed. T. Longman III and D. E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 743–44.

a royal prayer.”<sup>37</sup> Kraus therefore calls it a “royal psalm” expressing “a king’s vow of loyalty” with a future orientation.<sup>38</sup>

Early in Psalm 101 (vv. 1–4), David appears to represent a zealous righteous man in Israel. He sings and makes music, worshiping Yahweh for his steadfast love and justice (v. 1). He contemplates a blameless lifestyle and commits to integrity in his most intimate dealings (*בְּקָרְבַּתִּי*, “in the inner parts of my house,” v. 2). He rejects worthless things and moral wanderers (v. 3). He devotes himself to good by distancing himself from evil (v. 4).<sup>39</sup>

But later in Psalm 101 (vv. 5–8), David’s royal perspective and prerogative become clear, reframing his earlier statements. His stalwart guarantees display confidence in his settled role as judge in the land, and his impeccable moral calculus show that his intentions are pure as the torah. He silences secret slanderers and does not tolerate the arrogant (v. 5). He approves and positions the faithful and the blameless (v. 6). He drives away deceivers (v. 7) and daily destroys all the “wicked” and “evildoers” from Yahweh’s holy city (v. 8).

Personal convictions in vv. 1–4 become judicial actions in vv. 5–8.<sup>40</sup> Repeated terms reveal this relationship. David does not only ponder “the blameless way” (*בְּדֶרֶךְ תְּמִימִים*, v. 2) but also promotes and positions the one who walks “in the blameless way” (*בְּדֶרֶךְ תְּמִימִים*, v. 6) as his companion and minister. His private integrity of “heart” (*לִבְבֵי*, 101:2) and his personal rejection of a perverse “heart” (*לִבְבֵי*, 101:4) produce his commitment to punish the arrogant “heart” (*לִבְבֵי*, 101:5). With private integrity he walks “within my house” (*בְּקָרְבַּתִּי*, 101:2), which means that the deceitful are kept from dwelling “in my house” (*בְּקָרְבַּתִּי*, 101:7).<sup>41</sup> He states personally that no

37. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3, 13, 16–17*. See thorough discussions of form and genre in Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 7–9 and Karl Möller, “Reading, Singing and Praying the Law: An Exploration of the Performative, Self-Involving, Commissive Language of Psalm 101,” in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. G. McConville and K. Möller, LHB/OTS 461 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 113–25.

38. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 277. I prefer the phrase “royal voice” rather than “royal psalm” because the classification “royal psalm” can overshadow other important features in the psalm such as the lament in v. 2 or the temple-entrance qualities throughout.

39. Verse 1 alone or vv. 1–2a may function as an introduction as David celebrates the character of Yahweh (v. 1) and asks his plaintive question which colors the psalm (v. 2a).

40. Hossfeld and Zenger divide the psalm differently (vv. 1–2; vv. 3–5; vv. 6–8) but see the same private-to-public progression within the two main sections: “The first part is about private behavior and avoiding sin [vv. 3–5]; the second is about forensic activities and avoiding the wrong society [vv. 6–8].” Thus they divide between “private activities” and “forensic activities” (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3, 13–14*). McKelvey sees “the commitment of the king” (vv. 1–4) and “the effects of the commitment on the people” (McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 170n1). Allen describes this common view without holding it himself: “the king’s personal standards” (vv. 1–4) and “those for his people” (vv. 5–8) (Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 9). Allen himself senses a positive-to-negative movement: “The king sets forth what he will do and whom he will encourage, and then what he will avoid and whom he will discourage or destroy” (Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 10).

41. The clear royal connotations recast the “house” as the king’s “palace” (*בֵּית*, 101:2, 7; cf. 1 Kgs 4:6; 16:9) (Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms III: 101–150*, AB [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970], 4).

worthless matter is allowed “before my eyes” (*לְנֶגֶד עַינִי*, 101:3) before stating judicially that no liars are allowed “before my eyes” (*לְנֶגֶד עַינִי*, 101:7). He refuses to entertain any “worthless matter” (*דָבָר־בְּלִיעֵל*) (101:3), which may refer to a false “word” or malicious “report” (*דָבָר*), since he soon promises to cast out the “one who *speaks lies*” (*שְׁקָרִים*) (*דָבָר*, 101:7). His personal rejection of “evil” (*עַז*, 101:4) becomes a public cleansing of the “wicked” (*רֹשֵׁעַ*, 101:8), and finally, he sings of justice privately in the presence of “Yahweh” (*הָוה*, 101:1) before enacting justice publicly in the city of “Yahweh” (*יהוָה*, 101:8).<sup>42</sup> Clearly this Davidide possesses both the moral conviction and the royal position to enact divine ideals throughout the city and the land.<sup>43</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger note that the repeated Hiphil form of the verb *צָמַת* (“silence” or “destroy” in 101:5, 8) usually has God as the subject, so that David is taking on a role usually assigned to God. David is not speaking as an average Israelite helping his community toward holiness. He is rather exercising a God-given role under the moral authority of Yahweh.<sup>44</sup> Thus moral character meets royal capacity as a righteous king pledges to enforce a righteous culture.

## **Divine Judgment and Davidic Enforcement in Psalms 94 and 101**

Lexical and thematic interplay between Psalms 94 and 101 amplify and explain the royal voice in Psalm 101. Some canonical interpreters note these lexical and thematic connections, which I will explore below.<sup>45</sup> As noted earlier, Psalms 95 and 100 frame the core *הָוה מלך* psalms (96–99). Psalms 94 and 101 color this frame by showing how the kingship of Yahweh (93, 95–100) intersects with a wicked world (94, 101): God and his Davidic king judge the wicked and reorder the land.

42. The name *יהוָה* frames the psalm by occurring only at the beginning and end (101:1, 8). This framing device is independently noted by Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 9–10.

43. Gerstenberger objects to the standard royal interpretation and instead sees in Psalm 101 a portrait of the righteous man—“the ideal believer in Yahweh.” But his interpretation forces awkward exegesis, such as his view that the daily, authoritative, citywide moral cleansing in v. 8 expresses how “the righteous also will take any measure available to him in order to cleanse his community from evildoers” (Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, ed. R. P. Knierim, G. M. Tucker, and M. A. Sweeney, FOTL 15 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 206–10). This generic “righteous-man” view makes David’s moral resolve in v. 8 sound more like vigilante justice than royal authority. Similar to Gerstenberger, McCann notes, “With the disappearance of the monarchy and the eventual realization that it would never be reinstated, Psalm 101 could at least be understood as an articulation of the values that God wills to be concretely embodied among humans—love, justice, integrity” (McCann, *Psalms*, 1083). This kind of “democratization” is certainly an appropriate implication and application of the psalm, but the interpretation of Psalm 101 within the canonical structure of the Psalter remains decidedly royal. The quote from McCann appears in his final “Reflections” section on Ps 101 rather than the commentary proper, so he may be describing more of an application. But his comment that “the monarchy... would never be reinstated” is too comprehensive and ignores the eschatological promises to David’s house.

44. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 16; cf. McCann, *Psalms*, 1083.

45. Kim, “Structure and Coherence,” 331–34; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 16.

### **Placement of Psalm 94 within Psalms 93–100**

Psalms 93 and 95–100 form the central יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series. But interpreters often underscore the curious placement of Psalm 94, even though evidence within the psalm clearly maintains the theme of divine governance.<sup>46</sup> In the opening lines God is called “God of vengeance” (94:1) and “judge of the earth” (94:2). He is summoned to “rise up” and “repay” (94:2) those who subvert his moral order. The plight of the widow, sojourner, and orphan is laid before him (94:6), but he is neither blind to their plight nor deaf to their pleas, for he sees and hears all (94:7–9). Since he disciplines the nations (94:10) and teaches the law (94:12), he will enact justice for the righteous (94:15) and reject wicked rulers (94:20), wiping them out for their sin (94:23).

