Note: *The views expressed in the following articles are not necessarily those of the STR editorial board, the faculty, or the administration of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Individual authors are responsible for the research and content presented in their essays.*

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BOOK REVIEWS

More than Just Torah:
God's Instruction in the Psalms

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Approaches to Psalm 119 and the Psalter

Neither scholarly nor popular attitudes towards Psalm 119 have been uniformly positive. Weiser, for example, after providing his translation and notes, offers just over one and a half pages of comment on it.[1] He regards it as an 'artificial product of religious poetry'[2] and though he does offer some slightly more sympathetic comments, concludes that the psalm 'carries with it the germs of a development which was bound to end in the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes.'[3] Others seem to find its unrelenting focus on God's word as rather more than can be taken in, so that in the lectionary used by the Church of England for daily prayer it is the only psalm that is not read whole,[4] with segments of it punctuating the cycle of readings at various points. And, from the perspective of personal experience, there is undoubtedly a look of terror from the congregation when one announces that there is a reading from it that is usually soothed only by subsequently mentioning that only specific verses will be read. Indeed, the length of the psalm is itself problematic for many, with Anderson commenting that this, along with its rigid structure, prevents 'any real development of thought within the poem.' He then adds that its variations on its main theme become a 'monotonous repetition' though he does concede that it 'is impressive even in its repetitiveness.'[5] For Mowinckel, it is a 'styleless' mixture of types and representative

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[1] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 739–41.

[2] Weiser, *Psalms*, p. 741.

[3] Weiser, *Psalms*, p. 743.

[4] Strictly, Psalms 78 and 89 are also divided because of considerations of length, but the second half is then the next lection.

[5] A. A. Anderson, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Psalms* (2 vols, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), vol. 2, p. 806.

of a type of didactic poetry that, in its lack of connection with the cult has failed to understand what a psalm should be.[6]

Mowinckel's concerns of course preceded the more recent interest in Psalms as a book, but in a curious way they have paved the way for at least some initial reflections on how this psalm might contribute to this discussion. From Mays' perspective, it is the very fact that Psalm 119, along with Psalms 1 and 19, does not easily fit into any of the established genres that makes them important for this purpose. Their very distinctiveness, which he thinks points to them being among the latest psalms composed, makes them important precisely because we need to read them in terms of their place within the Psalter rather than seeking a *Sitz im Leben*.[7] For Mays, therefore, the interesting thing about the *Torah* psalms is that each one seems to be placed in a pair. As such, Psalm 1 is linked to Psalm 2 so that together they form the introduction to the Psalter, whilst both Psalms 19 and 119 follow psalms which are subject to an eschatological re-reading.[8] Jamie Grant has developed this insight further, arguing that each of the *Torah* psalms is placed with an immediately adjacent royal psalm, so that *Torah* and kingship go together.[9]

That Psalm 119 may have been placed intentionally relative to the psalms around is now something that is increasingly being recognised. Such concerns can, more generally, be traced back to the work of Brevard Childs,[10] and then through him his student Gerald

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[6] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (2 vols, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), vol. 2, p. 139.

[7] James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook of the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), p. 128.

[8] Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, pp. 132–34.

[9] Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Academia Biblica 17, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), pp. 11–12. Grant notes that Psalm 19 is both preceded and followed by a royal psalm so that it has a higher concentration of this feature, but the principal does not require that each *Torah* psalm have exactly the same relationship to the royal psalms. The important point for Grant is that these links point readers back to Deuteronomy 17:14–20. Whether or not Psalm 118 is a royal psalm is a point that might be debated, but his emphasis on the link between king and *Torah* seems sound.

[10] Especially Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), pp. 511–22.

Wilson. It was the published version of Wilson's doctoral thesis that really gave impetus to consideration of the shape of the Psalter as a whole, [11] though in his thesis he did not really focus to any great extent on Psalm 119.[12] However, reflecting on Mays' work, he did later point to a more significant role for Psalm 119.[13] Wilson thus opened the way for consideration of the function of Psalm 119, especially because of the importance he attached to Psalm 1's function as an introduction to the Psalter,[14] though it was only his later work that began to explore the particular significance of Psalm 119.[15]

However, it is striking that each of the scholars that we have so far noted as seeing a significant role for Psalm 119 do so in terms of its relationship to Psalms 1, 19 and 119, which together form a group recognised by some as *Torah* psalms.[16] That there is an obvious link between these three psalms has seemed apparent to most interpreters, even if debate continues about the best way to classify them, with some preferring to focus on their didactic goal and thus consider them as wisdom psalms.[17] Each approach has some bene-

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[11] Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBL Dissertation Series 76, Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

[12] In this, he is followed by other early studies on the formation of the Psalter such as Matthias Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters: ein formgeschichtler Ansatz* (FZAT 9, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994) and Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), though K. A. Reynolds, *Torah as Teacher: The Exemplary Torah Student in Psalm 119* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 147–60 has given further consideration to this theme, extending the insights of Mays.

[13] See Gerald H. Wilson, 'The Structure of the Psalter', in Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth (eds), *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), p. 236.

