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**“THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ...”  
(PS 27:1): PSALM 27 IN THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF  
PSALMS 25-34**

*ABSTRACT*

*Psalm 27 has some unique interpretational difficulties. The article briefly refers to the various ways in which its arrangement of elements has been explained. It then attempts to understand the psalm within its literary context, the cluster Pss 25-34, in two ways: First, in understanding the features and contents of Ps 27 in terms of a linear reading of the sequence from Ps 25 to 27. Second, Ps 27 is considered in relation to Ps 31, the corresponding psalm in the chiasmically arranged group running from Ps 25 to Ps 34. The implications of the connections between Ps 25 and Ps 31 are also considered in this phase. It is argued that the structure and contents of Ps 27 become more transparent within this literary context created by the editors of the Psalms.*

*1. INTRODUCTION*

*1.1 Psalm 27 – A Challenging Psalm*

Psalm 27 is a composition that confronts the interpreter with interpretational difficulties. Numerous interpreters have wondered why a psalm that initially speaks, in the third person, about trust in YHWH’s saving and protection (27:1-6), abruptly shifts to a cry for help, directed at YHWH himself (27:7-14). How do the two parts fit together to constitute one composition?<sup>2</sup> Since the time of Hermann Gunkel (1986:116), interpreters have suggested that the two parts originally were independent compositions, 27:1-6 being a (royal?) psalm of trust and 27:7-14 the supplication of an individual.<sup>3</sup> In view of (especially) v. 3, the

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2 Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:171) describe the question of its unity as the “cardinal” interpretational question.

3 Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:171-172) consider the first part to be a thanksgiving which ends in a promise to praise God. They think that v. 4b is an insertion from Ps 23:6 that does not fit well into its context. The second part is, in their view, a supplication with integrated lament and two direct addresses to an audience. Verse 14 they assess to be an editorial addition which unifies the two separate

first part would point to a king as speaker (it uses metaphors of a comprehensive military onslaught), while the second part could be understood as the prayer of an individual involved in a case of false accusation that had to be resolved within the temple. Creative solutions to the problem of why the two diverging parts form a single whole have been suggested, but this has not yet produced an entirely satisfactory explanation of the psalm as a unitary composition.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 *Psalm 27 in Its Immediate Literary Context: Psalms 25-34*

This article is not a new attempt to understand Ps 27 as a (composite) unit within a particular *Sitz-im-Leben*. Instead, it is an attempt to understand the psalm in its editorial literary context (its *Sitz-in-der-Literatur*). It is hoped that its context will illuminate some of the interpretational problems of the psalm. The basis for the investigation is the assumption that individual psalms were purposefully collected, newly composed, or edited to form collections and, at the end, a book.<sup>5</sup> Such a purposeful editing of elements

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psalms. References to the temple, respectively the seeing of the beauty of YHWH in v. 4 and the goodness of YHWH in v. 13, establish a connection between the two parts.

4 Mowinckel (2014:808 n. 54) suggested that the whole psalm is an individual lament with a largely extrapolated motif of trust which was shifted forward (27:1-6). Birkeland (1933) concluded that Mowinckel was right about the psalm being a lament, but wrong about the crisis of the psalmist being illness – the crisis is not so big. Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:172) regard the psalm as a royal psalm which was combined with the supplication of an individual by exilic editors. Hartenstein (2008:65-67) excludes a discussion of the origin of the two parts and accepts their unity based on the many links between the two parts. Konkel (2012:322-336) considers the psalm to be a paradigmatic prayer in which the speaker cites the prayer of a king although he does not yet experience the same trust in God. By doing this, the psalmist finds his own private language of payer.

5 About this there is not yet a general consensus. The position will not be argued here any further, but the reader can be referred to the opposing views of Willgren (2016). In our opinion, the results of various investigations have shown that the Psalms in its (proto-)MT shape (and in the arrangement in the LXX) constitutes a planned composition.

within a psalm and of arranging psalms in clusters provide an additional hermeneutical horizon which should be considered in the exegesis.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of its reception within the book, Ps 27 has various interpretational frames, for example to read it in terms of the indications provided in the superscripts of the psalms as a psalm or prayer of David, interconnected with events in the life of David as they are described in the books of Samuel.<sup>7</sup> We limit our investigation to a reading of Ps 27 in its immediate context, namely the cluster Pss 25-34, a subgroup of the first group of Davidic psalms within Book I (Ps 1/3-41).<sup>8</sup> We pay special attention to the beginning of this section, namely Pss 25-26 as a prelude for understanding Ps 27 (in a sequential reading), but also to Ps 31, since it is the counterpart to Ps 27 in the concentrically arranged cluster Pss 25-34 with Ps 29 in the centre.<sup>9</sup> Psalm 31 itself should also be understood in the context created by Ps 25, the introductory psalm of the group. The second context thus involves Pss 25, 27, and 31.

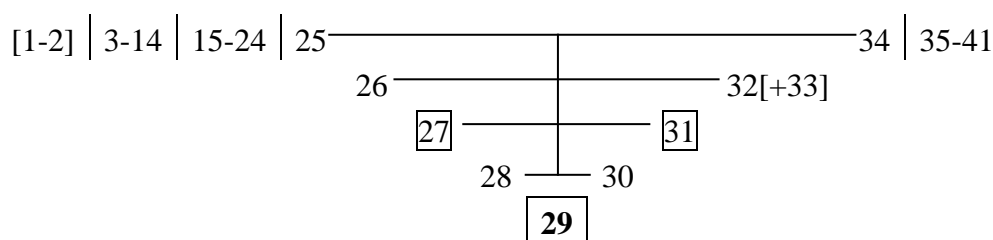


Figure 1: The structure of Book I of the Psalms and of the cluster Pss 25-34 (concentrically arranged around Ps 29)

Hossfeld & Zenger (1994) and Zenger (2010) have argued that the cluster was arranged chiastically around Ps 29 as centre. Psalms 25 and 34 form the frame of the composition. Both are similar acrostics with numerous

6 See Zenger’s plea for exegesis of individual psalms *and* exegesis of the Psalter, which refers to study of the psalms in their compositional units in the book (Zenger 2010:17-65).

7 Cf. Botha on the interpretation of Ps 31 (2011:30-48) and Ps 34 (2008:593-617).

8 The reasons why 25-34 are considered to be a cluster, are (*inter alia*) the high degree of formal correspondence between Pss 25 and 34; the focus on the temple in many of these psalms; and the many keyword connections between Pss 26 and 32, 27 and 31, and 28 and 30.

9 Within Book I of the Psalms, the clusters Pss 3-14 and 15-24 have been investigated in greater detail than 25-34, but enough has been done to use the exposition of Hossfeld & Zenger (1994) and Zenger (2010) as a basis for our investigation.

connections between them, but they also have an equivalent deviation from the acrostic pattern (a final פ-verse added). In the chiastic arrangement of the cluster Pss 25-34, the corresponding pairs are Pss 25/34; 26/32; 27/31; and 28/30. Ps 33 has neither a Davidic heading nor an equivalent psalm in the cluster; it seems to be a later extension of Ps 32 with the purpose of expanding the theology of Ps 29 with its focus on the glorious presence of YHWH in the temple.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.3 Procedure

Because of limitations of space, no analysis of Ps 27 or any other psalm from the cluster Ps 25-34 is made. We limit our investigation of Ps 27 in its literary embeddedness to two complementary perceptions, a “linear” and a “palindromic” one. First, Ps 27 is considered in the opening sequence Ps 25-27. The contingency and sequentialization present in MT (and LXX) are considered to be planned and meaningful, and accordingly an enrichment of meaning of Ps 27 by the (two) preceding psalms is assumed. In addition, in the chiastically arranged group Pss 25-34, the corresponding psalm to Ps 27 (see Figure 1), namely Ps 31, is taken into consideration and the mode of interrelation is ascertained. The associated equivalence (parallelization) of the two psalms is also regarded as intentional and correspondingly endowed with meaning. At the end, the insights will be summarized and evaluated. Compared to an (isolated) reading of Ps 27, there is valid reasons to suppose that consideration of the literary embeddedness of Ps 27 offers explanatory potential for understanding its “compositeness”. It is also to be considered that the inclusion of Ps 27 into the subgroup Pss 25-34 is related to its gestalt. To facilitate comparison, the Hebrew text of Ps 27 (MT) is presented below with a translation and a proposed segmentation.

