

“Ascribe Power to God, Whose Majesty Is over Israel, and Whose Power Is in the Skies” (Ps 68:35): The Theological Intent of Pss 65–68 and Their Connections with the Prologue to the Psalter (Pss 1–2)¹

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ABSTRACT

Psalms 65–68 constitute an editorially arranged and adapted cluster of psalms expressing universal praise and thanksgiving near the end of Book II of the Psalms. The article describes the theological purpose of the four psalms. There is a strong emphasis on God’s presence in the temple in Zion as a source of blessing for his elected people, the cosmos he created and all humanity. Through his magnificent involvement in creation and the history of his people, his fame as creator, righteous judge, and supreme ruler of the world will spread to the ends of the earth. By linking the cluster through keywords with Pss 1–2, the editors demonstrated how God’s benevolent and just involvement with his people would lead to his being universally recognised as the only God.

Keywords: Psalms 65–68; editing of the Psalms; YHWH’s presence in Zion; creation; judgement; the fame of YHWH; universalism.

A INTRODUCTION

Gianni Barbiero² made a synchronic analysis of the first Davidic collection of psalms (Pss 1–41). He demonstrated how these psalms were grouped into smaller series and larger clusters bound together through the repetition of concatenating

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¹ This article, on the commendable theological work of a group of unknown editors of the Psalms, is meant to honour Prof. Gerrie Snyman. Gerrie did the Old Testament Society of South Africa a tremendous service for many years as editor-in-chief of the journal *Old Testament Essays*. The references to verses of psalms in this article refer to those of the Hebrew text, which differ on occasion from those of some translations. The translations provided are based on the English Standard Version, but I made slight changes as I saw fit.

² Gianni Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch als Einheit: Eine synchrone Analyse von Psalm 1–41* (ÖBS 16; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).

Leitwörter to form networks of themes.³ He also showed how these structural units were further connected to more distant groups of psalms, including important links to the prologue to the Psalter (Pss 1–2). Barbiero’s work underlined the importance of the context of a particular psalm for its interpretation. In the words of Barbiero,⁴ “the Book of Psalms is the first exegete of a particular individual psalm.”⁵

Psalms 65–68 form a distinct cluster near the end of Book II of the Psalter (Pss 42–72). These four psalms constitute a unit of hymns and psalms of thanksgiving within the surrounding individual laments.⁶ The titles of the four psalms also indicate that they form a separate group. Psalms 61–64 form the preceding cluster.⁷ Among them, Pss 62–64 are simply described as “psalms.” In contrast, Pss 65–68 have the following descriptive headings:

Psalm 65: To the choirmaster. A psalm of David. A song.⁸

Psalm 66: To the choirmaster. A song. A psalm.

Psalm 67: To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

Psalm 68: To the choirmaster. A psalm of David. A song.

The similarity between the headings of Pss 65 and 68 and the chiasmic arranged similarity between some words in the titles of Pss 66 and 67 suggest that these four psalms were intended to form a unified group. The final psalms of Book II, Pss 69–72, do not have any description of the *Gattung* in their

³ See his description of “Verkettung” and “Vernetzung” in Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch*, 24–25.

⁴ Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch*, 30.

⁵ My translation. He got this from Jean-Marie Auwers, *Le Psautier hébraïque et ses éditeurs. Recherches sur une forme canonique du livre des psaumes* (Doctoral thesis, Catholic University of Leuven, 1994), 46.

⁶ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen II: Psalm 51–100* (NEB.AT; Würzburg: Echter, 2002), 383. Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume I* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 905, points out that Ps 65 forms part of a growing crescendo of praise already begun in Ps 56. He also notes that the description Ψ in the heading of Ps 65 connects it to the following two non-Davidic psalms, thus, binding the “non-Davidic” psalms into the Davidic collection and embracing Pss 66–67 with Ps 68. Psalms 62–65 are “Davidic,” like Pss 65 and 68. Cf. Wilson, *Psalms Volume I*, 906.

⁷ Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I: Die Psalmen 1 bis 72* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 274.

⁸ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen II*, 383, distinguish between a “psalm” as a song sung with instrumental accompaniment by one person and a “song” as a choral song accompanied by an orchestra. The use of both terms for the same psalm should possibly be understood comprehensively.

headings. Psalm 69 is again an individual lament of "David" and Pss 70–71 are urgent prayers by "David" to be rescued.⁹ Psalm 72 seems to be a prayer of David for the reign of Solomon so that לְשֹׁלֹמֹה in the heading should be understood as "for Solomon," not "of Solomon." The concluding editorial statement at the end of Ps 72 ("The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended") also suggests that David should be understood as the author of Ps 72.

In a linear close reading from Ps 65 to Ps 68, the repetition of certain words, phrases and themes becomes conspicuous. Hossfeld and Zenger note connections between individual members of the cluster and overarching links.¹⁰ Concerning Pss 65 and 66, they state the following: The *jubilation* of Ps 65:14¹¹ is taken up in 66:1; the *praise* of God in 65:2 is repeated in 66:2–8; and both psalms speak of the *awesome deeds* of God (65:6; 66:3, 5). Cultic actions in the temple in Jerusalem are also mentioned in both: A *visit* to the temple (65:5; 66:13) and the fulfilling of *vows* (65:2 and 66:13). The psalmist in both psalms acknowledges that his prayer is *answered* (65:3; 66:19). The theme of *blessing* plays a role in both (65:11; 66:8, 20). There is also mention of *sin* in both (65:4; 66:18). According to Hossfeld and Zenger, both emphasise hymnic praise to God and connections to the cult in Jerusalem.¹²

Concerning Ps 67, Hossfeld and Zenger say that it is connected in many ways to its neighbours Pss 65, 66 and 68 and that the sequence reflects a literary arrangement consisting of a hymn (65), a song of thanksgiving (66), and a prayer for blessing (67), culminating in Ps 68 with the announcement of a theophany of YHWH before the forum of nations.¹³ Psalm 68, in turn, is linked to the preceding Ps 67 through the motif of *God's help* (67:3; 68:20–21). There is also the repetition of בָּרַךְ in Pss 67:2, 7, 8 and 68:20, 27, 36. Lastly, the theme of *God as King and Judge* connects Ps 68 to its antecedents.¹⁴ *Blessing* and *praise* form a thread that binds the cluster together through the keyword בָּרַךְ, which occurs in Pss 65:11; 66:8, 20;¹⁵ 67:2, 7, 8; and 68:20, 27, 36. An arch is formed between the *praise* in Ps 65:2 and the concluding *Baruk*-formula in Ps 68:36.¹⁶

⁹ Psalm 71 has no heading but continues in the same vein as Ps 70.

¹⁰ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen II*, 386.

¹¹ The verse numbers in this article consistently refer to those of the MT.

¹² Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen II*, 386.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 394.

¹⁵ There is a printing error in their book here. The first reference to Ps 68 should be Ps 66.

