

An Intercessor Like Moses: A Key Component of the Psalter's Message

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Abstract

It is widely recognized that Book III of the MT Psalter explores the downfall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah and that Book IV has a Mosaic emphasis. This article builds on both of these observations and identifies textual features in Book III of the Psalter, namely the introduction of Moses and Aaron and numerous allusions to Exodus 34, that anticipate and elucidate unique aspects of Books IV and V. The clustering of references to Moses and Aaron in Books IV and V along with an increase of allusions to Moses' intercession in Exodus 32-34 suggest that the Psalter hopes for, among other things, a representative intercessory figure like Moses who can stand between God and a covenant-breaking people and turn away God's anger in the aftermath of the Babylonian exile. The article contributes to final form readings of the Psalter and argues that the expression of hope for an intercessor like Moses is one of the communicative features that emerges from the text when it is analyzed as such.

Keywords

Psalms, Shaping, Allusion, Exodus, Moses, Aaron, Intercession

This article examines portions of Book III of the MT Psalter (Pss. 73-89) and argues that the Psalter's first mentions of both Moses and Aaron in the climactic conclusion of Psalm 77 are significant for the macrostructure and message of the Psalter. Furthermore, it is argued that the emphasis in Book III on Mosaic intercession via inner-Biblical allusions to Exodus 34:6-7¹ (cf. the treatment of Pss. 77, 78, 79, and 86 below) anticipate and elucidate the strong Mosaic and priestly aura of Books IV-V. Clusters of references to Moses in Book IV and Aaron in Books IV-V enhance these conclusions. This article finds that in the macrostructural message of the MT Psalter,² Book III is not *solely* designed to explore and articulate the Babylonian exilic crisis as is often the caricature presented in the recent scholarly literature. Rather, in particular ways, Book III begins to introduce and anticipate how the exilic crisis will be resolved even as it laments and articulates the crisis itself.

To anticipate the trajectory of this article, I will argue that Book III begins a thematic trajectory developed in Books IV and V related to priestly intercession. Three textual features create an emphasis on an idealized priestly figure(s) in Books IV and V:

- 1) a cluster of references to Moses in Book IV
- 2) a cluster of references to Aaron in Books IV and V, and
- 3) a cluster of allusions to Mosaic Sinaitic intercession (Ex. 32-34) in Books IV and V.³

¹ I refer to this passage as "the Grace Formula" in this article. Since the Grace Formula is alluded to more frequently than almost any other text in the HB and is regularly used creatively and transformatively by later texts, I take it as axiomatic that the Grace Formula is the source text in a diachronic relationship with receptor texts when a link between the Grace Formula and another text is established. Cf. Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-By-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 877.

² Expecting an intentional macrostructure and communicative intent comes naturally from Zenger's characterization of the Psalter: so ist er doch zugleich ein Textganzes – eben ein biblisches Buch, das wie die meisten anderen biblischen Bücher sukzessiv entstanden ist und vor allem *auch* als Buch gelesen bzw. Gehört werden muss. Erich Zenger, "Psalmenexegese Und Psalterexegese: Eine Forschungsskizze," In *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 17–65, 26.

³ I acknowledge that the Grace Formula occurs throughout the Psalter. However, my argument that the Grace Formula functions in an editorially important way in Books III-V of the Psalter is not problematized by its presence in Books I-II for at least two reasons. First, it is by no means the case that a book always uses a word, concept, or intertext uniformly throughout its entire corpus. Variety in this regard is normal and should be expected. Second, despite some presence of the Grace Formula in

The Exodus 34 allusions demonstrated below along with the introduction to Moses and Aaron in Book III of the MT Psalter, when read in light of Books IV-V, suggest a particular message of restoration in the aftermath of the Babylonian exile: an intercessory figure must represent the covenant-breaking people before God, count on his character as revealed in the Grace Formula, and beg God to turn from his burning anger and keep his people as his inheritance. I offer this reading of Books III-V as *one facet* of the Psalter's message, not *the only* facet of the Psalter's message. For instance, in my judgment, it has been demonstrated convincingly that the editorial features of the final form of the MT Psalter promote messages of hope for a future messianic king,⁴ hope in YHWH's universal reign,⁵ hope in YHWH's role as refuge,⁶ and the importance of wisdom and Torah for the post-exilic community.⁷ I affirm the presence of these themes and intend for this

Books I and II of the Psalter, allusions to it cluster in Books III-V. The distribution of the Grace Formula in the Psalter as I understand it is as follows: **Books I and II:** Pss. 40:10-12 and 69:13. **Books III-V:** Pss. 77:8-9, 78:38, 79:8-9, 86:3, 15, 99:8, 103:8-10, 106:45, 145:7-10. This list evidences a two to eight contrast and shows the strong clustering of the Grace Formula especially in Books III and IV of the Psalter as well as its presence immediately before the final הלל. Without the presence of three or more lexical links to the Grace Formula, I take collocations such as *חסד ואמת* (Pss. 25:10, 40:10-12) and *חנון ורחום* (Pss. 111:4, 112:4) to be too generic to convince of an allusion to the Grace Formula. Each of the allusions present in the lists above are, in my judgment, significantly stronger than these probably generic phrases. For example, in Psalm 69:13 above, the addition of just the amplifier in construct with "covenant love" (*רַב־חֶסֶד*) in the same verse as the root *אמת* is a much stronger lexical and syntactical allusion to the Grace Formula than an occurrence of "steadfast love and faithfulness" without the amplifier in construct form.

⁴ Carissa Quinn, *The Arrival of the King: The Shape and Story of Psalms 15-24* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023).; David Mitchell, "Lord, Remember David: G. H. Wilson and the Message of the Psalter," *VT* 56, (2006): 526–48.; Michael Snearly, *The Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter*, LHBOTS 624 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).; Peter Ho, "The Shape of Davidic Psalms as Messianic," *JETS* 62, (2019): 515–31.; Hulisani Ramantswana, "David of the Psalters: MT Psalter, LXX Psalter and 11QPs a Psalter," *OTE* 24, (2011): 431–63.; Jamie Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2004). S.D. Ellison, "Hope for a Davidic King in the Psalter's Utopian Vision," (PhD diss., Queen's University Belfast, 2021).

⁵ David M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93-100*, BJS 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997).; Clinton McCann, *The New Interpreter's Bible 1 & 2 Maccabees, Introduction to Hebrew Poetry, Job, Psalms*, vol. IV (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 662-663, 1040.; James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

⁶ Jerome Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOTSup 217 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁷ Gerald H. Wilson, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Int* 46 (1992).; Steven Dunn, "Wisdom Editing in the Book of Psalms: Vocabulary, Themes, and Structure," (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009).

article to contribute an additional facet of the Psalter's message: the necessary role of an intercessory representative figure in Judah's restoration.⁸

This article is divided into two parts. First, I examine the Psalter's introduction of Moses and Aaron in Psalm 77 and exegete inner-Biblical allusions to Exodus 34 in Psalms 77, 78, 79, and 86. Second, I argue that these literary features in Book III have rhetorical and communicative significance for the message of the Psalter. Themes in Books IV and V will be elucidated and nuanced in light of the features identified in Book III.⁹ In this article, I follow a growing number of scholars who have agreed upon criteria for what constitutes an allusion. An allusion can be best understood as a reference to a source text that is:

- 1) an indirect reference, that is
- 2) intended by the author/editor of the receptor text,¹⁰ and
- 3) can plausibly be detected and interpreted by a reader.¹¹

1. Moses, Aaron, and Exodus 34 in Book III of the MT Psalter

Moses and Aaron's names are mentioned for the first time in the Psalter in Psalm 77:21. Subsequently, Moses is mentioned only in Book IV in Psalms 90:1, 99:6, 103:7, 105:26, 106:16, 106:23, and 106:32 while Aaron is mentioned throughout Books IV and V in Psalms 99:6, 105:26, 106:16, 115:10, 115:12, 118:3, 133:2 and 135:19. The absence of references to Moses and Aaron in the first three Books of the Psalter are not surprising since, outside of the superscriptions, it is not common for the Psalter to refer to individuals by name. For example, "Abraham" occurs in

⁸ The MT Psalter is a highly complex, thoroughly edited piece of literature. It is unrealistic to expect a diverse collection of 150 poems to collectively communicate just one simplistic idea.