The divine ruler in Psalm 94 suits the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series, but the degenerate culture does not.<sup>47</sup> If Yahweh reigns eternally and invincibly as the inaugural Psalm 93 announces (93:1–4), why does Psalm 94 graphically depict the ongoing suffering of God’s people at the hands of “wicked rulers” (94:20)? Why launch the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series only to come crashing back down to the injustice and ignominy faced by the righteous? Does Yahweh reign or not? Eaton offers one explanation:

Hardly has the great series of psalms (93–100) proclaiming the kingship of the Lord got under way, when this psalm intervenes with its picture of a world subjected to a ‘throne of destructions’, a reign of mindless cruelties. *So the harsh context for faith in God the King is acknowledged.*<sup>48</sup>

Hossfeld and Zenger offer a similar explanation but from the divine perspective. The great יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms praise Yahweh’s universal rule, but his rule is complicated by the need to separate the righteous from the wicked, which requires active and violent judgment. Psalm 94 answers this call.<sup>49</sup> Thus Psalm 94 does not interrupt the reign of God but rather acknowledges the disordering of Israel’s world while appealing for its reordering through divine justice. I propose that the righteous and waiting Davidide in Psalm 101 deliberately follows the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series, eager to enforce this world-ordering justice (101).

46. Howard, *Psalms 93–100*, 174–75; David M. Howard, Jr., “Psalm 94 among the Kingship-of-YHWH Psalms,” *CBQ* 61, no. 4 (1999): 667–85; McCann, *Psalms*, 1057; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 488–89.

47. McCann calls the placement of Ps 94 an “apparent intrusion” (McCann, *Psalms*, 1057), Howard calls it “puzzling” (Howard, *Psalms 93–100*, 174), and Tate admits that it appears “anomalous,” “out of order,” and “random” (Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 488). Each of these interpreters, however, does explain the placement of Ps 94 in terms similar to the view I will explain in this section.

48. John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 336 (emphasis added). McKelvey joins in emphasizing the sinful setting of earth over which God reigns: “Psalm 94 serves to remind the reader of the setting for faith in the kingship of YHWH. Though the factors of life and the world may be unfavourable to God’s people, YHWH still reigns and rules over all things, even if present circumstances might suggest otherwise” (McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 91).

49. Hossfeld and Zenger call the redactors’ placement of Psalm 94 (between 93 and 95) “theological brilliance” (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 456).

## **Lexical and Thematic Links between Psalms 94 and 101**

Several clear lexical repetitions between Psalms 94 and 101 suggest a relationship between God's coming justice and David's coming rule. Kim identifies 15 terms shared between Psalms 94 and 101 and concludes:

The parallels...are so close that it seems difficult to deny that Psalm 101 responds to Psalm 94. A large number of the lexical and thematic correspondences between the psalms are used in contrast, and the presence of the king in Psalm 101 is seen as answering to the questions posed by the lament Psalm, 94.<sup>50</sup>

Psalm 94 is framed by the twofold plea for God's “vengeance” (נִקְמַת, 2x in 94:1) and his twofold promise to “wipe out” the wicked (סְתִימָץ, 2x in 94:23). Then in Psalm 101 David promises to “wipe out” secret slanderers (אַצְמִית, 101:5) and “wipe out” all the wicked (אַצְמִית, 101:8).<sup>51</sup> Several lines of evidence support this meaningful connection between Psalms 94 and 101. First, the repetition of צִמְתָה at the end of Psalm 94 creates a memorable crescendo of justice picked up in 101. Second, צִמְתָה closes both psalms as the ruler's moral cleansing has the last word (94:23; 101:8). Third, all four occurrences of צִמְתָה express promises of coming justice. Fourth, צִמְתָה occurs twice in each psalm but nowhere else in Book IV. Fifth, in Psalm 101 צִמְתָה occurs near the phrase “all doers of evil” (כָּל־פָעֵלִי אֹון, 101:8), another key word shared between these two psalms (cf. 94:4, 16; see more below). Sixth, each usage of צִמְתָה relates to the destruction of the “wicked,” though different terms are used (רָעה in 94:23; רָשָׁע in 101:8). Kim explains, “Psalm 94 asks for their destruction, while Psalm 101 promises their extermination.”<sup>52</sup> What Psalm 94 promises of God, this Davidide pledges to perform. This clear lexical and thematic link centers on the core message of both psalms, inviting an interwoven reading.

In Psalm 94 the psalmist mourns over “all doers of evil” (כָּל־פָעֵלִי אֹון, 94:4) and asks who will protect the psalmist against these “doers of evil” (פָעֵלִי אֹון, 94:16) before promising that God will bring the “evil” (אֹונָם, 94:23) of the wicked back on their head. In Psalm 101 David then promises to cleanse “all doers of evil” (כָּל־פָעֵלִי אֹון, 101:8) from the city of Yahweh.<sup>53</sup> Once again, David pledges to perform what Psalm 94 promised God would do. In Psalm 94 the suffering psalmist asked, “Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against doers of evil (פָעֵלִי אֹון)?” (94:16). The future Davidide answers the call: he will cut off “all doers of evil” (כָּל־פָעֵלִי אֹון, 101:8).

Psalm 94 also appeals to God the “judge” (טֶפֶח, 94:2) and promises that “justice” (מִשְׁפָט, 94:15) will come to the righteous. Psalm 101 then depicts David musically pondering “justice” (מִשְׁפָט, 101:1), which he enforces stringently in the remainder

50. Kim, “Structure and Coherence,” 334 (see 331–334; the phrases “answering to” and “Psalm, 94” are original); cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 16.

51. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 16 independently note this lexical repetition.

52. Kim, “Structure and Coherence,” 332.

53. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 16 independently note this lexical repetition.

of the psalm. This justice must be enacted in real time and space, so Psalm 94 asks Yahweh to arise as judge of “the earth” (*הארץ*, 94:2), while David approves the faithful “in the land” (*ארץ*, 101:6) and destroys the wicked “in the land” (*ארץ*, 101:8).

In Psalm 94, the wicked assume that God is blind to their ways, so the psalmist admonishes them, “When will you *be wise?*” (*תשכלו*, 94:8). Psalm 101, in contrast, introduces David who “ponders” (*אשכלה*, 101:2) the blameless way. Both contexts are related to justice. The wicked keep breaking God’s law and oppressing God’s people because they assume they have escaped God’s gaze. But David is wiser than the wicked: he considers God’s laws and ways so that he can obey and enforce the moral code.<sup>54</sup>

Psalm 94 asks how long “the wicked” (*רשעים*, 2x in 94:3) will be allowed to exult but also promises punishment on “the wicked” (*לרשע*, 94:13). Yet wicked rulers are still found “condemning” (“making wicked”) (*רashiyu*, 94:21) the innocent. So in Psalm 101, David resolves to cleanse the city of “the wicked” (*רשע*, 101:8).<sup>55</sup>

On a positive note, Psalm 94 says that all the upright in “heart” (*לב*, 94:15) will follow justice. In Psalm 101, the heart matters greatly to David. He walks with integrity of “heart” (*לבב*, 101:2), condemns the perverse “heart” (*לבב*, 101:4), and rejects the arrogant “heart” (*לבב*, 101:5). Psalm 94 also mentions the cares of the psalmist’s “inner parts” (*בקרבי*, 94:19), which likely relate to a desire for justice. David then uses the same term twice as he keeps pure the “inner parts” (*בקרב*, 101:2; *בקרב*, 101:7) of his house.