[14] See also Gerald H. Wilson, 'The Shape of the Book of Psalms', *Interpretation* 46/2 (1992), pp. 132–33.

[15] Though of course Claus Westermann, 'Zur Sammlung des Psalters', *Theologia Viatorum* 8 (1961–62), pp. 278–84 that Psalm 119 may have been the end of an earlier edition of the Psalter.

[16] For Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, p. 128, these three represent the whole of this group.

[17] For example, the recent textbook of W. H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms: A Guide to Studying the Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), pp. 129–40, prefers to treat them as wisdom texts.

fits through where it causes us to focus in our interpretation, though equally it means we tend to overlook other features But irrespective of whether it is their linguistic content (specifically focus on *Torah*) or their didactic purpose, it has seemed clear to most interpreters that these psalms need to be seen in light of one another.

Nevertheless, prior to the contemporary focus on Psalms as a book, these psalms tended to play only a small role in Psalms-studies. This is evident already in Gunkel's work, since he regarded *Torah* as a minor genre that could be treated in a fairly cursory manner.[18] But Mays' work has opened up new possibilities for considering these psalms. However, a crucial difficulty remains in identifying them, and here we might return to Mowinckel for an insight which has not been developed as it might, perhaps because it was offered as a criticism of these psalms. As we have noted, he regarded Psalm 119 as a 'styleless mixture' which drew on the existing types.[19] Although making this sort of aesthetic judgment is something that would be better resisted, nevertheless it is founded on something quite important, and that is that Psalm 119 is rooted in a range of existing psalm types. Thus, at various points it approaches the thanksgiving (e.g. Ps. 119:56) whilst at others it is more like the complaints (e.g. Ps. 119:25). But more than just the types, it also draws on language that we find throughout the Psalter, so that Goldingay can observe that 'Ways of speaking to and of God characteristic of the Psalter reappear here.'[20] So, although it has appeared to be a stranger in the Psalter because of its massive size and extended use of the acrostic structure, its thought and language are more at home in the Psalter than was perhaps recognised by previous generations of scholars. Indeed, as we shall see, this provides us with a mechanism for realising that its associations within the Psalter are far wider than have been traditionally recognised, and that contrary to Gunkel, the theme of *Torah* is quite widespread within the Psalter so that it forms one of its central theological themes. Hints of this may be seen already in the work of Botha and

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[18] Hermann Gunkel with Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms. The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James. D. Nogalski, Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), pp. 249–50.

[19] Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol 2, p. 139.

[20] John Goldingay, *Psalms. Volume 3: Psalms 90–150* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 379.

Potgieter[21] and also Hossfeld and Zenger,[22] both of whom have recently identified certain psalms as 'Torah psalms'(33 for Botha and Potgieter, 111 for Hossfeld and Zenger) even though they lack the word תורה which has previously been regarded as essential to making this identification. Recognising that the word itself is not determinative for this theme enables us to see the wider ways in which the theme of God's instruction is expressed in the Psalms.

To recognise this, we need to appreciate that we understand the importance of Torah by looking for considerably more than just the word תורה itself. Rather, it is only when we realise that Psalm 119 draws on a range of forms and expression found across the Psalter that we begin to realise that this theme may be more integrated into the theology of the Psalter than has usually been recognised. Most obviously, we see this in the fact that Psalm 119 makes use of eight synonymous terms for God's instruction, and in particular his written instruction. In effect, the hermeneutical key for seeing how Psalm 119 interacts with the rest of the Psalter lies in its use of language that draws on key theological terms so that its emphasis on the supremacy of God's instruction, an emphasis already seen to a lesser extent in Psalms 1 and 19, is in effect a capstone to a larger theological concern of the Psalter, which is to emphasise the importance and power of God's written word. Although we shall see that this theme is widespread within the Psalms, it has played a remarkably small role in discussions about the theology of the Psalms, perhaps because of the focus on the word תורה rather than seeing it as one term that brings us into the semantic domain of God's instruction.[23]

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[21] P. J. Botha and J. H. Potgieter, '"The Word of Yahweh is Right:" Psalm 33 as a Torah-Psalm', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 31 (2010), Art. #431

[22] Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Eric Zenger, *Psalms 3* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), p. 166.

[23] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 35, 161, briefly discusses the theme of *Torah* in Psalms, but does so by focusing on Psalms 1, 19, 119. However, it does not emerge as a major theme within the Psalter. For some important reflections on how we move to thinking about exegesis within the context of the Psalter as a whole, which is a necessary precursor to thinking about their theology, see Beat Weber, 'Von der Psaltergenese zur Psaltertheologie: Der nächste Schritt der Psalterexegese?! Einige grundsätzliche Überlegungen zum Psalter als Buch und Kanonteil', E. Zenger (ed.), *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 733–44.