⁹ Thus, this article engages seriously with both Psalm-exegesis and Psalter-exegesis. As Zenger has said: "Die Psalterexegese will die Psalmenexegese nicht ersetzen, sondern ergänzen." Zenger, "Psalmenexegese Und Psalterexegese, 26.

¹⁰ Since we do not have access to the thought life and intentions of ancient authors, we cannot prove or know for certain that a feature in a text is indeed intended to allude to another text. We can only speak in terms of plausibility. Nonetheless, authorial intent is one of the criteria that defines a true allusion.

¹¹ For these criteria, see: Jonathan Kline, *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 20–21.; Jillian Ross, *A People Heeds Not Scripture: Allusion in Judges* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2023), 17.; Benjamin Sommer, "Exegesis, Allusion, and Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Lyle Eslinger," *VT* 46, (1996): 479–89.; Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms through the Lens of Intertextuality*, *StBibLit* 26 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2001), 7–9.

only two psalms (Pss. 47:11,¹² 105:6, 9, 42). Given this, numerous references to Moses and Aaron in Books IV-V of the Psalter (seven and eight times respectively) *are* surprising and as readers, we are invited to ask why references to individuals cluster at various points throughout the Psalter. It will become evident that in the case of Moses and Aaron, their emphasis in the latter portions of the Psalter has communicative and rhetorical effects and is part of the shaping and message of the macrostructure of the Psalter. I now turn to examining the introduction of Moses and Aaron in the Psalter followed by the identification and interpretation of allusions to Exodus 34 in Book III.

1.1 Allusions to the Grace Formula in Psalm 77

Psalm 77 ushers us into the world of a desperate individual. The psalmist cries out to God, but God seems to be part of the psalmist's problem (vv. 4-5, 8-10). Though the psalmist's crisis is never named or detailed, our speaker feels that God has failed to act, uphold justice, and defend those faithful to his covenant. However, the psalmist has a strategy to ease their theodic cognitive dissonance. They will:

Consider the days of old,
the years long ago.
“Let me remember my song in the night;
let me meditate in my heart...” (vv. 6-7).¹³

As we continue reading Psalm 77, we discover that the remembrance of days long ago (vv. 6-7) that the psalmist has in mind is the exodus event from Egypt (vv. 11-21).¹⁴ These verses recall God delivering Israel from Egypt using formulaic exodus event lexemes and collocations including עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶאך (cf. Ex. 15:11b) and גְּאֹלֶת בְּזֵרוּעַ (cf. Ex. 15:13 and 15:16) while also casting the God of Israel as a warrior deity as in Exodus 15 (cf. Ps. 77:18-19 in particular). The climactic conclusion¹⁵ to the exodus remembrance in Psalm 77 is v. 21 where:

¹² Here and elsewhere in this article, when the versification of the MT varies from ETs, the MT numeration is followed.

¹³ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁴ See: Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen* (Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer, 2016), Kindle edition, 674.

¹⁵ “In Ps. 77:20 (v. 21 BHS), the leadership of the people through the ministry of Moses and Aaron is the climax of the Psalm.” Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, StBibLit 112 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2007), 21.

נחית כצאן עמך ביד־משה ואהרן	You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.
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For Psalm 77:21, the salvation of God and the leadership of Moses and Aaron are inseparable. Our psalmist in crisis finds relief from their cognitive dissonance because they find hopeful precedent in Israel's historical relationship with God.¹⁶ God is the sort of deity who will step in to bring liberation and justice when God's people cry out (צעק) for rescue as both our psalmist (v. 2) and the Israelites enslaved in Egypt (Ex. 5:8, 8:12, 14:10) do. Given that Psalm 77 does not describe the resolution of the psalmist's crisis, it may be surprising how much optimism our poem ends with. The cries and doubts of that dominate the earlier sections of the poem seem to be vanquished by the warrior God of the exodus and by the deliverance achieved by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Thus, after their total absence through the last seventy-six psalms, we have in the conclusion of Psalm 77 a lofty introduction for Moses and Aaron in the Psalter.

The exodus event and the reference to the names of Moses and Aaron in its final verse are not the only ways in which Psalm 77 calls to mind the brothers and their actions in Torah. Psalm 77:8-10 anticipates the presence of Moses in the poem's conclusion by alluding to the Grace Formula.¹⁷ In its context, the Grace Formula is part of the aftermath of the golden calf disaster in which Israel, enabled by Aaron¹⁸ (Ex. 32:2-6, 25, 35), creates a calf to represent YHWH and worships it while Moses is on Sinai receiving the details of the Sinai covenant from YHWH. In the aftermath of the golden calf incident, Moses intercedes with YHWH not to destroy Israel but to remain with the people as they journey toward Canaan (Ex. 32:11-3 and 32:32, 34:9). The revelation of YHWH's character as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..." is evident in that YHWH responds to Moses' intercession and

¹⁶ Similarly, see: Weber, *Werkbuch*, 673.

¹⁷ For my initial demonstration of these allusions to Ex. 34 in Pss. 77-79, cf. Matthew Montgomery, "Inheritance in the Asaph Psalms: Interpreting a Unifying Theme," (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2025).

¹⁸ Aaron is part of the problem here and in Num. 12. This makes Aaron's strong presence and idealization in Books IV and V of the Psalter all the more interesting. This is addressed in part two of this article.

does not destroy the people due to their breach of the covenant; YHWH acquiesces to Moses' intercession and continues to "take us (Israel) as your inheritance" (ונהלתנו) in Exodus 34:9.¹⁹ Vv. 8-10 of our psalm strategically invert YHWH's character as revealed in the Grace Formula by using the same lexemes but inverting their meaning in context via rhetorical questions.²⁰ These links include:

- 1) While Exodus 34:6 claims that YHWH abounds in steadfast love (חסד), Psalm 77:9 asks if God's חסד has forever ceased.
- 2) While Exodus 34:6 claims that YHWH is gracious (חנון), Psalm 77:10 asks if God has forgotten to be gracious (חנן).
- 3) While Exodus 34:6 claims that God is compassionate (רחום) and slow to anger (אף), Psalm 77:10b asks if God's anger (אף), has shut up his compassion (רחמים).