In Psalm 94, God sees all because he formed the “eye” (*עין*, 94:9). In Psalm 101, David’s eyes are likewise central in his plans to enforce justice. His “eyes” (*עיני*, 101:3) gaze on nothing worthless, he does not endure haughty “eyes” (*עיניים*, 101:5), he sets his “eyes” (*עיני*, 101:6) on the faithful in the land, and he rejects all liars from before his “eyes” (*עיני*, 101:7).

The man whom God teaches his law will get rest from “evil” (*ער*, 94:13), a rest which David will help create because he will know nothing of “evil” (*ער*, 101:4). Indeed, Psalm 94 accuses the wicked of arrogant “words” (*ידברו*, 94:4), but David promises to stay away from all who “speak” (*דבר*, 101:7) lies.

Thematically, Psalm 94 depicts the “proud” (*עתק*, 94:2) and “arrogant” (*עתק*, 94:4) boasting that Yahweh does not see their evil deeds (94:7), but David in Psalm 101 will not endure the “haughty” (*גביה*, 101:5) and “arrogant” (*רחהב*, 101:5). Psalm 94 condemns unjust rulers who seek to be allied with God but are rejected by him because “they frame injustice by statute” (94:20). It seems that Psalm 94 may bemoan unjust kings that the righteous may encounter in Israel or in the exile; these wicked rulers

54. The verb *שכל* only occurs once more in Book IV, referring to the sins of the fathers (106:7) (Kim, “Structure and Coherence,” 332).

55. The root *רשות* occurs only once between Pss 94 and 101, declaring that Yahweh delivers the righteous from the wicked: “O you who love Yahweh, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked” (*רשעים*, 97:10).

cannot and do not reign as God's representative. If this view is implied, the rejection of unjust kings makes sense of David's declaration of righteousness in Psalm 101.

Finally, Psalm 94 asks “How long?” (*עד-מתי*, 94:3), and David asks, “When will you come to me?” (101:2). Both psalmists are waiting, and their waiting centers on justice. Thus the linkage between the justice-requesting 94 and the justice-announcing 101 helps explain the plaintive undertone of Psalm 101. The cosmic order heralded throughout 93–100 but questioned in 94 still awaits enactment.

## Lamenting Tone

Psalm 101 is a royal psalm with a lamenting tone, marked especially by the plaintive question “Oh when will you come to me?” (*מתי תבוא אליך*, 101:2b).<sup>56</sup> The temporal interrogative adverb (“when”) appears 12 other times in the Psalter: 2x directed toward humans (41:6; 94:8), 3x directed to God in lament (*מתי*, 42:2; 119:82, 84), and 7x directed toward God in lament using the full phrase *עד-מתי* (“How long?” or “Until when?” in 6:4; 74:10; 80:5; 82:2; 90:13; 94:3 [2x]). Since the adverb *מתי* expresses lament in its 10 other occurrences directed to God, David is surely lamenting in 101:2.

Psalm 101 begins with singing as the *יהוה מלך* tones seep into this new series (101:1). David states three intentions that harmonize in a Hebrew rhyme: “I will sing,” “I will make music,” and “I will ponder” (*אשפִילָה אֲזַמְרָה אֲשֶׁר-יְהָה*, 101:1 –2). This general threefold synonymy suggests a musical meditation, which is precisely what David crafts in the main body of the psalm. His topics are “steadfast love” (101:1, *תִּחְזֹק*), “justice” (*מֻשְׁפֵט*, 101:1), and “the blameless way” (*בְּדַרְךָ תְּמִימָה*, 101:2). The “blameless way” likely refers to God’s law.<sup>57</sup>

But despite David’s singing and study in vv. 1–2a, and despite his grand promises of justice, integrity, order, and city-cleansing in vv. 3–8, a cloud of lament hangs over his royal declaration. He asks, “When will you come to me?” (*מתי תבוא אליך*, 101:2b). The question clearly expresses an unfulfilled desire, i.e., a lament. But the question’s clear tone is clouded by its ambiguous meaning.<sup>58</sup> What is David asking, and why does he ask the question here?

56. Dahoo, *Psalms III*, 2; McKelvey notes both dynamics and identifies Ps 101 as a royal lament/complaint (McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 170–71n1). Allen sees the “hymnic introduction” as another reason to hear the psalmist lamenting because it functions as an “indirect appeal represented by his praise” (Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 8–9, 11). But Allen provides no solid basis for viewing hymnic features as plaintive.

57. DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, Tanner, *Psalms*, 743–44; cf. J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, SBT 32 (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1976), 141–42. For example, Ps 19:7 reads, “The law of Yahweh is *perfect*” (*תְּמִימָה תְּוֹרַת יְהָה*). Further, the opening of Ps 119 equates the “blameless way” with the law of Yahweh: “Blessed are those whose way is *blameless*, who walk in the *law* of Yahweh” (*אָשָׁר תְּמִימִידָרְךָ הַלְלָכִים בְּתוֹרַת יְהָה*, 119:1). Later the psalmist expresses his desire to be “blameless” related to God’s “statutes” (*תְּמִימָה בְּחַקִּים*, 119:80).

58. Most interpreters note the ambiguity of the question in v. 2 (e.g., Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 14–15; Barré, “Shifting Focus of Psalm 101,” 207–8; Booij, “Psalm 101:2,” 458–62;

Johnson argues that Psalm 101 depicts a “ritual humiliation” during an autumnal festival where the king undergoes a “lesson in dependence on Yahweh” as he pleads for Yahweh’s presence.<sup>59</sup> Booij hears David requesting a revelatory dream or vision like Solomon received in 1 Kings 3 (cf. בָּאָלָה [“came to …”] in the context of night-visions in Gen 20:3; 31:24; Num 22:8–9, 19–20).<sup>60</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger suggest the possibility of a theophany (cf. Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3) since the request calls for “movement by YHWH toward the royal petitioner.”<sup>61</sup> Keil and Delitzsch propose that David desires that the ark of Yahweh be installed in Jerusalem, making it the “city of Yahweh” (101:8).<sup>62</sup> Dahood hears David asking, “When am I going to be awarded by God’s presence for my perfect conformity to his will in the past?”<sup>63</sup> Botha suggests the question may “draw attention to the divine sanction of the authority of the speaker” and display a “close association between speaker and Yahweh.”<sup>64</sup> Kselman does not explain the meaning of the question in v. 2 but does argue that Yahweh responds to the question by coming to David in vv. 6–8 (where Kselman sees Yahweh speaking, not David).<sup>65</sup>

Rather than analyzing each view in detail, I propose an interpretation of David’s question that (1) fits the royal voice and ruling concern in the psalm, (2) matches the plaintive tone, (3) suits the message and flow of Book IV, (4) naturally follows the preceding יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series, (5) explains the verb “come” (בָּאָה), and (6) identifies a central concern shared by many of the views just described.<sup>66</sup>

The specific meaning of David’s question is initially ambiguous, but numerous elements are still clear. First, the question must be related to the clear theme of the song: the righteous rule of an Israelite king on earth. Second, the question should be heard from a Davidic voice due to the superscription. Third, the question implies “spatial distance” between the king and God, a distance that dissatisfies

Botha, “Psalm 101,” 734–35.

59. Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 113–16; cf. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 122–23.