### 1.4 Text, Translation and Segmentation of Psalm 27<sup>11</sup>

			לְדָוִד	Concerning David.
I	A	1 a	יְהוָה   אֹרְי וַיִּשְׁעִי	YHWH is my light and my salvation;

10 Cf. the explanation of Hossfeld & Zenger (1994:386-388).

11 The segmentation is not discussed here. For a discussion of the structure of Ps 27, Van der Lugt (2006:280-287) can be consulted. The segmentation differs partly from the Masoretic segmentation of verse lines. Different proposals are worth considering for vv. 6 (a bicolon + a tricolon), 7 (a bicolon) and 9 (a tricolon + a bicolon).

		b	מִמֵּי אִירָא	whom would I fear?
		1 c	יְהוָה מְעוֹז־חַיִּי	YHWH is the stronghold of my life;
		d	מִמֵּי אֶפְחָד:	of whom would I be frightened?
	B	2 a	בְּקִרְבִּי עָלִי מְרַעִים	When they approach me, evildoers,
		b	לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי	to eat my flesh,
		2 c	צָרִי וְאִיְבֵי לִי	my adversaries and my enemies against me,
		d	הֵמָּה כָּשְׁלוּ וַנִּפְּלוּ:	it is they who stumbled and fell.
	C	3 a	אִם־תַּחַנֵּה עָלַי מַחֲנֶה	Even though an army encamp against me,
		b	לֹא־יִירָא לִבִּי	my heart shall not fear;
		3 c	אִם־תִּקְוֶם עָלַי מִלְחָמָה	even though war arise against me,
		d	בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בֹטָח:	[still] in this I trust.
II	D	4 a	אֶחַת   שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְהוָה	One thing I have asked from YHWH,
		b	אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ	this I will seek out:
		4 c	שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה	my dwelling in the house of YHWH
		d	כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי	all the days of my life.
		4 e	לְחַזֹּת בְּנֹעַם־יְהוָה	to gaze upon the beauty of YHWH
		f	וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ:	and to inspect in his temple.
	E	5 a	כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי בְּסֻכֹּה	For he will hide me in his hut

		b	בְּיוֹם רָעָה	on the day of trouble;
		5 c	יִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסִתְרֵי אֹהֶלוֹ	he will conceal me in the shelter of his tent,
		d	בְּצוּר יִרְוַמְּנֵנִי:	on a rock he will lift me up high.
	F	6 a	וְעַתָּה יָרוּם רֹאשִׁי	And now my head shall be high
		b	עַל אֵיבֵי סְבִיבוֹתַי	above my enemies around me,
		6 c	וְאֶזְבַּחַהּ בְּאֹהֶלוֹ זִבְחֵי תְרוּעָה	and I want to offer in his tent sacrifices of shouts of joy;
		d	אֲשִׁירָה וְאֶזְמְרָה לַיהוָה:	I want to sing and make music to YHWH.
III	G	7 a	שְׁמַע־יְהוָה	Hear, YHWH,
		b	קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא	while I cry aloud
		c	וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי:	and be gracious to me and answer me!
		8 a	לְךָ   אָמַר לִבִּי	Concerning you my heart said:
		b	בְּקִשׁוֹ פָנָי	“Seek my face”.
		c	אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ:	Your face, YHWH, I seek.
	H	9 a	אַל־תִּסְתֵּר פְּנֵיךָ   מִמֶּנִּי	Do not hide your face from me;
		b	אַל־תִּטְּבֵאֵף עַבְדְּךָ	do not turn your servant away in anger,
		c	עֲזַרְתִּי הָיִיתָ	you who have been my help!
		9 d	אַל־תִּטְּשֵׁנִי	Do not cast me off
		e	וְאַל־תִּעַזְבֵּנִי	and do not forsake me,

		f	אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעַי:	O God of my salvation!
		10 a	כִּי־אָבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי	For my father and my mother abandoned me,
		b	וַיְהוּהַ יִּֽאֲסַפְּנִי:	but YHWH will accept me.
IV	I	11 a	הוֹרֵנִי יְהוָה דְּרִכְךָ	Teach me, YHWH, your way,
		b	וְנַחֲנֵי בְּאַרְחַ מִישׁוֹר	and lead me on a level path
		c	לְמַעַן שׁוֹרְרָי:	for the sake of my opponents.
		12 a	אַל־תִּתְּנֵנִי בְּנַפְשׁ צָרִי	Do not give me up to the throat <sup>12</sup> of my opponents;
		b	כִּי קָמוּבֵי עֵדֵי־שָׁקֶר	for false witnesses arose against me,
		c	וַיִּפֹּחַ חֲמָס:	and a witness with violent intent.
	J	13 a	לֹא־אֵלֵּא הָאֵמֶנְתִּי	Had I not believed
		b	לְרֵאוֹת בְּטוֹב־יְהוָה	that I would look upon the goodness of YHWH
		c	בְּאַרֶץ חַיִּים:	in the land of the living ...
		14 a	קַוֵּה אֶל־יְהוָה	Wait for (hope in) YHWH!
		b	חֲזַק וַיֵּאמֶץ לִבְךָ	Be strong and let your heart be strong!
		c	וְקַוֵּה אֶל־יְהוָה:	Wait for (hope in) YHWH!

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12 The word נפש is translated here as “throat” because it probably is intended to call to mind the murderous intentions of the witnesses – cf. the metaphor of “eating” in v. 2b.

## 2. PSALM 27 IN VIEW OF A LINEAR READING OF PSALMS 25-27

### 2.1 Repetition of Keywords in Psalms 25-27

Psalms 25, 26 and 27 share many Hebrew roots. These lexemes may give hints to the process of linking adjacent psalms (or alternating ones) to one another through a process called *concatenatio* or “chaining” psalms together. Some repetitions are more significant than others, especially the ones that point to a shared motif or theme or when the repetition is singularly conspicuous (because of rarity of the lexeme or a significant syntactic similarity). These phenomena may give insight into compositional and editorial processes regarding the psalms, their configuration in the group and, consequently, some associated hermeneutic horizons. We provide a list of the shared stems (particles and commonly encountered words<sup>13</sup> are excluded).

Keyword	Ps 25	Ps 26	Ps 27	Keyword	Ps 25	Ps 26	Ps 27
איב	25:2, 19		27:2, 6	ירה	25:8, 12		27:11
אני	25:16	26:1, 11	27:3	ישב		26:4, 5	27:4
אסף		26:9	27:10	ישע	25:5		27:1, 9
ארח	25:4, 10		27:11	לבב\לב	25:17	26:2	27:3, 8, 14
ארץ	25:13		27:13	למען	25:7, 11		27:11
בטח	25:2	26:1	27:3	מי	25:12		27:1, 27:1
בית		26:8	27:4	מישור		26:12	27:11
דוד	25:1	26:1	27:1	נפש	25:1, 13, 20	26:9	27:12
דרך	25:4, 5, 8, 9, 12		27:11	פנה	25:16		27:8, 9

13 Like the names דוד and יהוה and the noun כל.



חי		26:9	27:1, 4, 13	קוה	25:3, 5, 21		27:14
חמס	25:19		27:12	קול		26:7	27:7
חנן	25:16	26:11	27:7	ראה	25:18, 19		27:13
טוב	25:7, 8, 13		27:13	רעע		26:5	27:2
יום	25:5		27:4, 5	שמע		26:7	27:7
ירא	25:12, 14		27:1, 3	תם	25:21	26:1, 11	

Table 1: Keyword repetition in Psalms 25; 26 and 27

## 2.2 The Context Created by Psalms 25 and 26 for Understanding Psalm 27

All three these psalms are psalms of “David”, and all three can be described as prayers<sup>14</sup> which refer to *problems* that the suppliant experiences and for which he asks help. Despite difficulties, distress, threats and isolation experienced by the psalmist, all three these psalms also express *trust* in YHWH who can *save* the suppliant from his problems. Distress is caused by the sins of the psalmist in the past and YHWH’s righteous judgement, but especially also by *enemies*, corrupt people who act treacherously and who hate the psalmist and want to kill him. YHWH is presented as a righteous judge, but also as a *gracious* God who is forgiving and acts as the *protector* and *guide* on the road of life, so that the psalmist will be *saved* from sins, judgement, threats to his *life* and *humiliation*. YHWH will provide *access* to those who trustingly *wait* for him by allowing them into his *presence* in the *temple* where there is *safety*, protection, and *blessings* for which the psalmist will in return give *thanks*.