We can see that our psalm alludes to the Grace Formula and in doing so, creatively inverts²¹ its vocabulary used to describe YHWH's character. The psalm's inversion of the Grace Formula suggests that the psalmist's crisis has called into question the claims made about God's character in Exodus 34. Thus, in Psalm 77, we have the Psalter's first mention of Moses in the context of his delivering work in the exodus event *and* his nation-saving intercession on Sinai in the aftermath of the golden calf disaster (though the revelation of YHWH's character revealed in the aftermath of the golden calf disaster is inverted in the experience of our psalmist). Rather than the allusions to the Grace Formula in Psalm 77 being an isolated event, Psalm 77 begins a string of Asaphite

¹⁹ Similarly, cf. Hee Suk Kim, "Exodus 34.6 in Psalms 86, 103, and 145 in Relation to the Theological Perspectives of Books III, IV, and V of the Psalter," in *Inner Biblical Allusion in the Poetry of Wisdom and Psalms*, LHBOTS 659, ed. Mark J. Boda, Kevin Chau, and Beth Laneel Tanner (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2020), 36–48, 37-38.

²⁰ Cf. Kselman and Tate who also sense allusions to the Grace Formula here. John S. Kselman, "Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus," *JANES* 15 (1983): 51–58.; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 268-9.; McCann, *Psalms*, 983-4.

²¹ Cf. John Goldingay, *Psalms*, ed. Tremper Longman III, BCOTWP, vol. 2: Psalms 42-89 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 466.

psalms that allude to Exodus 34. Psalms 77, 78, and 79 ²²allude to the Grace Formula.²³ It is to these allusions and how they relate to one another that I now turn.

1.2 Allusions to the Grace Formula in Psalm 78

While Psalm 77 presents a righteous individual who is suffering greatly and therefore questions YHWH's Grace Formula, Psalm 78 presents Israel corporately as a rebellious, covenant-breaking people that nonetheless has experienced YHWH's character as revealed in Exodus 34 to be true. Immediately after describing the steadfast rebellion of Israel against God (vv. 32-37), the central portion of Psalm 78 (v. 38) recounts:

Yet he, being compassionate,
covered their iniquity
and did not destroy (them).
He often turned away his anger
and did not stir up all his wrath.

The verse draws heavily from Exodus 34:6-7.²⁴ Lexical links include the following:

- 1) The noun רחום occurs thirteen times in the HB²⁵ and first occurs in God's self-revelation creed in Exodus 34:6 where God reveals himself to Moses in the aftermath of the golden calf incident.²⁶ The remaining twelve occurrences of the term, with the possible exception

²² Fittingly, Beat Weber refers to these three Psalms as the "second arc" of the Asaph psalms and sees them as highly connected. Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen*, 676.

²³ Contra Schnittjer, the explicit mention of Moses, the string of three adjacent Asaph psalms that use the language of Ex. 34:6-7, and the rhetorically creative ways in which they do so make it implausible that these features are "likely stock phrases from lyrical diffusion." Schnittjer, *OTUOT*, 877.

²⁴ Erich Zenger and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 297.

²⁵ Because רחום is used as a technical term pertaining to the Grace Formula in the HB, it is important to distinguish between it and the synonymous and slightly more common (forty times in the HB) term רחמים.

²⁶ Cf. David Emanuel, "The Psalmists' Use of the Exodus Motif: A Close Reading and Intertextual Analysis of Selected Exodus Psalms" (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2007), 60.; Edward Greenstein, "Mixing Memory and Design: Reading Psalm 78," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 197–218, 200, 204.

of Deuteronomy 4:31, all seem to be allusions to the Grace Formula (cf. 2 Chr. 30:9, Neh. 9:17, 31, Ps. 78:38, 86:15, 103:8, 111:4, 145:8, Jer. 2:13, and Jonah 4:2).²⁷ In Psalm 78:38, it is celebrated that God continued to be compassionate (רחום) to Israel in light of their repeated rebellion.

- 2) In v. 38, God “restrains his anger,” which is semantically very similar to YHWH being “slow to anger” in Exodus 34:6.
- 3) Furthermore, in v. 38, God “covers the iniquity” (עון) of Israel whereas, in Exodus 34:7-9, God forgives iniquity (עון), visits iniquity (עון), and Moses asks God to pardon iniquity (עון).

Thus, almost every feature of Psalm 78:38 has meaningful points of connection with the Grace Formula. Given that the Grace Formula is the foundational articulation of God’s compassion in the HB, it is not surprising that v. 38, located at the heart of a psalm that records God’s judgment along with his patience with Israel, alludes to it. Ultimately, the mercy shown by God in Psalm 78 leads to the poem’s climactic and idealized conclusion where God builds his temple on Zion “like the earth which he has founded forever” (v. 69) and chooses David his servant “to shepherd... Israel his (God’s) inheritance” (v. 71).

All of this is good news for the suffering righteous speaker in the juxtaposed Psalm 77.²⁸ If Israel in all its rebellion ultimately finds YHWH’s Grace Formula (Ex. 34) to be true (cf. Northern Israel’s inclusion in the idealized v. 71 at the conclusion of Ps. 78 despite God’s moving out of his Shiloh residence in vv. 56-67), how much more must the Grace Formula also be true for this righteous speaker of Psalm 77! Psalm 78 and its use of Exodus 34:6-7 thus enriches our reading of Psalm 77. The speaker of Psalm 77 looks back to the exodus event for hope of deliverance from

²⁷ Cf. Schnittjer, *OTUOT*, 877.

²⁸ An observation from Walther Zimmerli is instructive here. After observing links between numerous psalms (many of which are from the Asaph psalms) which are juxtaposed in the MT Psalter, Zimmerli suggests that the interpretation of a psalm must at times extend beyond the consideration of the psalm itself to include the collection in which the psalm is found. Cf. Walther Zimmerli, “Zwillingspsalmen,” in *Wort, Lied Und Gottesspruch: Festschrift Für Joseph Ziegler*, Josef Schreiner ed. (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1972), 105–113.; Matthias Millard, *Die Komposition Des Psalters* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 19.

their crisis when they are not able to perceive YHWH's good character as revealed in the Grace Formula. The juxtaposed Psalm 78 also looks back on Israel's history with God and recalls God's mercy, forgiveness, and compassion despite Israel's repeated failings.²⁹ The suffering speaker of Psalm 77 can thus count on the same character of God as revealed in the Grace Formula to, in the end, be true for them as well.

1.3 Allusions to the Grace Formula in Psalm 79

The Asaph psalms continue to allude to the Grace Formula in the following poem. Psalm 79 is one of the clearest articulations of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem³⁰ in the Psalter. In v. 1, the Jerusalem temple lays in ruins as a result of the nations coming into God's inheritance; unburied bodies litter the ground in vv. 2-3. After addressing God with interrogatives and imperatives in vv. 5-7, vv. 8-9 plead with God for his intervention using key terms from the Grace Formula.³¹

אל־תִּזְכֹּר־לָנוּ עֲוֹנֹת רִאשֹׁנִים מִהֵר יִקְדְּמוּנוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ כִּי דָלוּנוּ מְאֹד 9 עֲזֵרנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵנוּ עַל־דְּבַר כְּבוֹד־שִׁמְךָ וְהַצִּילנוּ וּכְפֹר עַל־חַטָּאתֵינוּ לְמַעַן שִׁמְךָ	Do not remember against us our former iniquities; ³² let your compassion meet us quickly, for we are very low. 9 Help us, O God of our salvation, On account of the glory of your name; Deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!
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Lexical links between these two passages include:

- 1) Finding forgiveness or covering for iniquity (עוֹן) is a dominant concern for both texts (Ex. 34:7, 9, Ps. 79:8).
- 2) Both texts appeal to God's compassion/mercy using the root רָחַם (Ex. 34:6, Ps. 79:8).

