

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Not Moses, but David: Theology and politics in Psalm 78

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Abstract

Psalm 78 is a lengthy psalm with puzzling phrasing, which presents a peculiar historiography and enigmatic entities. The article begins by highlighting the omission of Moses in the psalm's chronological review, a feature that enables a strong focus on the role of God in the people's history. From concern with the absent Moses, the article moves to examine the role of David in the psalm as a way to access the psalmist's motivations and historical-political context. By examining literary, historical and theological features of the psalm, the article explores the use of collective memory and rewritten narratives for consolidating the people's religious and political ideals.

Keywords: collective memory; Davidic monarchy; Exodus; historical psalms; Moses; Psalm 78

Recounting the exodus without Moses

The review of Israel's history in Psalm 78 allocates forty-two out of seventy-two verses to the period of the exodus from Egypt and the journey in the desert. Within this lengthy record not a single allusion is made to Moses, either as God's mediator or as the people's leader at the time. The absence of Moses from the psalm distinguishes the text from other psalmic retrospective reviews that grant to Moses (sometimes together with Aaron) a decisive role in the past national chronicle (Pss 77:21; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32; cf. 99:6). But more striking is the deviation of the psalm-without-Moses from the Pentateuchal narrative of the exodus and the wilderness period, where Moses has a key role in every scene, from the time in Egypt (e.g. Exod 5:1), continuing in events at the sea (e.g. 14:21), and in the desert (e.g. Num 11:2), until the near entrance into the Promised Land (e.g. Deut 34:4).

The absence of Moses from the narrative in Psalm 78 presents the events in the account as God's wonders on behalf of the people, avoiding any diminution that could occur by acknowledging other factors. It is God alone who directs the event at the sea (vv. 12–13, 53), who functions as the leader and provider in the desert (vv. 14–16, 23–9, 52), and who conducts the entrance to the land (vv. 54–5). This series of actions ends with a further reference to the crossing of the sea (v. 53), preceded by an additional allusion to the time in Egypt, by mentioning the plagues performed by God against the Egyptians (vv. 43–51). Scholars have explained the peculiar location of the

sea and plagues in the sequence as an editing error,¹ but this order of the segments has the virtue of resonating with the beginning of the review (vv. 12–16) and thus infolding history with the narrative of the magnificent exodus. This choric structure further calls attention to God's ultimate role in history.²

God's exclusive contribution in the past events is further highlighted by the contrast with the people's tendency throughout that time – their ingratitude to God. The review interweaves God's actions for the people with references to the people's negative attitude to him from the time of the exodus until the entrance to the land (vv. 11, 17–20, 22, 32, 36–7, 40–2, 56–8). These allegations may point to 'the sons of Ephraim' (בני אפרים, v. 9) as the people's ancestors (v. 8) who 'did not keep God's covenant, but refused to walk according to his law' (v. 10). Alternatively, the sinful tendency may be of those who were fortunate to experience God's wonders while still in Egypt and then in the desert (vv. 12–16), exploiting the miracles to test God's capabilities (vv. 18–20). Those ancestors could be the very 'sons of Ephraim', but could also be their forefathers, according to the ambiguous connection drawn in verse 12.³ Either way, the ancestors manifest the sinful conduct that characterised the nation throughout time (cf. 'Yet they sinned still more against him', v. 17), which occurred despite the recognition of and the exposure to God's deeds for them (vv. 11–16).

The ancestors' attitude is a further way the psalmist highlights the divine largesse for the people. Thus, despite unleashing his anger and sometimes retaliating against the people (vv. 21, 31, 33, cf. 59–64), God is considered compassionate, since he has never destroyed the people. This is explained as a result of God's recognition of the people's mortal characteristics: 'Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again' (vv. 38–9).

Within a framework that accentuates God's actions in history, the role of Moses has no place. Moses was consciously removed from the narrative, as occurred in other retrospective references in the Hebrew Bible that sought to manifest and praise God's conduct in history. Such examples are the allusion to the deliverance from Egypt in Jeremiah 2; the retrospective review in Ezekiel 20;⁴ and the historiographical accounts

¹See Antony F. Campbell, 'Psalm 78: A Contribution to the Theology of Tenth Century Israel', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979), p. 59; Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *The Book of Psalms* (ICC, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986 [1906]), pp. 179, 187.