The Vocabulary of God's Instruction in the Psalms

In order to appreciate the extent to which the theme of God's instruction is woven into the whole Psalter,[24] we need to examine the terms used for it, because doing so enables us to see the breadth of terminology that addresses this issue. As such, it seems better not to use any one Hebrew term to describe this concept, such as *Torah*, since this privileges it above the others. 'God's instruction' is thus chosen to provide a relatively neutral label for this domain. Although we cannot restrict the relevant terminology to that used in Psalm 119, its eight roughly synonymous terms[25] provide us with an entry point to the process of formulating this semantic domain. Although there are also a range of verbs which can be applied to God's instruction in Psalms,[26] we will keep our focus for this paper to substantives which consistently apply to God's written instruction. We can work through these in their order of frequency in Psalm 119.

תורה is most common term, occurring twenty-five times in Psalm 119 (119:1, 18 29, 34, 44, 51, 53, 55, 61, 70, 72, 77, 85, 92, 97, 109, 113, 126, 136, 142, 150, 153, 163, 165, 174. In addition, it occurs a further eleven times in the rest of the Psalter (1:2 (x2), 19:8, 37:31, 40:9, 78:1, 5, 10, 89:31, 94:12, 105:45). The term thus occurs in books one, three and four. Although often translated as 'law', it is perhaps best to think of it as 'instruction' or teaching.

Almost as common is דבר, which occurs some twenty-four times (119:9, 16, 17, 25, 28, 42 (x2), 43, 49, 57, 65, 74, 81, 89, 101, 105, 107, 114, 130, 139, 147, 160, 161, 169). Although it has a broader semantic range than most of the other terms for God's instruction, a good case for it referring to God's instruction can be made for about twenty-three occurrences (17:4, 33:4, 6, 50:17, 56:5, 11 (x2), 103:20 (x2), 105:8, 105:19 (?), 28, 105:42, 106:12,24, 107:20, 130:5, 145:5 (?), 145:13 (1QPs^a, not MT) 147:15, 18, 19, 148:8).

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[24] Psalm 119 also uses a range of verbs found across the Psalter to express piety. See Reynolds, *Torah as Teacher*, pp. 31–43.

[25] Although it is possible to trace different meanings for these eight terms, it is more likely that they are used as synonyms, and we are not intended to see any significant differences in meaning. See also Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (2 vols, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1907), vol. 2, p. 415. All refer to God's written instruction for his people.

[26] E.g. למד, ירה, ידע.

Some of these are not absolutely clear (105:19, 145:5), whilst including Psalm 145:13 depends upon us accepting the reading of 1QPsᵃ, though there is good reason to think that it provides a נ-verse that is otherwise missing from the acrostic structure of the psalm.[27] Even if we discount the more debatable readings, then it is still clear that this term is well-represented across the whole Psalter with the exception of Book 3.

עדות occurs twenty-three times in Psalm 119 (119:2, 14, 22, 24, 31, 36, 46, 59, 79, 88, 95, 99, 111, 119, 125, 129, 138, 144, 146, 152, 157, 167, 168). In addition, it occurs a further nine times in the rest of the Psalter (19:7, 25:10, 78:5, 56, 81:6, 93:5, 99:7, 122:4, 132:12), covering books one, three, four and five. It is usually translated as 'testimonies'.

משפטים also occurs twenty-three times in Psalm 119 (119:7, 13, 20, 30, 39, 43, 52, 62, 75, 84, 91, 102, 106, 108, 120, 121, 132, 137, 149, 156, 160, 164, 175). In addition, and allowing that the singular can serve with the same meaning, it occurs a further fourteen times in Psalms (10:5, 18:23, 19:10, 36:7, 48:12, 72:1, 81:5 (singular), 89:31, 97:8, 103:6, 105:5, 105:7, 147:19, 20). Even if we discount the use of the singular in 81:5, it still occurs in all five books of the Psalter. It is most commonly translated as 'ordinances.'

מצות occurs twenty-two times in Psalm 119 (119:6, 10, 19, 21, 32, 35, 47, 48, 60, 66, 73, 86, 96, 98, 115, 127, 131, 143, 151, 166, 172, 176). However, this word is not widely used in Psalms, occurring only four other times (19:9, 78:7, 89:32, 112:1), though these occurrences leave only Books two and four unrepresented. It is most commonly translated as 'commandments.'

חקים also occurs twenty-two times in Psalm 119 (119:5, 8, 12, 16, 23, 26, 33, 48, 54, 64, 68, 71, 80, 83, 112, 117, 118, 124, 135, 145, 155, 171). It is more common than some of the words noted, occurring a further eleven times in the rest of the Psalter[28] (2:7, 18:23, 50:16, 74:11, 81:5, 89:32, 94:20, 99:7, 105:10, 45, 147:19, 148:6) and

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[27] With Peter W. Flint, 'The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls: Psalms Manuscripts, Editions, and the *Oxford Hebrew Bible*', in Susan Gillingham (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 25. For a defence of MT omitting this verse, see Mitchell First, 'Using the *Pe-Ayin* order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms', *JSOT* 38 (2014), p. 479.

[28] Three times in the feminine form—18:23, 89:32 and 119:16—though there is no discernible difference in meaning.

thus represented across all five books of the Psalter. It is most commonly translated 'statutes.'