²⁹ Cf. Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen*, 690.

³⁰ Cf. Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013), 670.

³¹ Cf. McCann, *Psalms*, 995.

³² Alternatively: "iniquities of former generations."

- 3) Psalm 79:8 asks for God's compassion to come speedily (מהר) because the people are brought low. In Exodus 34:8, Moses speedily (מהר) bows or brings himself low in response to God's self-revelation.
- 4) Psalm 79:9 grounds the logic of its plea to God in the reputation of God's name with the phrase "for the sake of your name" (שם). It is precisely this name (שם) that YHWH is revealing to Moses in Exodus 34:5-9.

Above, I argued that Psalm 78 responds to the inversions of the Grace Formula in the desperate cries of the speaker of Psalm 77 with hopeful allusions to the same text. Throughout its rebellious history with God, the nation of Israel in Psalm 78 has experienced God's gracious and compassionate character as revealed in Exodus 34. If this is so, Psalm 79 problematizes the idealized conclusions of Psalm 78. A God who is slow to anger, compassionate, and gracious is not the lived experience of the psalmist in Psalm 79.³³ Rather, the psalmist begs God to be these things via inner-Biblical allusion to the Grace Formula precisely because the characteristics of God proclaimed there seem absent as Jerusalem is destroyed and its people killed.

Lastly, the Grace Formula is alluded to most extensively in Book III in Psalm 86.³⁴ Psalm 86 is an individual complaint psalm.³⁵ The poem begins with the speaker repeatedly addressing God with imperatives begging God to remedy the individual speaker's sorry situation lamented in the poem. Our first hint that the Grace Formula has heavily influenced our psalm is in v. 5 where God's "abounding steadfast love" appears in construct via a *maqfef*: ורֶב־חֶסֶד. In the HB, this collocation is typically a strong indicator of the presence of the Grace Formula (cf. Ex. 34:6, Num. 14:18, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Ps. 69:14, 86:5, 86:15, 103:8).³⁶ This early indicator turns out to be telling in our

³³ See Cole who reads these three adjacent poems along similar lines: Robert Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73-89)*, JSOTSup 307 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 72.

³⁴ Some have suggested that Ps. 85:3-11 contains allusions to Ex. 34. This is possible, but in my judgment, the allusions and lexical links are weaker here than in the four psalms treated above and I remain unconvinced that Ex. 34 is intentionally alluded to in Ps. 85. Cf. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York, 1988), 347. What is more evident is the allusions to Moses' intercession in Ex. 32:12 in Ps. 85:3.

³⁵ Cf. Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James Nogalski (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 121-98.

³⁶ Lane notes that this occurrence of the collocation "is the only time in the Hebrew Bible that is not directly connected with a quotation of the credo" (Ex. 34:6-7). And even here, it is certainly *indirectly* connected. Nathan C. Lane, *The Compassionate, But Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6-7* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), Kindle edition, 120.

case. After the collocation of **וַיִּרְבֵּי-חַסֵּד** in v. 5, the Grace Formula is quoted more thoroughly in v. 15 of our psalm. Psalm 86:14-15 contrasts the insolent and ruthless ones who seek the psalmist's life (v. 14) with God who is "merciful, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (v. 15). The entire line is a verbatim quotation of Exodus 34:6b and it is the most complete and precise allusion to YHWH's self-revelation formula in the Writings.³⁷ The psalmist assumes that if God has been acting according to their character as revealed in the Grace Formula, then the psalmist's crisis should be resolved. Thus, the speaker "uses a phrase spoken by YHWH... in order to persuade YHWH to show the same loving-kindness to the psalmist."³⁸ This is the final allusion to the Mosaic intercession of Exodus 34 in Book III³⁹ and we are now ready for a significant increase of Mosaic presence in Books IV and V.

1.4 Conclusion to Part One

We have seen in part one of this article that Psalm 77 introduces Moses and Aaron in the Psalter and begins a cluster of three adjacent psalms (Pss. 77-79) along with Psalm 86 that allude to the Grace Formula where YHWH responds to Moses' intercession (necessitated by Aaron's failure) by revealing their compassionate and gracious character. We also saw that these psalms alluded to and transformed Exodus 34 in creative ways. In the juxtaposed Asaphite allusions, creative uses of Exodus 34 responded to one another in rhetorically meaningful ways. Having examined these textual features in our psalms, we can now consider how these features of Book III might lead us to read Books IV and V of the MT Psalter. As it turns out, Moses, Aaron, and the clustering of Exodus 34 allusions in Book III of the Psalter are instrumental in the macrostructural flow and message of Books III-V of the Psalter.

2. The Role of Idealized Intercessors and Exodus 34 in the Psalter's Message

³⁷ Lane, *Compassionate But Punishing*, 120-121. Lane also notes that the more ominous descriptions of YHWH's punishing the guilty in v. 7 are left unmentioned.

³⁸ Kim, "Exodus 34," 40.

³⁹ Though Ps. 85:4 alludes to Moses' intercession in Ex. 32:12. This enhances my argument. See comments on this below.

Part two of this article examines references to Moses and Aaron and allusions to Exodus 34⁴⁰ in Books IV and V to determine how these Books develop Moses and Aaron after their introduction to the Psalter in Psalm 77. It will be argued that Moses and (surprisingly) Aaron are presented in Books IV and V as idealized national representatives. Books IV and V express hope for an idealized priestly intercessor(s) to mediate between God and a covenant-breaking people in the way that Moses, and to a lesser extent Aaron, do in Torah. Allusions to Exodus 34 (and Ex. 32) in Books IV and V enhance this message as do psalms such as Psalm 110 which do not mention Moses or Aaron but create an idealized priestly aura in Book V. Given the number of references I explore here, my treatments are necessarily brief and not intended to be comprehensive.

2.1 References to Moses in Book IV

Book IV begins with Psalm 90 which bears the superscription “A Prayer of Moses.” The psalm focuses on God’s anger and the brevity of human existence in vv. 2-11 before an intercessory individual speaker (“Moses”)⁴¹ begs God to bless and show favor to their people in vv. 12-17. McKelvey and Freedman have rightly noted that near the beginning of the speaker’s intercession, v. 13 alludes to Exodus 32:12.⁴² These scholars show that the collocation in Psalm 90:13 of the roots שׁוּב and נָחַם strongly alludes to Moses’ intercession in the aftermath of the golden calf crisis where Moses begs God to turn from their burning anger and relent. This has been anticipated by Psalm 85:4 in Book III where the psalmist remembers when God turned (שׁוּב) from their burning anger (מַחֲרוֹן אַפַּי).⁴³ Thus, these allusions to Exodus 32:12 enhance the intercessory aura created by the Exodus 34 allusions in Books III-V identified above and below. The person of Moses is

⁴⁰ Along with allusions to Ex. 32:12, another influential portion of Moses’ intercession, in Pss. 85 and 90.

⁴¹ ““A Prayer of Moses” suggests that the psalm should be viewed as a prayer that Moses himself spoke.” Michael McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh: A Canonical Study of Book IV of the Psalter*, Gorgias Dissertations, vol. 55 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 250.