¹⁶ Although Ps 68 is linked to Ps 69 in numerous ways, the בָּרַךְ-formula inserts a caesura after Ps 68, disconnecting them decisively. This is according to Frank-Lothar

There can, consequently, be little doubt that the editors of the Psalms have been at work in building a tight cluster of psalms in Pss 65–58. This article is not an attempt to prove that these four psalms were edited to form a unity but to define the theological profile of the group. The editors command admiration through how they managed to combine a group of psalms from different genres and times of origin in such a way that a distinct theological perspective crystallised from this. They also managed to establish a connection with the prologue to the Psalms, showing how YHWH's salvation history with Israel was being put into action on a cosmic scale. A preliminary description of the cluster's scope is that God's formidable deeds in creation and history will culminate in the recognition by all inhabitants of the earth that he is the sole creator and sustainer of the cosmos and the righteous judge and ruler over the world. His presence in Zion is the source of true blessedness for Israel and the world. Humanity will realise his greatness and join in praise to and worship of the formidable God of Israel.

B DRAMATIS PERSONAE IN PSS 65–68

The dramatis personae in Pss 65–68 consist, as is the case in almost all psalms, of three persons or groups of persons: God, the individual worshipper together with his in-group and an out-group of other persons and nations. The psalmist is explicitly present only at the beginning of Ps 65 and the end of Ps 66.¹⁷ The out-group has a distinct dual character in these psalms. It consists of all nations, even to the ends of the earth, who have a respectful and grateful opinion of the God of Israel. They should and will "come" (בוא or אתא, 65:3; 68:32) to God in Jerusalem. However, there is still a rebellious element that rejects the righteous rule of YHWH. They are not described as the enemies of the worshipper as in

Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 256–257. Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Kindle edition, "W. Psalm 66," notes the following themes that form a link between Pss 65–68: God's power in creation (65:6–7, 9–13; 66:6–7; 67:6; 68:7–9, 15, 33–34); redemption (65:6–7 [creation]; 66:6 [exodus]; 66:13–15 [monarchy]; 67:6–7 [conquest]; 68:10 [conquest]; 68:16, 24–31 [monarchy]); abundant harvests (65:11–13; 66:12; 67:6); the universal praise of God (65:5, 8; 66:1–4, 8; 67:3–5; 68:32–35); the annihilation of chaos (65:7; 66:3; 67:4; 68:1–3, 12–14, 21–23); and the fear of God in response to his acts (64:9; 65:8; 66:16; 67:7; 68:35). Wilson, *Psalms Volume I*, 920–921, lists (1) a focus on all the peoples of the earth; (2) a growing crescendo of praise to God; (3) the universal fear of God; and (4) the salvation of the nations as related themes that bind the psalms of the cluster together.

¹⁷ That is, in Ps 65:4 and Ps 66:13–20. In both psalms, there is a tension between the "I" and the "we" speakers, according to Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 228.

the individual laments but rather as the enemies of God.¹⁸ The opposing descriptions “wicked” and “righteous” from the individual laments are indeed used (68:3–4) but the wicked people are not accused of attacks on the righteous in the cluster. Somewhere in the past, the psalmist was in trouble but he asked God for help, and God listened to him because he did not “cherish” (רָאָה) “iniquity” (אָוֶן) in his heart (66:18). The “wicked people” in this cluster are, instead, described as “enemies” and “haters” of God (68:2–3). They are associated with the “rebellious” or “stubborn” element among the nations (סָרָר, 66:7; 68:7, 19). The righteous are onlookers who will respond with gladness and joy when the wicked perish (68:4). However, the wide circle of inhabitants of the world who are impressed by God’s “awesome” acts of creation and salvation play a very prominent role in the cluster. They are described as “all the ends of the earth and the farthest seas” (65:6; cf. 67:8), “those who dwell at the ends of the earth” (65:9), “all the earth” (67:1, 4), “peoples” (עַמִּים, 66:8; 67:4, 67:5, 6, 31) and “nations” (גֵּוֹיִם, 67:3; לְאֻמִּים, 67:5). Some “nations” (לְאֻמִּים) are or were in tumult (65:8), and there are those “peoples” (עַמִּים, 68:31) who delight in war. Overall, however, the world is in unison in its praise of the God of Israel.¹⁹

A further characteristic of the cluster is the key role accorded to the cosmos, adding a fourth actant to the group—God has established order in creation and is also involved in constantly sustaining creation. God’s actions are accompanied by abundant rain (65:10; 68:9–10), snow (68:15), thunder (68:34) and even earthquakes (67:9), which all serve as witnesses to his power and majesty (68:34–35). Moreover, nature recognises God’s blessing, benefits from it and, therefore, metaphorically joins in the praise and worship accorded to him (65:13–14).

¹⁸ Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, *Psalms*, Kindle edition, “Ps 66,” are mistaken in understanding “your enemies” as possibly referring to Israel’s historical enemies or the forces of chaos.

¹⁹ Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT I/15; Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 257, proceeds from the presupposition that the psalms’ setting was cultic in nature and consequently understands “peoples” (עַמִּים) in 66:8 as the assembled congregation.

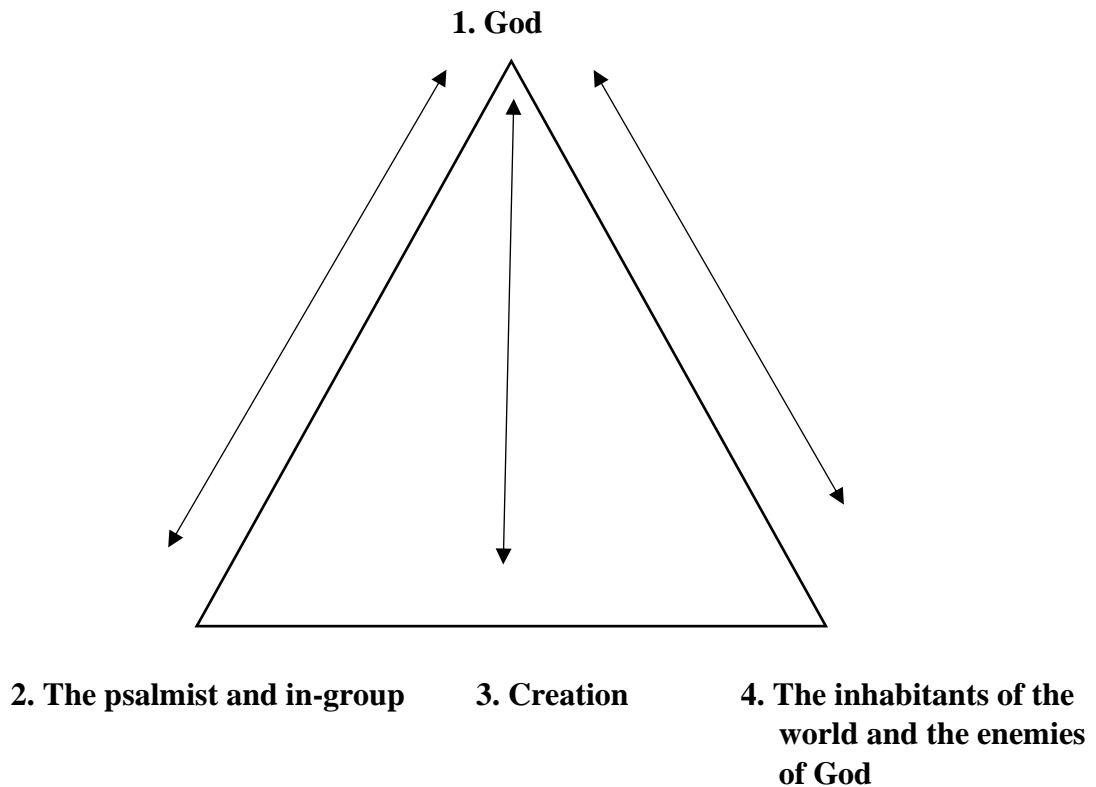


Figure 1: The triangle of relationships in Pss 65–68

The cluster defines the four actors or groups in terms of their characteristics, attitudes and locations. The earthly actors or groups engage in a two-way relationship with God—experiencing his actions and responding to them. God listens to the prayers of the psalmist and his in-group, forgives their sins, saves them, executes judgement on the nations and cares for the needy among his people. “David” is presented as the author and spokesperson of the in-group. He is concerned about his own and the group’s sins (65:4)²⁰ and describes how God cares for the fatherless, widows, solitary people and prisoners in his society (68:6–7).²¹ The implied author acts as a prophet, convinced that God’s victory over his enemies will lead to universal recognition of his power.