²A similar suggestion is raised in the following studies: Edward L. Greenstein, 'Mixing Memory and Design: Reading Psalm 78', *Prooftexts* 10 (1990), p. 209; Richard J. Clifford, 'In Zion and David a New Beginning: An Interpretation of Psalm 78', in Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (eds), *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), pp. 129, 133; Yair Hoffman, *The Doctrine of the Exodus in the Bible* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1983), pp. 98–9; Yair Zakovitch, 'Psalm 78: Sources, Structure, Meaning and Tendency', in Yair Zakovitch et al. (eds), *David, King of Israel, Lives and Endures* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Simmor, 1997), p. 165. See Gärtner's definition of the 'two rounds through the salvation history of Israel ... with a structural and conceptual analogy' in Judith Gärtner, 'The Historical Psalms: A Study of Psalms 78; 105; 106; 135, and 136 as Key Hermeneutical Texts in the Psalter', *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 4 (2015), p. 378.

³See Tammuz's suggestion (Oded Tammuz, 'Psalm 78: A Case Study in Redaction as Propaganda', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 79 (2017), pp. 210–15) about the secondary nature of the Ephraimites 'armed with the bow' (vv. 9–10), based on the reference in verses 56–7 about the ancestors who 'twisted like a treacherous bow'.

⁴Some scholars, however, relate Ezekiel's silence about Moses to the prophet's attempt to portray himself as 'second Moses'. See: Corrine Patton, "'I myself gave them laws that were not good': Ezekiel 20 and the

in Psalms 135 and 136.⁵ All express gratitude for God's actions in the events with no acknowledgement of the role of Moses.

The tendency to retell the exodus narrative without Moses continues into the medieval Passover Jewish Haggadah. The Passover Haggadah stresses that God took the people of Israel out of Egypt 'not through an angel, not through a seraph and not through a messenger (שליח)', rather 'the Holy One, blessed be He, did it in His glory by Himself'.⁶ This proclamation contradicts even more radically the biblical narrative, where allusions to Moses frequently use the root שלח ('send'), manifesting his role as שליח for the nation (Exod 3:10–15; 4:13, 28; 5:22; cf. 1 Sam 12:8; Mic 6:4; Ps 105:26). While the Passover Haggadah continues the tendency we met in the Hebrew Bible to an approach that magnifies the image of God, its blatant omission of Moses' part in the salvation narrative reveals further motivations of the authors. Thus, scholars point to the opposition of the medieval Jewish writers to any potential human idealisation,⁷ part of the polemic against the Christian concepts of deity and redemption.⁸

But further motives for the omission of Moses from the exodus narrative can already be detected in the Hebrew Bible. This article will argue that the peculiar historiography of Psalm 78 that omits Moses from the people's chronology emerges not only from theological concerns, but also from socio-political considerations. The article will trace the declared and implied messages of the psalm and its ideological suppositions through a consideration of literary, historiographical, and theological elements in the psalm, beginning with the concluding message of the epilogue and then looking back at the prologue.

Exodus Traditions', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 69 (1996), pp. 85–9; Risa Levitt-Kohn, 'With a Mighty Hand and an Outstretched Arm: The Prophet and the Torah in Ezekiel 20', in Stephen L. Cook and Corrine Patton (eds), *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World* (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), p. 166. See in contrast my argument that the historical review in Ezekiel 20 is oriented less to the prophet's image and more to the portrayal of God and his actions with the people: Gili Kugler, 'The Cruel Theology of Ezekiel 20', *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 129 (2017), pp. 51–2.

⁵On the phenomenon of the silence about Moses in the exodus retellings see: David Or, *Moses and his Age in Biblical Literature* (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977 [Hebrew]); Henri Cazelles and Heinz J. Fabry, 'Moses', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 9 (1998), pp. 28–42; Meindert Dijkstra, 'The Law of Moses: The Memory of Mosaic Religion in and after the Exile', in Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking (eds), *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), pp. 70–98.

⁶'Tzeh Ulmad' section, the Passover Haggadah.

⁷The idea that Moses played the main role in the redemption process is implied in the words of the people at the incident of the Golden Calf, referring to him as 'the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt' (Exod 32:1). This language is also used by God, when he states to Moses that 'Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely' (v. 7).