60. Booij, “Psalm CI 2,” 460; cf. Dahood, *Psalms III*, 2. Booij does not mention that 1 Kgs 3 records that God “appeared to” (לֵאמֹר, 1 Kgs 3:5) Solomon rather than “came to” him.

61. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 15.

62. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, trans. F. Bolton (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 3:108. In this view, Ps 101:2 reflects David’s question in 2 Sam 6:9 after people died for mishandling the ark on its way to Jerusalem (Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3:109; contra Booij, “Psalm CI 2,” 459). “And David was afraid of Yahweh that day, and he said, ‘How can the ark of Yahweh come to me?’” (2 Sam 6:9). The prayers are similar: “When will you come to me?” (מַתִּי תָבוֹא אֲלֵיכָם) (Ps 101:2) and “How can the ark of God come to me?” (אֵיךְ יָבוֹא אֲלֵיכָן יְהוָה) (2 Sam 6:9).

63. Dahood, *Psalms III*, 4; cf. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 114–16.

64. Botha, “Psalm 101,” 734–45.

65. Kselman, “Psalm 101,” 57. This interpretation requires Kselman’s unlikely view that the king speaks in vv. 3–5 while Yahweh speaks in vv. 6–8.

66. Often in detailed discussions over interpretive debates, atomistic evaluation of the views can create blinders that hinder us from seeing how some or all of the views may overlap by sharing common principles or key concerns.

David.<sup>67</sup> Fourth, the question assumes that such distance is not ideal, i.e., not the ideal relationship between God and his king. Fifth, the question assumes that God must close the gap to draw near to the king. Sixth, the question presupposes some obligation on Yahweh's part to respond, so that "when" and not "whether" is the question. Seventh, the question assumes that the royal righteousness David claims in vv. 3–8 will motivate Yahweh to respond to his question.

Considering the royal voice, plaintive tone, pledges of justice, inter-psalm connections, and the preceding "psalms, the verb "come" (חֲבֹא) appears to echo the announcement of Yahweh's "coming" explicitly promised in the series. The verb בָּוָא occurs throughout this series. Four times it refers to people "coming" before Yahweh to worship him (95:6; 96:8; 100:2, 4) and once it refers to Israel being prohibited from "entering" his rest (95:11). But three times, in the core songs headed by the incipit 98 ,96 (יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ), the verb describes Yahweh himself coming as king to judge the earth (96:13 [2x]; 98:9). Both statements conclude their respective psalms, each rising to a crescendo that depicts Yahweh "coming" to reorder the world.

Psalm 96:13

before Yahweh, for he comes (בָּא),  
for he comes (בָּא) to judge (לִשְׁפַּט) the earth (הָרִץ).  
He will judge (לִשְׁפַּט) the world in righteousness,  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Psalm 98:9

before Yahweh, for he comes (בָּא)  
to judge (לִשְׁפַּט) the earth (הָרִץ).  
He will judge (לִשְׁפַּט) the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

Therefore I propose that in Psalm 101:2 we hear a Davidic king-in-waiting soulfully meditating on the faithfulness of Yahweh (v. 1). He asks Yahweh to come as promised (v. 2) so that the Davidic king might begin ordering the city and land (vv. 3–8), performing locally what Yahweh does globally: order and restore all of creation through his royal judgment. Lexical and thematic relationships between the הָרִץ psalms and Psalm 101 (in addition to the clear links between 94 and 101) support this interpretation.

God rules as "judge" and comes to "judge" (לִשְׁפַּט) throughout Psalms 93–100 (94:2; 96:13 [2x]; 98:9 [2x]). His "justice" and "judgments" (מִשְׁפָּט) reign throughout the series (94:15; 97:2, 8; 99:4).<sup>68</sup> Nearest to Psalm 101, Psalm 99 declared, "The King in his might loves justice (מִשְׁפָּט). You have established equity; you have executed

67. Hossfeld and Zenger, *PSALMS 3, 15*.

68. Many other words and phrases throughout Pss 93–100 emphasize God's judgment, but space limitations require that I focus on the central root לִשְׁפַּט.

*justice* (*מִשְׁפָט*) and righteousness in Jacob” (99:4). Now David ponders God’s “justice” (*מִשְׁפָט*, 100:1) which he plans to enact. Indeed, after Psalms 93–100, Psalm 101 seems “appended as an echo out of the heart of David.”<sup>69</sup> The Davidide in 101 desires to embody God’s reign by enforcing God’s justice, but he must mournfully await the appointed time (101:2).

The celebration throughout the *יהוה מלך* series likewise echoes into Psalm 101. Psalms 96–99 summon creation to “sing” (*שִׁירוּ*, 96:1a; *שִׁירוּ*, 96:1b; *שִׁירוּ*, 96:2; *שִׁירוּ*, 98:1) and “sing praises” (*זָמָרוּ*, 98:4; *זָמָרְתָּ*, 98:5) because God orders the world with his justice.<sup>70</sup> Psalm 101:1 then presents David who “sings” (*אָשִׁירָה*, 101:1) and “sings praises” (*הָזֹמֵרָה*) as he commits to supply this justice.

The center of Book IV likewise shows concern for the “earth” (*אָרֶץ*) (94:2; 95:4; 96:1, 9, 11, 13; 97:1, 4, 5, 9; 98:3, 4, 9; 99:1; 100:1). Virtually all 44 appearances of *אָרֶץ* in Book IV denote the global “earth” rather than a particular land. But in Psalm 101, where *אָרֶץ* is once again a priority (101:6, 8), the meaning is clearly local rather than global. The “faithful in the land” (101:6) (*אֲבָנָמָנִי־אָרֶץ*) will receive the king’s favor, the “wicked in the land” (*רָשָׁעִי־אָרֶץ*, 101:8a) his impartial judgment.<sup>71</sup> Book IV moves from the worldwide “earth” (*אָרֶץ*) in 93–100 to the localized “land” (*אָרֶץ*) in 101, suggesting that God’s universal reign and world-ordering justice will be embodied and enacted first in his holy city (101:8). Here the nations will gather to worship the God who summons them into his courts in Psalms 95–100. After all, the eschatological hope of Israel was not that Jewish and Gentile worshipers would float to heaven but stream to Zion.

In summary, lexical and thematic runoff from the *יהוה מלך* peaks flows into Psalm 101, helping us interpret David’s question, “When will you come to me?” (1) God comes to judge, and David desires to enact his judgment. (2) Creation sings at God’s coming, and David sings to anticipate his coming. (3) God’s judgment will enact moral order and cosmic justice throughout creation, and David’s judgment will enact moral order throughout the land and citywide justice throughout Jerusalem. But (4) God comes in fullness only in the future, so David wants that future to come now: “When will you come to me?” Thus it appears that a Davidide in v. 2 is waiting (and asking) for Yahweh to “come” and judge the earth by installing him as king so that he can do Yahweh’s royal bidding, localizing God’s galactic rule.<sup>72</sup>

69. Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3:108.

70. Dozens more worship-words fill Pss 93–100, but here I am simply showing how David picks up several lexically connected themes from Pss 93–100.

71. Psalm 101 has a local feel. David twice speaks of his “house” (*בַּיִתִי*) (101:2), highlights the slanderer’s “neighbor” (101:5) (*רָעָה*), and speaks of “the city of Yahweh” (101:8) (*מִעְרֵי־יְהוָה*). Meanwhile there are no unambiguous global or universal references.

