

“May God Bless Us, So That All the Ends of the Earth Will Fear Him!” (Ps 67:8): The Spatial Perspective in the Eschatological Vision of God’s Universal Rule in the Cluster of Psalms 65–68

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Abstract

Psalms 65–68 form a tight collection or “cluster” of psalms close to the conclusion of Book II of the Psalter. The implied redactors’ purpose with this cluster was to offer thanksgiving and praise to God for manifesting his eschatological rule over the entire world. This article investigates the function of spatial descriptions in defining God’s rule over the cosmos in these four psalms. After establishing harmony in the world, God is present as King in his temple in Zion. To dwell in his vicinity is the pinnacle of his people’s blessing and privilege. Further away from Jerusalem, all nations, even to the ends of the earth, worship and praise God and bring him gifts. There is a centripetal movement of joy, worship, praise, and tribute toward God from all who accept his benevolent rule over the world, but also a centrifugal movement away from him by those who oppose his rule and refuse to accept it.

Keywords: cosmos; pilgrimage of the nations; Psalms 65–68; spatial perspective; YHWH’s eschatological rule; Zion

UNISA  UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Journal for Semitics

<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/JSEM>

Volume 31 | Number 2 | 2022 | #11743 | 23 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6573/9447>

ISSN 2663-6573 (Online), ISSN 1013-8471 (Print)

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Introduction

Psalms 65–68 form a coherent group of songs of praise and thanksgiving close to the end of Book II of the Psalms (Pss 42–72). The existence of an edited cluster in these four psalms can be recognised from their superscriptions which all use the (extraordinary)¹ double description of “a psalm” and “a song.” Further, they all have a hymnic (and thus a collective) character (Weber 2001, 290–91), distinguishing them from the surrounding individual laments in Pss 61–64 and 69–71.² The phrases “praise (>H̄Z) is due to you, O God, in Zion” in Ps 65:2 (verse numbers are those of the Masoretic Text) and “blessed (E~~W~~) be God!” in Ps 68:36 form an envelope of praise to God around the cluster. Numerous concatenating links connect adjacent psalms in the group or establish connections to other cluster members further removed.³

The semantic field of words of praise in the cluster, such as “praise,” “awe,” “shout for joy,” “sing,” “sing the glory,” “worship,” “be glad,” “bless,” “let hear,” “tell,” “exult,” “exalt,” “ascribe power,” and “majesty” is extremely rich and varied. This indicates that the theological purpose of the group was to express praise and thanksgiving for the power and majesty of God exhibited throughout the world, which served or would serve to reach a state of calmness, harmony, and blessedness. Given the individual laments in the psalms preceding and succeeding the cluster, this view of a harmonious world is probably meant to express the eschatological expectation of the editors. Those verses in the cluster formulated as requests or prayers⁴ indicate that such concord is still a

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- 1 The terms seem contradictory. The word ~~W~~A is understood to indicate instrumental accompaniment and ~~W~~N a cantillating (chanting) song with no accompaniment. See KAHAL (2013, 601). Apart from these four psalms, only Pss 30 (of David), 48 (a psalm of the Korahites), 75–76 and 83 (psalms of Asaph), 87–88 (psalms of the Korahites), and 92 and 108 (of David) have the double description. In this cluster, Pss 65 and 68 are also described as “of David.” Beat Weber pointed out to me (in a personal communication) that singers and musicians are mentioned together in Ps 68:26.
 - 2 This is not to deny the existence of connections between the cluster and other psalms in its vicinity. Beat Weber (2001, 291) points out the repetition of certain keywords between Pss 63 and 65 and between Pss 68 and 69 (Weber 2001, 313).
 - 3 Pss 65–66 are noteworthy for having especially strong connections. See the “shouting” and “singing” at the end of Ps 65 and the beginning of Ps 66; the motif of prayer (65:3 and 66:19–20); the fulfilment of a vow (65:2 and 66:13); a visit to the temple (65:2, 5 and 66:13–15); the motif of universal worship (65:3, 6, 9 and 66:1, 4, 8); God’s strength (65:7 and 66:7); and the awe for God (65:6 and 9 and 66:3, 5, 16). For these and additional links, see Weber (2001, 295).
 - 4 Ps 67:2–8 and Ps 68:15[?], 29, 31. There has been an ongoing debate about whether the verb forms in Ps 67:2 and 7 should be regarded as statements or requests. See Talstra and Bosma (2001, 290–313) for an in-depth discussion. Some interpreters erroneously accept that the psalm is a song of thanksgiving for a harvest and that the text, therefore, needs emendation (see Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 152). The psalm is, however, rather a prayer that God would bless Israel so that the peoples of the world would subject themselves to him and accept his rule over the world. This is how Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 153) also understand the psalm. Even though there are numerous references to the temple and the temple cult, the psalms of this cluster probably did not serve on their own or collectively as an agenda for the cult but probably as material for meditation during a “spiritual” visit to the temple. See Janowski’s (2019, 208) remark that it is not possible to reconstruct a *Sitz im Leben*

desideratum rather than a *fait accompli*. In line with this, the peoples of the world are urged to unite in praising the God of Israel (66:8; 68:33), while God is also requested to let that happen (67:4–6, 8; 68:33). But on the other hand, some verses in the cluster suggest that the universal adoration of the God of Israel is viewed as already happening and that it will soon be complete (cf. Ps 65:6, 9; 66:4).