**Psalm 25** mentions as *problems* youthful “sins” and “transgressions” of the psalmist (25:7), but also the danger of having his “feet” caught in a net (25:15),<sup>15</sup> enemies who intend to “shame” him (25:2, cf. 20), a great

14 The supplication is, however, mixed in each case with other forms of expression such as declarations of trust and teaching directed towards fellow humans.

15 It is not explained who the hunters are who want to capture him in a net, but according to Ps 31:5-9, it is the enemy who plan his fall.

number of opponents who hate him with a “violent hatred” (שנאת חמס, 25:19) and his being in a state of loneliness and depravity (יחיד ועני, 25:16). The suppliant nevertheless *trusts* in YHWH (בטח, 25:2) and knows that those who “wait” for (קוה) YHWH will not be shamed (בוש) publicly (25:3, cf. 21). They are those who fear (ירא) YHWH (25:14) and who try to live an upright life (תם and ישר, 25:21). He can therefore ask YHWH to “turn” to him (פנה) and “be gracious” (חנן) to him (25:16). He also asks YHWH to “instruct” him (ידע *hi*, למד, דרך *hi*, ירה *hi*) about the “road” (דרך, ארח, 25:4, 5, 12) of life since YHWH is “good” (טוב, 25:7-8), and those who worship him will enjoy the blessings of “goodness” (טוב) which includes the promise that his descendants will take possession of the “land” (25:13).<sup>16</sup>

In **Psalm 26**, the *prayer* of 25:21 for dedication and uprightness (תם וישר) changes into a *confession* of dedication and righteous conduct (בתמי הלכתי, 26:1-3). The psalmist also *promises* that he will keep on living like this (ואני בתמי אלך, 26:11). His *problem*, however, is partially still the same as in Ps 25, since he fears that his “life” (נפש) might be swept away by YHWH together with “sinners” (חטאים) and “bloodthirsty people” (אנשי דמים, 26:9), thus those who threaten him directly in Ps 25:19. His life is possibly still under threat from them, but his prayer is focused on *dissociating* (שנא, לא בוא, לא ישב) himself from corrupt people, evildoers and the wicked (רשעים, מרעים, געלמים, מת־שוא, 26:4-5). In contrast to them, he conducts his life while focussing on the “loyalty” (חסד) and “faithfulness” (אמת) of YHWH (26:3) on which he also based his supplication in 25:6, 7 and, 10. He expresses the desire to be in the *presence* of YHWH in the temple (he loves the “habitation” of YHWH’s house and the “place” where his glory dwells, 26:6-8) and wants to worship him there (he wants to “go around” the altar, proclaiming *thanksgiving* aloud) rather than spend time with the wrong people. The *danger* he experiences is that his life might be wrongfully “taken away” (אסף) when YHWH punishes the evildoers (26:9). As in Ps 25, the psalmist still prays for YHWH’s *grace* (חנן, 26:11; cf. 25:16). He still pronounces his *trust* in YHWH (בטח, 26:1; cf. 25:2) and is confident that his feet stand on “level ground” (מישור), consequently his progress to the temple and YHWH’s presence will not be hampered (26:12). YHWH has thus “brought out his feet” (רגל) from the

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16 There are clear connections between Ps 25 and Proverbs in the acrostic form as well as the contents of the psalm (e.g., the motif of trust in YHWH, teaching terminology, the metaphor of life as a road to be travelled, restoration of the land to the righteous, etc.).

net (רשת, 25:15) so that his “foot” (רגל) now stands on level ground (26:12). The connection between the prayer for “integrity and uprightness” (תם וישר) to preserve the suppliant in 25:21 and his confession of his own “integrity” (תם, 26:1 and 11) and having his foot on “level ground” (מישור, a cognate noun from the stem ישר, 26:12) should not be overlooked.

When one turns the page to **Psalm 27**, the preparation for its interpretation is complete. When the psalmist says YHWH is his “*salvation*” (ישעי, 27:1, cf. also 27:9), this echoes the confession in 25:5 that YHWH is the “God of his *salvation*” (אלהי ישעי) for whom he “*waits* (קוה) all day”. It also explains his exhortation to himself in 27:14 to persevere in this “*waiting*” for (קוה) YHWH. The “*evildoers*” (מרעים) who seem to threaten him in 27:2 are the same “*evildoers*” (מרעים) for whose assembly he explained his “hate” in 26:5. This abhorrence is thus for a group of people who were said in 25:19 to be his enemies who also “hate” (שנא) him first with a “violent” (חמס) hate. Their “violence” (חמס) is a characteristic which is thus confirmed in 27:12. The three psalms together describe the characteristics of the psalmist as being incompatible with those of his opponents and defines their relationship as one of mutual detestation.

While the psalmist expressed his disgust for “sitting” (ישב) twice in 26:4) with corrupt people, evildoers and the wicked in 26:4-5, it follows logically that he rather wants to “sit”, or, as the verb can also be translated, “dwell” (ישב) in the house of YHWH all the days of his life (27:4).<sup>17</sup> Note in this regard the promise in 25:13 that the “soul” of the one who fears YHWH will “abide (ליזן) in goodness”. Like ישב, it is a verb from the semantic field of dwelling. In Ps 27:13, the “goodness” of YHWH is still the blessing hoped for. The desire to be in the *presence* of YHWH for love of him as in 26:8 thus comes to full fruition in 27:4. In Ps 25:16, the psalmist pleaded with YHWH to “turn” (פנה) to him because he was “lonely and afflicted” (יחיד ועני). The same prayer is repeated in Ps 27:9-10, although it is now formulated differently: The psalmist now asks YHWH not to “hide” his *face* (פנה) from him, to not “turn him away” (נטש) or “forsake” (עזב) him. When he refers in verse 10 to his father and mother having “abandoned” (עזב) him, it calls to mind the *isolation* of Ps 25:16, since יחיד, which is used there to express being “lonely”, also has the meaning of being an “only” child. This suggests that the expression of being “abandoned” in 27:10 and

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17 This stich is usually considered to be an interpolation from Ps 23:6. So, for example Kraus (1978:367), who describes it as poorly integrated in terms of syntax and subject matter. This contextual reading demonstrates that it makes perfect sense whether it was a later interpolation or not.

“accepted” or “taken in” (קָסַם) in the same verse is to be interpreted metaphorically and not literally. Psalm 26 in turn speaks of the voluntary isolation of the psalmist, since he detests the company of evildoers (26:4-5).

Psalm 27 also links up with all the pronouncements in Ps 25 about YHWH *teaching* those who fear him the *road* of life and *guiding* them through life (25:4, 8, 12) when the psalmist asks YHWH to *teach* him his road and *guide* him on a “level” road (27:11, cf. the same metaphor in 26:12). In all three these psalms there is also the plea for YHWH to “be *gracious*” (25:16; 26:11 and 27:7) towards the psalmist and the expectation that this will happen and result in the psalmist’s enjoyment of the “*goodness*” of YHWH is a logical consequence (cf. 25:13 and 27:13). The temple is portrayed as a safe haven of asylum and protection in Ps 27 (“stronghold” in 27:2; “shelter” and “cover” in 27:5), but it is emphasised that this is a result of YHWH’s presence (the “beauty of YHWH” in 27:4; his “face” in 27:8-9) and benevolent grace (“take in” in 27:10; “goodness” and “land of the living” in 27:13) towards the psalmist.

The repetition of important keywords and motifs and the development of themes from psalm to psalm suggest a process of editing which has created a narrative and hermeneutical context for interpreting each of the three psalms. According to Barbiero (1999:365), the theme of *trust* in YHWH connects not only Pss 25-27, but also Ps 28 where it is mentioned in 28:7. Trust functions in these psalms in the context of the threat from “enemies” (אֹיֵב in 25:2, 19; 27:2, 6) who are unmasked as “wicked people” in 26:5, but the members of the out-group display the same treacherous, murderous disposition in all three these psalms.<sup>18</sup> The metaphoric representation of life as a journey, which is used in all three psalms, is correctly understood by Barbiero as a reference to the way of the Torah, but simultaneously a reference to the journey to the temple, which in turn serves as a metaphor for the presence of YHWH (Barbiero 1999:370-371). It is therefore the journey towards the temple, towards the presence of YHWH, as well as enjoyment of the protection and blessings he bestows there, associated with thanksgiving and praise, that form a *Leitmotiv* in Pss 25-27, and this is constructed combining road and temple imagery.

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18 Cf. “wantonly treacherous” in 25:3; “violent hatred” in 25:19; “falsehood” in 26:4; “bloodthirsty men” in 26:9; “evil” and “bribes” in 26:10; “to eat up my flesh” in 27:2; and “false” and “violence” in 27:12.