72. Earlier I described many different interpretations of the plaintive question in v. 2. Together they display one overarching concern: the presence, guidance, and power of Yahweh is needed for David to reign in fullness. A proposed “ritual humiliation” would illustrate how the king needs God. A divine vision would serve the cause of godly rulership in Israel (e.g., Solomon’s vision). A theophany would reorient the king toward God’s power, presence, and principles. The presence of

## Future Orientation

Psalmic lament is inherently future-oriented, straining through the dark present toward the bright horizon of God's promise. Therefore the lamenting tone of Psalm 101 immediately suggests a future orientation. Most modern translations and many interpreters construe Psalm 101 as future-oriented.<sup>73</sup> But the time-orientation within Psalm 101 depends primarily on the temporal conception of its verbs. Psalm 101 is filled with imperfect verbs, but the imperfect does not dictate temporal orientation. Rather, imperfective aspect portrays an action as not completed or in process. The LXX translates the fifteen Hebrew imperfect verbs with three different tenses: four futures, four aorists, and seven imperfects (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Hebrew imperfective verbs and  
LXX verb tenses in Ps 101**

Verse	MT	ESV	LXX	Greek Tense
101:1	הָרַיְשָׁא	I will sing	ἀσομαί	Future
101:1	אָזֶםֶרֶת	I will make music	ψαλῶ	Future
101:2	אֲשַׁכְּלִילָה	I will ponder	συνήσω	Future
101:2	תָּבוֹא	will you come?	ἥξεις	Future
101:2	גָּלַתְהָא	I will walk	διεπορευόμην	Imperfect
101:3	לֹא־אָשֵׁית	I will not set	προεθέμην	Aorist
101:3	לֹא־בָּקַע	it shall not cling	έμίσησα	Aorist
101:4	רוֹא	shall be far	ἐκολλήθη	Aorist
101:4	עָדָא	I will know	ἐγίνωσκον	Imperfect
101:5	תִּמְצָא	I will destroy ( <i>silence</i> )	ἔξεδίωκον	Imperfect
101:5	לֹא אָכַל	I will not endure	συνήσθιον	Imperfect
101:6	יִשְׁרַתְנִי	he shall minister to me	ἐλειτούργει	Imperfect
101:7	לֹא־יָשַׁב	(No one) shall dwell	κατάκει	Imperfect
101:7	לֹא־יָכַן	(no one) shall continue	κατεύθυνεν	Aorist
101:8	תִּמְצָא	I will destroy	ἀπέκτεννον	Imperfect

Ultimately, neither the MT nor LXX verbal forms prove a specific time-orientation for these verbs.<sup>74</sup> Neither does the plaintive question in v. 2, because David could be

the ark near David in Jerusalem would vividly illustrate how God favors and empowers Davidic rule (and more importantly, how David serves and enacts divine rule). Thus my interpretation honors the central concern inherent in other views.

73. Translations: ESV, HCSB, NAS, NET, NKJV, NRSV, RSV. Interpreters: McCann, *Psalms*, 1081–82; Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3:108–10; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 277; John Goldingay, *Psalms 90–150*, BCOT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 138–40; Creach, *Destiny of the Righteous*, 97–98, 107–8; Eaton, *Kingship in the Psalms*, 122. Others hear the psalmist claiming a current or past pattern of faithfulness rather than vowing blameless behavior for the future (Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 114–16; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 12; Dahood, *Psalms III*, 2).

74. For an explanation of the aorist and imperfect verbs in the LXX translation, see Möller, “Psalm 101,” 123–24n71.

expressing any of three perspectives, all of which could ground his plea that Yahweh come to him: (1) he has already kept his way blameless and established moral order in the land; (2) he currently keeps his way blameless and maintains moral order in the land; or (3) he will in the future keep his way blameless and establish moral order in the land. David could even be claiming all three: past, present, and future faithfulness. Therefore while David’s temporal perspective on *Yahweh’s coming* is clearly future-oriented, David’s temporal perspective on his own royal actions is debated.

For contextual, theological, and canonical reasons, it is unlikely that David is recounting his past performance. Contextually, if David were recounting his royal faithfulness in the past, the “steadfast love,” “justice,” and “blameless way” celebrated in v. 1 would seemingly refer to David’s own performance rather than Yahweh’s character, an unlikely interpretation. Theologically, the grand vision of comprehensive righteousness—personal and political, administrative and judicial, attitudinal and behavioral—strikes an eschatological chord that resonates with the future more than the past.<sup>75</sup> Canonically, since Psalm 89 recounted the fall of David’s line, and Psalm 90 confessed that sin was the cause (a confession confirmed by the egregious history of Judean kingship), a Davidide now claiming comprehensive faithfulness would cut against the canonical position of Psalm 101.

It is also unlikely that David is presenting his current performance for Yahweh’s consideration. The imperfective verbal aspect could naturally express ongoing royal activity, but (once again) the comprehensive and ideal perspective in the psalm suits eschatology better than history. Further, the canonical context of wilderness exile marking Book IV (including the picture of a crumbled Zion in 102:14–23) suggests that no Davidide is enthroned at this point in the Psalter’s progression.

Therefore, the verbs in Psalm 101 are best interpreted as future-oriented—the pre-commitments of a future Davidide. As noted, the holistic and comprehensive pronouncements fit better with a vow than with history. Mitchell notes that these kinds of ideal realities, never seen in Israel’s history, strike an eschatological tone. His assessment regarding the eschatological perspective of the entire Psalter is worth repeating:

First, [the Psalter] originated in an eschatologically conscious milieu.

Second, the figures to whom the Psalms are attributed were regarded as future-predictive prophets even in biblical times.

Thirdly, certain psalms seems [*sic*] to be of an intrinsically ‘ultimate’ character, that is, they describe a person or event in such glowing terms that the language far exceeds the reality of any historical king or battle.

75. The immediately preceding יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ series paints a similar idealistic picture and strikes the same eschatological chord (see David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], 85–86, 284–85).

Fourthly, the very inclusion of the royal psalms in the Psalter suggests that the redactor understood them to refer to a future *mashiah-king*.<sup>76</sup>

The imperfective verbs thus express the torah-shaped values this future Davidide promises to embody, endorse, enact, and enforce. Indeed, the entire discussion about verbal aspect is contextualized by psalmic arrangement. Even if David's psalm on its own expressed past actions, what does it now insinuate here in Book IV of the Psalter?

Psalm 101 (a) presents the first named Davidide since David's line was severed in Psalm 89, (b) follows the יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ psalms where God's global reign was promised, (c) resonates with Psalm 94 where God's justice is yet unrealized, (d) begs God to "come" and empower this Davidide to embody divine rule; (e) vows a righteous tenure to motivate Yahweh to respond, and (f) precedes Psalm 102 where an individual mourns his afflictions amidst a fallen Zion. The perspective is clearly future-oriented.

Finally, Allen illustrates a wise canonical reading by taking seriously the placement of Psalm 101 and interpreting its microelements within a macrohermeneutic. Allen interprets the psalm as a king looking back on his actions, but still views the psalm as forward-looking within the structure of the Psalter:

This royal psalm has an important canonical role within Book IV of the Psalter. It became the witness that Book IV provides to the messianic hope of Israel. It serves to appeal for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty by reference to God's self-imposed obligations and attests the perfection of that coming kingdom ...<sup>77</sup>

## **Ascending the Hill of Yahweh: Psalms 15 and 101**

Psalm 101 also resonates lexically and thematically with several distant psalms. This resonance helps illuminate the role Psalm 101 plays in Book IV. Interpreters often note similarities with Psalms 15 and 24. Below I explore lexical and thematic repetition among these psalms and seek to interpret their mutually illuminating relationships.

### **Structure of Psalms 15–24**

Many note a chiastic structure binding Psalms 15–24.<sup>78</sup> The temple entrance psalms (15 and 24) provide the frame. The torah-exalting Psalm 19 stands at the center,

76. Mitchell, *Eschatological Programme*, 82–89.

77. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 12.