⁸See David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: University of London Athlone Press, 1956), pp. 326–7; Daube, 'The Earliest Structure of the Gospels', *New Testament Studies* 5 (1958), p. 178; Franz E. Meyer, 'Die Pessach-Haggada und der Kirchenvater Justinus Martyr: Aus der Frühzeit der jüdisch-christlichen Kontroverse', *Veröffentlichungen aus dem Institut Kirche und Judentum* 3 (1977), pp. 84–7; Israel J. Yuval, 'Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue', in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (eds), *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), pp. 98–124; Israel J. Yuval, *Shenei goyim be-vitnekh* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000), pp. 95–7. See also the suggestion about an opposition to the demigod portrayal of Moses in the Samaritan ethos in Michael Avioz, 'Moses in the Passover Haggadah', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (2009), p. 47.

The nation sustained under the Davidic leadership

While the review of the past in Psalm 78 does not include Moses and thus encourages the focus on God's marvels, the end of the psalm, the epilogue (vv. 67–72), allows another human figure to appear alongside God. This is David. The appearance of David in the epilogue is equated by Frisch with the emergence of the Torah in the prologue: both were seemingly given unconditionally to 'Israel' and 'Jacob' (cf. vv. 5, 71).⁹ But while the circumstances of the reception of the Torah are considered positive – a glorious deed of God for the sake of the people (vv. 4–5) – the elevation of David appears to be associated with God's response to the people's wrongdoing. This wrongdoing has prompted God's rejection of 'the tent of Joseph', namely – according to the verse parallelism – by *not choosing* 'the tribe of Ephraim' (v. 67). At this critical moment in the people's lifetime, according to the epilogue, David is appointed.

The Joseph-Ephraim nomenclature is synonymous in the broader context of the psalm with 'Israel', mentioned as being rejected by God (וימאס מאד בישראל, v. 59),¹⁰ after repeatedly violating the treaty with God (vv. 56–8), as had happened in earlier days (vv. 11, 17–20, 22, 32, 36–7, 40–2). Nonetheless, while the psalm declares God's rejection of the Israel/Joseph/Ephraim entity, using the verb וימאס ('rejected', vv. 59, 67), it does not seem to intend it as the end of the existence of this entity.¹¹ As known from other accusatory preaching in the Hebrew Bible, מאס may convey a dismissal from the role of God's 'priests' and therefore from the divine obligations, without meaning a complete eradication (Isa 33:8; Jer 33:24–6; Hos 4:6; Ps 89:38; Lam 5:18–22). In the psalm, the appearances of מאס do not point to a disappearance of the nation from the political scene. The actual manifestation of God's rejection according to verse 59 (וימאס) is the downfall of the people through a threefold punishment, in which the Shiloh tabernacle was abandoned (v. 60), God's 'power' was neglected (implying the ark, עזו, v. 61), and a painful defeat in battle was inflicted on the people (vv. 62–4). The resonance with the story of the war with the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4–5 further indicates that וימאס in this context refers to defeat rather than destruction. This is also plausibly confirmed by the description of God's revenge against the people's enemies after the war (Ps 78:65–6; cf. 1 Sam 5:9–12), a reaction which would be meaningful only if the suffering people were still in existence.¹² The second occurrence of מאס in the psalm, in verse 67, likewise does not point to the end of the people. It rather communicates the termination of the earlier relationship with God, as they were no longer chosen by him: 'He rejected (וימאס) the tent of Joseph, he did not choose (לא בחר) the tribe of Ephraim.' Instead, according to the text, God chose one tribe with whom to continue the relationship, Judah ('but he [God] chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves', v. 68), and founded a new institution of worship (v. 69).

This is the background, apparently, against which the emergence of David's kingship occurred: 'He chose his servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the nursing ewes he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his

⁹Amos Frisch, 'Ephraim and Treachery, Loyalty and (the House of) David: The Meaning of a Structural Parallel in Psalm 78', *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009), p. 194. This view stands in contrast to Zakovitch's suggestion ('Psalm 78', p. 169) that the psalm considers David's election as conditional.

¹⁰For the interchange between Joseph and Israel-Jacob, see Obad 18; Pss 77:16; 80:2.

¹¹Cf. the employment of the verb וימאס in the meaning of political disaster, either regarding the whole nation (Lev 26:44; Jer 31:36–7; Ps 53:6), or particularly the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17:20; Hos 9:17) and Judah (Jer 7:29–34, 14:19).