## 2.3 *Discussion of Specific Aspects and Themes*

### 2.3.1 The Gattung of the Three Psalms

The three psalms of the series Pss 25-27 do not belong to the same Gattung, and it is difficult to define the Gattung of each one on its own. Ps 25 is (an individual) lament with supplication, but it also contains clear wisdom teaching (especially 25:8-14), lending also to the prayer sections a wisdom (teaching) character.<sup>19</sup> Ps 26, with its combination of different formal and content-related moments, like Ps 27, does not simply fit into a conventional genre, although some would describe it as a supplication with a possible background in a legal process involving false accusations.<sup>20</sup> But, in addition to the protestations of innocence and assurances of integrity, there are confessional statements and a strong temple reference which is unusual for a supplication. As in Pss 25 and 26, Ps 27 also contains a supplication, but it is combined with statements that can be described as “confessions of trust”. In all three psalms, in fact, there are confessions that the psalmist “trusts” or has “trusted” (בטח) in the beginning of the psalm (25:2; 26:1; 27:3), possibly a clear indication of the work of the editors. The group Pss 25-34 is thus opened in Pss 25-27 with three generic disparate pieces, but which have conspicuous connections. Pss 25 and 26 also display numerous characteristics which point in the direction of having been composed by people who were schooled in wisdom.<sup>21</sup> For Ps 27, which is in focus here, there is no conclusive indication for the combination of its two distinct parts – unless one considers the two preceding psalms with their “composite” character to be a preparation for Ps 27 with its “bipartite” character. Barbiero (1999:362) explains the strange sequence of confidence and then supplication in Ps 27 as an attempt to create a psalm with a chiasmic arrangement of sections, but with an inverted sequence of elements in comparison to the similarly chiasmatically arranged Ps 26. However it be, through the frame formed by Pss 25/34 as well as the wisdom features

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19 About the combination of supplication and wisdom in Ps 25, cf. Petrány (2015:85, 88-96), who defines the unique art of wisdom in the Psalms in comparison to Proverbs, and who writes, “These wisdom passages, rather than detaching the psalm from the vertical movement of cultic or liturgical discourse, implicitly allow for or even promote the psalm’s use in the context of worship” (96).

20 Botha (2011) has argued that it was composed by the wisdom editors of the Psalms and only makes use of imagery from priestly service.

21 For the arguments, cf. Botha (2007 and 2011).

present in Ps 26, the final composition of Book I of the Psalms was thus given a wisdom character, a feature which is also present in the final group consisting of Pss 35-41.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.3.2 The Role of the Temple

The opening psalm of the group Pss 25-34 is without a direct reference to the temple. The temple is hinted at when the psalmist asks in 25:16 that YHWH would “turn” (פנה) to him<sup>23</sup> and when he says in 25:20 that he “takes refuge” (חסה) in YHWH. The temple is then mentioned again only in the middle of Ps 26 where the speaker, in opposition to a gathering of wrongdoers (26:4-5), declares his love for the “place where your glory dwells”, the “habitation of your house” (26:6-8). But, as a theme, the temple is strongly present in Pss 26 and 27. Psalm 26 revolves around the temple, since the altar is mentioned in the central colon (26:6). In both Pss 26 and 27 there is mention of the “dwelling place”, in Ps 26 the habitation of YHWH himself or his “glory” (26:8); in Ps 27 then the longed-for (and later reached) place of residence of the suppliant himself (27:4, cf. 27:6, 8, 13). The “glory” (כבוד) of God present there is correspondingly perceived “visually” in Ps 27:4 and 14 as the “loveliness” of YHWH (for the associated ideas of an audience, see Hartenstein 2008:103-104). In both Pss 26 and 27, the presence in the temple is associated with proclamation and praise (*Todah*) (26:7), with jubilation and musical offering (27:6).

### 2.3.3 Refuge and Trust

Psalm 26 shares with Ps 27 the theme of the temple (see above), but the motif of taking refuge with God or in the temple (27:5, also vv. 1, 10) is not present in Ps 26. This topic is, however, introduced in Ps 25, even if it has no direct reference to the temple. This is most clearly done at the end of the psalm, in 25:20, in the phrase “because I have sought protection in/with you (חסיתי)”. Although the root חסה used here does not appear in Ps 27, the latter psalm does contain several similar notions from the motif of “seeking refuge” (see 27:1, 5, 10). The related word “trust” (בטח) in God, on the other hand, is present in Ps 25, where it forms part of the frame of the psalm

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22 Cf. especially Ps 37, certainly also Pss 36; 39 and 41. Concerning Ps 37 and the final group in the first Book of Psalms, cf. Petrány (2015:137-155). Botha (2007:563-564) has argued that Pss 25 and 37 display so many similarities, that they were probably composed by the same person or group of people. For the wisdom features of Ps 39, cf. Botha (2017:240-264).

23 Cf. also 27:9.

with the salvation motif (25:2, 20), as in Ps 27, where it forms the basis and outcome of the statement of refuge at the end of stanza I (see 27:1, 4).<sup>24</sup> The fear of God mentioned in Ps 25, to which God responds with guidance (25:12, 14, cf. 4-5, 8-9), is combined in Ps 27 with the triumph of fearlessness over external powers (see 27:11). So, in the reading arrangement, the sanctuary is introduced in Ps 25 and the temple in Ps 26. In Ps 27, the two themes appear combined and amplified – covering both parts of the psalm (27:1-6 and 7-14). In that sense, the sequential placement of Ps 27 makes good sense. It will be shown later that the two motifs appear again in Ps 31 and are, at the same time, accentuated in a new way (see below).

### 2.3.4 Enemies and Distress

Slightly simplified, one can say that in Ps 25, the first-person speaker sees himself, namely his guilty disposition, above all as a “problem”, so that he needs salvation or mercy (compare 25:11, also 5-10, 15-18, 21) – even though this distress about sin coincides with enemy problems (see 25:2, 19-20, the framework of the psalm) and isolation (25:16-18). In Ps 26, the suppliant still calls on the “grace” (חֲנֹן) of YHWH to “save” (פָּדָה) him (26:11; cf. 25:16 חֲנֹן and נִצַּל *hi*, 25:20). He asserts his innocence and emphasises his righteousness, but this happens in order to dissociate himself from wrongdoers. In Ps 27, we have a third variant, apart from confession of guilt or innocence. Faced by malefactors, adversaries and enemies, metaphorically represented as dangerous animals (or cannibals) or an army at war, the speaker confesses his courage because YHWH supports him (27:1-5). But in the second part of the psalm (from 27:7 onwards) the enemies are back. They are now more clearly profiled: They are depicted as *lying* witnesses and *false* accusers, and a legal procedure appears as background (see 27:11-12).<sup>25</sup> Thus, a hint is taken from Ps 26, where the opponents of the suppliant are associated with *falsehood*, *hypocrisy* and *bribery*, a similar offense as in Ps 27 (see 26:4, 10). As far as distress is concerned, in Ps 25, among other things, the nonspecific term “(my) distresses” (צָרוֹת, cf. 25:17, 22) is used, which is absent in the other two psalms; in Ps 27 there is instead the analogous personal description “my oppressors” (צָרִי, cf. 27:2, 12). In Ps 27 the enemies of Ps 25 appear in the first part (Ps 27:1-6), but their effect is removed since they are described as being shamed (stumbling and falling, 27:2); in the second part (Ps 27:7-

24 Moreover, it also appears in Ps 26:1.

25 In Pss 25:19 und 27:12 their behaviour is connected with “violence” (חָמָס).

14), the adversaries from Ps 26 who operate with lies and deception, appear in the context of a petition (again) as threatening and giving cause for the invocation of YHWH to salvation.

### 2.3.5 Salvation and Hope

If one begins with the root *שׁע* and the standard notion of “rescue, salvation”, this appears in Ps 25 in the form of the address “God of my *salvation*” (25:5). The same phrase, together with the synonym “my help”, is also found in 27:9, after YHWH was extolled as “(my light and) my *salvation*” at the beginning of the psalm (27:1) and the term thus connects the two parts of the psalm (it does not appear in Ps 26).<sup>26</sup> In Ps 25:5, the address “God of my *salvation*” is immediately followed by the statement “I wait for (hope in) you” (*קוֹיִתִּי*); this wording is repeated in Ps 25:21 at the conclusion of the psalm (before the final prayer for Israel). This term appears for the first time in reference to those who “wait” for or “hope” in YHWH (as a participle) in Ps 25:3, making it clear that the concept and fact are important for the psalmist. In Ps 27, the same verb also appears twice, both at the conclusion of the psalm and in identical form, as a double exhortation: “Wait for (hope in) (*קוּה*) YHWH!” This is to be regarded as conspicuous in terms of editorial work, since the confessional statements from Ps 25 are now taken up and recalled. This moment is further enhanced when it is considered that the final verse of Ps 31 also repeats this same exhortation (31:25). The final verse of Ps 27 (like the Israel-conclusion in Ps 25:22) was thus probably editorially added to the psalm in connection with its insertion into the group. The fact that the motif of “waiting” or “hoping” is formative for the cluster Pss 25-34 can also be seen later in Ps 31:15 and further on in the same cluster as well (compare Ps 33:18, 22).