פקודים occurs twenty-one times in Psalm 119 (119:4, 15, 27, 40, 45, 56, 63, 69, 78, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 110, 128, 134, 141, 159, 168, 173). It is even rarer than מצות in the rest of the Psalter, occurring only three times (19:9, 103:18, 111:7), though this still covers books one, four and five. It is most commonly translated 'precepts.'

The least common term in Psalm 119 is אמרה, which occurs only nineteen times (119:11, 38, 41, 50, 58, 67, 76, 82, 103, 116, 123, 133, 140, 148, 154, 158, 162, 170, 172). It occurs a further seven times across the rest of the Psalter (12:7 (x2), 17:6, 18:31, 105:19, 138:2, 147:15), occurring in books one, four and five. Although perhaps closest as a synonym to דבר, it is most commonly translated as 'promise.'

As is clear from this, although the distribution of terms is uneven (reflecting the fact that in aiming for a number of synonyms, Psalm 119 has been forced to draw on some less common terms), it is worth noting that the language of God's instruction employed by Psalm 119 is well represented across the Psalter. That is, although Psalm 119 is relatively unusual in its concentration of terms for God's instruction, its decision to focus on it draws on a theme that, linguistically at least, is well represented across the Psalter. Indeed, taking these eight terms as our guide, we can tabulate the distribution as follows:

Term	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5
דבר	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
תורה	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
עדות	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
משפטים	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
מצות	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
פקודים	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
חקים	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
אמרה	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

All statistical analyses such as this can hide as much as they reveal, but it is immediately apparent that the theme of God's instruction, at least in terms of the language of Psalm 119, is most fully represented in Book 1, with all terms represented, but closely followed by Books Four and Five, where all but one of the terms

for God's instruction are present. One might argue that the level of influence in Book One is distorted by the inclusion of Psalms 1 and 19, which are the other traditional '*Torah*' psalms, and it is true that if we discount these texts Book One would be missing מצות and פקודים. Even if we allowed this, Book One would still have a significant number of texts that reflect on the theme of God's instruction. But of course the compilers of the Psalter have included these Psalms in Book One, presumably because they wanted to emphasise the importance of God's instruction.[29] That we have a higher concentration of terms for God's instruction in Books One, Four and Five could then suggest that this theme is thought to be important for readers of the Psalter, so we enter it through the theme of reflection on God's *Torah* in Psalm 1 and then move into the closing burst of praise by noting its presence in Psalms 145, 147 and 148, each of which have at least two references to God's instruction.[30] Such an observation would extend Janowski's argument about the architecture of the Psalms as building on the theme of *Torah* which then recurs as we come to the concluding universal praise of Psalm 150.[31] Theories about the overall structure of the Psalter are still much disputed, but if we accept the possibility that the Psalter has an intentional introduction in Psalms 1 and 2, then it is highly probable that what seems an intentional closing of the Psalter in Psalms 145–150 might want to return to the themes initially established whilst summoning praise.[32] If so, then this struc-

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[29] See also Mark J. Whiting, 'Psalms 1 and 2 as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Psalter' *EQ* 85 (2013), pp. 246–62. On the relationship between Psalms 1 and 2, see Robert Cole, 'An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2', *JSOT* 26 (2002), pp. 75–88 and P. J. Botha, 'The Ideological Interface between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2', *OTE* 18 (2005), pp. 189–203.

[30] For Psalm 145, this depends on accepting the reading of 1QPs[a] with its additional נ-verse.

[31] B. Janowski, 'Ein Tempel aus Worten. Zur theologischen Architektur des Psalters', in E. Zenger (ed.), *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 281–84, 301–304. Janowski highlights the importance of Psalms 1 and 2 as an entrance to the Psalter, but although he points to the importance of *Torah* for the concluding burst of praise, does not note the importance of these psalms for this theme.

[32] It goes beyond the scope of this paper, but apart from God's instruction we should also note the presence of themes such as the king and the need for the nations to submit to Yahweh's purposes as other motifs that link the opening and closing of the Psalter.

ture has the effect of pointing to reflection on God's written in-
struction as both the start and finish of the Psalter, so that as one
works through it then we are not only informed its importance at
the start of our journey, we are reminded of it as we conclude, and
are thus brought back to the start of the Psalter to make the jour-
ney again.

However, in thinking about the vocabulary of God's instruction
in the Psalter we actually have to go beyond the terminology of
Psalm 119. Its structure requires that it stays with the same eight
terms and so does not explore in full this semantic domain, with
the most direct way of exploring this further being to note terms
used in parallel to those from Psalm 119 in other psalms. The most
obvious evidence for this comes from the fact that Psalm 19, which
of course closely parallels Psalm 119, does not use the same terms
for God's instruction, including יראת יהוה among its terms for this
field. In this context, the fear of Yahweh refers to the inward effect
of God's instruction on those who read it.[33] Indeed, this sense of
יראת יהוה recurs in Psalm 111:10. In addition, the closely related ירא
יהוה is also paralleled to God's commandments in Psalm 112:1,
whilst in Psalm 25:10 we are told that Yahweh will instruct (ירה) the
one who fears him. However, in these psalms is not the fear of
Yahweh itself that acts as God's instruction whereas in Psalms 19
and 111 it is this which stands for the instruction.