²⁰ The psalmist says in 65:4 that “Matters of sin (or guilt, עוֹן) overwhelmed me.” According to 66:18, the psalmist denies that he had been aware of (or cherished) iniquity (or sin or injustice, אִשָּׁר) in his heart. It is possible that 65:4 had contained an admission of personal guilt but that the editors made this less explicit by adding “matters of” before עוֹן.

²¹ In view of the fact that the psalmist does not identify himself as one of the needy persons, it seems that the reference to the *personae miserae* in Ps 68 is a secondary addition to Ps 68 to bring in this theme at the end of the (first group of the) second

The in-group thus requests help from God, thanks him, pays their vows to him, proclaims his acts of grace and praises him in his temple. The cosmos, which, for the editors of the psalms, consisted of the earth and the skies, experiences God's involvement through his suppression of chaos, beneficent reign and sustenance with rain and blessing. He also daily "carries" his people (68:20). Nature also responds to God's care with abundant fruitfulness, metaphorically joining in the human praise of God. According to this cluster, the world's inhabitants recognise God's acts of saving Israel and his power in nature and willingly offer to join in praising him. However, rebellious nations and wicked people are identified as God's enemies. They will be routed and forced to accept his kingship over the world.

C CHARACTER AND LOCATION OF GOD IN PSS 65–68

God is in his temple, according to this cluster of psalms. The presence of God in Jerusalem plays a key role in the group of four psalms. The theme of the sanctuary forms an envelope around the cluster (cf. "Zion" in 65:2 and "his sanctuary" in 68:36).²² The temple features prominently, especially in Pss 65 and 68. Psalm 65:2 says that praise is due to him in "Zion." God chooses privileged people to dwell there—in his presence, in his "courts" (65:5). There they are satisfied with the "goodness" of his "house" and the "holiness" of his "temple" (65:5). To be in his presence is thus considered the pinnacle of blessing. God's "house" is also where the psalmist performs his vows and where God is worshipped with burnt offerings (66:13). There, the psalmist relates to all who fear God what God has done for his soul (66:16). In Ps 68:6, God is described as acting on behalf of the needy from his "holy habitation." Zion is described in Ps 68:17 as the "mountain" God had desired for his "abode" where he, YHWH, will "dwell forever." The heathen "mountain of God," Bashan, with its many peaks, is envious of the mountain God has chosen for his residence (68:17). God has moved there from Sinai, as Ps 68:18 declares that "Sinai is now in the sanctuary."²³ His abode is elevated, for he ascended "on high" after leading a

Davidic psalms (Pss 51–68) as it was introduced into the end of the first Davidic psalms. This is according to Johannes Bremer, *Wo Gott sich auf die Armen einlässt: Der sozio-ökonomische Hintergrund der achämenidischen Provinz Yähüd und seine Implikationen für die Armentheologie des Psalters* (BBB 174; Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2016), 431.

²² It is possible, even probable, that Ps 68 originally had its place in the worship of the Northern Kingdom and that the sanctuary referred to was not the Jerusalem temple. Cf. the place names referring to locations towards the north of Israel and other similar northern features in Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 303–304.

²³ In Ps 68:9, he is also called "the One from Sinai." For a discussion on the archaeological and biblical evidence about the origin of YHWH from the south, see

host of captives in his train (68:19). The word מְרוֹם refers to the place where earth and heaven touch one another, thus the sanctuary and heaven simultaneously.²⁴ As King, God leads a procession into the "sanctuary" where a "great congregation" assembles (68:27). It is also in his "temple" in Jerusalem where the kings will bear gifts to him (68:30) and it is from "his sanctuary" that he acts as the God of Israel, giving power and strength to his people (68:36). All flesh should and will eventually "come" to him there (בוא and אֵתָהּ, 65:3 and 68:32).²⁵

God, identified as YHWH (68:17, 19, 21, 27),²⁶ moved to Zion from Sinai (68:9, 18) and from there, he "strode out" through the "wilderness" (68:8), going out before his people so that the earth "quaked" and the heavens poured down rain in abundance (68:9–10). When God acts against the kings in the north, it causes snow to fall on Zalmon (68:15). He is, therefore, also the one who "rides in the ancient heavens," sending out his "mighty voice" (68:34) and displaying his "power in the skies" (68:35). There are echoes from Ps 29 and the Canaanite worship of Baal in these descriptions. Although God is simultaneously in heaven and in his temple, he also "visits" (פָּקַד, 65:10) the earth, bringing with him the "river of God" full of water (65:10)²⁷ so that his "wagon tracks" (מַעֲגִלֵּי־דָ) ²⁸

Martin Leuenberger, "Jhws Herkunft aus dem Süden: Archäologische Befunde–biblische Überlieferungen–historische Korrelationen," *ZAW* 122 (2010):1–19.

²⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 253. God is simultaneously present in heaven and in his temple.

²⁵ When Ps 65:3, with the assertion that "all flesh" should come to God, is read in the context of the cluster (or even the context of 65:6, 9), it is clear that every human is meant, *not* "all Israelite humanity," as Goldingay asserts. Cf. John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2: Psalms 42–89* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), Kindle edition, "Psalm 65." Wilson, *Psalms Volume I*, 907, notes that "all flesh" "reaches far beyond the confines of Israel to include *all* humanity, and even in many instances the animal world." According to him, the pericope of Isa 66:18–24 possibly provided the foundational vision for Ps 65. Cf. Wilson, *Psalms Volume I*, 907.

²⁶ This identification in a group of Elohistic psalms is remarkable.

²⁷ This canal of water runs from the heavenly ocean through the firmament into the sky above the earth, bringing rain in abundance. Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen II*, 385.

²⁸ Since he is the one who rides through the heavens (68:5, 34), his "wagon tracks" are visible in the (cirrus or stratocumulus) clouds. This is not a reference to the tracks of a cart at harvest time (as suggested by Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, "Psalm 65").

overflow with abundance (65:12). His power is visible in the “skies,” in heaven (68:35).²⁹

D GOD’S ACTS OF GRACE TOWARDS HIS PEOPLE AND THEIR PRAISE OF HIM

The character of God is defined through his acts towards his people, the cosmos and the nations, notably the rebellious leaders among the nations. All these *dramatis personae* respond to his actions and in their response, much is said about the character of God, whether it be through the submission, awe, praise, gifts or worship by humanity. It is, therefore, necessary to say something about the role of praise in the cluster before praise is described as part of the response of the various groups of people and nature.