### 2.3.6 Guidance on the Road of Life

The topic of instruction appears multiple times in our series of psalms, often associated with “road” conceptuality. It begins with three petitions in Ps 25:4-5 in the context of salvation and “waiting” for or “hoping” in YHWH. Derivatives of the root *דָּרַךְ* play an important role, at least in the first half of the psalm (compare 25:4, 5, 8, 9, 12, also the “feet” in 25:15). It features with requests and statements about YHWH as guide in Ps 25. Those who are privileged to have YHWH as a guide and instructor, are those who

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26 Pss 25 and 26 are connected through the plea to be “saved” (cf. 25:22; 26:11, similar 25:20) as well as “grace”-concepts (cf. 25:6, 7, 10; 26:3), that lack in Ps 27.



“wait” for or “hope” in him (25:5), (repentant) “sinners” (25:8), the “humble” (25:9), those who “keep his covenant and testimonies” (25:10), and the person who “fears” YHWH (25:12). In Ps 26, the psalmist speaks of ethically compliant “walking” (הלך, cf. 26:1, 3, 11), and he “walks” in YHWH’s *faithfulness* (אמת), with his “steadfast love” (חסד) as guiding principle (he has it “before” his “eyes”, 26:3). This establishes a direct connection with 25:10, since it is stated there that “all the paths of YHWH are *steadfast love* (חסד) and *faithfulness* (אמת)”. In Ps 27, the theme is less pronounced and linked directly to the enemies of the psalmist (27:11). However, the psalmist asks to be led on a “level path” (ארה מישור), reminiscent of the “level ground” (מישור) on which his “foot” stood in 26:12 and YHWH’s action of plucking his “feet” out of the net in 25:15. Walking on the road of life is beset with the danger of “stumbling” and “falling”. There is therefore a direct connection between the “evildoers”, “adversaries” and “enemies” who “*stumble and fall*” in 27:2 and the request in 27:11 to be led on a “level path”. The *level path* is in turn explained in Ps 26:11-12 as the intention to “walk in integrity” under YHWH’s grace, and in 26:2-3 to “walk in integrity” under guidance of YHWH’s “steadfast love and faithfulness”. This in turn directs the attention back to the statement in 25:10 that “all YHWH’s paths are *steadfast love and faithfulness* for those who keep his *covenant* and his *testimonies*”. A righteous person travels successfully on the road of life under the direction of YHWH through his testimonies, keeping his eyes on YHWH (25:15) and on his steadfast love (26:3), escaping the net laid by enemies (25:15) and avoiding falling because of false accusation (27:12). This journey towards YHWH is characterised by “trust” in him (25:2; 26:1; 27:3) and willingness to “wait” for him (25:3, 5, 21; 27:14).

### 3. PSALM 27 IN VIEW OF A CONCENTRIC READING OF PSALMS 25-34

Our comparison of Ps 27 with Ps 31 is done because the group Pss 25-34 has a concentric structure. That they were intended to be read together is proven by the sheer number of shared words in both psalms. Psalm 31 thus throws new light on Ps 27 and *vice versa*. Although the focus is here on Ps 27 and its understanding in view of Ps 31, the connections between Ps 25 and Ps 31 will also be considered, since Ps 25 is the opening text of this arranged composition and there are numerous connections between it and Ps 31.

### 3.1 Keywords Repeated in Psalms 25; 27 and 31

Almost every single verse of Ps 31 seems to echo a motif from either Ps 25 or Ps 27:

Keyword	Ps 25	Ps 27	Ps 31	Keyword	Ps 25	Ps 27	Ps 31
אור		27:1	31:17	נחה		27:11	31:4
איב	25:2, 19	27:2, 6	31:9, 16	נטה		27:9	31:3
אמץ		27:14	31:25	נפש	25:1, 20		31:8, 10, 14
אמר		27:8	31:15	נצל	25:20		31:3, 16
אמת	25:5, 10		31:6	נצר	25:10, 21		31:24
בוש	25:2, 3, 20		31:2, 18	סביב		27:6	31:14
בטח	25:2	27:3	31:7, 15	סך/סכה		27:5	31:21
בית		27:4	31:3	סתר		27:5, 9	31:21
חזק	25:14		31:25	עון	25:11		31:11
חי		27:1, 4, 13	31:11	פדה	25:22		31:6
חנן	25:16	27:7	31:10	פנה	25:16	27:8, 9	31:17, 21
חסד	25:6, 7, 10		31:8, 17, 22	צור		27:5	31:3
חסה	25:20		31:2, 20	צפן		27:5	31:20, 21
טוב	25:7	27:13	31:20	צרה	25:17, 22		31:8
יצא	25:15, 17		31:5	ראה	25:18, 19	27:13	31:8, 12

ירא	25:12, 14	27:1, 3	31:20	רב	25:11		31:20, 14
ישע	25:5	27:1, 9	31:3, 17	רגל	25:15		31:9
לב/לבב	25:17	27:8, 8, 14	31:25	שמע		27:7	31:23, 14
למען	25:11, 7		31:4	שנא	25:19		31:7
מעוז		27:1	31:3, 5				

Table 2: Keyword repetition in Psalms 25; 27 and 31

Ps 31 revisits all the themes first encountered in Ps 25, while a fair number of these were subsequently refined or redefined in Ps 27. However, those already found in Pss 25 and 27 are provided with a new context if they are repeated in Ps 31; in addition to that, there are many keywords shared only by Pss 27 and 31, while the ones shared by Pss 25 and 31 (not found in Ps 27) also contribute towards shifting accents and horizons of interpretation. The outline compiled in the previous main section can still be used and just refined here. The major themes are still *problems* experienced by the psalmist; his *response* to these problems; the characteristics and actions of *YHWH*; and the focus on the *temple*. Under problems are included the *guilt* of his sins, the *distress* he experiences; and *enemies* who threaten the psalmist’s life and who want to *trap* and *shame* him; his response is still to *trust* in YHWH, pray for *grace*, hoping to experience *salvation* from YHWH, enjoy his *guidance* and to be *protected* on the road of life. These actions of YHWH are still very strongly associated with the *temple* as a place of *refuge* where his *blessings* can be *enjoyed* in his *presence*. The psalmist just needs to have *courage* to *wait* patiently for YHWH. If he does, there is the expectation of *blessings* which will give rise to *thanksgiving* and *praise*. The development of these motifs will now be discussed.

### 3.1.1 Trouble and Distress; Honour and Shame

Ps 25 uses synonyms such as transgressions (פשעים), sin (חטאים) and guilt (עון) (25:7, 11) to express the notion that the psalmist is aware of his own moral deficiency. Forgiveness is specifically asked for his *guilt* (עון) in 25:11. In Ps 31, the motif is still present, but this psalm focuses more on the *effect* of the guilt on the life of the psalmist: He says his life is “spent with sorrow”, his “years with sighing”, and that his “strength *stumbles*”

because of his “*guilt*” (עוֹן, 31:11, cf. 25:11).<sup>27</sup> After lamenting about the “troubles” (צָרוֹת) of his heart and his “distresses” (מִצּוֹקוֹת) in 25:17, he asks YHWH to “see” (רָאָה) his “affliction” (עָנִי) and his “trouble” (עַמְל) (25:18). According to Ps 31, YHWH has done exactly that, having “*seen*” (רָאָה) his “affliction” (עָנִי) and “*known*” the “distresses” (צָרוֹת) of his soul (31:8). Psalm 25 makes it clear that the confessions of guilt should be understood as attestations of humility on the part of the psalmist.<sup>28</sup> To deny guilt amounts to arrogance, and this is a characteristic of the wicked (cf. 31:18-19). Acknowledging the reality of guilt and its effects (31:10-11) constitutes recognition of the need for help, grace and forgiveness from YHWH (25:7-9).