This article investigates the spatial aspects of the editors' perspective of such a peaceful world. How did they envisage that the world would get to the point where all is in order, and what is entailed in such a blessed state? The laments in Psalms often describe a world in which the psalmist or the in-group is off-centre in spatial terms, experiencing the world as threatening and chaotic.⁵ This happens when a psalmist is far from the temple,⁶ or God is experienced as keeping his distance,⁷ or the psalmist experiences sinking in a pit or drowning in water.⁸

In contrast, this cluster paints a picture of the world as it should be, a world in harmony: God is in his temple in Jerusalem, and his throne forms the centre of the world. The religious *axis mundi* runs through the temple. It is where one has access to God and can experience “fullness of life,” enjoying his benevolent presence (his face shining upon them), blessing, joy, abundance, and security. Therefore, the people of God are also in the centre: They dwell in God's vicinity, with easy access to him. They experience his blessing and power, which he uses to subdue rebellious elements in the cosmos and “carry” them daily. In this world, all nations will eventually recognise the unique power of the God of Israel. Some have already done so. They respect him and come to Zion to worship him. Everybody, therefore, should join in with the whole cosmos in praising and honouring him, even though some may do so out of fear rather than conviction. Psalm 68 indeed suggests that terrible fighting, hatred, blood, and death on the part of God's enemies will precede eschatological peace, but in the end, there will be gladness and exultation, praise, and thanksgiving among the righteous.

The View of the Cosmos in Pss 65–66

The typical ancient Near Eastern worldview is portrayed in the cluster of psalms. The world resembles the circular one depicted in the so-called Babylonian Map of the World (see Keel 1997, 21). However, Jerusalem, not Babylon, is situated in its centre (see Keel 1997, 24). This centralisation of Jerusalem in Jewish thought resulted in the Persian period from an ideological shift in which Jerusalem replaced Persepolis and its role in

behind the text of the psalms. See also his description (Janowski 2017) of the theological and anthropological transformation of some important elements in the cultic system of religious symbols.

5 See Prinsloo (2013, 2015).

6 E.g., Pss 61:3 ; 137:4.

7 E.g., Pss 10:1; 22:2, 12, 20; 27:9; 35:22; 38:22; 71:12.

8 Pss 18:17; 30:4; 40:3; 69:1, 15; 88:7; 143:7; 144:7.

Persian propaganda. It can be seen in postexilic prophecies such as Isaiah 60.⁹ The authors or editors of this group of psalms shared the perspective with the authors of such prophetic texts.

From this circular perspective of the world, with Jerusalem in the centre, the author of Ps 65 thus speaks of people who “dwell at the ends of the earth” and are in awe of God’s signs (65:9).¹⁰ The parallel stich in this verse praises God for making the “going out of the morning and the evening” to shout for joy. Therefore, the “ends of the earth” refer to the far east and west, seen from the perspective of Zion.¹¹ “All humanity” will come to God in Zion since that is where praise is due to him, according to Ps 65:2–3. In the same psalm, God is described as the one who answers his worshippers “by awesome deeds” and “with righteousness,” causing him to be the “trust (BC: L) of all the ends of the earth and the farthest seas” (65:6). Psalm 66:4 says that “all the earth worships” God and sings praises to him. These are profound theological statements about the world accepting YHWH as the only true God (cf. Ps 40:5 and Jer 17:7 for what it means to make YHWH one’s “trust”).

As in the Babylonian Map of the World, the world’s habitable land is surrounded by seas (Keel 1997, 21). People will come from those distant places in the east and west to praise God; they also trust him wherever they are because they have come to know his awesome deeds of righteousness and salvation (65:6). Because this last-mentioned verse says that God answers the psalmist and his in-group with righteousness and that he is their salvation, one can assume that his “awesome deeds” refer to his past (and possibly future) interventions on behalf of his people.¹²

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- 9 Christopher M. Jones refers to this as a process called “implacement” in spatial theory (Jones 2014, 615, 618–19). The same shift is already visible in Isa 19:23–25, where Israel is described as “the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth (TV> : VW:), whom YHWH of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.’” Brueggemann and Bellinger (2014, loc.7575) refer to this text in their exposition of Ps 67.
- 10 The “ends” of the earth, also mentioned in Ps 67:8 in this cluster, means “end” in the sense of “cessation, discontinuation of existence” (Kleer 1997, 42). The phrase TV​ occurs in the Psalms and Isaiah in Pss 2:8; 22:28; 59:14; 67:8; 72:8; 98:3; Isa 45:20–22; and 52:10. Other (postexilic) texts containing the phrase are Deut 33:17; 1 Sam 10:2; Prov 30:4; Jer 16:19; Mic 5:3; and Zech 9:10.
- 11 The parallelism makes it unnecessary to consider the possibility that this is a merism meaning “all day long” as Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 140) posit. In the view of the psalmists, the temple is located vertically in a lofty position (J@LH 68:19), horizontally in the centre, far from the periphery (dOS8 TV&, 67:8), and temporally forever (BUNH 68:17).
- 12 The exact form Z@V​ occurs only in Pss 45:5; 65:6; 106:22; 139:14; and Isa 64:2. The context in Ps 106:22 and Isa 64:2 point to the passage through the Reed Sea as the most important “awesome deed” of salvation. The prophetic text seems to have been the inspiration for the occurrence of the term in Ps 65:6, since the “iniquities” (M@pl.) are mentioned in passing in Ps 65:4 but explained more fully in Isa 65:5–6 and 8.