The psalms of the cluster belong to different *Gattungen*³⁰ but the essence of the collection is the praise of God. Adoration is found in calls to the faithful to praise God throughout the cluster. Examples are calls to praise him such as, “Bless God in the great congregation” (68:27) and statements that constitute direct praise, for example, “Blessed be God!” (68:36). However, when the psalmist tells God, “Praise is due to you, O God” (65:2) or “you atone for our transgressions” (65:4), this also constitutes “expressives,” speech-acts of praise or thanksgiving to God.³¹ Even those verses which seem to recall distress or

²⁹ The singular *שחַקִּים* refers collectively to “(dust) clouds” but the plural *שחַקִּים* used here probably indicates the “heavens.” Cf. Walter Dietrich and Samuel Arnet, eds., *Konzipierte und aktualisierte Ausgabe des Hebräischen und Aramäischen Lexikons zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 597.

³⁰ Psalm 65 is usually described as a hymn. Ps 66 is described as consisting of a communal song of praise (vv. 1–12) and a song of praise of an individual (vv. 13–20). Ps 67 is described as a mix between a supplication for blessing and a hymn and Ps 68 is described as a psalm with a complex history of growth which celebrates God’s eschatological triumph over his enemies, ending in a call to the kingdoms of the earth to sing praise to God and to recognise his majesty. Cf. the descriptions in Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen II*, 382, 386, 392–394, 398. Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 289, describes Ps 65 as a mixture of prayer, confession and praise. He describes Ps 66 as a similar combination of thanksgiving song and hymn, only focused on history while Ps 65 focuses on creation (Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 293).

³¹ See Searle’s classification of speech acts according to Touria Drid, “Language as Action: Fundamentals of the Speech Act Theory,” *Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature* 1/10 (2018):1–14 (9). According to Searle, an alternative taxonomy of speech acts (compared to that of Austin) includes *representatives* (in which the speaker asserts, claims, says, reports, denies or concludes); *directives* (attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something via requests, suggestions, commands, etc.); *commissives* (committing the speaker to some future course of action

contain accusations against God serve the function of praise. For example, when it is reported that God had "tested and tried" the psalmist's people, brought them "into the net," "laid a burden" on their backs, "let men ride" over their heads or caused them to go "through fire and water" (66:10–12), such statements constitute praise in the context of the psalm and the cluster. The final stich of these lines states, "yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance" (66:12). Therefore, the remarks about tribulation are intended to thank God for ending their suffering. The bigger context of this group of psalms is praise, and all that they contain, operate within this parameter. The cluster itself is enveloped in praise. The first line, "Praise is due to you, O God" (65:2) and the last, "Blessed be God!" (68:36), both constitute praise. Praise thus forms an *inclusio* around the four psalms.

The group of four psalms thus contain various sets of reasons why God must be praised. Those reasons are all based on his impressive acts of grace towards the in-group, the cosmos and the nations. The "awesomeness" (נורא) of his deeds or his person is often mentioned in the cluster as a reason he must be praised (65:6; 66:3, 5; 68:36). Psalm 65:6 speaks about his "awesome deeds," by which he answers his worshippers with "righteousness." One can infer it refers to instances of saving his people from injustice (cf. the noun ישע in 65:5). Even people who dwell at the ends of the earth are "in awe" (ירא) at his "signs" (65:9). In Ps 66:3, his "awesome deeds" are again the reason why all the earth must praise him; his great power, which causes his enemies to "come cringing" to him. In Ps 67:8, the fact that God will bless his people also will cause all the ends of the earth to "fear" him. Lastly, in Ps 68:36, the psalmist declares that God is "awesome" from his sanctuary, the one who gives power and strength to his people. God's impressive acts of saving his people and his awe-inspiring involvement in creation, nature and history are reasons he is praised by the in-group and respected by all inhabitants of the world.

Towards the psalmist and the in-group, God is not only awe-inspiring but also benevolent. What he does for them and which acts constitute reasons for them to praise him are his willingness to "hear" and "listen" to their prayers (שמע, 65:3; 66:19), to "atone" (כפר *piel*) for their transgressions (65:4) and to allow them permanent access to his presence where they can be satisfied with the "goodness" of his house and the "holiness" of his temple (65:5). His righteous

by promising, threatening or offering); *expressives* (expressing a psychological state or attitude about a state such as thanking, apologising, congratulating, deploring, regretting or the like); and *declarations* (effecting changes in the institutional state of affairs such as excommunicating, christening, ending employment, etc.). Cf. John R. Searle, "A Classification of Illocutionary Acts," *Language in Society* 5/1 (1976):1–23 (10–16).

acts of saving his people serve to inspire people even to the ends of the world to make him their “trust” (מבטח, 65:6). His acts of saving his people at the Reed Sea and helping them to cross the Jordan are described as showing him to be “awesome” in his dealing with humanity (עלילה על-בני אדם, 66:5). He is the one who has prevented Israel from passing away or letting their feet slip (66:9). He caused his people to be tested and tried by bringing them into a net, laying a crushing burden on their backs, allowing men to ride over their heads and letting them go through fire and water but, eventually, he brought them to a place of “abundance” (רויה, 66:12). The word “abundance” establishes a link to Ps 23:5 and thus to the temple. There are also other conspicuous links to Ps 23 such as נוה (“grazing place,” 23:2; 65:13); דשן (“make fat” and “abundance,” 23:5; 65:12); מעגל (“tracks,” 23:3; 65:12); and נחה (“guide,” 23:3; 67:5). The psalmist and the in-group pray that God will be gracious to them and bless them and make his face shine upon them (67:2) but the purpose of such blessing is that God’s “way” may be known on earth and that all nations will take note of his saving power (67:3).

The psalmist, within the context of the cluster presented as “David’s,” “tells” what God did for his soul. We may presume this feature replicates David’s praise for YHWH after YHWH delivered him from all his enemies in Ps 18 (see 18:1 and compare 18:19–25 with 66:14, 16–20). He had been “in trouble” (בצר-לי, 66:14, cf. 18:7).³² Therefore, he called aloud to God (“with my mouth,” 66:17), with praise “under” his tongue.³³ This was characterised by a lack of iniquity (און), which caused God to listen (66:18, cf. a similar confession of innocence in connection with being saved in Ps 18:21; 24).³⁴ God thus dealt positively with the request of the psalmist (66:19) and did not reject his prayer or remove his steadfast love (חסד) from the psalmist (66:20; cf. Ps 18:26). Since the cluster is close to the end of Book II, the editors possibly felt the urge to link the group to significant psalms of “David” in Book I, namely Pss 18; 23 and 29.³⁵

³² According to Johannes P. M. van der Ploeg, *Psalmen Deel I: Psalm 1 t/m 75* (BOT; Roermond: J.J. Romen & Zonen), the phrase in Ps 66:14 was taken over from Ps 18:7.

³³ Presumably, this means that he was ready to praise God when the time came.

³⁴ The reference to “iniquities” (עונות) in 65:4 establishes a link to Ps 18:24 but also to the similar description of “iniquities” as a material-like sphere encompassing the sinner. Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 216.