¹²Cf. Isa 51:9–11 for a similar imagery of God's awakening to save the people after first hurting them.

inheritance' (Ps 78:70–1). This new political arrangement indicates the continuing existence of the Israel/Jacob entity: David's shepherding was exercised over them, and they, Jacob/Israel, were among the subjects of David's sovereignty. Like the Torah, which was applicable to the whole nation – 'He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel' (v. 5) – the monarchy was appointed to rule over all 'his people Jacob ... Israel, his inheritance' (v. 71). Accordingly, the psalm does not communicate a disappearance of the nation. This conclusion differs from the view of scholars who argue that the psalm reflects the days after the northern exile, and the suggestion that the psalm provides an apologetic explanation for the sole survival of the Judean Kingdom. Such, for example, is Ramond's argument that points to Jeremiah 7:12–15 and 2 Kings 17 as the literary sources of the psalmist's allusions to the rejection of Israel, Ephraim, and Joseph.¹³ Ramond's suggestion is based on reading the term מאס in the psalm as meaning 'deportation', bearing in mind the historiographical description of the northern exile.¹⁴ But the use of similar terminology in this case cannot guarantee the same meaning.

The unlikelihood of a total end of the nation should also be deduced from the context of the historiographical review in the psalm. The review alludes to repeated instances in the people's history when God was angry with the Israelites (ויתעבר v. 21, cf. v. 59) and still avoided destroying them: 'Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath' (v. 38). As pointed out earlier, this resulted from God's acknowledgment of the people's mortality: 'He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again' (v. 39). While on occasion God inflicted massacres on the people (vv. 21, 31), he still ensured their continued existence. In light of this theological portrayal it is difficult to attribute to the psalmist an intention to report a total loss or extinction of the nation.¹⁵ Moreover, the prominent attention given to Israel in the text is in itself evidence for the existence of this entity together with or alongside the kingdom of Judah.¹⁶

¹³Sophie Ramond, *Les leçons et les énigmes du passé: Une exégèse intra-biblique des psaumes historiques* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), p. 61.

¹⁴For similar views about the psalmist's familiarity with the northern exile see Arnold A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (London: Oliphants, 1972), p. 562; Clifford, 'In Zion and David', p. 138; Erik Haglund, *Historical Motifs in the Psalms* (Stockholm: CwK Gleerup, 1984), pp. 100–1; Michael D. Goulder, 'Asaph's History of Israel (Elohism Press, Bethel, 725 BC)', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 65 (1995), p. 73; Stern, 'The Eighth Century', pp. 51–2, 57; David Emanuel, *The Psalmists' Use of the Exodus Motif: A Close Reading and Intertextual Analysis of Selected Exodus Psalms* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007), p. 96; Thomas Wagner, 'Recounting מני קדם in Psalm 78: what are the "riddles" about?', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 14 (2014), pp. 5, 21; Gärtner, 'The Historical Psalms', p. 379; Tammuz, 'Psalm 78', p. 219.

¹⁵See my argument that, while the psalm implies the idea that God protects the people from his threat of annihilation, it does not rely on narratives documented in Exodus and Numbers about God's threats to destroy the Israelites in reaction to the incidents of the Golden Calf and the violation of the spies: Gili Kugler, 'The Threat of Annihilation of Israel in the Desert: An Independent Tradition within Two Stories', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 78 (2016), pp. 645–7. As these Pentateuchal stories could be considered to reflect the sins of the northern kingdom and criticism against it, the absence of the stories from the psalm challenges the assumption that the text is an indictment against the northern kingdom.

¹⁶See Stern's endeavour to explain the prominence of the northern tribes in the author's awareness, despite Stern's assumption that these tribes no longer exist: 'we have the late literature including Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Habbakuk, and possibly Job, none of which sources evince a shred of interest in the question of Ephraim's fate or of Ephraim's standing with

Ruling out the post-northern exile context from the psalm also undermines the scholarly view that the text was addressed to survivors of the northern kingdom in the eighth or seventh century.¹⁷ Likewise, it is difficult to date the text to an exilic or post-exilic period based on supposed phrasings, as suggested by scholars, of Deuteronomistic aspirations for a renewed covenant with God.¹⁸ The epilogue does not describe any repentance by the people nor does it mention a covenant to which they now intend to adhere. It presents, rather, a solution that enables the people's survival despite disappointments of the past. The key, according to the psalm, is a modification that occurred in the structure of the nation's public life, namely God's installation of David's establishment over all parts of the nation: 'he brought him [David] to be the shepherd of his people Jacob; of Israel, his inheritance' (v. 71).