The social values of *honour* and *shame* therefore play an important role in Pss 25, 27 and 31, although they are perhaps less pronounced in Ps 27.<sup>29</sup> The first real petition of the psalmist in Ps 25 was that he would “not be shamed” (אַל בּוֹשׁ) and that his enemies would not “exult” (עֲלֵץ) over him (25:2). This request to be protected against *shame* is repeated in 25:20, and this inclusion within Ps 25 serves as a witness to its importance. In Ps 31 it still is a primary concern. It is the first real supplication of that psalm, and the formulation of the request about this in 31:2 forms a chiasmus with Ps 25:20, indicating its importance also to the editors of this group of psalms:

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27 The verb כָּשַׁל “stumble” was used in 27:2 to indicate the shaming of the enemy during the attack. In 31:11 it indicates the difficulty experienced by the psalmist himself. Psalm 32 is not discussed in this article, but it should be kept in mind that Ps 31 is preparing the way for the discussion of guilt in Ps 32.

28 YHWH is said to teach “sinners” his way (“the way” 25:8), and he does the same for the “humble” (“his way” 25:9) and the one who “fears” him (“the way that he should choose”, 25:12; “his covenant” 25:14). A humble person is thus one who acknowledges his or her sin in submission to YHWH.

29 In Ps 27:6, the psalmist expresses the expectation that his “head” will be “lifted up above” his enemies, signifying triumph and honour. The same indication of the dishonour of the enemy is represented by the fact that they “stumble and fall” when they attack the psalmist in 27:2. The statement of the psalmist about his “father and mother” having forsaken him in 27:10 describes shame, since rejection by the family signifies lack of honour and shame. That YHWH will “take” him “in”, in turn, is a claim to the restoration of honour.

<i>Ps 25:20</i>	<i>Ps 31:2</i>
A Deliver (נצל <i>hi</i> ) me!	C I take refuge (חסה) in you
B Let me not be put to shame (אל בוש)!	B Let me never be put to shame (אל בוש)!
C I take refuge (חסה) in you	A Deliver (פלט <i>pi</i> ) me!

*Table 3: The chiasmus between Pss 25:20 and 31:2*

The request is again repeated in Ps 31:18, where the psalmist expands on his entreaty by asking YHWH that the *wicked* would rather be put to shame. In all three psalms, Pss 25, 27 and 31, the matter of honour should therefore also be understood in terms of the *arrogance* of the opponents of the psalmist. The psalmist’s humbleness before YHWH serves as motivation for his request to be protected against shame; emphasising the arrogance of the enemy serves the same function. Humbleness equals dependence on YHWH, and that is why the psalmist also emphasises in all three these psalms his “trust” (בטח) in YHWH (25:2; 27:3; 31:7, 15; cf. also 26:1). Trust appears in all three psalms under discussion here in the context of attacks by the enemy and serves as a distinguishing characteristic between him and his arrogant opponents (25:2-3; 27:3; 31:7, 14-15).

The same disposition of *humility* is also exemplified by the psalmist when he formulates the necessity to “wait” for or “hope” in (יחל, קוה) YHWH to act (25:3, 5, 21; 27:14; 31:25) and when he repeatedly declares that he takes “refuge” (חסה) in YHWH (25:20; 31:2, 20). Another description for humbleness is found in 25:9, where, in an aphorism, the psalmist declares that YHWH leads the “humble” (עני) in what is right and teaches them his way. References to social isolation such as being “lonely and afflicted” (יחיד ועני) in 25:16 also describe this attitude. As has been pointed out above, this description is matched in 27:10 with the statement that the “father and mother” of the psalmist have “forsaken” him. Although he declares in 27:1 that he does not “fear” (פחד) the enemy, he says in 31:12 that he himself has become an object of “dread” (פחד) to those who know him. This indicates his low social status, and this constitutes a claim to humility.

The arrogance of the enemies in contrast to this attitude is described in 25:3 with the expression that they are “wantonly treacherous” (בוגדים ריקם). From the verdict that it is they who will be “shamed” in the

same verse, one can infer that this action implies arrogance. The attacks of the enemies on a humble person thus imply that they are arrogant in the view of the psalmist, and this is equated to being “wicked” (31:18), also to be lying about the psalmist, because this is described as speaking “insolently” (עתק) in “pride and contempt” (בגאווה ובוז) (31:19) and acting “in pride” (עשה גאווה 31:24). All these descriptions point to *arrogance* on their part. In this group of psalms, verbal attacks by the enemy form a very important motif: Lying, plotting, and slander are mentioned or implied in 27:12 (“false witnesses”) (cf. also 26:4); 31:14 (“whispering”), 19 (“lying lips” which “speak” insolently against the righteous) and 21 (“plots”, “strife of tongues”).

The *isolation* (יחיד) (25:16) and danger of *shame* (25:2, 20) the psalmist initially petitioned about, seem to have increased, since he has now become a “reproach” (חרפה) to his neighbours, an object of “dread” to his acquaintances, and people who see him in the street even flee from him (31:12). In 27:10 it was the very close family of father and mother who were said to have “forsaken” (עזב) the psalmist, but in 31:12 he is cut off from all social connections. He is forgotten (שכח) like a dead person,<sup>30</sup> discarded like a broken vessel (31:13). The enemies still plot to take his life (31:14). It is true that YHWH has “taken him out” of the “net” they had hidden for him as he had stated confidently (31:5; cf. 25:15); that YHWH has set his “feet” in a broad place (31:9) as he had asked in different words in 27:11 (he asked to be led on a “level path”); that YHWH now “leads” him and “guides” him (31:4) as he had requested in 27:11 and before that in 25:4-5; even that YHWH has “redeemed” (פדה) him (31:6) as he had requested in 25:20 (נצל *hi*) and has “heard” the voice of his pleas when he cried for help (31:23) as he had asked to be heard in 27:7. But he still feels the need to ask YHWH to *listen* to him, to *rescue* him, to serve as a rock of *refuge* for him (31:3), very similar to the supplications in 25:20 and 27:7-9. In the cluster, the servant of YHWH remains in distress and therefore dependent on YHWH.

### 3.1.2 Grace and Salvation

In all three these psalms, there is the plea for YHWH to “show grace” to the psalmist (25:16; 27:7; 31:10). Exactly the same form of the verb חנן plus

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30 There is agony connected to this statement, since he asked YHWH in 25:7 to “forget” (to “remember not”) his sins, but to remember him according to his (YHWH’s) steadfast love and for the sake of his goodness. Fortunately, he still has praise for YHWH’s “goodness” in 31:20.

suffix is used in all three cases, and this same form is also found in 26:11 and 30:11. From the point of view of the psalms as an edited collection, it is clear that this aspect was considered to be very important by the editors. Why does the psalmist need YHWH's grace according to these psalms? Because of his *isolation* (25:16); the danger of being accidentally *punished* with unrepentant sinners (26:11); then again because of *isolation* (27:7-10); and because he is in physical *distress* that resulted from his guilt (31:10). It was argued above that asking for grace is a sign of humility and dependence on YHWH, parallel to declaring trust in him as saviour. These psalms teach that YHWH is ready and willing to help those who approach him with this kind of attitude. His *mercy* (רחמים), *steadfast love* (חסד), and *faithfulness* (אמת) are emphasised in the psalms of the group (25:5, 6, 7, 10; 26:3; 31:6, 8), since these characteristics serve as a basis for the expectation that the psalmist will be saved. They form the basis for his *trust* in YHWH. He is described as the “God of salvation” (ישע) of the psalmist (25:5; 27:1) who can be approached to “save” (הושיע) him (31:3 and 17). Psalm 25:20 has the additional supplication “deliver me” (נצל), and this exact request is repeated in 31:3 and 16.