³⁵ Bernard Gosse has investigated the connections between Ps 18 and Ps 40 and some of those at the end of Book II (Pss 68–70). He considers Ps 40 to be a response to Ps 69 in the tradition of Ps 18 but I think that the editors simply connected the ends of the two collections and the end of Book II with significant psalms in Book I. Cf. Bernard Gosse, “Les relations Ps 40/Ps 69 et Ps 18/Ps 68 et le livre des Proverbes,” *OTE* 26/3 (2013):684–694.

The similarities with significant psalms from Book I and Second and Third Isaiah testify to the active involvement of an editorial team in composing this cluster.

In Ps 68, God is described as especially benevolent towards the needy. This establishes a link to the theology of the poor in Book I. He is defined as the father of the fatherless, the protector of widows, the one who settles solitary people in a home and who leads prisoners out to prosperity (68:7).³⁶ His people are needy but God provides for them (68:11). Psalm 68:20 praises God for daily “carrying” his people, saving them. He is the only one who can deliver them from death (68:21). He is “of Israel’s fountain,” the one who provides for them (68:27). As God worked for Israel in the past, he will again use his power to their advantage (68:29). His mighty voice is a sign of his majesty and power and his ability to give power and strength also to his people (68:36).

In the editors’ view, God’s acts of grace towards his people thus directly influence the inhabitants of the world. By intervening on behalf of Israel, the nations get to know his way and learn to respect him. This echoes the theological perspective found in Second and Third Isaiah. Therefore, the proper response of his people is to lead the world (and the cosmos) in praising him. Keywords from the semantic field of praise serve to link the psalms of the cluster together. Examples are:

Table 1: Keywords from the semantic field of praise in Pss 65–68

Keyword	Context
“praise” – תהלה	65:2 – “Praise” is due to you, O God, in Zion
	66:2 – (all the earth) give to him glorious “praise”
	66:8 – O peoples, let the sound of his “praise” be heard
“awe” – ירא	65:6 – God’s “awesome deeds” effecting “righteousness”
	65:9 – “those at the ends of the earth” are in awe of God’s signs
	66:3 – all the earth praises God for his “awesome deeds”
	66:5 – his deeds are “awesome” toward humanity
	66:16 – all those who “fear” God
	67:8 – all the ends of the earth must “fear” God when he blesses the in-group
	68:36 – God is “awesome” from his sanctuary
“shout for joy” – רגן	65:9 – God makes the going out of the morning and the evening “shout for joy”
	67:5 – let the nations “shout for joy”

³⁶ This description is couched in language reminiscent of texts like Isa 41:17 and 61:1.

"shout for joy" – רוע	65:14 – the meadows and valleys "shout" (and sing) together for joy
	66:1 – "Shout for joy" to God, all the earth
"sing" – שיר	65:14 – the meadows and valleys shout and "sing" together for joy
	68:5 – "Sing to God"
	68:33 – O kingdoms of the earth, "sing" to God
"sing" – זמר	66:2 – all the earth "sing the glory of his name"
	66:4 x 2 – all the earth "sings praises to you"
	68:5 – "sing praises to his name"
	68:33 – the kingdoms of the earth must "sing praises to Adonai"
"glory" – כבוד	66:2 x 2 – all the earth sing "the glory of" his name; give him "glorious" praise
"worship" – חוה	66:4 – all the earth "worships" you
"be glad" – שמח	66:6 – (when we passed through the river on foot) we "rejoiced" in him
	67:5 – let the nations "be glad" (because God judges the peoples with equity)
	68:4 – the righteous "shall be glad" (when the wicked perish)
"bless" – ברך	65:11 – God "blesses" the growth of the crops
	66:8 – "Bless" our God, O peoples
	66:20 – "Blessed" be God because he has not rejected the psalmist's prayer
	68:27 – "Bless" God in the great congregation
	68:36 – "Blessed be God!"
"make heard" – שמע	66:8 – O peoples, let the sound of his praise "be heard"
	66:16 – Come "and hear," all you who fear God
"tell" – ספר	66:16 – I "will tell" what he has done
"praise" – רומם	66:17 – "high praise" was under my tongue ³⁷
"praise" – ידה	67:4 x 2 – let the peoples "praise" you, O God; let all the peoples "praise" you
	67:6 x 2 – let the peoples "praise" you, O God; let all the peoples "praise" you
"exult" – עלץ	68:4 – the righteous ... shall "exult" before God

³⁷ The meaning is probably that he was ready to praise God, not because he doubted that his prayer will be heard (as suggested by Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 258) but because he anticipated that God would help him.

"rejoice" – שוש	68:4 – the righteous ... shall be "jubilant" with joy
"gladness" – שמחה	68:4 – the righteous ... shall be jubilant with "joy"
"exalt" – סלל	68:5 – "lift up a song" to him who rides through the clouds
"exult" – עלז	68:5 – "exult before him"
"ascribe power" – נתן עז	68:35 – "Ascribe power" to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies
"majesty" – גאווה	68:35 – God, whose "majesty" is over Israel

The richness of the semantic field of words of praise and worship indicates how important this aspect was for the editors. God is almighty. He uses his power to the benefit of his people and creation. He silences the roaring of the seas and the tumult of the peoples. Eventually, all the rebellious elements in humanity that do not accept his rule will be subdued. All the earth will acknowledge that the God of Zion is the supreme God.

E GOD'S ACTS OF GRACE TOWARDS CREATION AND THE RESPONSE OF CREATION AND ALL HUMANITY

God's interaction with creation is given extensive treatment in Ps 65:7–8, 10–14. All he did and still does to nature, according to Ps 65, are listed as reasons why he should be praised. The theme is again taken up in Ps 67:7 and Ps 68:9–10, 15. Especially the reference to the earth having yielded its increase in Ps 67:7 seems to be an attempt by the editors to link the psalms of the cluster to one another. Through his strength and might, God "established" the mountains (65:7) and "stilled" the roaring of the waves of the seas (67:8). Suppression of the powers of chaos and stabilising elements of creation are followed by a description of God's care to sustain his creation. He "visits" the earth and "waters" it (65:10); he greatly "enriches" it through "the river of God," which is full of water (65:10); he arranges for grain to grow (65:10); he waters the soil and softens it with showers, blessing the growth of plants (65:11); he cares for the crops so that there is an abundance in the pastures of the wilderness, the hills, meadows and valleys, thus, caring for the flocks and grain (65:12–14).

In the context of the cluster, the word ארץ in Pss 65:10 and 67:7 should be translated with "earth" and not "land" (contra the NIV). The prayer for blessing in Ps 67 is for God's people (cf. "us" repeated five times in 67:2, 7, 8) but the focus is on the effect it will have on the "earth" (67:3), "all nations" (בכל־גוים, 67:3), the "peoples" (עמים x2, 67:4), the "nations" and "peoples" (לאומים x2, עמים, 67:5), then, again, the "peoples" (עמים x2, 67:6) and "all the ends of the earth" (כל־אפסי־ארץ, 67:8). The remark that "the earth has yielded its increase" (67:7) thus refers to God's visiting the earth and blessing it with rain, as reported

in Ps 65:10–14. The statement is made in the context of a prayer for blessing and serves as confirmation that God will bless the earth and his worshippers again. It is encapsulated between a request to God to have the peoples praise him and a third-person command to the “ends of the earth” to fear God (67:6, 8).