78. Interpreters credit Auffret for identifying this chiasm, and many have applied and expanded his view. See Pierre Auffret, *La Sagesse a Bâti Sa Maison: Études de Structures Littéraires dans l'Ancien Testament et Spécialement dans les Psaumes*, OBO (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 407–38; Patrick D. Miller, "Kingship, Torah Obedience, and Prayer: The Theology of Psalms 15–24," in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung*, ed. K. Seybold and E. Zenger, HBS 1 (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1994), 127–42; Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 72–74, 234–40; Vesco, *Psautier de David*, 1:175; William P. Brown, *Psalms*, IBT (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010), 97–107; William P. Brown, "'Here Comes the Sun!' The Metaphorical Theology of Psalms 15–24," in *Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. E. Zenger (Walpole, MA: Peeters,

surrounded by royal Psalms 18 and 20–21. Complaint and petition (17, 22) alongside songs of trust (16, 23) complete the collection. Miller senses a unified message involving obedience, trust, deliverance, kingship, and torah. “Obedience to torah and trust in Yahweh’s guidance and deliverance are the way of Israel and the way of kingship.”<sup>79</sup> Grant agrees that “righteousness and relationship with God are to be found in the keeping of his torah.”<sup>80</sup> Sumpter sees the ideal “framing psalms” (15, 19, 24) providing theological (and eschatological) context for the “intervening psalms” which reflect the real-time struggle of the faithful. This ten-psalm collection tells “the eschatological narrative of God’s consummation of creation by bringing his righteous king... into the reality beyond the threshold of his temple.”<sup>81</sup> Brown sees Psalms 15 and 24 sitting at the foothills of a chiastic structure which rises to a torah peak in Psalm 19. “Because both psalms make reference to God’s ‘holy mountain’ or ‘hill’ (15:1; 24:3), the overall arrangement of this cluster takes on a distinctly metaphorical shape, with Psalm 19 assuming the ‘summit’ of the arrangement” (see Figure 1). Thus the life-giving, world-ordering, king-qualifying torah governs this series just as the torah governs Israel’s king and community.

**Figure 1. Chiastic structure of Psalms 15–24<sup>82</sup>**



The bookends in Psalms 15 and 24 paint a picture picked up by Psalm 101. Psalm 15:1 begins, “O Yahweh, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?” Psalm 24:3 likewise asks, “Who shall ascend the hill of Yahweh? And who shall stand in his holy place?” Both psalms then sketch a portrait of the man whose character answers these questions (15:1–5; 24:3–6). Now in Book IV, a waiting

2010), 259–77; Philip Sumpter, “The Coherence of Psalms 15–24,” *Biblica* 94, no. 2 (2013): 186–209.

79. Miller, “Psalms 15–24,” 140–41.

80. Grant, *King as Exemplar*, 240.

81. Sumpter, “Psalms 15–24,” 209.

82. Adapted from Brown, *Psalms*, 97. Brown notes that “YHWH’s ‘hill’ or ‘holy place’ constitutes a microcosm of the well-established earth. To ascend it is, in effect, to scale the pinnacle of creation” (Brown, *Psalms*, 99).

Davidide promises to embody and enforce these principles (101). The resonance especially between Psalms 15 and 101 is striking (see Table 6).

## Lexical and Thematic Repetition in Psalms 15 and 101

Only “he who walks blamelessly” (*הוֹלֵךְ תְּמִימָם*, 15:2) may ascend Yahweh’s holy hill. So David contemplates the “blameless way” (*בֶּדֶרֶךְ תְּמִימָם*, 101:2) and vows to promote only servants who “walk in the way that is blameless” (*הַלֵּךְ בֶּדֶרֶךְ תְּמִימָם*, 101:6). This torah-saturated lifestyle is the dual qualification for entering Yahweh’s presence (15:1) and leading Yahweh’s people (101:2, 6).

Ethics create actions, so both psalms emphasize “doing” (*עֲשָׂע*). The acceptable worshiper “does” (*עֲשָׂה*, 15:3) no wrong to his neighbor, and the one who “does” (*עֲשָׂה*, 15:5) the lifestyle of Psalm 15 will be established. David complements this emphasis by hating the “doing” (*עֲשָׂה*, 101:3) of transgressors and those who “do” (*עֲשָׂה*, 101:7) deceit. The root *עֲשָׂה* is also joined by the root (“work,” “practice”): the one who “does” (*פָּעַל*, 15:2) right is qualified, but David will destroy those who “do” (*פָּעַל*), 101:8) evil.

This emphasis on “doing” expands beyond individual incidents, occasions, and events. Both psalms emphasize that righteousness is a lifestyle. God desires a blameless “walk” (*הַלֵּךְ*, 15:2), so David promises to “walk” (*אֲתָה הַלֵּךְ*, 101:2) with integrity while affirming those with a blameless “walk” (*הַלֵּךְ*, 101:6).

This walk starts in the heart. Only the one who speaks truth “in his heart” (*בְּלֹבֶבּ*, 15:2) and has a pure “heart” (*לִבְבָּם*, 24:4) may ascend God’s mountain. Therefore David is well qualified: “I will walk with integrity of *heart*” (*לִבְבֵי*, 101:2). David also rejects a perverse “heart” (*לִבְבָּם*, 101:4) and an arrogant “heart” (*לִבְבָּם*, 101:5). He not only commits to cultivate the right heart himself but drives all corrupt hearts from God’s presence. David internalizes, embodies, and enforces the righteous qualities God desires.

Both psalms reflect the principle that the heart overflows in speech. The ascending worshiper must “speak” (*דָּבָר*, 15:2) truth in his heart. David enforces this truth-speaking requirement, rejecting all who “speak lies” (*דָּבָר שְׁקָרִים*, 101:7) and practice “deceit” (*רְמִיה*, 101:7). Slander is likewise condemned in both psalms, though the terms are synonymous rather than identical. The righteous man “does not slander” (*לֹא־רָהַל*, 15:3), and David promises judicial violence upon “whoever slanders” (*מְלֹוֹשָׁנוּ*, 101:5). Explicit slander with the “tongue” (*לְשָׁנוּ*, 15:3) is then broadened to include “evil” (*רְעֵה*, 15:3), “reproach” (*חֶרְפָּה*, 15:3), and false “swearing” (*גַּשְׁבָּע*, 15:4; cf. 24:4). Malicious attacks and false oaths, including but not limited to false testimony in judicial settings, are the shared targets in both psalms.

Truthful speech is central because righteousness is primarily relational in both psalms. The qualified worshiper does no evil to “his neighbor” (*לְרַעֵהוּ*, 15:3). David, cultivating this quality by enforcing the requirement, vows to punish the one who

slanders “his neighbor” (*רעהו*, 101:5). David himself steadfastly avoids this kind of relational “evil” (*רעה*, 15:3) in all areas of life: “I will know nothing of “evil” (*רע*, 101:4).

The “eyes” (*בְּעֵינֵי*, 15:4) of the righteous despise vile people, and David embodies the principle perfectly. His “eyes” (*עֵינֵי*, 101:3) will entertain nothing worthless; his “eyes” (*עֵינָה*, 101:6) will favor the faithful; his “eyes” (*עֵינָה*, 101:7) will reject all liars; and he will rebuff those with proud “eyes” (*עֵינִים*, 101:5).