Among the awesome deeds of God are his acts of establishing the mountains and stilling the seas with their roaring waves at creation (65:7–8). These two acts are connected because of the perception that there are mountains in the outer reaches of the oceans surrounding the disc of land. On those mountains, the dome of heaven rests (Keel 1997, 22). Firmly establishing those mountains thus demonstrated the strength and might of God (65:7) since he first had to subjugate the waters of chaos, the seas with their roaring waves (65:8). It also implied that he, through the same strength, could silence the “tumult of the peoples” (65:8).¹³

In the cosmological view of the implied editors, God is thus present in Zion, where he receives praise and vows are performed to him (65:2). This is where he listens to prayers, where all flesh should come to him (65:2–3). Those who live in his vicinity are extraordinarily blessed—they are the people whom God chooses and brings near to “dwell” in his “courts” (65:5a) since it means to be satisfied with the goodness of his house and the holiness of his temple (65:5b).¹⁴ Urban cultic spaces in the Bronze Age in Canaan could not accommodate many standing people, let alone house them (see Susnow 2021, 144). This was probably also the case in Israelite temples in the Iron Age, and only the priestly and social elite had access to the inside of the temple. Common people were restricted to the temple’s courtyard (see Knoppers 1999, 60). The living quarters and storerooms located on the flanks and possibly the temple’s rear were reserved for use by the priests and Levites.¹⁵ Psalm 65:5 could thus imply that those who have access to the temple, who live in its vicinity, in Jerusalem or near the city, are exceptionally blessed. In the postexilic period, the temple acquired more and more symbolic value, especially for those who could not visit it.¹⁶ It was perceived as the throne of God in Jerusalem, which formed the centre of the world and guaranteed its stability, fruitfulness, and justice.¹⁷ The temple in Jerusalem was also a place of abundance. Psalm 84:12 describes the person who has an audience with YHWH as receiving “everything that is good.” That implies, according to Janowski (2012, 373),

13 Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 140) state that God’s “active creative power” was thought to be displayed in both the *creatio prima* and in the *creatio continua*. God can maintain order in the world even in the time of the psalm’s author. They (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 140) refer to Isa 51:15, among other texts.

14 The temple in Jerusalem was the “source of life,” implying that it was the place of cosmic order, paradisiacal abundance, and divine justice. See Janowski (2012, 369). In the postexilic era, when the psalms of the cluster were assembled and edited, the cultic system of symbols was reinterpreted (even though the cult still functioned). According to Janowski (2017, 227), the semiotic value of this system of symbols helped worshippers to reconcile the tension between the suggested order of the world and reality in which elements of order and disorder were always interwoven.

15 See Knoppers (1999, 65) for a discussion about these rooms being reserved for use by priests and whether the Levites also had access to them, as the authors of Chronicles assert (1 Chr 9:26, 33; 2 Chr 31:11–12).

16 See Sutton’s description of Ps 66 as helping the individual and the community to experience piety by using memory to recreate a new lived space (Sutton 2021, 1–9). He seems, however, to date the psalm to a time when the performance of cultic worship was only a memory (thus during the exile).

17 See Janowski (2017, 227).

all a person needs to be successful and happy. In this cluster, the verb “satisfy” (שבע) in Ps 65:5, and the nouns “goodness” (טוב) in Ps 65:5, “bounty” (טובה) in Ps 65:12 and 68:11, “abundance” (דשן) in Ps 65:12 and רויה in Ps 66:12, as well as “produce” (יבול) in Ps 67:7 signify such abundance.¹⁸ After the exodus, the people were like a flock of animals that found a dwelling place in the promised land, with God providing for the needy in his “goodness” (>: @, 68:11). After the return from exile, God again brought his people “out” to a place of “abundance” (>@ 66:12). To have spiritual access to the holiness of the temple satisfied a longing in the mind of worshippers of YHWH. The holiness of the temple radiated outwards but became weaker and weaker the further one went away from it. To be far from the temple meant, for most Judeans, to be far from YHWH, off-centre and troubled. In times of trouble, they normally experienced God to be far from them (cf. Pss 10:1; 22:2, 11, 20; 35:22; 38:22; 71:12). However, those who sought refuge in him (Ps 34:9) could expect him to see their distress, even to be close to them wherever they were (cf. Ps 34:16, 18–19).

According to the cluster, God is present in Jerusalem, in his temple on the mountain he desired for his abode and where he will dwell forever (68:17). However, he is also in heaven since Ps 65:10 says he “visits” the earth.¹⁹ He brings the “river of God” with him (65:10). This is the channel running from the stores of water in heaven to the gates in the celestial dome, and this is how he brings abundant rain, which causes pastures, hills, meadows, and valleys to produce grass (BLU Z@N JDF) and grain (M, W) (65:10–14).²⁰ As Brueggemann and Bellinger say (2014, loc.7404), the sum of the praise in Ps 65 “is that Israel can assert that in all parts of its life it is astonished and dazzled that the world works so well; Israel know, of course, that a properly functioning world is not autonomous but is the gift of God.” Psalm 66:7 also says that God’s eyes keep watch (>SU) on the nations to prevent the rebellious ones from exalting themselves. This verse does not spell it out, but it is known from other texts in the Psalms that God watches from above, from heaven.²¹ Psalm 33:13 says that YHWH looks down from heaven, seeing all humans. Psalm 11:4 spells out that “YHWH is in his holy temple; his throne is in heaven; his eyes see, and his eyelids test the children of man.” There is a

18 See Isa 55:2, where the words “satiation” (>P: Ö), “good” (: @), and “fatness” (M<) are all used to express this motif.