David's role is presented as a positive outcome from the potential destruction threatened by God's rejection of the people, after God's removal from his dwelling (v. 60), his abandonment of his 'power' to captivity (v. 61), and the defeat of the people, giving them into the hands of their enemies (vv. 62–4). With this in the background, David's emergence appears to be the element that enabled the people to continue as a nation, while operating within a new theological-political structure. The crucial role of David in the national theology is further manifested by his appearance in a text that mentions no other human leaders. Moses, whose closeness to God is strongly emphasised elsewhere, is thus removed from the narrative to avoid eclipsing the carefully designed image of David. The omission of Moses should therefore be understood as a result of the psalm's endeavour to celebrate the role of David and elevate the importance of the monarchy in the people's life. This monarchy, as we will see, is

YHWH ... After all, in the late period Ephraim was long gone, so that it is hardly surprising that its fate was not at issue. In pre-exilic literature, however, these matters are treated as of great importance ... Since Psalm 78 shows great interest in Ephraim, it is logical to take this as another indication that Psalm 78 is early.' Philip Stern, 'The Eighth Century Dating of Psalm 78 Reargued', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 66 (1995), p. 46; cf. p. 57: 'The poet wishes to emphasize past rejections of Ephraim, while playing on the election of David ... The poet was less interested in the tribe of Ephraim than in the rejection of the northern kingdom, as the prophet Hosea foresaw it.'

¹⁷Leonard attributes the psalm to King Hezekiah's attempt to gather the northern kingdom's survivors under his rule, as indicated in 2 Chron 30:5–9 (Jeffery M. Leonard, *Historical Traditions in Psalm 78* (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2006), pp. 336–7). Anderson relates such concerns to King Josiah, considering that: '(i) the Solomonic Temple is still standing; (ii) the Davidic dynasty is still in power, which points to a pre-Exilic date; (iii) there is no indication of the Exile and its lessons; (iv) ... the general outlook suggests that the northern kingdom is no longer in existence' (Anderson, *Psalms*, p. 562). See also H. Junker, 'Die Entstehungszeit des Ps 78 und des Deuteronomium', *Biblica* 34 (1953), pp. 487–8; Clifford, 'In Zion and David', pp. 138–41; Zakovitch, 'Psalm 78', p. 182; Emanuel, *The Psalmists' Use*, p. 97.

¹⁸See Herman Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), p. 342; Robert P. Carroll, 'Psalm LXXVIII: Vestiges of a Tribal Polemic', *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971), p. 150; Marco Treves, *The Dates of the Psalms: History and Poetry in Ancient Israel* (Pisa: Giardini, 1988), pp. 67–8; Hans J. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), pp. 123–4; Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms and Lamentation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 97; Adele Berlin, 'Psalms and the Literature of Exile: Psalms 137, 44, 69, and 78', in Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (eds), *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 78; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 51–100* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), pp. 290–3; Markus Witte, 'From Exodus to David – Historiography in Psalm 78', in Nuria Calduch-Benages and Jan Liesen (eds), *History and Identity: How Israel's Later Authors Viewed Its Earlier History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), p. 39. See also Wagner's argument that 'the composition of Ps 77–80 originated in the late exilic or early post-exilic period when the temple was still in ruins' (Wagner, 'Riddles', p. 22).

portrayed in our text as more than God's favoured form of rule in a time of crisis: it provides a substitute for the actual role of God in the relationship with the people.

A substitute for the relationship with God

By mentioning events from the people's past, Psalm 78 is considered a historical text, similar to Psalms 105, 106, 135, 136.¹⁹ But beyond an ambition to recount history, the psalm employs the collective memory to pursue a national agenda.²⁰ Apart from its theological message, the retrospective review aims at justifying the particular socio-political structure of the people's life.

The last verses of the epilogue signal the position of David as a result of God's decision: 'from tending the nursing ewes he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance; With upright heart he tended them, and guided them with skilful hand(s)' (vv. 71–2). David is described as taken by God to shepherd the people, לרעהו (v. 71), and is indeed settled in the position: וירעהם (v. 72). While David is not explicitly mentioned in the latter verse ('With upright heart he tended them, and guided them with skilful hand'), the repeat of the root רעה from the previous verse, and the physical features associated with the leadership, relate the role to the Davidic monarchy rather than to God. Indeed, the 'upright heart' (בתם לבבו, v. 72) is used elsewhere in regard to David's nature (1 Kings 9:4), and the 'skilful hand(s)' (תבונות כפיו, Ps 78:72) recalls the description of Solomon's great discernment (תבונה, 1 Kings 5:9) granted by God.