Finally, both psalms use synonyms to portray visiting or settling in God’s presence. Psalm 15 asks, “Who shall *sojourn* (*גַּוֹּר*, 15:1) in your tent? Who shall *dwell* (*שָׁכַן*, 15:1) on your holy hill?” David vows that the faithful rather than the deceitful will “dwell” (*לַשְׁבַת*, 101:6; *יָשַׁב*, 101:7, 101:7) with him, presumably in a restored Jerusalem, the “city of Yahweh” (*מִשְׁרִירֵיהָה*, 101:8), which rests on his “holy hill” (*בְּהֶרְקָדְשָׁךְ*, 15:1).

**Table 6. Lexical and thematic repetition in Pss 15 and 101**

Verse	MT	Translation
15:1	מוֹזֵר לְדוֹד	a psalm of David
101:1	לְדוֹד מוֹזֵר	a psalm of David
15:2	הוֹלֵךְ תְּמִימָם	he who walks <i>blamelessly</i>
101:2	אֲשֶׁר־יָלַל בְּדַרְךָ תְּמִימָם	I will ponder the <i>blameless way</i>
101:6	הַלֵּךְ בְּדַרְךָ תְּמִימָם	walk in the way that is <i>blameless</i>
15:3	עָשָׂה	<i>does</i> no evil to his neighbor
15:5	עָשָׂה	He who <i>does</i> these things
101:3	עָשָׂה	the <i>work</i> of those who fall away
101:7	עָשָׂה	the one who <i>does</i> deceit
15:2	פָּעַל	<i>does</i> (what is right)
101:8	כָּל־פָּעָלֵי אָוֹן	all <i>doers</i> of evil
15:2	הוֹלֵךְ תְּמִימָם	he who walks blamelessly
101:2	אֲתַהֲלֵךְ בְּתַמִּילָבִי	I will walk with integrity of heart
101:6	הַלֵּךְ בְּדַרְךָ תְּמִימָם	he who walks in the way that is blameless
15:2	בְּלֹבֶבְךָ	and speaks truth <i>in his heart</i>
101:2	לֹבֶבֵי	I will walk with integrity of <i>heart</i>
101:4	לֹבֶב	a perverse <i>heart</i> shall be far from me
101:5	לֹבֶב	an arrogant <i>heart</i>
15:2	דָּבָר	<i>speaks</i> truth in his heart
101:7	דָּבָר	who <i>speaks</i> lies
15:3	* לא־רָגֵל	does not <i>slander</i> * <sup>83</sup>
101:5	* מָלוֹשֵׁנִי	whoever <i>slanders</i> *

83. Asterisks mark words or phrases that are not identical but have similar meaning.

Verse	MT	Translation
15:3	לֹרֶעַתָּהוּ	does no evil to <i>his neighbor</i>
101:5	רְעֵהוּ	Whoever slanders <i>his neighbor</i> secretly
15:3	רְעֵה	does no <i>evil</i> to his neighbor
101:4	רַע	I will know nothing of <i>evil</i>
15:4	בְּעִינֵי	in whose <i>eyes</i> a vile person is despised
101:3	עִינֵי	I will not set before <i>my eyes</i>
101:5	עִינִים	a haughty <i>look</i>
101:6	צָנֵי	<i>I will look</i> with favor on the faithful in the land
101:7	עִינֵי	shall not continue before <i>my eyes</i>
15:1	* בְּהַר קָדֵשׁ *	on <i>your holy hill</i> *
101:8	* מִעֲרֵיהוָה *	from <i>the city of Yahweh</i> *

## Psalm 101 Embodies and Enforces Psalm 15

How does Psalm 101 apply the standards in Psalm 15? H. Wallace suggests that Psalm 101 “echoes the entrance liturgies in Psalms 15 and 24:3–6.”<sup>84</sup> Kraus notes similarities with the “liturgies of the gate” in Psalms 15 and 24 and suggests that “the king is the guardian of the Torah of the gate.”<sup>85</sup> Regardless of the precise setting envisioned, the Davidic king in Psalm 101 both *embodies* and *enforces* the required covenantal qualities of the accepted worshiper in Psalms 15:1–5 and 24:3–6. But why is a psalm that repeats these qualities placed here in the canonical structure of the Psalter? I suggest four overlapping reasons. First, Psalm 101 is positioned to portray David meeting God’s requirements to ascend the hill of Yahweh in response to the cosmic invitations to worship filling Psalms 93–100.<sup>86</sup> Second, Psalm 101 is positioned to portray David as the foremost example of a torah-keeping worshiper as Israel and the nations stream to Zion and enter Yahweh’s land, city, temple, and presence.<sup>87</sup> Third, Psalm 101 is positioned to portray David announcing that he will enact and enforce the righteous requirements of temple worship as Israel and the nations ascend Zion in response to Yahweh’s invitation (Pss 95–100). Fourth and finally, Psalm 101 is positioned to portray David declaring that he meets the requirements to rule with Yahweh and enforce justice in the land, because the Davidic throne is installed on the same “holy hill” that houses God’s temple (Pss 2:6; 15:1), and the torah that governs the temple governs both city and land, king and people. Therefore these qualities are

84. H. Wallace, *Psalms*, 157; cf. McCann, *Psalms*, 1083; Botha, “Psalm 101,” 730.

85. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 279.

86. Zenger independently takes this same view (Zenger, “Psalms 90–106,” 184).

87. See Grant’s helpful and balanced discussion regarding the “democratization” of royal psalms as the king stands as the foremost example for the people (Grant, *King as Exemplar*, 281–89). Grant displays balance by not allowing such democratization (I prefer the term communalization) to diminish the messianic and eschatological hope inherent in these psalms and in the entire Psalter (Grant, *King as Exemplar*, 33–39).

not only temple entrance requirements. After all, Psalm 15 does not conclude with a successful entrance to the temple but with the promise, “He who does these things shall never be moved” (15:5). Likewise Psalm 24:5: “He will receive blessing from Yahweh and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” David reformulates and applies themes from Psalms 15:1–5 and 24:3–6 because these two psalms are more than temple entrance requirements. Anyone wanting to visit, sojourn, stand, or settle at the high point of Zion must be torah-saturated and torah-obedient. David desires exactly this dwelling-place that he might enact Yahweh’s rule in the land. So David promises to embody, enforce, and extend torah-keeping in Yahweh’s city.

## Summary, Conclusion, and Psalms 101–102

The יהוה מלך series begins in Psalm 93, but Psalm 94 interrupts the celebration with a desperate plea that God bring moral order to a chaotic and wicked world. Psalms 95 and 100 then bookend Psalms 96–99 by summoning Israel and the nations into his courts (95, 100) where they will join the entire cosmos singing fresh songs (96:1; 98:1) hailing Yahweh’s righteous and resplendent reign (97:1; 99:1). But the יהוה מלך collection insinuates that Yahweh does not yet reign in fullness, either among his people or in his world. Psalm 94 mourns the violent arrogance of the wicked, Psalm 95:7–11 warns Israel not to rebel, and Psalms 96:13 and 98:9 announce that Yahweh is *coming*. Thus the blend of idealism and rebellion characterizing Psalms 93–100 casts a strong eschatological hue over the יהוה מלך collection.

In this eschatological context, Psalm 101 then depicts a musing Davidide awaiting Yahweh’s world-ordering arrival. This future king pledges to embody and enforce the divine requirements for worship and kingship (101:3–7; cf. Ps 15) as he prepares to ascend the holy hill of Yahweh and rule the holy city of Zion (101:8; cf. Ps 15). Steeped in torah, he promises to personify the cosmic kingship of Yahweh celebrated throughout the יהוה מלך series. As the nations respond to the worldwide summons to gather and worship in God’s courts, this Davidide swears to ensure the purity of the city by enacting the world-ordering justice God promised in Psalm 94. Thus the intra-book links (within Book IV), Davidic title, royal voice, lamenting tone, future orientation, inter-psalm connections, and strategic placement make Psalm 101 a central psalm sustaining Davidic hope in Book IV. Ultimately, Psalm 101 reveals that the unbearable tension and covenantal dissonance marking Psalm 89 will be resolved—“a just Davidide will one day rule.”<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the reign of Yahweh does not upend the Davidic line but upholds it.