A similar important and related motif in these psalms is that of “*refuge*”. It is represented through the confession of the psalmist that he has “taken refuge” (חסה) in YHWH in 25:20 and 31:2, but also through the descriptions of the *temple* that point to its function as a place of protection and asylum: “Rock” (צור, 27:5; 31:3), “stronghold” (מעוז, 27:1; 31:3, 5), “hut” (סכה/סד, 27:5; 31:21), “house” (בית, 26:8; 27:4; 31:3). In this regard there is a very strong connection between Pss 27 and 31,<sup>31</sup> although Ps 27 emphasises trust in this (27:1, 5) and Ps 31 formulates this as requests (31:3), the latter psalm also contains pronouncements of trust in this regard (31:4, 4, 22). The psalmist is assured that he, and others like him, will be *hidden* from threats through access to the temple, and this is expressed in both psalms with a verb and noun derived from the stem סתר as well as the verb צפן: He will “*hide*” (צפן) (27:5; 31:20) the psalmist in his “shelter”, he will “*conceal*” (סתר) him under the “*cover*” (סתר) of his tent or of his presence (27:5; 31:21).<sup>32</sup>

The important place accorded to this motif in Pss 27 and 31 relate to the focus of the whole group of psalms on the temple, YHWH's presence there,

31 According to Barbiero (1999:486) צור מעוז in 31:3 establishes a direct connection to מעוז in 27:1 and צור in 27:5.

32 Barbiero (1999:486) identifies also this correspondence as a direct connection between Pss 27 and 31.

and the enjoyment of the privileges he accords to those who are granted access to him.

### 3.1.3 The Presence of YHWH in the Temple and His Guidance

It is very interesting that Ps 31:4 makes a connection between the temple as a place of *refuge* and YHWH's *guidance*: "You are my *rock* and my *fortress*; and for your name's sake you *lead* me and *guide* me". "Rock" and "fortress" are metaphors for YHWH's protection in this verse, but both words refer to Ps 27, namely 27:1 and 5, and have clear temple connotations.<sup>33</sup> This confirms Barbiero's observation noted earlier in this article that the journey of life in these psalms is a journey to the presence of YHWH in the temple. The enemies threaten the progress of the psalmist, laying a net for him or accusing him falsely.<sup>34</sup> Through his personal involvement as teacher and guide, YHWH counters the threat of the enemies (25:4-5), enabling the psalmist to walk in integrity (25:20; 26:1, 11) on a level road (26:12; 27:11) or in a broad place (31:9) on the road of life, but according to Ps 27, towards YHWH's presence in the temple (27:4). The road is YHWH's way (27:11), involving "what is right" (25:9), characterised by his "steadfast love and faithfulness" (25:10), and it involves choices one has to make in life (25:12). The contents of what YHWH teaches, is contained in his *covenant* (25:14) as well as his *Torah* (עדות "testimonies" is used to refer to this in 25:10). The destination involves "*staying overnight*" (לִין) in "*goodness*" (25:13). This "goodness" of YHWH is also mentioned in 27:13 and 31:20 and forms a connecting link between these three psalms. Such "goodness" refers to a *blessed life*, linked to the promised *land* (cf. 25:13; 27:13), but it is also connected to the temple (cf. the parallel concept of the "beauty" of YHWH in 27:4). A permanent stay in the temple is the ultimate symbolic destiny, since this is where the psalmist wants to " *dwell*" (27:4), not only "spend the night" (25:13), although the verbs לִין and שָׁב can be understood as synonyms in this regard. In this process of journeying to his presence, YHWH is asked, in typical audience terminology, not to "turn his face away" (27:9), but

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33 Cf. also the references to YHWH as a "stronghold" in 27:1 and his action of lifting the psalmist on a "rock" in 27:5.

34 According to 25:15, the enemies lay a net for the psalmist's feet (25:15), and the "leading" and "guiding" of the psalmist in 31:4 are connected in the following verse (31:5) with YHWH's taking the psalmist out of the net they have hidden for him, making YHWH his "refuge". Ps 27:11 also makes a connection between the enemies and the need for guidance.



towards the psalmist (31:17; cf. also 25:16). When that happens, the psalmist can “see” his beauty (27:4; cf. 27:13) and experience his *blessings* (25:8, 13, 14; 31:20). That is when YHWH lets his face “shine” on the psalmist (31:17), reminiscent of his description of YHWH as his “light” in 27:1. This in turn leads to celebration with *thanksgiving* (26:7; 27:6), *rejoicing* and gladness (31:8) and *praise* for having been delivered (31:22).

#### 3.1.4 The Righteous Disposition

One aspect of the psalms of this collection that one can easily overlook is what it says about righteous conduct. Since these are all psalms “of David”, the implication is that they contain prayers, confessions, moral teaching and praise of an exemplary kind. Designations for the self or the in-group include “those who fear YHWH” (25:12, 14; 31:20), “sinners” (repentant sinners, that is, 25:8, cf. 26:9), the “humble” (25:9), those who walk in “integrity” and “uprightness” (25:21; 26:1, 11), YHWH’s “servant” (27:9; 31:17), his “faithful” (31:24), and those who “take refuge” in him (31:20; cf. also the repetition of the stem חסה). According to these three psalms, the ideal worshipper is the one who “lifts up” his or her “soul” or “eyes” to YHWH in prayer, thus respectfully acknowledging their dependence on him (cf. 25:1, 15; 26:3). Ps 31 uses two unique expressions in this regard, namely when the psalmist declares that he “commits” his “spirit” into the hand of YHWH (31:6) and that his “times” are in YHWH’s “hand” (31:16). The ideal worshipper is also one who acknowledges his or her iniquities (25:7, 11, 18); who therefore acknowledges his or her lack of self-sufficiency by describing the own character as “humble” (עני, 25:9) or one’s position as “depraved” (עני, 25:16, 18; 31:8) and who expresses trust in YHWH (25:2; 26:1; 27:3; 31:7, 15) and a willingness to wait for him or keep hoping in him (25:3, 5, 21; 27:14; 31:25). The disposition of being willing to “wait” for or put one’s “hope” in YHWH is important not only in the psalms investigated here, but even beyond, since (with the root יחל) it is repeated also in Ps 33 and, similar to Pss 25 and 27, emphasised at the end of that psalm (33:18, 22). The reader is subtly advised to conduct his or her life with integrity and uprightness like the psalmist does (25:21; 26:1, 11). Encouragement to act in this way is given by depicting YHWH as a graceful and approachable God who “guides sinners on his way” (25:8), who gives them his “friendship” (25:14) and makes known to them his “covenant” (25:14), thus establishing a very personal and intimate relationship with them. He is repeatedly described as the “good” God who rewards his faithful with “good things” (25:7, 8, 13; 27:13; 31:20).

### 3.1.5 The Gattungen of Psalms 27 and 31

Ps 31 is often (like its predecessor Ps 30)<sup>35</sup> classified as a psalm of thanksgiving (*Todah*).<sup>36</sup> Seen from its final part (31:20-31), this is fitting. The main part before it (vv. 10-19), on the other hand, is rather a lament and supplication. The Gattung of the first part (31:2-9) is the most uncertain, since it contains elements of both genres.<sup>37</sup> Thus, we have a similar phenomenon as is the case with Ps 27, its counterpart, which can also be described as a generic composite psalm. In both psalms, between Ps 27:6 and 7 and between Ps 31:19 and 20, there is an unmarked *caesura*. The one in Ps 31 is perceived as less harsh, probably because in Ps 31 the thanksgiving section follows the supplication section and not vice versa as in Ps 27. This makes logically and chronologically better sense. However, the first part of Ps 27 is usually not described as a “thanksgiving”, but a (more diffuse) “psalm of trust”. In any case, a “psalm of trust” and a “psalm of thanksgiving” are close to each other, and it will have to be clarified in another context whether the first part of Ps 27 is also to be described as *Todah* and how the two parts of Ps 27 are to be interpreted together. For our investigation it is enough to state that the two parts of both Pss 27 and 31 (also) correspond to the extent that both are generic composites and a supplication is combined with statements in which salvation seems to have already occurred. As we have shown elsewhere, Ps 31 is more intertextually significant than Ps 27 and is characterized by an “anthological style”.<sup>38</sup> Without being able to show in detail here to what extent it is the donor or recipient text, it is at any rate suspected of being secondary in comparison to Ps 27 due to its double composite nature – concerning both Gattung and type of pronouncement.<sup>39</sup> However, this will have to be substantiated based on a comparison of individual statements and motifs.

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35 On this, see Weber (2014a).

36 On the connecting keywords in the sequence of Pss 30-31, see Weber (2016:156).

37 While Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:191-192) describe vv. 2-9 as supplication with confessions of trust and promises of thanksgiving, they recognise a lament in the centre (vv. 10-19) framed by a song of thanksgiving, Weber (2016:155) sees vv. 2-9 (like vv. 10-19) as supplication. This complex matter cannot be investigated further here.

38 Cf. Botha (2019), on Ps 32.

39 The clear connections between Ps 31:2-4 (in Book I) and Ps 71:1-3 (in Book II, and without a David-ascription) should also be considered in this regard.