God’s interaction with creation is also mentioned in Ps 68:9, 10, 15. When he marched through the wilderness before his people, the earth quaked and the heavens poured down rain (נטף, 68:9). His inheritance, which languished, also received rain in abundance (גשם נדבבות תניף, 68:10). Nature thus joins forces with God to fight his enemies. When God scatters kings on the Golan Heights (or in the region of the Hauran mountains), it snowed on Zalmon (בצלמון, 68:15).

The abundance of growth in the pastures, grain fields and flocks is described metaphorically as praise from nature in response to God’s blessing. The pastures of the wilderness overflow according to Ps 65:13a. The parallel second stich describes the hills as “girding” themselves with “rejoicing” (גיל, 65:13b). The valleys, having “decked” themselves with grain, are said to “shout and sing together for joy” (יתרועעו אף-ישירו, 65:14). When the praise of “all the earth” or humanity is described elsewhere in the cluster with these words (cf. 66:1; 68:5, 33), it becomes clear that nature is represented as singing praises to God.

The noun כל, “all,” forms an important connection between the psalms of the cluster in this regard. Whether “all” in conjunction with “earth” refers to the creation or all humanity is not always clear. The descriptions, however, all refer to the universal praise and worship of God by all humans and the whole earth:

65:3 “...to you shall *all flesh* come.”

65:6 “...the trust of *all the ends of the earth*.”

66:1 “...shout for joy to God, *all the earth*.”

66:4 “*All the earth* worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.”

67:3 “...that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among *all nations*.”

67:4 “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let *all the peoples* praise you!”

67:6 “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let *all the peoples* praise you!”

67:8 “God shall bless us; let *all the ends of the earth* fear him!”

The members of the in-group who should praise God are those who worship him in Zion (65:2), who enjoy the satisfaction of his presence in his temple (65:5), who have experienced his salvation (65:6; 68:21), who have experienced the miracles at the Reed Sea (66:6), who have passed through the tribulation but are again able to enjoy abundance (66:12). The psalmist refers to himself (65:4;

66:13–20) but for the greater part, he speaks in the first-person plural (65:4, 6; 66:9–12; 67:2, 7–8; 68:20, 29). Members of his in-group are described as “all who fear God” (66:16), “the righteous” (68:4), the destitute and freed prisoners (68:6–7, 11), those who are daily “carried” (עָמַס) by God (68:20), who experience his majesty over them (68:35), who receive power and strength from him (68:36).

F GOD’S SUBJUGATION OF THE REBELLIOUS LEADERS AND THEIR HOMAGE TO HIM

Praise is a constant feature of the cluster of four psalms. The motif of the entire world recognising God’s rule is also found in all four psalms, although it is strongest in Pss 65 and 67. The motif of God’s blessing of nature is the strongest in Ps 65 since it is referred to in about half of the verse lines. From there, the motif of God’s influence on creation experiences *ritardando*. It is skipped over in Ps 66 and only one of the eight verses in Ps 67 mentions it. In Ps 68, four of the 36 verses mention the motif (68:9–11, 15).

In contrast, God’s response to rebellious peoples is treated with *accelerando* in the four psalms. In Ps 65:8, God is said to “still” (מַשְׁבִּיחַ) the “tumult” (הַמּוֹן) of the “peoples” (לְאֻמִּים). In Ps 66, we are told about the effect of God’s great power, which means that his enemies come “cringing” to him (66:3). The verb כָּחַשׁ (*piel*) means “to feign obedience” according to HALOT (*in loco*). The context of this verse, as well as that of Ps 18:45 with which it resonates and where the verb is also used, suggests not pretended submission but true surrender because of fear. Thus, “cringe” is a better translation.³⁸ In Ps 66:7, the psalmist says God keeps watch on the nations to prevent “the rebellious” (הַסֹּרְרִים) from exalting themselves. No mention of the rebels or enemies of God is made in Ps 67. They are, however, the main topic in Ps 68. Psalm 68 describes how they will be scattered (68:2, 15). They will flee (68:2, 13) and perish (68:3). The rebellious people will dwell in a parched land (68:7). This forms an antithesis with the “solitary persons”³⁹ (יְחִידִים) whom God settles in a home and the “prisoners” whom he leads out to “prosperity” or “happiness” (בוֹשְׁרוֹת). God will hold a triumphant procession with the captive enemies (68:19). Their destruction will be ruthless (68:22) and they will not be able to hide from him (68:23). Israel will see their humiliating death and derive satisfaction from it

³⁸ The same sense of “cowering in fear” is also present in Deut 33:29. This is the way the New English Translation also translates the verse (see also the NIV and NRS).

³⁹ In Ps 26:16, the psalmist describes himself as a יְחִיד. This reference, in a late wisdom-infused psalm, is the only other mention in the Psalms of persons who have no support from family members.

(68:24). Finally, God is called upon to rebuke, trample and scatter those who delight in war (68:31).

Rebellious peoples, therefore, will have to submit to the rule of God. Even the rebellious will have to bring gifts to God (68:19), while nobles from Egypt and Cush (68:32) will come with “outstretched hands,” carrying gifts. The four psalms were arranged so that God’s vengeance on his enemies forms the climax. His triumph over his enemies and their disappearance form the introduction to the final call to the “kingdoms of the earth” to sing praises to God, Adonai, in Ps 68:33–36.

G CONNECTIONS WITH THE PROLOGUE TO THE PSALMS

The editors of the Psalms established conspicuous links to Pss 1–2 by using certain keywords from those two psalms. At the beginning of the cluster, the reference to “Zion” (Ps 65:2) as the place where praise is due to God, where vows should be performed, where he listens to prayer (65:3) and where “all flesh” should come to him (65:3) introduces the temple and its cult as one of the important themes of the cluster but it also reminds the reader of the prologue to the Psalms. In conjunction with the expression “all the ends of the earth” (כָּל־קְצוֹי־אֶרֶץ 65:6; קְצוֹת 65:9),⁴⁰ it points to Zion as the centre of the earth (cf. 65:2) as in Ps 2:8, which speaks of the “ends of the earth” (אֶפְסֵי־אֶרֶץ). The exact description אֶפְסֵי־אֶרֶץ as in Ps 2:8 is used later in the group to express the idea of respect again (Ps 67:8). The trust and respect displayed by those at the ends of the earth to the God in Zion thus complete the promise of the “ends of the earth” as the extent of the heritage of the Messiah in Ps 2:8.⁴¹

A similar conspicuous link is established with the words “wicked people” (רָשָׁעִים), “they will perish” (יִאֲבֹדוּ) and “righteous people” (צַדִּיקִים) in Ps 68:3–4. This contrast between the future fate of the wicked and the righteous is reminiscent of Ps 1:6 and it suggests that the rest of Ps 68 should be read as a scenario of eschatological judgement.⁴² The Hebrew words for “wicked people”

⁴⁰ Cf. the parallel description “the going out of the morning and the evening” in Ps 65:9, referring to the far east and west.

⁴¹ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 217, point out the similarity to the theme of universal praise in Isa 42:10–12.