The epilogue indicates that David was appointed to shepherd 'his people Jacob' (יעקב עמו) and 'his inheritance Israel' (ישראל נחלתו) (v. 71). While the pronoun 'his' in the verse could ambiguously relate to both David and God, as both are mentioned in the context, there is no doubt that the people are subject to David's sovereignty and thus can be considered 'his', as indicated elsewhere: 'So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people' (2 Sam 8:15; cf. 1 Chron 18:14 and another ambiguous reference in 2 Sam 5:12).

Back to the historiographical review in the psalm; it regards the people of Israel as God's possession, over whom he exercised his shepherding: 'Then he [God] led out his people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies' (vv. 52–3, cf. v. 14). Later in time, however, these people were rejected by God: 'When God heard, he was full of wrath, and he utterly rejected Israel ... He rejected the tent of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim' (vv. 59, 67). This is the background of the transition of the sovereignty to David, the new shepherd. David, it seems, is substituted for the former divine leadership, a development that occurs because of the people's sinful behaviour in earlier times. In this way David incarnates a concept known from the exodus story of God's willingness to hand the people over to a substitute emissary/angel to guide them instead of him (Exod 33:2–3). This technique, as explained by God's own statement in the exodus narrative (v. 5), is a compromise that aimed at preventing a danger of a total destruction threatening the people because of their previous sin (cf. 32:7–10). Likewise, according to our psalm the monarchy is portrayed as a device

¹⁹Gärtner, 'The Historical Psalms', p. 373.

²⁰See Greenstein's definition of psalm 78 as a text of memory rather than historiography: Greenstein, 'Mixing Memory', p. 209. See also Ramond's definition of the Psalm as a rhetorical construction of the past and at the same time a partisan work reflecting the concerns of a community which tries to elaborate its identity, and by that to generate the past (Ramond, *Les leçons*, p. 83).

to sustain the people's existence (Ps 78:71–2) and, as such, is regarded positively. Though the nation ceases to be led by God it continues, united, under the new human leadership.

Loewenstamm defines Psalm 78 as aiming to explain the 'transference of hegemony from Joseph to Judah'.²¹ As indicated by the above analysis, however, the psalm even more emphatically serves as a justification of the Davidic institution. Unlike messianic statements that promise the return of the House of David in a distant future (Isa 9:6–7, 11:1–5, 10; Jer 23:5–6; Mic 5:2; cf. Matt 1:1, 21:9; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 22:16), the focus on the Davidic sovereignty and the monarchic establishment (linked with the temple, v. 69), with no hint of later events, reveals familiarity with these institutions.²² As known from the books of Samuel and Kings, the Davidic monarchy occasionally suffered from oppositional voices that questioned the legality of the Davidic hegemony (e.g. 2 Sam 16:5–18, 19:41–4, 20:1–2; 1 Kings 11:26–8, 40, 12:16, 25–33). Psalm 78 provides a response to this kind of opposition, pointing to the theological revolution that enabled the monarchy. In this way, as well as delivering religious teachings, the psalm aims at supporting and promoting the new political structure.²³ It endorses the new monarchy by ascribing to it the capability to sustain the people's existence. This continues as long as the assumed right choice – that is, David – is recognised. As summarised by Brettler regarding the Davidic accounts elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible: 'not all ideologies ... are religious, and a substantial part of the canon has been shaped by secular ideologies from the political realm'.²⁴ Psalm 78 was shaped by ideologies and interests held within the political realm. Connecting politics with theology, it teaches that David's leadership was vital for the entire nation, intended to bridge the gap after God's detachment from the people.

While this background is explicitly asserted in the epilogue verses, it appears to be already implied in the prologue of the psalm. In stating the goal of rescuing the generations from the sins of the predecessors, the prologue offers a pedagogic way to achieve a change in the people's attitude to God. This new method reflects the new theological and a new social structure, recognising a cessation of direct contact with God. In the last part of the article we will identify the psalmist's intended recipients and the tools offered to them for maintaining their new type of relationship with their God.