19 For the peoples of the ancient Near East, temples were places where heaven and earth met. They, therefore, made no “hard distinction” between the heavenly palace of their god (or God) and temples as their earthly dwelling places (Hoppe 2000, 24). Because the Israelites had to ascend to the city’s highest point to get to the temple, its topographic position could easily symbolise its role as the meeting point between heaven and earth. The temple was a piece of the earth jutting into heaven, but also a piece of heaven touching the earth (Keel 1980, 151). Janowski (2012, 369) describes the temple in accordance with the Egyptian view of temples as a heaven on earth.

20 In this respect, YHWH has taken over the function of Baal (Keel 1997, 48). The waters coming down from heaven are the waters of *Tehom*, the primeval flood, but the violent power of the waters of chaos has been broken and the waters subdued by God (Keel 1997, 48).

21 Keel (1997, 43) refers to Pss 14:2; 33:13; 80:14; and 102:19 as reminiscent of the Egyptian representation of the eye of the sun, associated with the sun disc.

close connection between the temple and God’s palace in heaven. He is present in both places at the same time. Psalm 66:7 seems to convey the same perception as Proverbs 15:3, where the verb >SU is also used for God’s keen observation: “The eyes of YHWH are in every place, keeping watch (>SU) on the evil and good (people).”²² It is in the creation and in the skies that God’s majesty is visible: he rides in the ancient heavens (J<VdLÑ DLÑ:), sending out his mighty voice (68:34). His majesty is over Israel, and his power is in the skies (JDBÑ, 68:35). His power also extends to the waters beneath the disc of the earth since he will bring back his enemies (and the enemies of Israel) from Bashan and the depths of the sea (68:23).

Past Experiences of Being Off-Centre

In contrast to the surrounding individual lament psalms, the psalms of this cluster foreground the community of Israel. The individual psalmist, represented as “David” in the headings of Pss 65 and 68, moves to the background. A first-person singular speaker is present only in Pss 65:4, 66:13–20, and 68:25. The psalmist’s group is mentioned much more often: Pss 65:4–6; 66:6, 8–12; 67:2, 7–8; and 68:20–21 and 29. Past problems are mentioned for both the psalmist as an individual and the in-group as a community. The psalmist and the people have been off-centre in the past, but God intervened on their behalf.

The psalmist experienced distress when “matters of guilt” (ZM^Q DW<) overwhelmed (W;) him (65:4). It is unclear whether this refers to the sins or guilt of the psalmist or those of the people since the second stich of the line says, “but you atone for our transgressions.” A few modern translations opt for the latter possibility and change the text to read “when *we were overwhelmed* by *our* transgressions” or something similar. Since the psalmist insists in Ps 66:18 that he did not harbour “iniquity” (M) in his heart and that it is because of this innocence that the Lord listened to his call for help,²³ it is best to understand the psalmist (“David”) as having experienced distress because of the sins of the in-group.²⁴ When Ps 65:4 is read together with verse 5, it becomes clear that guilt causes distance between God and his worshippers since God’s atoning for their transgressions goes hand in hand with his choosing people and “bringing them near” to dwell in his courts. The psalmist is part of that group since he says that they (“we”) will be satisfied with the goodness and holiness of his temple. Transgressions can therefore

22 Since these are the only two texts in the Hebrew Bible that describe God’s careful perception of human activity, Ps 66:7 may be dependent on Prov 15:3.

23 This meaning of the Hebrew can be maintained without emendation, despite the assertion of Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 144) that it requires a conjecture.

24 Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 138) explain the tension as the petitioner speaking for himself and the group. Comparison with Isa 64:5, 6, and 9 shows that the sins of the people, which caused the exile, are probably referred to. The editors, however, kept in mind that this is a psalm of David and that there could not be such obvious allusions to the exile as in Isa 64.

cause people to be off-centre, removed from God. Atonement brings them back into the presence of God again.

When God “removes” his steadfast love from a person, that person can also become off-centre. It is implied that God can “reject” one’s prayer and “remove” (WQ, *hiphil*) his steadfast love from a person because that person is harbouring iniquity (66:18, 20). The psalmist was in “trouble” (W), according to Ps 66:14. He made a vow (66:14) and cried out aloud (“with my voice”) to God (66:17). He also says that when he cried out, “high praise” was “under” his tongue, probably indicating that he was ready to give high praise to God if God would respond (66:17). God did listen, and now he could praise God with “Blessed be God because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!” (66:20). The response of the psalmist also meant that he would “come” (8@) into God’s house with burnt offerings to perform his vows (66:13) as he had promised (66:14). The offerings he mentions are in a special category as if spoken by a king or sourced from a large group of people (66:15).²⁵ The psalmist also invites all who fear God to “come” (EH) and hear what God had done for his soul (66:16). Verbs of movement, such as “come,” “bring near,” and “not remove” indicate a process of coming closer to God when everything in one’s life is how it should be, thus when a person is approaching the centre of the world.

The people of Israel had also experienced being off-centre in the past. The dangers that threatened them during the exodus are hinted at in Ps 66:6. As part of the community’s praise, the congregation now calls on the world to “come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of mankind” (66:5). What he did was to “turn the sea into dry land” so that the Israelites could “pass through the river” on foot (66:6). “River” does not refer to the Jordan here but forms a parallel to the “sea,” namely the Reed Sea (Hossfeld and Zenger 2002, 388). But the present in-group of the psalmist was “present” there since the second stich of verse 6 continues: “There did *we* rejoice in him.”²⁶ Their joy resulted from God’s preventing their enemies from killing them. This is explained in verse 7, which says that God “rules by his might forever” and his eyes “keep watch on the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves.” Verse 9 continues: “Who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip.” Going down into the sea or deeper into Sheol is therefore perceived as another way of being off-centre. God saved the Israelites during the exodus from the Egyptian army and the threat of the sea and kept them alive by enabling them to cross the sea on dry land.