⁴² Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 251. Psalm 68 is notoriously difficult to interpret (Van der Ploeg, *Psalmen Deel I*, 391) but in the context of this group of psalms, its purpose becomes clearer.

and "perish" occur together only in Pss 1:6; 9:6; 37:20; 68:3; 112:10;⁴³ 119:95.⁴⁴ The verb to "drive away" (גָּדַף, 68:3) in conjunction with "perish" (אָבַד) further reminds the reader of the wicked being like chaff that the wind "drives away" (גָּדַף, Ps 1:4). The image of chaff being driven away by the wind is replaced by the notion of smoke being blown away – which has a closer resemblance to Ps 37:20 – but it also brings to mind the "wrath" (אַף) of YHWH (Ps 2:5) which "flares up" (בָּעַר) quickly according to Ps 2:12.⁴⁵ The "kings" (מְלָכִים) and "rulers" (שֹׁפְטִים) of the nations were warned that they could "perish" (תֵּאָבְדוּ) along the way in Ps 2:10–12. According to Ps 68, some "kings" (מְלָכִים, 68:13, 15) are said to be fleeing from YHWH and are "scattered" (פִּוֵּץ in 68:2 and פָּרַשׁ in 68:15) but there are also "kings" (מְלָכִים, 68:30) in this cluster who have heeded this warning (cf. Ps 2:2–3, 10–12).

In Ps 68:3–4, the "wicked people" are thus equated with the "enemies" (אֵיבֵיוֹ) and the "haters" (מִשְׁנְאִיוֹ) of God. Earlier in the cluster, in Ps 66:3, God's "enemies" (אֵיבֵיךָ) are said to be so frightened by his deeds that they come "cringing" (כָּחַשׁ piel) to him. It was argued above that this verb could not indicate mere *feigned* obedience in that verse. The enemies mentioned in Ps 66:3, however, are also identified as the "rebellious" (סוֹרְרִים) elements among the "nations" (גּוֹיִם) in Ps 66:7. God's eyes watch the nations lest the rebellious "exalt" (רוּם hiphil or qal) themselves. The situation in Pss 65–68 is, therefore, the same as is described in Ps 2:1–5, where the "nations" (גּוֹיִם) "rage" (רָגַשׁ) against YHWH and his anointed and the "peoples" (לְאֻמִּים) plot in vain. The editors used the same word for "peoples" (לְאֻמִּים) to describe their "tumult" (הִמּוֹן) being "stilled" (שָׁבַח hiphil) by God in Ps 65:8. YHWH's promise to his anointed in Ps 2:9 that he (the anointed) will "break" (רָעַע II) and "smash" (נָפַץ piel) the nations to the ends of the earth turns into reality when God "strikes" (מָחַץ) the heads of his unrepentant enemies in Ps 68:22.⁴⁶ By linking the cluster to Pss 1–2, the editors made explicit the implicit connection between the "wicked" and rebellious nations, as suggested by the similarity between Ps 1:6 and 2:12. Rebellious world leaders are therefore grouped with the "wicked."

⁴³ In Ps 112:10, it is the "desire" or "plan" of the wicked that is said to "perish."

⁴⁴ In Ps 119:95, it is the wicked who wants to "destroy" the psalmist. "Wickedness" (רָשָׁע) is associated with the verb אָבַד in Ps 5:5–7 and "the wicked" and "wickedness" are also found in the context of the verb "perish" (אָבַד) in Ps 10:15–16.

⁴⁵ Psalm 21:9–10 already spelled out that YHWH's enemies and those who hate him will be consumed by his wrath as in an oven. The connections between the royal Pss 2 and 21 point towards the eschatological "day of YHWH" as the time when the enemies of YHWH's reign will be destroyed (cf. Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch*, 252).

⁴⁶ Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 264, refers to Num 24:17–18; Ps 2:9 and Ps 110:5 as parallels.

However, in the cluster of Pss 65–68, the rebellious nations and leaders form the exception. Most of the “peoples” (עמים, cf. 66:8; 67:4, 6) of the world have already accepted the invitation to “fear” (ירא) God (Ps 67:8) and “rejoice” (גיל) with “trembling” (cf. the invitation in Ps 2:11). Psalm 67:5 urges God to “let the nations be “glad” (שמח) and sing for joy (רנן *piel*) since he, God, “judges” (שפט) the “peoples” (עמים) with equity and guides the “nations” (לאמים) upon the earth. All the “ends of the earth” (כל־קצוֹי־אֶרֶץ) have taken note of the power and might of God and already worship him willingly (65:6; 67:8) and will do so with even greater resolve when all evil is rooted out (68:29–36). It is no coincidence that YHWH promised the “ends of the earth” (אפסי־אֶרֶץ) as an inheritance to his anointed in Ps 2:8.

The nations in Pss 65–68 are so enthusiastic about the God of Israel that they consider God to be their “trust” (מבטח), according to Ps 65:6. In other words, they have also accepted the invitation in Ps 2:12 to “take refuge” (חסה) in him. The similarity with Ps 40:5, from the end of Book I of the Psalms, where special connections with the prologue are also evident, is noteworthy. Psalm 40:5 says, “Blessed (אשרי) is the man who makes YHWH his “trust” (מבטח), who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!” People from the ends of the earth and the farthest seas can, therefore, also be considered “blessed” (אשרי) when Ps 65:6 is read together with Ps 40:5.

According to Barbiero,⁴⁷ Ps 1 is simply about “humankind” (האיש, 1:1), about humanity’s striving after happiness (אשרי, 1:1) and success (צלח, 1:3). Psalm 2, in contrast, is about the history of Israel, the king, the holy city and the uprising of the peoples. This means that the Psalter should be read in relation to humanity (Ps 1) and Israel (Ps 2). What happens to Israel has meaning for humanity in general and this causes Israel to be a paradigm for humanity. Wisdom and prophecy, creation and election belong together and the God of Israel is also the creator. This description of the prologue by Barbiero is equally applicable to the cluster Pss 65–58. In this group, “David” describes the person whom God selects and brings near to dwell in his courts as “blessed” (אשרי, 65:5; cf. 1:1 and 2:12). “David,” as representative of the individual, rejects sin and chooses to be in God’s presence. When “iniquities” (דברי עונת) threaten to overwhelm him, he looks up to God, who atones for transgressions (65:4). He does not “harbour sin” in his heart (און אס־ראיתי בלבי, 66:18). The “David” of this cluster thus emulates “the man” in Ps 1:1 who avoids the way of sinners and follows the Torah. He is one of the “blessed” (אשרי) people who is like a tree planted by streams of water, whose leaves do not wither and who is successful in all he does. In Ps 65:5, being “blessed” (אשרי) like that is described as enjoying

⁴⁷ Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch*, 42–43.

the privilege of dwelling in God’s presence, in his courts and being “satisfied” with the goodness of his house and the holiness of his temple. This verse (Ps 65:5) serves as an explication of Ps 1:3. As the tree of Ps 1 is satisfied by being in the presence of “streams of water” (פּלְגֵי מַיִם), so the worshipper of Ps 65 is satisfied by being in the presence of God.⁴⁸

The “streams of water” (פּלְגֵי מַיִם) of Ps 1:3 reappear in Ps 65:10 as the “river of God” (פְּלֵג אֱלֹהִים), “full of water” (מֵלֵא מַיִם) but in this context, it is part of a description of how God blesses the earth with fruitfulness when he visits it (Ps 65:10–14). As the righteous person in the image of a tree “gives” (נָתַן) his “fruit” (פְּרִי) on time, so the earth “gives” (נָתַן) its “produce” (יְבוּל) when God blesses it (Ps 67:7). It is God who “crowns” the year with his bounty (65:12) but as the wicked people become dry and parched like chaff, “driven away” (נִדְּף) by the wind (Ps 1:4), so the rebellious peoples will live in a “parched land” (צַחֲיִנָּה, 68:7) and be “driven away” (נִדְּף) before God (68:3).

