

Appendix 6 A Critique of Psalms 1 and 2 Not as One Unit

Some scholars hold to a position that Psalms 1 and 2 do not form one unit. The strongest contender of this notion is John T. Willis.⁹⁰⁸ After examining the manuscript and early church traditions, the internal unity of Psalm 1 and its strophic structure, he concludes that Psalms 1 and 2 are “not a single psalm, but two separate self-contained entities. Accordingly, they should be studied separately.”⁹⁰⁹ His thesis contains a major weakness, however, due to his insufficient handling of the obvious semantic links between Psalm 1 and 2; Willis noticeably dismisses the evidence with just one sentence.⁹¹⁰ Such treatment of data shows bias. Furthermore, in order to prove that the recurrence of words and phrases in Psalms 1 and 2 does not mean the two psalms should be interpreted together, he takes it upon himself to examine Psalms 2 and 3, an endeavor that draws eight lexical connections between them. The problem is that half of the semantic links Willis says exist between Psalms 2 and 3 are synonymous words and not the occurrences of the same words. His evidence neither supports nor denies his contention; therefore, his faulty data renders his conclusion doubtful.⁹¹¹

Another contender is Nancy deClaissé-Walford who, in her attempt to explain the reference in Acts, offers three options:

(1) the author of Acts and/or the scribes who copied the manuscript knew of a form of the Psalter in which Psalm 1 and 2 were a single entity; (2) they knew of a form in which Psalm 1 and 2 were separate, but Psalm 1 was unnumbered; or (3) they knew of a form of the Psalter in which Psalm 1 was not yet included and Psalm 2 stood in the first position.⁹¹²

After evaluating each of the above options, deClaissé-Walford proposes that both Psalms 1 and 2 were added to the Psalter at the same time, but because of their different subject matter, Psalm 1, remaining unnumbered, became the introduction to the Psalter, while Psalm 2 became Psalm 1 – in effect, serving as the introduction to

908 John T. Willis, “Psalm 1: An Entity,” *ZAW* 91 (1979): 381-401.

909 *Ibid.*, 401.

910 *Ibid.*, 392.

911 *Ibid.*, 393. For examples, שָׁמוּ and יִיחַצְבוּ (2:2 and 3:2[1]), שָׁבַר and רָעַע (2:9 and 3:8[7]), אֲשֶׁרִי and בִּרְכַּתְךָ (2:12 and 3:8[8]). The exact recurrences between Psalm 2 and 3 are: עָם, אֲמִיר, הִרְיָקֶשׁ and בֶּן, אֲמִיר. Note how the first three words frequently occur in the OT.

912 See deClaissé-Walford, *The Hebrew Psalter*, 38.

Book I.⁹¹³ While the suggestion by deClaissé-Walford is attractive and might seem plausible, it cannot be proven through the textual traditions.⁹¹⁴

The difficulty of this position, to disjoin Psalms 1 and 2, is significant. This approach ignores many verbal and thematic parallels within these two psalms, reflecting a redactional concern in the final shape of the Psalter. Besides אֲשֶׁר־י, we can add the following words, which occur in both psalms: יֵשֶׁב, הִנֵּה, נָחַן, יוֹם, שִׁפְטָה, דֶּרֶךְ, אֲבֵר (and Yahweh).⁹¹⁵ These verbal and thematic similarities are the reason why the Psalm redactor put these two psalms at the beginning of the Psalter. There are no sufficient reasons presented by biblical scholarship to deny this redactional clue. Furthermore, removing the possibility of a dual introduction to the Psalter created by the redactor also gets rid of the “ambiguity for the reading of the Psalms.”⁹¹⁶ That poses the question, however, does the redactor intend to create an ambiguous reading? The answer to the above question is no. Through a juxtaposition of these two psalms, the redactor intends to introduce a reading that requires any reader to pay close attention to the two psalms’ semantic-syntactical structure. This reading enables the reader to draw out the theological implications of the Psalter (see our chapter 8 for the “Torah-messiah” reading based on these two psalms).

⁹¹³ Ibid., 41.

⁹¹⁴ We have selected a few more representative scholars who hold to a similar position: Marc Girard, *Les Psaumes: Analyse structurelle et Interprétation, 1-50* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1984), 66 and Wilson, “The Use of ‘Untitled’ Psalms in the Hebrew Psalter,” *ZAW* 97 (1985): 404-405. Both agree with J. T. Willis’ analysis. Cf. also F. Diedrich, “Psalm 2,” 30-31 and Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 89.

⁹¹⁵ To this list of “Wortverbindungen,” Barbiero also adds his “Motivverbindungen” (3 listed) in his *Das Erste Psalmenbuch*, 36.

⁹¹⁶ Patrick D. Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” in *Shape and Shaping*, 91.