25 Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 147) think the person fulfilling the vow is a leading personality who stands forth as a liturgist in this section. The psalm is, however, not to be read as the script for a liturgy.

26 Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 145) refer to this as “an example of the solidary culture of memory in the Bible, which cuts across all times.” Sutton (2021, 7) refers to this verse as an instance where communal memory is used to create a new “sanctuary” or space within which piety can be practised (whether formal, personal, or private in nature).

A later generation of believers has, however, also experienced being off-centre. After confessing that God had kept them alive, the in-group testifies (66:10–12): “For you, O God, have tested us: you have tried us as silver is tried.²⁷ You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.” These metaphors describe the experience of exile: being tested like silver, being caught like birds, having to do hard labour, being killed by horse-drawn chariots or wagons, drowning, or burning to death. The combined threat of fire and water is reminiscent of Isa 43:2.²⁸ But God “brought them out” (8UDhiphil) to “abundance” or “superfluity” (>DNY). This seems like a herding metaphor and links up with God’s acts of grace described in Ps 68:7–11. In Ps 68:7, the psalmist says, “God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out (8UDhiphil participle) the prisoners to prosperity (>VN@), but the rebellious dwell in a parched land (>BDU).” “Prosperity” in Ps 68:7 corresponds to “abundance” (>DNY) in Ps 66:12; the “parched land” of Ps 68:7 forms the opposite of these two concepts. It is the area outside the cultivated land, where roads are not clearly indicated, where one can easily get lost, die from thirst, or be overtaken by rebels or criminals (Keel 1980, 66). Psalm 68:8 then describes how God “went out” before his people through the wilderness, and in verse 9, how the earth quaked, and the heavens poured down “rain in abundance” (Z@NJÑ;), restoring his inheritance as it languished (v. 10) so that his flock could find a dwelling in it (v. 11). “Prosperity” (or “happiness”) and “abundance” are thus used as descriptions of the promised land and living in God’s vicinity. As God travelled with his people, he made their surroundings a pleasant place to be, and they reached the climax of pleasantness when they settled in the land in his vicinity.²⁹

YHWH is at the Centre of the World, and Israel is Privileged

The scene that unfolds when one reads the psalms of the cluster is that the world is a very regular, highly ordered system with low entropy. God listens to the prayers of his people (65:3). He atones for their transgressions, enabling them to come near to him so that they can be “satisfied” with the goodness and holiness of his temple (65:4–5). God

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- 27 Ps 66:10 is reminiscent of Isa 48:10, although the latter says, “I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.” In this instance, it seems that the Isaiah text is commenting on the psalm text, but it could also be the other way around. It is, in any case, clear that the suffering during the exile is hinted at in both verses. Ps 66:11 also clearly refers to exile (see Hossfeld and Zenger 2002, 388 who refer to Ezek 19:9).
- 28 The context of Isa 43:2 makes it clear that life-threatening dangers are implied, as Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 146) explain. Brueggemann and Bellinger (2014, loc.7478) also refer to Isa 43:2, yet they strangely understand the reference to going through fire and water as referring to the Egyptian slavery, thus before the exodus.
- 29 Since the psalms of the cluster are represented as the work of David or to be read in conjunction with his life near the end of his reign, the editors were careful not to include obvious references to the return from exile. The vocabulary, however, is reminiscent of exilic and postexilic Isaianic texts so that it seems certain that they were edited in the Persian period.

answers their prayers with “awesome deeds of righteousness,” saving them, and this causes him to become the “trust” of all the ends of the earth and the farthest seas (65:6). It is a stable world because God had established the mountains and stilled the roaring of the seas. He has also stilled the tumult of the peoples (65:8). Even people at the ends of the earth take note of his power and are impressed by it. His enemies cringe in fear because of the display of his power (66:3). The far east and far west “shout for joy.” This is an expression of pride in and praise of God (65:9). No part of creation is excluded from the worship of the God of Israel: All the earth is called to “shout for joy” to God (66:1), to bless and praise the God of Israel (66:8). Psalm 66:4 contains an extraordinary claim: “All the earth worships you [or “bows down to you,” >Ⓢ *hishtaphel*] and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.”³⁰

In the middle of the cluster (in terms of the number of verses), however, the short Ps 67 formulates the blessed state of the world as a prayer to God for greater peace and accord. The psalm begins with a prayer for blessing by rearranging and shortening the Aaronite blessing from Num 6:24–26. In Ps 67:3, a purpose is inserted for God to be gracious to his people, bless them, and make his face shine upon them: so that his “way may be known on earth” and his “saving power among all nations.” God’s blessing of nature, as described in Ps 65:10–14, is acknowledged in Ps 67:7a: “The earth has yielded its increase.” But, according to Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 153), the psalm in its present form then prays for the blessing of “‘political fruitfulness’ of the earth as something that is apparently still unattained.” The worldwide praise of God is formulated five times as a prayer: “Let all the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you!” (v. 4); “Let the nations be glad and sing for joy” (v. 5); “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!” (v. 6). To this is added the concluding prayer: “May God bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!” (v. 8). God has blessed the agriculture of the world. Israel is in a privileged position. But paradise has not yet been restored. This would happen if God extended his blessing to the political realm so that the world would acknowledge that there is no god but their God. The Elohist formulation in Ps 67:7, “May God, our God, bless us,” seems to drive at a complete monotheistic acceptance of only one God in the world.