As in the prologue, the reader is presented in this cluster with a choice between two ways of living. On the one hand, there is the possibility of choosing to be in the presence of God. That means to accept his benevolent rule and judgement and to be satisfied with the goodness of his presence. That is the choice the “blessed” person in Ps 1:1–3 makes and the choice of the one whom God, in turn, chooses to bring near to him in Ps 65:5. God is presented in Pss 65–68 as the awesome creator and sustainer of the cosmos, the God who stills chaos and rebellion. He uses his power to protect his people, making his power visible in the skies and his majesty over Israel (68:34–35). Humanity and nature join Israel in his praise. The earth is blessed by God, who makes nature fruitful and who cares for the needy, who rules by his might forever. Through his acts of saving and blessing his people, humanity has learned to fear and adore him. They have come to know his way on earth (67:3).

However, there are still those who choose not to follow his way—the rebellious who exalt themselves (66:7). They are jealous of the fame of Mount Zion (68:16–17); they lust after tribute and delight in war (68:31). In doing this,

⁴⁸ In the cluster, with its universalistic accent already introduced in 65:3 (“to you shall all flesh come”), the “one” whom God chooses and brings near to dwell in his courts is not restricted to a Levite or priest (as Van der Ploeg and others suggest) but can refer to any human being. Cf. Van der Ploeg, *Psalmen Deel I*, 376, 378 and VanGemenen, *Psalms*, Kindle edition, “W. Psalm 65.” The extension of God’s grace to all nations is clearly reflected in Ps 67:2–3. God’s blessing of Israel implies that his “way” will become known among all nations. Van der Ploeg, *Psalmen Deel I*, 386, says that no other psalm is determined so strongly by universalism as Ps 67. The Aaronite blessing for Israel (Num 6:22–27) was extended through the insertion of universalistic pronouncements, according to Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 297.

they characterise themselves as enemies of God—people who hate him. They will be forced to accept his rule and come cringing to him (66:3). They will form part of the host of captives in his victory procession, bringing gifts to him in his temple (68:19, 32). They will be scattered and try to flee (68:2) but God will strike their heads and bring them back from Bashan and the depths of the sea (68:22–23). This description of the extent of God’s rule and dominion explains the phrase “the ends of the earth” in Ps 2:8. Kings and nobles will come in adoration and sing praises to Adonai but his enemies will be trampled and scattered (68:31).

H CONCLUSION

The theological profile of Pss 65–58 reflects a confident assertion of the undisputed, righteous and permanent reign of YHWH, the God of Israel. His sovereignty, enforced from the temple in Jerusalem, visible in the skies and recognised worldwide, seems to be a central notion in this cluster. The human king, represented by “David,” is pushed into the background. For the psalmist, God is also King. He addresses God as “my God, my King” (68:25). The focus is on what God has done and will do for the implied psalmist and his in-group, Israel.⁴⁹ God has listened to his prayer and he atones for the people’s sins. He continues to show them his steadfast love (65:4). He preserved them when they suffered, and he acts as a father and protector for the needy among them (66:9; 68:6–7, 20–21). He is supplicated to be gracious to them, bless them and let his face shine upon them (67:2). However, the purpose of the cluster is to praise him for his great acts of creation and salvation, his everlasting and just rule, the suppression of rebellious elements among the nations and his willingness to give power and strength to his people.

According to the cluster, human happiness is meant for all humanity. It depends on accepting God’s supremacy and experiencing the satisfaction of being in his presence in the temple. His interventions on behalf of Israel are beneficial to all humanity (66:5–6). Among those saving acts are the wonders of the exodus from Egypt, the selection of Jerusalem as his abode on earth and the restoration of his people after hardship.⁵⁰ His involvement in Israel’s history and

⁴⁹ Johannes Bremer, *Wo Gott sich auf die Armen einlässt*, 437, thinks that the closeness of the editors (the “*Trägerkreis*”) to the destitute people in Ps 68 points, as in the first Davidic psalms, to the group called “the servants.” The motif of universal worship of the God of Israel found so often in this group also echoes the sentiment of Second and Third Isaiah. Compare “all flesh” in Ps 65:3 with Isa 40:5; 49:26; 66:23.

⁵⁰ There is consensus that “river” in Ps 66:6 forms a parallel to “sea” and that it does not refer to the Jordan. The image reminds the reader of texts such as Isa 43:16; 50:2; 51:10. Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 223. Ps 66:12 points to suffering

nature is his way of making his "way" known on earth (67:2–3). Everybody who accepts his awesome power and acknowledges his care for his people and creation is blessed and has a desire to join in with the praise that comes from the entire world. Since he is all-powerful, righteous and just, the rebellious elements among the nations and the wicked people will be removed. The foolhardy enemies will be punished. All resistance against his reign will be neutralised in the end. His power will be visible to all and the privileged position of his people will be clear for all to see (68:35–36).

The cluster sharpens the understanding of the prologue to the Psalms. Due to the proclamation of these four psalms, YHWH's presence in Zion (Ps 2:6) is understood as permanent and crucial for Israel's existence to be meaningful. God rules over the world from Zion. He is the King and in the great congregation in the temple, he is praised as the "fountain of Israel" (68:27).⁵¹ The rebellious nations mentioned in Ps 2:1–2 will be subjected to his rule. Kings from all the kingdoms on earth will bear gifts to him in Jerusalem and acknowledge his awesomeness. All inhabitants of the world, even to the farthest reaches, will sing his praise (cf. Ps 2:10). As described in Ps 1, human happiness is defined as being dependent on the rejection of wickedness and a striving to stay in YHWH's presence, the source of true success and fruitfulness (נתן פרי in Ps 1:3 and נתן יבול in Ps 67:7; צלח in Ps 1:3 and בושרה in Ps 68:7). Rejection of the "way" of YHWH is defined as rebelliousness and wickedness (cf. Ps 1:1–2). Those who seek protection in YHWH (Ps 2:12, cf. 65:6) are safe and will experience prosperity. They will rejoice with trembling, as Ps 2:10 says. However, anyone who rejects it will struggle in a parched land (1:4; 68:7). They will perish (1:6; 2:12; 68:3).

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during the exile since "fire" and "water" as metaphors for suffering reminds one of Isa 43:2. According to Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 225, they form together a merism for extreme danger.

⁵¹ The expression "YHWH of the fountain of Israel" (יהוה ממקור ישראל, 68:27) is not perfectly clear. It may be an allusion to Ps 36:10, "For with you is the fountain of life" (ביעמך מקור היים).

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