Another term closely related to those found in Psalm 119 is אמר,
which seems functionally indistinguishable from אמרה, and indeed
BDB makes no distinction in their meaning.[34] This term refers to a
word from God in Psalms 68:12, 77:9, 107:11 and 138:4, though in
68:12[35] it is perhaps more likely to refer to a prophetic message

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[33] With Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1–41)*
(Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), p. 466. On the basis of this interpretation
he rightly rejects the proposal of Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A
Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), p. 268 that יראת be emended to
אמרת and thus bring it into line with Psalm 119.

[34] Indeed, there appears to be no obvious difference in meaning be-
tween אמרה in Psalm 138:2 and אמר in verse 4 of the same Psalm.

[35] Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Eric Zenger, *Psalms 2* (Minneapolis: For-
tress Press, 2005), p. 165, point to the analogy of the war prophecy in 1
Kings 20.

from God, whereas in 77:9, 107:11 and 138:4[36] it refers back to God's written word.

Another term that is closely parallel to those of Psalm 119 is עצה. It can be used without reference to God's written word, most obviously in Psalm 1:1 where the counsel of the wicked stands in opposition to God's instruction in his תורה or in Psalm 20:5 where it refers to the desires of the king. However, it can also refer to God's instruction Psalms 33:11, 73:24(?), 106:13 and 107:11. In Psalm 119:24, it is Yahweh's testimonies (עדות) that become the psalmist's counsellors. עצה in turn can also be paralleled with מחשבה, which refers to God's instruction in 33:11 (in contrast with the fallible thoughts and counsel of the nations in 33:10) and 92:6.

Apart from יראת יהוה, the additional terms noted so far can all be easily recognised as fitting into the semantic domain of speech. However, just as we noted that יראת יהוה can point beyond itself to the inward effect of God's word, so also the psalmists sometimes draw on other terms which, though not self-evidently in this domain, can be drawn into it because they point to God's greater purposes and the need for conformity to it. Three words which might not self-evidently be drawn into this domain but which occur in parallel with other terms in this domain and refer to God's instruction are ברית, דרך and ארח. Since דרך occurs thirteen times in Psalm 119 (119:1, 3, 5, 14, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37, 59, 168), mostly as a term which stands for God's instruction or its effects (e.g. Psalm 119:3, a verse which does not otherwise use one of the eight terms but where דרך stands for this), we should not be surprised that this term occurs with this sense elsewhere in the Psalter. The word itself occurs sixty-seven times in Psalms, but apart from Psalm 119 it refers to God's instruction ten times (Psalms 18:22, 31, 25:4, 8, 9, 12, 81:14, 86:11, 103:7, 143:8). Closely related to this word is ארח, which occurs with this sense five times in Psalm 119 (Psalm 119:9, 15, 101, 104, 128) and a further four times (Psalms

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[36] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), p. 507, believes that the reference here is back to a salvation oracle delivered by a cultic prophet in verse 2. However, the exaltation of Yahweh's name is paralleled with his word (אמרה) in verse 2, and here the paralleling of these elements makes more sense if the reference is to the written word since these are points of reference that allow the exaltation of both name and word in a way that is not possible with a prophetic oracle that is not then recorded.

25:4, 10, 27:11, 44:19). Finally, ברית stands for God's instruction seventeen times, in Psalms 25:10, 14, 44:18, 50:16, 78:10, 37, 89:4, 29, 35, 40, 103:18, 105:8, 10, 106:45, 111:5, 9, 132:12. In this case, ברית covers both the relationship that exists between the worshipper and God and also the particular instruction that regulates that relationship.

If we tabulate these terms relative to the five books of the Psalter, then we obtain the following result:

Term	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5
יראת יהוה	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
אמר	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
עצה	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
מחשבה	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
דרך	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
ארח	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
ברית	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Although care must be taken because we are here dealing with less common usages, it is still notable that this distribution of the vocabulary of God's instruction follows a similar pattern to what we saw above for those terms which are explicitly used for God's instruction in Psalm 119.[37] So, although no one Book has all seven terms, only one (אמר) is absent from Book One, which also had the highest concentration of vocabulary in this domain from Psalm 119. Book two once again has the lowest concentration of terms, with only three of the seven terms occurring. Book Five again has the second highest concentration of terms with five represented, while Books Three and Four each have four terms. The close parallel in distribution of terms concerned with God's instruction demonstrates that the distribution of terms from Psalm 119 can legitimately be seen as demonstrating the interest of each Book in this theme, and that the vocabulary used in Psalm 119 is representative of the theme without being exhaustive. Moreover, it shows that with the possible exception of Book two, the whole of the Psalter

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[37] That is, excluding דרך and ארח since these are not usually included among Psalm 119's core terms, though as we have noted they function as close parallels.