⁴² McKelvey, *High Kingship of Yahweh*, 33-34.; David Noel Freedman, “Other than Moses... Who Asks (or Tells) God to Repent?” *Bible Review* 1 (1985), 58.; Krista J. Mournet, “Moses and the Psalms: The Significance of Psalms 90 and 106 within Book IV of the Masoretic Psalter,” *CWBW* 31 (2011): 66–79, 71. Also cf. McCann, *Psalms*, 1040-1.

⁴³ This is an established way of alluding to Moses’ intercession in Ex. 32 in the HB. Cf. for example, Jonah 3:9-10.

highly emphasized when the opening psalm of Book IV bears his name (v. 1) and alludes to his intercessory work on Sinai (v. 13).⁴⁴

Psalm 99, near the end of the YHWH *malak* psalm group (Pss. 93-100) makes mention of both Moses and Aaron and alludes to Exodus 34 (I return to the latter two features below). In vv. 6-8, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel⁴⁵ feature prominently as ideal Israelites who called on God (v. 6), kept their statutes (v. 7), and received God's forgiveness (v. 8). Moses and Aaron are both called priests in v. 6a;⁴⁶ their intimacy and right-standing with the just and holy God proclaimed in the psalm (vv. 4 and 9) present them as ideal priests and leaders for God's covenant people.⁴⁷ Targum Psalms elaborates v. 6 to claim that Moses and Aaron were priests "who gave their life for the people of YHWH."⁴⁸ Given that Moses' Sinai intercession (Ex. 34:6-7) is alluded to in v. 8 of our psalm (see the following sections), it is likely that the Targum authors recognized this allusion and incorporated Moses' self-sacrificial intercessory act (cf. Ex. 32:32) in Psalm 99:6. Thus, the Targum of Psalm 99:6 supports the association between the presence of the Moses cluster in Book IV and the idea of intercessory, self-sacrificial priesthood.

Moses next features in Psalm 103:7 where God "made known his ways" to Moses. The ידע verb is gapped in the second line of the verse where God's acts (are made known) to the people of Israel.⁴⁹ Thus, the objects of the verb (Moses and Israel) are in syntactical parallelism. This results

⁴⁴ Furthermore, Wallace has convincingly demonstrated how the juxtapositions of Pss. 90-92 are explained in light of Moses' efficacious intercession in Ps. 90 and as alluded to in Ex. 32. Psalm 91 responds to Moses' intercession with God ensuring divine protection and in Ps. 92, the people respond in thanksgiving for that protection. Wallace, *Book IV*, 89.

⁴⁵ Samuel is fittingly included among the priestly brothers Moses and Aaron since Samuel himself was a Nazirite and was closely associated with the priesthood (cf. 1 Sam. 1-3). Samuel calling on the name of God using the verb קרא (Ps. 99:6) is best viewed as an allusion to 1 Samuel 12:17-18 where Samuel calls upon YHWH to bring about a rainstorm on a clear day when the people ask for a king. Samuel's opposition to human kings in favor of YHWH as king in the context of 1 Sam. here could not fit the YHWH *malak* psalm group more nicely.

⁴⁶ The psalmist is clearly not concerned with technicalities such as Moses not being a Levite. Moses is Aaron's brother, acts like a priest throughout Torah, and is therefore called a priest. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 490.

⁴⁷ McKelvey, *High Kingship of Yahweh*, 285.; Wallace, *Book IV*, 50.

⁴⁸ משה ואהרן בכהניו דמסרו נפשיהון מטול עמא דיהוה

⁴⁹ Although ידע is a very common verb, several scholars seem correct to point out that its contextual use in v. 7 more than likely alludes to Ex. 33:13. McCann, *Psalms*, 1092.; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 35. This, of course, increases the intercessory characterization of Moses in the psalm.

in Moses being idealized and representing the nation of Israel in their relationship with YHWH. It is also important for this article that Psalm 103 is saturated with allusions to Exodus 34. I will return to this in a later section, but for now, it is important to note that the allusions to his intercession make the reference to Moses in v. 7 especially fitting.

Moses next appears in Psalm 105. This historical Psalm⁵⁰ is an expected place to find a reference to Moses given his prominent place in Israel's story. Psalm 105 is an entirely positive remembrance of Israel's history with YHWH; the way in which Moses has been presented thus far in Book IV of the Psalter accords well with his presentation here. Moses' role in the psalm (cf. vv. 26-27) is specifically related to his working signs and miracles (the exodus plagues). Thus, Wallace says: "The psalm celebrates YHWH's power (and honors Moses and Aaron) by proclaiming that YHWH, Moses, and Aaron are the executors of the plagues of Egypt..."⁵¹ The idealized remembrance of Psalm 105 is contrasted in Psalm 106 where instead of focusing on God's loyalty (Ps. 105), Israel's rebelliousness highlighted.⁵²

In contrast with Psalm 105 where Moses is presented as a sign and miracle worker, Psalm 106 accredits everything related to the exodus event solely to YHWH. YHWH's faithfulness and mighty works are severely contrasted with the unfaithful nature of the Israelites. Moses is first mentioned in v. 16 only in reference to the Korahite rebellion (Num. 16) where Korah and a number of leaders among the tribes rise up to challenge the authority of Moses and Aaron. The emphasis is not on Moses and Aaron themselves, but rather on the historically rebellious nature of Israel.

Moses is referenced two more times in Psalm 106. In v. 23, Moses' intercessory work is described. In the aftermath of the golden calf incident (Ps. 106:20), God would have destroyed Israel had not Moses "stood in the breach before him (God) to turn away his wrath from destroying them." Thus, in a long poem emphasizing the severe failures of Israel throughout its history, Moses' successful intercession is a rare bright point.⁵³ As in the opening psalm of Book IV (Ps. 90), the closing psalm of Book IV (Ps. 106) focuses on Mosaic intercession on behalf of the covenant-breaking nation.

⁵⁰ See Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, 247-50.

⁵¹ Wallace, *Book IV*, 77.

⁵² Cf. Wallace who calls these poems "two sides of the same coin." Wallace, *Book IV*, 92.; also cf. McCann, *Psalms*, 1103-1104.; Zimmerli, "Zwillingspsalmen," 105-113.

⁵³ Cf. Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 72.

Furthermore, the נחם root used by Moses when he begs God to relent from disaster against Israel in the aftermath of the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:12) forms an inclusio of Mosaic intercession around all of Book IV. נחם occurs when “Moses” begs God to have sorrow for their servants in Psalm 90:13 which is part of a larger allusion to Exodus 32:12 (see above). נחם also occurs in the climactic conclusion of Psalm 106 in v. 45.⁵⁴ In this verse, YHWH has “remembered his covenant and relented (נחם) according to the abundance of his covenant love” in their response to Moses’ intercession on Sinai; as I show below, this is a blended allusion to Exodus 32:12 and 34:6-7. Because of this historical precedent for God relenting from destroying their covenant-breaking people in Exodus 32-34, the psalmist appeals to God for salvation and ingathering from exile (v. 47) and praises God in advance for their deliverance (v. 48). Thus, *the model of Mosaic intercession in the past is held out as the way to achieve exilic restoration in the conclusion of Book IV of the Psalter.*

The final reference to Moses in the Psalter comes in Psalm 106:32. Here Moses’ lost opportunity to enter Canaan is blamed on Israel just as Moses himself blames Israel for this tragedy in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 1:37, 3:26, 4:21). The psalmist has no problem scapegoating the wilderness generation⁵⁵ and agrees with Moses’ not-so-subtle claims of innocence in Deuteronomy.⁵⁶

Having completed our survey of references to Moses in the Psalter, we can claim that every psalm that references Moses idealizes him. Moses is presented as an ideal leader, national representative, intercessor, priest, and miracle worker. Furthermore, we saw that it is fitting to speak of a Mosaic inclusio that frames Book IV of the MT Psalter. Moses’ name (v. 1) and intercession (v. 13) occur in Psalm 90 which opens Book IV. Moses’s name (vv. 16, 23, 32) and his intercession (vv. 23 and 45) also occur in the final psalm of Book IV. Finally, as we will see below, references to Moses also tend to occur near allusions to his intercessory work as presented in Exodus 32-34.