The prayers for blessing and help, such as those in Pss 67 and 68:29, “Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us,” are, however, overshadowed in the cluster by testimonies that God is in complete control through his power (as in Ps 66:7) and that he has repeatedly saved the lives of his people (cf. 66:9; 68:21) and daily carries them³¹ and gives them power and strength (68:20, 35–36).³²

30 It is also possible to interpret the verbal forms in the verse as jussives.

31 This confession in Ps 68:20 seems to allude to Isa 46:3–4, part of a polemic against Bel and Nebo, whose idols need to be “carried” by poor beasts (Isa 46:1–2).

32 The verse seems to allude to the promise in Isa 40:29.

Such a state of low entropy means there is little threat of chaos. God’s power and the visible manifestation of his strength ensure that chaos is contained. The psalms speak of his “strength” (BF) and “might” (>W@;) with which he established the mountains and subdued the waters of chaos and the tumult of the peoples (65:7–8), his “awesome deeds” of righteousness (Ps 65:6; cf. 66:3, 5) and his great “power” (Æ) (66:3). He rules by his “might” (>W@;), preventing rebellious nations from exalting themselves (66:7). It is because of his display of power and his earnestness for righteousness that his enemies come “cringing” (ÑBF *piel*) to him (66:3).

There is also little threat from nature in the world pictured in the cluster. There is abundant rain at the right time of year and, therefore, food security. Wherever God goes, there is abundant rain, as the Israelites experienced in the desert (68:9–10).³³ God visits the earth (or the land) to water it and enrich it (65:10). Since the “river of God,” the channel bringing water from the storerooms in heaven to the skies, is full of water, there is enough grain (65:10). The waters of chaos have been subdued; thus, rain does not threaten to flood. There are only ample showers (>@Y Ps 65:11, cf. Z@<NJÑ; in Ps 68:10) at the right time to keep the soil soft and moist (65:11). The result of this friendly rain is enough grain for the people (65:10, 14) and pasture for the animals (65:13–14). Metaphorically, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks and the valleys with grain, shouting and singing together for joy (65:14). Because of the blessing of the God of Israel, the earth has yielded an increase (67:7). Food security was a major concern in the ancient world, and the number of verses dedicated to such blessings in this cluster shows how important it was for the concept of eschatological blessedness.

When God blesses his people, it influences other peoples as well. It would make known God’s way on earth and his saving power among all nations (67:3). Because he judges the peoples with equity and guides the nations on earth, all the peoples and nations will want to praise him (67:3–6). This view of the cosmos is paradisiacal, as was envisaged in Gen 12:3.³⁴ When he blesses Israel, all the ends of the earth will fear him (67:8). The temple in Jerusalem plays a vital role in this. The cluster begins by stating that praise is due to God in Zion (65:2) and ends by acclaiming his “awesomeness” from his sanctuary in Ps 68:36. It is “because of” his temple in Jerusalem that kings will bear gifts to him (68:30). Nobles shall come from Egypt, and Cush will hasten to stretch out her hands to God (68:32). When God ascended the throne in his sanctuary on the mountain he selected for his abode, he led a host of captives in his procession and received gifts from them (68:17–19). There, in the temple, he is honoured by a great procession led by

33 Hossfeld and Zenger (2002, 398) note about this passage that the singular turmoil in nature described in Judg 5:4–5 as an answer to the theophany is changed into a continuous provision for the promised land, described in the same way as in Ps 65:10–14.

34 Brueggemann and Bellinger (2014, loc.7546) say that “the reason given for the broad sweep of praise in verse 4 is that YHWH is a judge who will bring all nations to justice, well-being, and peace.”

singers and musicians, with Benjamin and princes of Judah, Zebulun, and Naphtali taking part (68:25–28).

God is described in the cluster as the “One of Sinai” and “the God of Israel” (68:9). In Ps 68:18, the psalmist says, “The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands; the Lord (D~~8~~) is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary.” The last stich of this verse line (N̄<V: D~~8~~J: D~~8~~) is not clear. Some translations explain it as “the Lord is among them *as at* Sinai, in the sanctuary.” However, it seems clear that the sanctuary is in Jerusalem since the previous verse referred to “the mount that God desired for his abode, yes where YHWH will dwell forever.” The psalms of the cluster are part of the Elohist group. The reference to YHWH is, therefore, significant. But the vital role of the temple in Jerusalem is also noteworthy. God is described as the one “who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens,” and, in a phrase reminiscent of Ps 29, as the one who “sends out his voice, his mighty voice” (68:34). In the next verse, the congregation is called to “Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies.” Verse 36 continues, “Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—he is the one who gives power and strength to his people.” Therefore, stability in the universe is described as the result of God’s power, which is visibly and audibly displayed in the skies. It is clear to everybody that he selected Zion as the place where he will dwell forever. His known might in Jerusalem ensures submission, awe, and praise from all nations to the world’s end.