demonstrates an interest in this theme and that Psalm 119 is there-
fore highlighting a key moti that runs throughout the Psalter. It is
thus a text that differs from others in the Psalter by the degree of
its interest in God's instruction rather than anything more funda-
mental. In addition, since this distribution of terms shows that in-
terest in God's instruction is widespread in the Psalter, we also
need to revise our understanding of the *Torah* psalm since the con-
cept occurs in so many forms. Indeed, if we note only Psalms in
which there are two or more references to the theme of God's in-
struction (allowing that a single reference might be incidental to a
given psalm) then we would have to consider Psalms 1, 2, 17, 18,
19, 25, 33, 37, 50, 56, 78, 81, 89, 94, 99, 103, 105, 106, 107, 111,
119, 132, 138, 147, 148—twenty five psalms in all. But in reality,
there are times when a single reference is sufficient to establish the
importance of this theme. For example, Psalm 93:5 asserts that
Yahweh's 'testimonies (עדות) are very trustworthy.' Although this is
the only reference to God's instruction in this Psalm it, along with
the holiness of the temple, is the point to which this psalm builds.[38]
But this merely reinforces the point that the theme of God's in-
struction is of great importance for the theology of the Psalms.

The Function of God's Instruction in the Psalms

It is one thing to find the vocabulary of God's instruction
across the Psalter, but to appreciate the importance of this theme
for the theology of the Psalms we also need to see how it is used.
This is because simply finding the words enables us to say that the
theme is present, and on the basis of the extent to which it is pre-
sent important, but how that theme is understood depends on ac-
tual usage. This is because, as James Barr stressed, meaning does
not reside in words themselves, and in particular their etymology,
so much as the utterances in which they are used.[39] So noting that

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[38] As Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (Dallas: Word, 1990), p. 480, ob-
serves, the juxtaposition of this theme here 'implies that Yahweh's guid-
ance for human conduct has proved true and reliable—as stable as the
throne of God and the earth.' Note also the three references to stability
(verses 1–2, 5), which refer to the world, the throne and Yahweh's testi-
monies. Cf. Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press,
2001), p. 232.

[39] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford Uni-
versity Press, 1961).

the vocabulary of God's instruction occurs across the Psalter simply tells us it is something that is referenced relatively frequently, and more often than most summaries of the Psalms' theology might suggest, but it does not tell us how the Psalter develops this theme. Accordingly, we need to turn to explore some of the ways in which the theme is explored in the Psalms, though given the frequency with which the theme occurs this can only be a survey rather than an in-depth examination of the topic. To do this, we will note the presence of some recurring motifs in the Psalter as a whole, though setting aside Psalm 119. Since the relationship of Psalms 1 and 19 to Psalm 119 is well-known, we shall omit them from this survey too, though of course all points noted here should be supplemented by an exploration of how these psalms also explore this. For reasons of space, these are only initial soundings in this theme.[40]

God's Instruction is the Measure of Israel

The theme of God's instruction is particularly important in the psalms which recount Israel's story, most notably in Psalms 78, 105 and 106. So, Psalm 78 recounts Israel's story as a 'parable' (משל, Psalm 78:2), running from the wilderness period to the rise of David. From the outset, it establishes the theme of God's instruction as crucial to the interpretation of this history that is offered. So, although it refers to the poet's parable as 'instruction' (תורה), the larger point of the poem is that subsequent generations would know about Yahweh's glorious deeds (Psalm 78:4). However, the later generations need a grid through which they can interpret these deeds and Israel's response to them, and this is clearly set out in verses 5-8, and it is these later generations which are in effect addressed by the psalmist with the goal of encouraging faithfulness to God's instruction among them.[41] Here, the psalmist draws on a range of terms from the theme of God's instruction, describing it in terms which suggest that it is Yahweh's gift to his people. Hence, we are told he 'established his testimony (עדות) in Jacob, he set his

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[40] Gordon J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah Reading Biblical Song Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), pp. 77–138, explores this area in terms of ethics, also starting from Psalm 119, though of course (as Wenham recognised), the Psalms use this motif for considerably more than ethics.

[41] See also Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity and the Making of Modern History* (Lousiville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), p. 34.

instruction (תורה) in Israel' (Psalm 78:5). It was this instruction that was to be taught to subsequent generations so they might not forget God and also 'keep his commandments (מצות, Psalm 78:8) since they had set their hope in him. Hence, it was God's instruction that was to shape the life of the nation, and which also becomes the means by which the nation will be assessed, so that it was failing to keep covenant (ברית) and refusing to conduct themselves in accordance with God's instruction (תורה, verse 10) which provides the basis for the psalmist's critique of them. Apart from a passing reference to the nation's failure to keep covenant (ברית) in verse 37 the rest of the psalm does not draw directly on this theme, but it is clear from the language that is used that the assessments of them are drawn from earlier texts, so that both the narratives and the laws that had come down to the poet form part of his teaching, but a teaching which aims to point readers back to these texts that they may learn from them.