⁵⁴ Mournet, “Moses and the Psalms,” 73.; Cf. McKelvey, *High Kingship of Yahweh*, 250-1. McKelvey also points out the occurrence of the root נחם in Pss. 90:7 and 106:23 which strengthens the inclusio created by Pss. 90 and 106.

⁵⁵ See Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 73.

⁵⁶ The claim of Hossfeld and Zenger that Moses is simply “taking collective responsibility” here seems a bit too smoothed over. Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Eric Zenger, *Psalms 3* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 91.

2.2 References to Aaron in Books IV and V

One might expect Moses to be recalled in an idealized fashion when later portions of the HB reference the exodus and wilderness traditions. Torah itself idealizes Moses as a prophet without equal (Deut. 34:10).⁵⁷ One might not expect the same idealizing tendencies when it comes to remembrances of Aaron. While there are positive portrayals of Aaron in Torah (cf. most of Leviticus and Num. 16b), he has significant moments of failure and numerous lapses in judgment. Aaron helped to create the golden calf crisis which could understandably be labeled the most significant failure of the wilderness generation (Ex. 32:2-6, 25, 35). All of Numbers 12 also focuses on Aaron's (and Miriam's) rebellion against Moses' leadership. These prominent failures of Aaron in Torah, along with continued prominent failures of the priesthood throughout Israel's history (cf. Lev. 10, 1 Sam. 2:22-36, Mal., etc.) make it all the more surprising that Books IV and V of the Psalter present Aaron in the most idealized of fashions. It is to these references to Aaron that we now turn.

Like Moses, Aaron is first introduced to the Psalter in Psalm 77:21. Here, Aaron functions alongside Moses as a leader during the exodus. Aaron is subsequently mentioned in the Psalter in Psalms 99:6, 105:26, 106:16, 115:10, 115:12, 118:3, 133:2, and 135:19.

I have treated Psalm 99:6-8 above as it pertains to Moses. This is sufficient for my purposes in this article. As was the case for Moses, Psalm 99:6 presents Aaron as an idealized priest who operates in obedience to and intimacy with YHWH. Notably, though, this presentation of Aaron suppresses his significant moral and covenantal failings documented in Torah. Aaron's actions in Exodus 32 especially call the portrayal of Aaron in Psalm 99 into question. But perhaps an accurate portrayal of Aaron as presented in Torah is not the goal of the psalm⁵⁸ (see the following sections below).

Like Moses, Aaron is named in Psalms 105:26 and 106:16. As I argued in reference to Moses in Psalm 105, Aaron is presented as an obedient, idealized sign and miracle worker in the exodus narrative. Likewise, as was the case for Moses in Psalm 106:16, Aaron is mentioned in the

⁵⁷ Moses is not, however, without flaws in Torah. Cf. Ex. 2:11-12 and Num. 20:12.

⁵⁸ McCann seems to come to the same conclusion when he says of the idealized obedience described in v. 7: "the wilderness was actually characterized by distrust, complaining, and disobedience." McCann, *Psalms*, 1076.

verse only for the sake of describing Israel's lapse of faith in the Korahite rebellion of Numbers 16. Unlike Moses, Aaron is not mentioned again in the psalm. What is perhaps surprising is the *absence* of Aaron in the creation of the golden calf as recounted in Psalm 106:19-22. If Aaron's inclusion as an idealized priestly leader in Psalm 99:6-8 despite his complicity in the golden calf crisis makes one's eyebrows raise, so does his conspicuous absence in the golden calf crisis of Psalm 106:19-22. Thus, Hossfeld and Zenger can speak of "Aaron's joint culpability (being) suppressed."⁵⁹

I now treat together three Book V references to the "house of Aaron" in Psalms 115:10-12, 118:3, and 135:19. In each of these cases, several sociological groups⁶⁰ are called upon with jussive verbs to, with some variations in each poem, praise and express faith in YHWH. While these psalms provide no characterization or description of the *בית אהרן*, we can note that the *priesthood as represented by Aaron*⁶¹ rather than another group, is singled out for encouragement to trust in and praise YHWH. The *בית אהרן* title coheres well with Books IV and V of the Psalter and keeps Aaron as a representative figure at the forefront of these latter Books. Via the *בית אהרן* title in these three psalms, Aaron in Book V primarily becomes a representative for the priestly order rather than in individual character as he is portrayed in the Torah. Thus, we can speak of a tradition or network of texts in Book V⁶² that emphasize the representative Aaron and his priestly lineage ("house") and the vitality of their role in trusting in and worshiping YHWH. We can further note that this tradition occurs at the opening of Psalm 118 and at the climactic conclusion of Psalm 135 as a form of emphasis.

Aaron is mentioned in a more substantive manner in Psalm 133:1-3. Here, the goodness of brothers dwelling in unity (v. 1) is likened to good oil running down Aaron's head, beard, and robe collar (v. 2). The goodness of brothers dwelling as one is further likened in v. 3 to the dew of the Mount Hermon in the North which flows down to Zion in the South, giving life and blessing (agriculturally speaking) to God's people. This short psalm again presents us with a lofty portrayal

⁵⁹ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 91.

⁶⁰ The identification of the groups has been discussed at length in the commentaries with little agreement. This is not a concern for this article.

⁶¹ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 209.

⁶² Cf. McCann, *Psalms*, 1154.; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 495.

of Aaron as priest who is abundantly anointed as “Yahweh’s mediator at the sanctuary.”⁶³ Here, the work of the high priest is likened to life-giving water in v. 3a and “life forevermore” in the place where YHWH has commanded blessing in v. 3b. Hossfeld and Zenger are worth quoting at length as they tease out the implications for Aaron and his priesthood:

“The subject is power over life and the ability to bless, conveyed by the precious oil of anointing, in light of the office of Aaron on behalf of the community for whose service Aaron was anointed. The abundance of oil poured on Aaron’s head is enhanced still more by the expansion of the “beard motif,” inasmuch as in v. 2d the length of the beard is explicitly emphasized. It extends over the upper hem of the priestly vestment, so that the precious oil dripping down the beard extends with its consecratory power and enchantingly sweet smell to the ephod and the breastpiece that lay on the front of the high priest’s robes of office. The ephod and breastpiece bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Exod 28:5-21; 39:2-14). The “oil of blessing” for Aaron’s consecration thus drips onto these symbols of the twelve tribes – whereby again the aspect of the community of the twelve brothers or tribes is articulated.”⁶⁴

Thus Psalm 133 describes the idealized priestly role of Aaron as nothing short of lifegiving and life-sustaining for the covenant community. While it is true that in the rhetoric of the poem Aaron and his anointing is a metaphor for brothers living together in unity in v. 1 and YHWH commanding the blessing of life forevermore in v. 3, it is also true that the metaphor only works if these are apt comparisons in the mind of the author of the poem. Thus, we have here a succinct portrayal of Aaron and his priesthood in which he conveys the perpetual life and power of God’s presence to the covenant community.⁶⁵

So, in Books IV and V, Aaron is remembered not for his prominent failings as described in Torah; nor is his “house” whom he represents remembered for its perennial failings as critiqued throughout the HB. Rather, Aaron is an idealized exodus leader (Ps. 99) and sign/miracle worker (Ps. 105), is left unmentioned in the golden calf crisis (Ps. 106), and is singled out along with his

⁶³ Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 280.