From his “holy habitation” in Jerusalem, God acts as a father to the fatherless and a protector of the widows (68:6). He helps the solitary settle into a home and leads prisoners out to prosperity (68:7). This refers to people who have been made prisoners by unjust rulers and their liberation from exile. For “prosperity,” a plural indicating intensity is used: Z~~8~~N̄@ from >W̄N̄@, derived from the stem W̄NF. Since the antithetic parallel refers to the rebellious who “dwell in a parched land,” Z~~8~~N̄@ probably indicates having agricultural success on arable land or in a business enterprise within the promised land.³⁵

The Flow of People and Emotions Toward God at Centre

In this cluster of psalms, there is a centripetal movement of awe, reliance, joy, worship, praise, sacrifices, and tribute toward God, from which Israel also benefits. There is also a movement of God himself to Zion described in the cluster. He moved from Sinai to Zion. Psalm 68:18 makes the cryptic statement, “Adonai (is) among them; Sinai in holiness [or: in the sanctuary].” Some translations understand this as “Adonai is among them [the thousands upon thousands of chariots]; Sinai is now in the sanctuary,” and

35 The suggestion of HALOT (see KAHAL 2013, 242) that the noun >W̄N̄@ with the preposition : should be translated “with songs of joy” cannot be correct since the antithesis of >W̄N̄@ is >BIBU a “bare” or “scorched” land.

others as, “Adonai came [changing J: into 8:] from Sinai in holiness [or: into the sanctuary].” He is, in any case, called “the one of Sinai” in Ps 68:9, where his “marching” (<PU) through the wilderness (MND) before his people is described in Ps 68:8.

The first reaction from the world is “awe.” The process begins in the psalm immediately preceding the cluster under discussion: Psalm 64 describes how God shot an arrow at the enemies of the psalmist, wicked evildoers who had no fear of attacking blameless people (64:8–10). Through God’s action against them, they are brought to ruin. The consequence of this was that “all mankind feared” (J<8dF (8WD)) They talked about what God did and gained insight into him. In the cluster of Pss 65–68, the *niphal* participle of 8WDs then used four times to describe the awesomeness of God’s actions or his person (65:6; 66:3, 5; 68:36). The first two of these verses refer to God’s righteous deeds in saving his people, but Ps 66:5 speaks of his awesome deeds before (HP in the meaning of Latin *coram*) the “children of man.” In verse 6, the author says that God turned the sea into dry land so that “they” (Israel) could pass through the river on foot. God’s intervention on behalf of Israel during the exile is thus interpreted as an awesome deed before humanity. Psalm 68:36 refers to the God of Israel, who gives power and strength to his people, as the “awesome one.” Two other finite forms of the same verb in this cluster describe how “those who dwell at the ends of the earth” are in awe at his signs (65:9) and how “all the ends of the earth” should “fear him” when God blesses his people (67:8).

Awe, respect, or fear is also the reason some of God’s enemies “come cringing” (ÑBF *piel*) to him (66:3). The dictionaries assign the meaning “to feign obedience, fawn” to both the *piel* and the *hithpael* forms of this verb, but “cringe” or “cower” seem to fit the context better in Ps 66:3 and Ps 18:45, where the *piel* is used, and 2 Sam 22:45 where the *hithpael* is used as an equivalent for the *piel* form in Ps 18:45. Through awe, some enemies of God are forced to show respect to him. People who are not enemies, however, find God’s power liberating since they see the God of Israel as a source of hope or trust: he becomes their BC: L, their “trust” or “reliance.” This means that people from “all the ends of the earth and the farthest seas” have abandoned their reliance on other gods and political powers and switched allegiance to Israel’s God.³⁶ Consequently, “all flesh” (WÖ: dF) will come to God in Zion (65:3).

Awe for God is also a source of joy among the world’s inhabitants. In conjunction with the awe at his signs experienced by those who dwell at the ends of the earth, the exits of the morning and evening (the far east and west) “shout for joy (MW)” (65:9). Joy is also expressed by the hills who “gird themselves with joy” (65:13), the meadows and valleys who “shout and sing together for joy” (65:14) because of an abundance of flocks

36 Prophetic texts such as Jer 17:7; 48:13; and Ezek 29:16 indicate that reliance for safety on a political power or a god or God can be described with this term. Wisdom texts refer more often to people, physical structures, or riches as sources of trust.

and grain, and the nations who will be glad and sing for joy (67:5). Such joy is a form of praise and thanksgiving, and praise is also mentioned explicitly in Pss 66:2, 4, 8; 67:4, 6; and 68:33.³⁷ As was mentioned earlier, the psalmist goes as far as to say that “all the earth worships” God (or bows before him) in Ps 66:4. There will be unanimous recognition in the world described in this cluster that there is only one God who deserves to be worshipped. It is only the many-peaked mountain of God, Bashan, who looks with envious hatred at the hill in Israel which God has desired for his abode, according to Ps 68:17. Apart from that, the authors reckon with the possibility of rebellion, but God is ready for that (66:7). The rebellious will be banished to the inhospitable regions of the world (68:7) and will also have to pay tribute to God at the end (68:19).

There is also a stream of praise towards Zion from God’s people, while vows must also be performed to him there (65:2). It is “into” his house that the psalmist will come with burnt offerings to fulfil his vows (66:13). All who fear God are invited to “come” and listen to the psalmist’s retelling of what God did for him (66:16). This follows the invitation to the entire world to “come and see what God has done” in Ps 66:5. When God punishes his enemies—those who hate him and the wicked—the righteous will be glad. They will rejoice before God and be jubilant with joy (68:4).

When the nations come to Jerusalem, they will not be empty-handed. The world’s kings will bear gifts to him (68:30). Nobility will come from Egypt, and Cush shall hurry with outstretched hands (68:32). The kingdoms of the earth will sing praises to the Adonai of Israel (68:33).