Psalms 105 and 106 form a pair of psalms[42] which also interpret Israel's story. Psalm 105 stays largely with the wilderness period in order to present a more positive account of Israel's story, whilst Psalm 106 also focuses on the wilderness period but then extends this to consider the exile as something that came about because of Israel's sin.[43] The psalms are joined by more than just a shared interest in Israel's story , for both are concerned with the means by which Yahweh remembered his covenant with them through Abraham (Psalms 105:8–11, 42, 106:44–46).[44] Such a strong focus on covenant (ברית) leads naturally to consideration of God's instruction, and it is therefore not surprising to note that there is a high concentration of terms drawn from this semantic domain placed at significant points in these psalms. The Abrahamic covenant is thus presented as a sworn statute (חק, Psalm 105:10) and something Yahweh has spoken (דבר, verse 8), though this also occurs in the context of Yahweh's spoken משפטים in verses 5 and 7. That these משפטים are in all the earth probably alludes to the title

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[42] See Walther Zimmerli, 'Zwillingpsalmen,' in J. Schreiner (ed.) *Wort, Lied, und Gottespruch:Beiträge zu Psalmen und Propheten: Festschrift für Joseph Ziegler*, (Würzburg: Echter, 1972), pp. 105–13.

[43] The prayer of Psalm 106:47 presumes that the nation is in exile.

[44] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, p. 75.

Abraham gave Yahweh in Genesis 18:25 as he interceded for Lot,[45] though that this is in terms of a covenant in all the earth might also refer back to the covenant with Noah.[46] Later references to God's word (דבר) refer to Moses and Aaron's faithfulness to the word they had received (Psalm 105:29) and Yahweh's faithfulness to his promise to Abraham (Psalm 105:42). As with Psalm 78, these references all point to God's instruction as comprising both the narratives that had come down to the poet and the laws that framed and interpreted them. But crucially, the recital of the nation's history reaches its climax in the claim of verse 45, which asserts that the reason Israel received the land was that they might keep Yahweh's statutes (חקים) and instruction (תורה). The placement of such a claim as the climax of this psalm means it also becomes the prism through which we can then read the story of Israel's failures and sin in Psalm 106 as it becomes the measure of the nation.

From this point, Psalm 106 can then review Israel's history up to the exile as a story of failing to remain faithful to God's instruction, though in fact only one of the key terms from Psalm 119 occurs in Psalm 106.[47] In its first occurrence it refers to nation believing Yahweh's promise as they passed through the Sea of Reeds, whereas in verse 24 it refers to their failure to believe Yahweh's promise that they would enter the land. However, this psalm also draws on the wider range of terms available within this domain, noting in verse 13 that they did not wait Yahweh's counsel (עצה). Hence, although the language of this domain is not as prevalent as we saw in Psalm 105, the fact that key moments of sin are introduced by reference to God's instruction means that it continues to shape the life of the nation. Conversely, the final prayer for deliverance from exile responds to the fact that Yahweh has remembered his Yahweh's covenant in the past (106:45), and this in turn gives hope for future deliverance. But since this hope is grounded in both the laws and the narrative of Israel's story, it becomes clear that both form God's instruction to this point on which the psalmist draws. The nation is thus measured by God's instruction, but it

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[45] So, David Emanuel, *From Bards to Biblical Exegetes: A Close Reading and Intertextual Analysis of Selected Exodus Psalms* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), p. 34.

[46] Genesis 9:1–17.

[47] דבר in verses 12 and 24.

is this same instruction that gives hope even in the midst of the struggle of the exile.

God's Instruction is the Measure of the King

Closely related to the theme of God's instruction as the measure of the nation is that of God's instruction being the measure of the king. Obviously, we here encounter the problem of determining exactly which psalms are royal, but for our purposes we can stay with those psalms which make an explicit reference to the king. There is also an obvious interrelationship between these psalms and those of both the nation and the individual (below) in that the king is the one who holds individual and nation together. Grant has already shown the close relationship between Deuteronomy's kingship law and the psalms,[48] so our focus can examine other elements.

Since the meaning of חק in Psalm 2:7 is open to debate, the first expressly royal psalm we encounter is Psalm 18. Although the central text of the Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel 7:1–17, does not make reference to God's instruction, it is notable that many of the psalms do make this connection. Thus, in Psalm 18:23, the king proclaims that he has been faithful to God's משפטים and חקת, whilst verse 31 points to dependability of God's אמרה. Given that this is linked to God's perfect way (דרך) we should probably understand this also as a reference to God's instruction, something that experience has proved to be true, which in turn also points back to the reference to the דרכי יהוה in verse 22 being to that which God has revealed in his word. If the king is meant in some way to typify the reader described in Psalm 1, then in these verses he claims not only to have read God's instruction but to have lived by it.