⁶⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 481.

⁶⁵ In addition to the explicit references to Aaron in Pss. 133 and 135, the priesthood is also prominent in Ps. 134:1. This strengthens my observations made here.

lineage to trust in and praise YHWH (Pss. 115, 118, 135). Most notably, the anointed Aaron is used as a metaphor for divine blessing, abundance, and everlasting life in Psalm 133. These idealized presentations of Aaron and his house fly in the face of the actions of priests so regularly critiqued in the HB. And yet, perhaps this is part of the point. When combined with the intercessory and sometimes priestly portrayal of Moses in Book IV as demonstrated above, the clustering of references to Moses and Aaron cast a priestly aura over Books IV and V of the Psalter. One additional literary feature enhances this aura in Books IV and V; namely, the repeated presence of Exodus 32 and 34 allusions which often occur in close proximity to references to Moses in Book IV. It is to this that I now turn.

2.3 Inner-Biblical Allusions to Exodus 32 and 34 in Books IV and V

In the section above on Book III of the Psalter, I demonstrated that Psalms 77, 78, 79, and 86 allude to the Grace Formula. I suggested the clustering of allusion to Exodus 34:6-7 along with the introduction of Moses and Aaron to the Psalter in Psalm 77 anticipate part of the message of Books IV and V where a mediating figure interceding on behalf of a covenant-breaking people is part of the Psalter's solution to exile. I have demonstrated above how the idealized portraits of Moses and Aaron in Books IV-V support this argument. This section returns to the Grace Formula in the Psalter and exegetes allusions to it in four psalms in Books IV-V; Psalms 99, 103, 106, and 145.⁶⁶ Special attention is given to the ways in which three out of the four allusions occur in contexts where Moses is mentioned. The pairing of references to Moses and allusions to the Grace Formula in Psalms 99, 103, and 106 greatly enhance the idealized intercessory and even self-sacrificial priestly portrait of Moses in the Psalter.

Psalm 99:8 follows a description of Moses and Aaron as priests who called upon YHWH's name (v. 6a) and received replies (v. 6b). One instance of YHWH "answering them" in v. 8 is a shorthand version of the Grace Formula. The portion of the Grace Formula alluded to is YHWH forgiving (נָשָׂא) but also avenging wrongdoing. While it must be acknowledged that the verb נָשָׂא

⁶⁶ Notably, Ps. 106 blends its Grace Formula allusion with an allusion to Ex. 32. This is not unprecedented in the HB (cf. Joel 2:14 and Jonah 4:2) and will be addressed below. Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation of YHWH's Gracious and Compassionate Character," *JBL* 108, (1989): 207–23, 219–21.; Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 79.; Joel Barker, "From Where Does My Hope Come? Theodicy and the Character of YHWH in Allusions to Exodus 34:6-7 in the Book of the Twelve," *JETS* 61, (2018): 697–715.

is very common in the HB, its contextual use in Psalm 99:8 and Exodus 34:7 is compelling. Both texts are found in contexts where Moses is functioning in a priestly fashion (Ex. 32-34 and Ps. 99:6). In both cases YHWH responds in forgiveness (נָשָׂא) but still avenges wrongdoing. Furthermore, there is a wordplay between the vengeance verbs in our two texts. YHWH “by no means clears the guilty (וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקֶה) in Exodus 34:7 and avenges (וְנִקֵּם) wrongdoing in Psalm 99:8. This allusion enhances the priestly portrayal of Moses in Psalm 99:6 and situates Moses’ priestly vocation in relation to his Sinaitic intercession where he offers his life on behalf of the covenant-breaking nation (Ex. 32:32) in the aftermath of the golden calf crisis.

Psalm 103 shares greater lexical overlap with the Grace Formula. While the psalm’s large-scale allusion to the Grace Formula is found in vv. 8-10, this is anticipated in vv. 3-4. Psalm 103:3 proclaims that YHWH forgives iniquity using a collocation comprised of the roots סָלַח and עָוֹן. The same collocation occurs in Exodus 34:9.⁶⁷ This makes the collocation חָסַד וְרַחֲמִים in Psalm 103:4b a stronger allusion to Exodus 34:6 where the same terms occur. The Grace Formula is picked up again in vv. 8-10. V. 8 comprises one of the more complete allusions to the Grace Formula in the HB (though Ps. 86:15 is more complete because it includes the final lexeme אָמֵן whereas Ps. 103:8 does not). Other than Exodus 34:6 supplying the divine name before the Grace Formula while the psalm supplies the name in the middle of it, the two texts match perfectly in all grammatical forms used. The more ominous statements of YHWH punishing the guilty are not initially included in the primary allusion to the Grace Formula, but the relevant lexemes promptly show up in the following verses.⁶⁸ V. 10 enhances this already extensive allusion by using the terms for wrongdoing employed by the Grace Formula⁶⁹ (compare the roots חָטָא and עָוֹן in Ps. 103:10 and Ex. 34:7).⁷⁰ Thus, Psalm 103 alludes to the Grace Formula in numerous ways and, like Psalm 99 above, these allusions occur in the context of a reference to Moses. Directly before the extensive allusion to the Grace Formula in Psalm 103:8, v. 7 states that “he (God) made known his ways to Moses.” In the next verse, these ways of God are stated in terms of the Grace Formula. Thus, it is

⁶⁷ See McCann, *Psalms*, 1091.

⁶⁸ Lane, *Compassionate But Punishing*, 128.

⁶⁹ Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 31.

⁷⁰ Two additional occurrences of the חָטָא root are found in v. 13 of Psalm 103. The double occurrence of this lexeme in close proximity to the primary allusion in v. 8 strengthens the allusions to the Grace Formula (specifically Ex. 34:6) in our psalm.

not a generic Moses that appears in Psalm 103:7, but an interceding Moses⁷¹ who mediates between a covenant-breaking people and their God.⁷²

Next, we come to the climactic conclusion of Psalm 106. Four key lexemes in vv. 45-46 create allusions not only to the Grace Formula but also to Moses' intercession as described in Exodus 32. In Psalm 106:45-46, the psalmist describes YHWH's mercy toward Israel despite their consistent rebellion as described at length in vv. 32-43. Vv. 45-46 state that YHWH relented (from the implied judgment against their people) using the verb נָחַם according to their abounding covenant love (כֶּרֶם הַסְדִּיּוֹ). Furthermore, God caused their people to be "pitied" using the term רַחֲמִים. As I have described above, נָחַם is used in both Psalm 90:13 and 106:45 to form an inclusio around Book IV and describe Moses' Sinai intercession with allusions to Exodus 32:12-14 where Moses asks YHWH to repent from disaster and YHWH does just that. On the other hand, YHWH's abounding covenant love (כֶּרֶם הַסְדִּיּוֹ) and compassion (רַחֲמִים) found in Psalm 106:45-46 allude to Exodus 34:6 where the same terms are used.