Converting by pedagogy

The prologue of Psalm 78 (vv. 1–8) mentions various potential recipients of the psalmist's words: 'my people', 'their children', 'last generation' (vv. 1–7). These join other titles mentioned by the psalmist: 'our/their ancestors' (vv. 3, 5, 8) and 'Jacob/Israel' (v. 5). This collection of terms creates a sense of ambiguity over the identity of the

²¹Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), p. 75.

²²This possibility was argued by Campbell: 'Obviously, the Psalm as a whole cannot be older than the Davidic monarchy with which it concludes. The fact that it does end with David's kingship does not preclude the possibility of its being later, but it may be said to shift the burden of proof on to those advocating a later date' (Campbell, 'Psalm 78', p. 75). See also Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), pp. 284–6.

²³On the role of narratives and historiography in strengthening the foundations of the Davidic monarchy see Marc Z. Brettler, 'Biblical Literature as Politics: The Case of Samuel', in Adele Berlin (ed.), *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 1996), pp. 71–92.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 71.

speaker and his audience, manifesting, poetically, the 'parable' and 'dark sayings from of old', as promised by the psalmist (משל... הידות מני קדם, v. 2).²⁵

Nonetheless, the prologue is the only place in the psalm that offers any information about the speaker's identity and his position in relation to his recipients. By stating: 'Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth ... things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us' (vv. 1–3), the psalmist urges 'his people' to listen to his teaching, while positioning himself alongside them – as an offspring of the same ancestors. This equation, however, is followed by a mention of the ancestors' 'children', בניהם ('We will not hide them from their children', v. 4), supposedly indicating people other than the speaker and his addressees. Tammuz argues that the shift in the prologue from a self-reflective utterance to the mentioning of a supposed alternative progeny results from an editorial insertion in the last days of the Judean kingdom. The insertion, according to Tammuz, aimed at distinguishing the speaker and his recipients from condemned 'others', such as the people of the historical northern kingdom.²⁶ But this suggestion is difficult to accept when the reference to בניהם is examined in the broader context of the prologue.

The prologue recounts the negative dynamic with God in the past and aspires for a change in the people's approach and conduct. It proclaims the hope of bringing the people to a better acknowledgement of God, while deterring them from the deviant path of their predecessors: 'a stubborn and rebellious generation ... whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God' (v. 8). The successors thus are expected to 'set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments' (v. 7). This aspiration will be achieved, according to the prologue, by communicating knowledge about God's deeds in the past provided to the ancestors' offspring, including 'their children' (בניהם) mentioned above: 'We will not hide them from their children' (v. 4). Since the group of בניהם has the capability of deviating from the path of the past wrongdoing, they cannot be considered, as Tammuz suggests, a condemned segment in the nation. Instead, as the speaker mentions himself in separation from his peers – although he is, like them, the ancestors' offspring – so the term בניהם should be understood as referring to the speaker's own and current generation.

Another reference in the prologue to the psalmist's current generation is implied in the ambiguous expression דור אחרון (lit.: 'last/later generation', vv. 4, 6).²⁷ The first occurrence of דור אחרון may point to the offspring of בניהם mentioned in the verse (בניהם, v. 4), to whom (i.e. to דור אחרון) the stories are told by בניהם (cf. the KJV: 'We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come'). At the same time דור אחרון can be a synonym for 'their children', בניהם (v. 4), when relating the verb in the verse, מספרים, to the mentioned speaker(s) (cf. the NRSV: 'We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation'). This

²⁵Cf. the suggestion that the 'riddles' are about the unbalanced relationship between God and the people: Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 541; Clifford, 'In Zion and David', p. 125; Witte, 'From Exodus to David', p. 33. See Wagner's interpretation of the 'riddle' as implying 'the question of why Judah and Jerusalem could fall even though God had elected its people, city and kingdom' (Wagner, 'Riddles', p. 21). But as the psalm does not allude to occurrences of exile and destruction this suggestion is more difficult to accept.

²⁶Tammuz, 'Psalm 78', pp. 208–9, 219–21.

²⁷My translation. Cf. 2 Sam 19:12, 23:1; Isa 44:6; 1 Chron 23:27; Neh 8:18. While the Hebrew term דור אחרון (vv. 4, 6) is non-defined, the use of a superlative adjective in the translation makes it defined (cf. KJV, NRSV, ESV, JPS).

option indeed applies to the second occurrence of the term, when דור אחרון seems to replace אשר צוה את אבותינו להודיעם לבניהם. למען ידעו דור אחרון בנייהם, mentioned in the verse before: דור אחרון (‘which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them’, NRSV, vv. 5–6). Within this verbal play on identities, דור אחרון signifies the children of the speaker’s ancestors, in other words – the very generation of the psalmist.

