

## Dissertation Summary

### THE RE-PRESENTATION OF DAVID IN PSALMS 140–143<sup>1</sup>

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It is counterintuitive to find individual laments like Psalms 140–143 near the end of the Psalter, as the arc of the Book of Psalms is often described as from lament to praise and from psalms of the individual to psalms of the community. The placement of these psalms is intriguing, as many commentators see Books IV–V as an ‘answer’ to the disaster of the fall of Jerusalem and loss of Davidic kingship in Psalm 89, and the last collection of לְדָוִד (*ledavid*) psalms (Pss 138–145) as an ‘answer’ to the communal lament of Psalm 137.

The presence and character of David at the end of the Psalter is hotly debated by scholars. Some commentators claim continuity of David’s royal authority throughout the whole Psalter (emphasising Psalms 110 and 132), while others suggest a change in the presentation of David in Books IV–V (Pss 90–150), arguing that the ‘I’ is a generic figure who no longer represents David, or that David is disempowered, diminished, and dependent compared with Books I–III. The connection to David of the *ledavid* psalms is controversial, as לְדָוִד can mean ‘of’, ‘to’, or ‘for’ David.

This study examines the placement of Psalms 140–143 near the end of the Psalter, asking whether David is presented in these psalms, whether he is presented differently from Books I–III, and examining the placement of these individual Davidic laments in the arc of the Psalter. Part I introduces the research questions in Chapter 1, the scholarly debate in Chapter 2, and the methodology in Chapter 3. In Part II, Chapters 4–7 examine whether the presentation of David shows

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<sup>1</sup> Gillian C. Firth, ‘The Re-presentation of David in Psalms 140–143’ (Ph.D. dissertation, Ridley College, 2016). Supervisor Dr Lindsay Wilson.

continuity or change with Books I–III by a contextual examination of words and phrases found both in Psalms 140–143 and in Books I–III. The study compares the diction of the ‘I’ and David’s circumstances in relation to enemies and in relation to God to see whether the presentation of the ‘I’ in Psalms 140–143 is generic, or if it is distinctively linked to the presentation of the ‘I’ in the *ledavid* psalms of Books I–III. I use a defined data set of the *ledavid* psalms in Books I–III and the rest of the psalms of Books I–III as a control group. Part III draws out the results of the study, with Chapter 8 focusing on the representation of David, and Chapter 9 examining the relationship of Psalms 140–143 to the control group (especially Pss 77, 88, and 89) and to the arc of the whole Psalter. Chapter 10 offers conclusions and suggestions for further research.

I argue that the ‘I’ of Psalms 140–143 re-presents David from the *ledavid* psalms of Books I–III in his diction, circumstances in relationship to his enemies, and relationship to God. David trusts in God while surrounded by his enemies in Psalms 140–143, as in the *ledavid* psalms of Books I–III, and prays using distinctive forms and phrases compared with the control group of non-*ledavid* psalms of Books I–III. I go so far as to posit distinctive Davidic idiolect in Psalms 140–143. The voice of David still speaks in Psalms 140–143. The proposal of idiolect bypasses the question of authorship, and the study remains agnostic whether Psalms 140–143 are ancient or written in response to the fall of Jerusalem.

David is not downplayed, disempowered, or dependent compared with Books I–III, but the suffering of David in the face of his enemies is foregrounded in Psalms 140–143. In Book I of the Psalter, according to Rolf Rendtorff, David is introduced as an exemplar of Torah piety (Ps. 1), kingship (Ps. 2), and suffering (Ps. 3), and suffering is foregrounded in Book I. This study acknowledges that in Book V Torah piety (Ps. 119) and mighty kingship (Pss 110, 132) are also displayed, but argues that the last images of David in the Psalter (Pss 138–145) foreground his suffering.

In Psalms 140–143, David is royal, engaged in warfare, and dependent on God, as in Books I–III, but the genre of lament emphasises his suffering and dependence on God at this juncture of the flow of the Psalter. A hermeneutical key is the *relecture* of the thanksgiving of Psalm 18 in Psalms 140–143, where distinctive words, forms, and phrases from Psalm 18 are re-used in Psalms 140–143,

acting as hyperlinks to recall David's rescue from all his enemies and to evoke his song of thanksgiving in the context of Psalms 140–143, where David is again surrounded by dangerous enemies. God's past rescue of David in Psalm 18 becomes a ground for confidence in Psalms 140–143 for the future fulfilment of the Davidic promises.

Psalms 140–143 are part of the Psalter's 'answer' to the disaster addressed in Book III. Psalms 140–143 are connected by resonances of vocabulary and phrases to the laments of Book III (especially Pss 77, 88, and 89). Psalms 140–143 enter into a dialogue with the control group as the language of the suffering David in Psalms 140–143 is layered on to laments about the fall of Jerusalem in Book III, creating a palimpsest which leads to double vision.

Distinctive words and phrases from the non-*ledavid* psalms of Books I–III are transformed from a communal focus (we, our, us) to an individual focus (I, my, me) in Psalms 140–143 and are interwoven with expressions distinctive of the voice of David. Expressions from the complaint of Psalm 89 are placed within David's more confident prayers in Psalms 140–143, so that the complaint genre is transposed to pleas for deliverance, indicating that though the circumstances may still be dire, David patiently awaits the fulfilment of God's promises. David's plea for deliverance in Psalms 140–143 is mapped on to the distress of the fall of Jerusalem in Book III so that the disaster of the fall of Jerusalem has been taken up into the suffering of David.

The arc of the Psalter is not a simple movement from individual lament to corporate praise, but a complex movement that re-presents the individual figure of the suffering David surrounded by his enemies in Psalms 140–143 between Psalm 137 and the final *hallel* (Pss 146–150). The future victory of the Davidic king is signalled in psalms such as 110 and 132, and the certainty of the coming of God's kingdom is signified by the flow of praise at the end of the Psalter, but the present may include suffering and persecution for the Davidic king. This understanding of the 'now' and the 'not yet' can strengthen the endurance of the faithful as they await the fulfilment of God's promises.

Psalms 140–143 re-present David as he is seen in the individual laments of Books I–III, surrounded by his enemies but trusting in God. This re-presentation of David is foregrounded at the end of the Psalter, utilising the genre of individual lament to affirm the trustworthiness of God's promises to David and to strengthen the reader's endurance to

await their fulfilment. Placed between Psalm 137 and the final *hallel*, the Davidic hope is evoked and nuanced in a poignant juxtaposition of present suffering and future vindication. The coming king will be, like David, a powerful and righteous but suffering servant of the LORD.