This reestablishment of David and Zion is further clarified as Psalm 101 flows into Psalm 102. Despite sharing few lexemes, Psalms 101–102 resonate with shared

88. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NTSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 199.

themes. These shared themes stand out against the paucity of shared terms. Psalm 102 clearly complements, clarifies, and answers the tone and perspective of Psalm 101.

First, the Davidic figure in Psalm 101 intends to rule the “land” (*אֶרְךָ*, 101:6, 8) and the “city of Yahweh” (*מִצְרַיִם-יְהוָה*, 101:8). But the last explicit mention of a landed Davidide appeared in the rubble-strewn complaint of Psalm 89: walls breached, fortresses fallen, throne overturned, and crown cast down (89:40–41, 45). So where is this “land,” this “city of Yahweh” (101:8), and how will it be reconstituted? Psalm 102 answers that the time has come for God to pity (102:14) and rebuild (102:17) “Zion” (*צִיּוֹן*, 102:14, 17, 22), synonymous with Jerusalem (102:22). He will have mercy on those mourning their holy city (102:15), and he will favor and rebuild his fallen capital (102:17). Thus in both psalms the city of Yahweh—i.e., Jerusalem or Zion—waits to be restored and reordered.

Second, the afflicted figure in 102 clarifies and amplifies the lamenting tone in 101. The psalmist is not just waiting (101:2) but suffering (102:2–12, 24–25); not just suffering but miserably afflicted (102:2–12); not just miserably afflicted but overturned and broken by the angry hand of God (102:11, 24–25a). Most importantly, he is not alone. The camera slowly zooms out to show this afflicted Davidide surrounded by the mourning servants of God (102:15), the dust and stones of Zion (102:15), and the imprisoned exiles (101:21) groaning for redemption (102:18). Therefore this Davidide is not just waiting for divine presence (101:2) but divine deliverance—for himself, his city, and his people (102:13–23).<sup>89</sup> With this in mind, Psalm 102 clarifies the ambiguous plaintive question, “When will you come to me?” (101:2). Earlier I argued that the Davidide in Psalm 101 desired Yahweh to “come” and fulfill the promises of the *מלך יהוה* series so that David could enact Yahweh’s world-ordering justice. But Yahweh has not yet “come to me [i.e., David]” (*תָבוֹא אֲלֵי*, 101:2) in power, so David “comes to you [i.e., Yahweh]” (*אֲלֵיךְ תָבוֹא*, 102:2) in prayer. David’s pained prayer in 102 explains his complaint in 101: He asked “When?” (*מֵתִים*) in 101:2 because he was awaiting the “time” (*עת*, 102:14) when God would fulfill his promises. But now, “the appointed time has come” (*כִּי-בָא מָעוֹד*, 102:14). What does this mean? It means that Yahweh himself is coming: he will “arise,” “hear,” “regard,” and “appear” so that he might “pity,” “favor,” “set free,” and “build up” (12:13–23) his humbled people and his holy city. Thus each psalm begins with a prayerful lament (101:2; 102:2–12), but 102 explains and broadens the lament from 101, and then states outright the hope that was only implicit in 101.<sup>90</sup>

89. “Thus, the king who vows innocence and commitment (Ps 101) then furthers his lament in complaining about his enemies and confessing his hope in YHWH (Ps 102)” (McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh*, 180).

90. Psalm 102 clarifies David’s question in 101:2 and answers a possible objection to my interpretation in chap. 5: Why does David ask Yahweh to come “to me” (*אלֵי*, 101:2) if he is seeking a broader movement from God that matches the promises in the *מלך יהוה* series? How does his personal prayer in 101:2 express a sweeping eschatological desire like the fulfillment observed in 102:13–23? The Psalter is indicating that the reinstatement of a just future Davidide coincides with

Third, despite this hope, Psalm 102 still reiterates the problem of time and waiting. David had asked “When?” (101:2), and the afflicted one has answered that the appointed time has come (102:14), *but he is still afflicted*: his “days” (vv) still pass away quickly and painfully (102:4, 12, 25). Yet the permanence of God puts this fast-passing life in perspective, bolstering the psalmist’s hope for deliverance: God predates, created, and outlasts the universe (102:26–27), and he endures “throughout all generations” (102:25), without changing and with “no end” (102:28). Thus both 101 and 102 are future-oriented, but 102 expresses both the pain and the promise more pointedly.

Fourth, Psalm 102 paves an international path to a rebuilt Zion and shows the multinational response to the global summons ringing through Psalms 95–100. The envisioned restoration draws widespread worshipers to Zion including “peoples” and “kingdoms” (102:23). The rebuilding of Zion (102:14–15, 17, 22), the resettling of the land, and the ingathering of the nations (102:23) necessitate the holy-hill requirements David pledges to embody and enforce throughout 101. God redeems his people “that they may declare in Zion the name of Yahweh, and in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship Yahweh” (102:22–23). God’s chosen city, the joy of all the earth (Ps 48:2), will be rebuilt, and its people must be pure (101:3–8).

Fifth, these two psalms juxtapose the kingships of David and Yahweh. In 101, David awaits God’s coming and declares his readiness to rule righteously, but he can only envision—not inhabit—the restored “land” and “city of Yahweh” (101:8). In 102, a Davidide still waits, but the restoration arrives when the eternally enthroned God (102:13) “looks down from his holy height” (102:20), sees his people’s plight and hears their pleas (102:20–21), and rises to rebuild Zion (102:14, 17). When “he appears in his glory” (102:17), he is feared by “all the kings of the earth” (102:16). Thus Psalms 101 and 102 juxtapose (a) the heavenly king who redeems his people and rebuilds Zion and (b) the human king who rules God’s rebuilt city with torah and justice. These two psalms harmonize to declare that when and where Yahweh restores, David will rule.

McCann summarizes: “Psalms 101–102 together address the three key elements of the crisis of exile—loss of monarchy, Zion/Temple, and land.”<sup>91</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger explain that the psalm pair 101–102 “transplants,” “explains,” and “concretizes” the

(and perhaps causes) the restoration of Zion and the ingathering of the nations.

91. J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in vol. 4 of *NIB*, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 1081. Witt argues that Ps 102 is a central hinge within Book IV and the Psalter as a whole: “Psalms 101–102 form a literary hinge upon which the answers to exile are given in Book IV. Without Psalm 102, there would not be [a] decisive turning point in the Psalter between the lamenting questions posed by Book III and the strong affirmations of YHWH’s faithfulness and steadfast love for his people in Book IV. Considering the importance of Book IV in the shape and message of the entire book, the declaration of the king in Psalm 102 may even be the hinge upon which the Psalter can finally turn from lament into praise” (Witt, “Psalm 102,” 606).

rule of Yahweh. Yahweh will enact his rule through the Davidic king (101:1–8) in “the city of Yahweh” (101:8) which coincides with a “rebuilt Zion” (102:13–23).<sup>92</sup> Thus psalmist and city will be restored together: the razed city (102:14–15) will be raised again (102:17, 22), and the offspring of the afflicted will flourish unafraid (102:29).

92. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 1–2.