God's instruction is more explicitly presented as the means by which the king is assessed in Psalms 89 and 132. In Psalm 89:31–32, presented as part of an oracle quoting Yahweh, we have a cluster of terms associated with the importance of faithfulness to God's instruction since they provide the criteria by which Israel's kings are to be assessed. Indeed, in these verses this particular theme is made explicit as faithfulness to Yahweh's תורה, משפטים, חקת and מצות all determine whether or not the king reigns under Yahweh's blessing or experiences punishment. In addition, we are told in verse 35 that Yahweh would keep his covenant (ברית) which is defined in terms of that which has gone from his lips, thus pointing back to an exist-

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[48] Grant, *The King as Exemplar.*

ing body of material that could be known.[49] This material is already
acknowledged in the references to the covenant with David in
verse 4 which refers to specific words God has uttered, suggesting
that the reference to ברית in verse 29 also references previous texts.
Although the psalm will go on to complain that Yahweh has in fact
broken this covenant (Psalm 89:40), the reason it can do is precise-
ly because it believes that God's instruction is known, and this
therefore provides the proper basis for complaint since the king
was to be measured against this instruction. These themes recur in
Psalm 132:12, which also makes the king's faithfulness to Yahweh's
covenant and testimonies (עדות) the measure of whether or not he
stands under Yahweh's blessing.

God's Instruction is the Measure of the Individual

In that the Psalm considers God's instruction to be widely
available and the measure of both nation and king, it is not surpris-
ing to note that it often explores this theme in terms of the indi-
vidual as well. Given the extent to which this theme occurs across
the Psalter, we will note this element only briefly.

Like Psalm 119, Psalm 25 is also an acrostic, and though it co-
vers a wider range of topics than Psalm 119, it is notable that it
includes within it a number of themes associated with God's in-
struction. Central to the psalm is the prayer of verses 3–4, where
the psalmist asks Yahweh to make known his ways (דרך) and paths
(ארח). Given that the psalmist asks to have these made known, one
could argue that the reference is to guidance on specific issues ra-
ther than to the existing body of God's instruction. However, in
verses 9–10 the way-metaphor recurs, this time insisting that Yah-
weh does indeed teach people his way, before insisting that those
who keep Yahweh's ברית and עדות walk in Yahweh's חסד ואמת.
Here, the reference must be to an existing body of material, and it
is this collection of God's instruction that the psalmist desires to
know precisely because it is what is intended to shape one's life. As
such, when Yahweh makes known his covenant (ברית) to those
who fear him in verse 14,[50] then we are to understand that this re-

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[49] Most English versions, such as ESV, include 'word' here, but there
is no Hebrew term which

[50] For our purposes, it is not necessary to decide on whether סוד refers
to Yahweh's friendship or counsel, but given that סוד is normally a secret

fers to those whose life is shaped by the existing body of God's revelation.

This theme also occurs in Psalm 111, another acrostic. This psalm initially focuses on Yahweh's great works, alluding to events such as the exodus, wilderness wanderings and entry into the land.[51] But in verse 7 it introduces a variant motif, speaking now of Yahweh's פקודים, a term which is quite rare outside of Psalm 119.[52] Since these are here within the context of Yahweh's historical works, then it seems likely that this psalm shares with Psalms 78, 105 and 106 the belief that God's instruction is both the laws which have been received and also the narratives that frame them, a narrative that frequently takes us well into the period of Israel's occupation in the land. In particular, the פקודים are here part of Yahweh's historical works for his people, and these are to be done 'with faithfulness and uprightness' (באמת וישר). God's instruction thus constitutes both law and story, and together they are to form the practice of each member of the community of God's people forever, as is seen in the enduring nature of his covenant (ברית). Thus, God's instruction can be seen as the fear of Yahweh, an expression which here points to the internalisation of God's instruction which is to be done.[53] But however complex God's instruction might be in its combination of story and law, it is all meant to be done because it provides the measure of the individual.

Conclusion

Rather than standing outside the mainstream of the book of Psalms, Psalm 119 stands near its theological heart. That heart is not only seen in its use of poetic forms and structures found elsewhere in the Psalter, but also in the fact that its exaltation of God's instruction represents a theological theme that is widespread within

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counsel (Jer. 23:18, 22), albeit counsel that is rooted in what is already known.

[51] See Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), p. 419.

[52] Elsewhere only Psalms 19:9 and 103:18.

[53] Exactly what is to be done is problematic. The only possible antecedent for the suffix on the verb עשׂיהם is the פקודים (so NIV), but this requires a reference back several verses. It is perhaps more likely that יראת יהוה is being generalised, though in either case it is God's instruction that is the point of reference.

the Psalms, albeit one that has not featured to any significant degree in Psalms-research in recent years. God's instruction to both the nation and individual, and therefore by implication the king, covers not only the laws which have been received, but also the narrative traditions that joined them. That is, there is a significant literary deposit that worshippers could come to know and which is summed up in the concept of covenant. The whole of this is meant to shape worshippers so that fidelity to God's instruction is the fundamental means of assessing faithfulness to Yahweh. The theme of God's instruction goes beyond this, so that for example in Psalm 33 there is a close link between creation and God's instruction, pointing to the fact that there are other themes to which the psalmists relate the theme of God's instruction. But all this points to the fact that, for the Psalms, God's instruction is more than just what we might traditionally have conceived as *Torah*. This is not the beginning of Pharasaic legalism (though it might be distorted in that way) but rather a genuine delight in discovering the range of ways in which God's instruction writes for, and so shapes, his people.