Whether דור אחרון refers to current time, as assumed from the convoluted list of titles, or points to the future (cf. ‘the coming/next/future generation’ according to NRSV, JPS, ESV), it is clear that the term does not refer to a remote time or the end of a genealogic line (cf. Pss 48:13 [14]; 102:18 [19]; see also: Deut 29:21; Joel 1:3). This generation has children of its own (v. 6), to whom the same teaching will be passed. The דור אחרון can be rather defined as ‘last’ as a mark of the conversion of the nation, so that in time to come things are expected to be different.

What change will then occur in this current/coming generation? The psalmist’s recipients, as we saw, are anticipated to cease the negative pattern of the predecessors and adopt a positive mode of conduct: ‘so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. And that they should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God’ (vv. 7–8). The way to achieve such a change in the people, proclaims the psalmist, is by means of stories and teaching. The legacy of the past is expected to give rise to the required confidence in God:

Things that we have heard and known,
that our ancestors have told us.
We will not hide them from their children
...
we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.
He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach to their children;
that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children. (Ps 78:3–6)

The prologue points to the recounting of stories as the method of creating a new relationship with God, replacing the embedded negative pattern of the ancestors. This pedagogic method is expected to instil knowledge of and trust in God, enhancing loyalty to him. As such, the introduction and repetition of stories replace the role of miraculous deeds performed in the sight of the former generations. The awareness of and reflection on God’s power in the past is the basis for the expected shift in the people’s recognition of the divine.²⁸ Using the words of Jung in his *Answer to Job*, the psalm implies that the knowledge of God ‘cannot be established as physical facts’, while miracles, which the people’s doubts have constantly subverted, ‘appeal only to

²⁸See Ramond’s description of the generation to come as becoming faithful to God by experiencing his ‘divine education’ through discourse and speech. Ramond, *Les leçons*, p. 84.

the understanding of those who cannot perceive the meaning'.²⁹ Likewise, the speaker of the prologue in the psalm attests that a genuine belief would rely on 'stories' rather than on any experience of miracles or 'physical' wonders by God.

What is then the background for such a shift in the recognition of God? What would have relegated the demand for divine actions (vv. 18–20, 22, 32, 36–37; cf. Pss 91, 107), to concern with notions and knowledge? Why did this shift occur specifically in the time of the palmist? The answer is reflected in the epilogue verses, which, as we saw, attest a reform in the theological and socio-political structures of the people's life.

The epilogue teaches that the people are not shepherded by God anymore. In consequence, powerful divine prodigies should no longer be expected. Rather than further divine wonders, stories about those that occurred in the past will have to suffice for the people, now and in future generations. This reform is demonstrated by the psalmist's own work: his recounting of the past with no expectation of further future involvement of the divine. As direct divine intervention is no longer available, the affiliation to God would now have to be based on epistemological consciousness:

We will not hide them from their children;
 we will tell to the coming generation
 the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,
 and the wonders that he has done ...
 that the next generation might know them,
 the children yet unborn,
 and rise up and tell them to their children,
 so that they should set their hope in God,
 and not forget the works of God,
 but keep his commandments (Ps 78:4–7)

The lack of direct connection with God provides in itself the means to avoid the outcomes that resulted from the ancestors' behaviour. The retrospective review recounts that when the people had a direct relationship with God, God 'made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror' (v. 33). This treatment helped make the people seek for God and acknowledge his authority (vv. 34–5), but this attitude lasted only for a while. Soon, the people again violated the relationship with God, thus putting their existence at risk (vv. 36–8). In such a complex dynamic, the people were constantly vulnerable. The emergence of the human within the political structure was thus an effective buffer between the people and God. The Davidic monarchy, the psalm recounts, has reduced the risks accompanying the relationship with God, risks known from the near and distant past, to enable a safe continuation of the existence of the nation. Embodied in the king, a single individual stands at a critical intersection in the people's life, shepherding the people in God's place. Back to our first inquiry, one would say, the monarchy is just 'a little lower than God' (Ps 8:5). To convey such a message about the ruler David, any other human figure in the context of the people's history, even Moses, had to be completely disregarded.³⁰

²⁹Carl G. Jung, *Answer to Job* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p. xii.

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