#### 4. CONCLUDING ASSESSMENT

Hossfeld & Zenger (1994) considered Pss 25-34 as a sub-group of the first Book of Davidic Psalms. This investigation (although only partial in relation to the subgroup) confirmed and strengthened the assumption of a deliberately edited composition in the group Pss 25-34 within the (proto-)Masoretic Psalms. Through placement, contiguity and concatenation as well as editing, updating or rewriting individual psalms in view of the composition of the group, new horizons of meaning and understanding were introduced, earlier ones set in a new light or inserted into a new frame of understanding. Compared to an (earlier) single use of psalms, performative accents are softened in favour of an oral or literary “meditation”. More significantly, prayer (whether lamentation or praise) are brought into a reciprocal relationship with wisdom: prayers would be used to ask and simultaneously to instruct, while instruction in turn would again lead to prayer.

With the sequential positioning of Ps 27 in the group Pss 25-27, we focused on the immediately preceding context. It became clear which statements in its two predecessors Ps 27 takes up, mitigates, amplifies or omits and which accents it brings. The following points are singled out and summarised:

- Ps 25 already introduced a generic compoundedness where forms of prayer, addressed to God, are mixed with forms of “teaching”, addressed to a human (mostly anonymous) audience. In that psalm, the “teaching” part is partially addressed in the form of requests to YHWH (25:8-10 and 12-14 contain direct “teaching”) and was thus given a (praying) theological accent. Ps 27 fits in with this, even though the transition from descriptive, horizontal communication in 27:1-6 to communication with God from verse 7 onwards is introduced more abruptly than in any other psalm of this group.
- The theme of “teaching” combined with motifs of the “way” not only has a definitive beginning in Ps 25 (see above), but it runs through the sequence of three psalms (and then continues further on). In Ps 25, teaching happens in the context of honour and shame. YHWH is requested to teach the psalmist as an expression of his humbleness and sinfulness, in contradistinction to the enemies who are arrogant and who want to shame him. Repentant sinners and humble people who fear YHWH, who put all their trust in him, and who seek refuge in him, have the right to ask YHWH for teaching. Teaching is YHWH’s way to protect the psalmist and his in-group against shame

and bring them to communion with him (25:14). In Ps 26, the ability to “walk” in YHWH’s faithfulness (26:3) serves as the distinguishing mark of the psalmist, fencing him off from false people and evildoers, and this also protects him against stumbling. He keeps YHWH’s steadfast love before his eyes and that is why he succeeds in reaching the temple where YHWH’s glory dwells. In Ps 27, the evildoers are identified as the psalmist’s enemies and YHWH is again asked to teach his way to the psalmist to prevent him from stumbling in error (27:11). When he reaches the temple, he will enjoy communion with YHWH and stay protected against the enemies.

- With YHWH as the one who embodies and grants salvation, the present, the past and the future are combined in Ps 25 (cf. 25:5, 21) and Ps 27 (27:1, 9). Linked to this and directed to the future is the motif of hoping on or waiting for God (the corresponding lexemes are missing in Ps 26). Here the trail of the confession at the end of Ps 25 (25:21, compare also v. 3) leads on to the double appeal at the end of Ps 27 (27:14), which is combined with a similar call to be strong and courageous at the end of Ps 31 (31:25) (see below). This obviously was an important motif for the editors of these psalms.

In addition to the sequential reading, the reception of the chiasmic structuring of the group of psalms was considered as a “cross-checking” measure. Compared to the sequential reading as a *lectio continua*, the concentric principle is well-known as a phenomenon of poetic design of individual psalms (and is recognized in the context of a *lectio repetitiva*). In the Psalms, however, it is not only present in single psalms, but also in psalm groupings like these. The analysis showed that Ps 31 is not only mutually connected to the corresponding Ps 27, but also has considerable interfaces with the opening Ps 25. The following selected aspects of these connections should be emphasised:

- The quality of being composed of more than one Gattung connects Pss 31 and 27, as it also connects Ps 27 with Ps 25. In all three psalms there is an aspect of supplication, although they differ in the type of supplication: In Ps 31 there is more mention of suffering than in Ps 27. They also differ in the way they combine supplication with statements that are not addressed to God but addressed to humans. Ps 25 contains more instruction directed at the in-group than Ps 27, while both Pss 27 and 31 contain more confessions of trust and praise than Ps 25. The style of Ps 31 is to be designated as “more anthological” than Ps 27. It has a great deal of contact with other texts

and was therefore probably inserted in the arrangement of this group with the intention of serving as a twin for Ps 27 and emphasising the motifs of Ps 25.

- Ps 31 was purposefully linked to Ps 25 through the themes of shame, salvation, refuge, and waiting for YHWH by repeating the prayer of 25:20 in 31:2 and connecting the confession in 25:21 with the exhortation in 31:25. These motifs are all also present in Ps 27, but are intensified in Ps 31 in comparison to Ps 27. Although most of the prayers in Ps 25 are reported to have been answered in Ps 31, the psalmist remains in a state of suffering, shame, verbal attack and increased isolation in comparison to Ps 27. In this regard it comes as a surprise that the psalmist praises YHWH for the abundant goodness he works “for those who take refuge in him” and thanks him for “the steadfast love and mercy” shown to him (31:22-23) as he had asked in 25:6. Ps 31 thus extensively refers back to the opening psalm of the group and only afterwards establishes connections with Ps 27 through the dense references to refuge and protection (31:3-4 and 20-22 at the end, cf. 27:1, 5, 10). The psalmist’s request to be taught and led on a level path (27:11) was granted (31:4 and 9), though, and there is still hope that the “goodness” of YHWH expected in 27:13 will be enjoyed by the psalmist himself (31:20). That is why jubilation, singing and making melody (27:6) as well as rejoicing and gladness (31:8) also form a link between the two psalms.
- There is potential of mutual interpretation also in the connection of the reference of the suppliant to himself as “your servant”, connected with God’s “face” and the petitions not to hide it (cf. Ps 27:8-9 and 31:17-18). Significant is the staggering at the ends of Pss 25 and 27 (the motif of *waiting* or hoping) on the one hand and Pss 27 and 31 on the other hand (imperatives of *waiting*/hoping and being strong or courageous, together with the *Tetragrammaton* as the last word at the conclusion of both psalms). This is one of the clearest indications of a conscious alignment of the three psalms, indeed of the design of the group of psalms.

Taking the conclusions of the two investigations together shows that Ps 27 fits well into the group Pss 25-34 and its embeddedness shows with high probability a deliberate and creative intention. An examination of the group overall would probably confirm this. Ps 27 has its special place in the character of the group with its wisdom frame in Pss 25 and 34 and the centre in Ps 29 with its characteristic of divine kingship and temple theology. It

anchors the other psalms, as it were, proving God's power and glory over past and present afflictions of all kinds in the surrounding psalms. It is possible that not only in explicit content of instruction, but also in the combination of elements in these psalms themselves and of the group, a formal kind of wisdom influence and editing is visible.<sup>40</sup> As far as Ps 27 is concerned, it could not yet be adequately clarified whether the composition with its distinct parts is (from the beginning) literary and owes its editorial integration into the group to wisdom circles in late post-exilic times (so rather Botha) or possibly goes back to an earlier liturgical "independent life" with little or no interventions by wisdom-editorial hands (so rather Weber).<sup>41</sup>

What could be established through this investigation, is that the psalms of the cluster 25-34 form a literary context in which certain motifs recur regularly, and that this context should guide the interpretation of each psalm in the cluster. Among those motifs are the verbal attacks by treacherous opponents who want to shame the psalmist; the protecting response of YHWH to this by guiding the psalmist who fear him and put his trust in him on the road of life through revealing his will to the psalmist and providing access to him in the temple as a place of refuge where an intimate relationship with him and access to his blessings will lead to enjoyment, praise and celebration. What the psalmist, and the reader of the collection, need to do in times of distress and suffering, is therefore to pray, to humble himself or herself before YHWH, to walk in integrity and uprightness, and to wait for YHWH to intervene on his or her behalf and to guide the suppliant to the joy of being in his presence.

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40 Wisdom adaptation and intention are accepted by both authors but are differently evaluated and weighted in terms of manner and extent. Botha sees in the group as a whole the influence of wisdom as significant and considers this in a literary way; Weber is more reserved about this label and the number of instances where this can be seen in Pss 27 and 31. With Petrány (2015) he sees a stronger connection between "wisdom", psalm supplication and thus of teaching as part of liturgy, cf. Weber (2014b).

41 An examination of Ps 27 (on its own as single psalm) is planned (Weber). It could possibly provide answers to this question.

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