Like we have seen with Psalms 99 and 103, Psalm 106 not only alludes to the Grace Formula but also references Moses. In a previous section, I examined all three references to Moses in our psalm. Only the latter two occurrences concern us here. First, it is notable that Moses' Sinaitic intercession in the aftermath of the golden calf incident is described in the main historical retelling of our poem back in Psalm 106:23. Thus, there is a considerable distance between the initial recounting of Moses' intercession (v. 23) and the conclusion where it is brought back into focus (vv. 45-46). This demonstrates the importance of Mosaic intercession for the author(s) of the psalm. The last mention of Moses' name in Psalm 106 is found in v. 32. This is significant because v. 32 is a structural hinge that begins a lengthy retelling of Israel's repeated shortcomings in their relationship with YHWH (vv. 32-43). While any sin of the wilderness generation (and there are many!) could have fittingly begun this section of the poem, v. 32 focuses on the incident at Meribah where "it was bad for Moses on account of them." The use of this incident to begin a summarizing list of Israel's rebellions against God both removes guilt from Moses (he is the one being wronged, not the one committing the wrong), and scapegoats the people for Moses' actions; it is not Moses' sin (Num. 20:12) that our psalm finds offensive, but rather that the rebellious Israelites lead Moses

⁷¹ Cf. McCann who rightly notes that the whole golden calf crisis is resonating in the background in this section of our psalm. McCann, *Psalms*, 1092.

⁷² Cf. McKelvey, *High Kingship of Yahweh*, 286.

into the act. Thus, we *again* have an idealized, intercessory Moses figure mediating between a perpetually covenant-breaking people and their God.

Lastly, Psalm 145:8 alludes to the Grace Formula at length in a manner that is identical to (taken from?) Psalm 103:8.⁷³ This final and thorough allusion to the Grace Formula⁷⁴ in the MT Psalter occurs just prior to the final הלל and cements the importance of the Grace Formula and its themes of priestly intercession on behalf of a covenant-breaking people for Books IV-V.⁷⁵ Kim rightly notes that Psalm 145:8-21 begins to describe “why YHWH should be praised”;⁷⁶ the section emphasizes YHWH’s universality and nearness to all who call on them.⁷⁷ This ending to Psalm 145 is thus a fitting launching point into the final הלל. When Psalm 145 provides the Grace Formula as its lead piece of evidence as for why YHWH should be praised (as demonstrated in Pss. 146-150) we get a sense of just how climactic and democratized this final allusion to the Grace Formula is within the structure of the MT Psalter. Further organizational significance for the Grace Formula in the Psalter is established when we notice that both Books IV and V⁷⁸ allude to Exodus 34:6 near the conclusions of their final psalms.

3. Implications, Relationship to Other Psalter Studies, and Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that Book III of the Psalter introduces Moses and Aaron (Ps. 77:21) and contains a notable clustering of allusions to the Grace Formula where Moses intercedes on behalf of a covenant-breaking people (Pss. 77, 78, 79, 86). I then demonstrated that idealized references to Moses and Aaron that emphasize their intercessory, priestly roles cluster notably in Books IV and V of the Psalter. Furthermore, allusions to the Grace Formula are regularly paired with references to Moses. These allusions cast a strong intercessory tint over Moses’ character which itself forms an *inclusio* around Book IV. Finally, immediately prior to the conclusion of the

⁷³ An additional occurrence of the רחם root is found in v. 9 of Psalm 145 as well.

⁷⁴ Or at least to the first half of it. As we have seen repeatedly above, the ominous portions of v. 7 where YHWH does not leave the guilty unpunished are not included in our psalm. Cf. Lane, *Compassionate But Punishing*, 134.

⁷⁵ Lane, *Compassionate But Punishing*, 137.

⁷⁶ Kim, “Exodus 34,” 45.

⁷⁷ Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, BO (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 338.

⁷⁸ In my view, the final הלל is an editorial conclusion and not part of Book V proper.

MT Psalter (Pss. 146-150) a final, lengthy allusion to the Grace Formula is included. In my view, all of these textual features are highly intentional and bursting with communicative intent. The intent seems to be that the collapse of Judah, its temple, and its monarchy at the hands of Babylon as portrayed in Book III is already beginning to receive a response in Book III itself. Moses, Aaron, and the Grace Formula are all introduced. Books IV and V proceed to contain clusters of references to Moses and Aaron which, in context, cast them as idealized intercessors and priests. Allusions to the Grace Formula enhance this portrayal of the brothers and more specifically emphasize Moses' Sinaitic intercession and mediation in the aftermath of the golden calf disaster. All of these lines of evidence lead to the conclusion that the MT Psalter holds out a message of hope⁷⁹ for restoration from exile⁸⁰ via the work of an idealized intercessory priest (or, we could say, a priestly messiah)⁸¹ who can stand between a covenant-breaking people and their God,⁸² appeal to God's gracious and compassionate character as revealed in the Grace Formula, and ultimately convince YHWH to "relent from disaster" (Ex. 32:12-14) and keep YHWH's people as their inheritance (Ex. 34:9) despite their covenantal shortcomings. This hope is surely worthy of the final response of praise found in the final הלל.

The conclusions of this article are both unique and complementary to much recent research on the shape and message of the MT Psalter. While I grant the widespread claim that Book III of the Psalter mourns the Babylonian exile along with the collapse of the Davidic dynasty and the temple, I have argued above that there are also the beginnings of a hopeful response to the exile in Book III. While numerous studies have explored the royal messianic facets of the Psalter's message (see footnote 4 above), the cluster of priestly and Aaronide themes in Books IV-V of the Psalter has not received comparable treatment. This article begins to remedy this. Importantly, as

⁷⁹ I emphasize again that this is not the *only* editorially intended, macrostructural message communicated by the literary features of the MT Psalter. It is one of several.

⁸⁰ See McKelvey: "The occurrence of exile is thereby equated to the experiences of the exodus/wilderness generation. Consequently, it seems clear that this setting leads the reader to view the exilic/post-exilic covenant community as being in a second exodus/wilderness event." McKelvey, *High Kingship of Yahweh*, 287.; M.A. Vincent, "The Shape of the Psalter: An Eschatological Dimension?," in *New Heaven & New Earth. Prophecy & the Millennium: Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston*, VTSup 77, ed. Peter J. Harland and Robert Hayward (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 61–82.; McCann, *Psalms*, 1041.

⁸¹ Thus, we have both royal and priestly messianic hopes in the Psalter; this anticipates the messianic expectations of Qumran, though Ps. 110 merges these hopes into one.

⁸² Weber gestures in this direction on the basis of Ps. 77 alone. See: Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen*, 674.

noted above, idealized royal and priestly hopes are not mutually exclusive and co-exist within the Psalter (see Ps. 110 for the clearest articulation of both). The findings of this article also correlate well with studies that have emphasized the kingship of YHWH as a major message of the Psalter (see footnote 5 above). An idealized priestly hope only makes sense when said priests are serving and mediating the presence and blessing of YHWH to the people. Thus, while distinct, it is evident how these theological and communicative themes within the Psalter are mutually supportive.

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