The Flow of People and Emotions Away from God

There is also a centrifugal movement of people and emotions away from God at the centre described in this cluster. The focus of this movement is found in Ps 68. The psalm announces that God shall arise, and his enemies shall be “scattered” (T₈, 68:2).³⁸ The parallel stich describes it as his haters “fleeing” (O₈). Their dispersal is compared to smoke being “driven away” and wax “melting” before the fire (68:3). The movement is also described as the “fleeing” (<<N) of kings with their armies (68:13, 15). While God delivers his people from death, he will “strike” (TBL) the heads of his enemies (68:21–22). Then, after the campaign, God will bring the slain enemies back (: ₈ *hiphil*) from Bashan and the depths of the sea (68:23). These descriptions point to the distant places the enemies have fled to escape punishment. For Israel, satisfaction seems to be involved since they can “strike” their “feet” in the enemies’ blood while their dogs lick it. In Ps 68:31, the psalmist pleads with God to “rebuke (VP;) the beasts that dwell among

37 *W₈Ap₈iel*, *Z₈H₈Z* <@F *L₈D₈*, *L₈W*, *Z₈H₈Z* *H₈W* *D₈D₈N*>, ><*Dhiphil*, *W₈N*, *W₈Ap₈iel*.

38 The image of “scattering” enemies is associated in Ps 18:15 with YHWH sending arrows of lightning. In Isa 41:16, a strong wind will “scatter” Israel’s opponents after they were made like chaff by Israel “threshing” them.

the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,” and that God would “trample underfoot those who lust after tribute.” He should “scatter (WA *piel*) the peoples who delight in war.” Being scattered and driven away and then struck or trampled down is the description of the fate of God’s enemies. Thus, a movement away from the centre and down to Sheol. This movement is accompanied by fear on the part of God’s enemies. Such fear is suggested by the haste with which they are “scattered” and “fleeing.” The similes of smoke driven away by wind and wax melting before the fire express powerlessness on the part of the enemies. The reaction of the righteous is that they will “be glad” and will “exult before God” and “be jubilant with joy” (68:4).

The Theological Location of the Editors of This Part of the Psalms

When were the psalms in this part of the Psalter redacted to form a cluster? Each individual psalm probably originated at a different time and had a growth history. Psalm 68 is perhaps the clearest example of such growth, possibly spanning centuries. Therefore, its present (final) form should contain hints about the time the cluster was put together.

According to Hossfeld and Zenger, the basic form of Ps 68 dates from the pre-exilic period, possibly the seventh to sixth centuries.³⁹ It then underwent an Asaphite redaction during the exile, in which the outer ring consisting of verses 5–7 and 33–36 were added (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 163). The prelude (vv. 2–4) was added still later, during the postexilic period. In this, its youngest part, sayings from Num 10:35–36 (which itself possibly originated in the early monarchy), were used to give a secondary interpretation to the whole psalm as “a concretion of the final judgment on the evil and the righteous” (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 163). According to them, the late redactor who did this had Num 10 and Pss 1 and 97 in view.⁴⁰ However, this frame of reference (that of Pss 1 and 97) itself locates the redactor or redactors sometime after the forming of the Messianic Psalter (Pss 2–89), plus the addition of Psalms 90–92 to the Messianic Psalter, and the addition of the “YHWH is King” psalms (Pss 93–100) to this composition to constitute an early form of the entire Psalter made up of Pss 2–100.⁴¹ Such an early form of the

39 Weber (2001, 303–4) thinks that its original version was much older (as in the time of Solomon) based on northern place names, the role of Sinai as the place of theophany, and the influence of the song of Deborah. It would have been brought to Judah after the fall of the northern kingdom in his view.

40 Num 10:35 is alluded to in Ps 68:2 when the author says that God “shall arise” (J **YD**) and his “enemies” (**D** **YB**) shall “be scattered” (**U** **SD**), and that those who “hate” him (**B** **N** **L**) will “flee before” (**DSL** **U** **MD**) him. Moses’s battle cry will thus become a reality. The author also alludes to Ps 1:4 and 6 when he describes how “the wicked” (J **D** **N** **W**) will “perish” (< 8) before God, comparing them to smoke being “driven away” (**R** **N**) (68:3). Ps 97:5 is involved in the description of the wicked “melting like wax before the fire,” since Ps 97 describes the “melting” of the mountains when God appears in similar terms.

41 To which Ps 1 was presumably appended as an introduction.

Psalter Hossfeld and Zenger date to the fourth century BCE (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 7). Thus, if they are right, an important phase in the redaction of the cluster must have happened in the fourth century BCE.⁴²

The eschatological perspective in the cluster is, indeed, similar to that found in the group of “YHWH is King” psalms (Pss 93–100; cf. also Ps 47). There are similarities in, among other things, the focus on the power⁴³ of God through which he had conquered the waters of chaos⁴⁴ and established the world on its foundations,⁴⁵ the expectation that God will judge the world with equity,⁴⁶ his care for the *personae miserae*,⁴⁷ the joy of his people when he exercises judgement,⁴⁸ and the praise of all the earth when that happens,⁴⁹ the praise offered to God by his creation,⁵⁰ God’s elevated position in Zion,⁵¹ and the awe experienced by the world⁵² and their response of worshipping God.⁵³ At the same time, the redactors also established connections with the “prologue” to the Psalms, Pss 1–2. The “perishing” (<: 8) of the “wicked” (J D Ñ W) while being “driven away” (R < Nhiphil) in Ps 68:3 is a clear allusion to Ps 1:4 and 6. The references to the “ends of the earth” (T W & O S 8) in Ps 67:8 (see also T W & O V & H in 65:6) and the kings’ willingness to subject them to the rule of God in turn possibly allude to Ps 2:8 and 10.⁵⁴

The prominence of some motifs in the cluster can help locate the time when the redactors put the cluster together. The emphasis on the centrality of Zion, the kingship of God over Israel and the nations, and the inclusion of other nations in worshipping YHWH are some elements which the cluster shares with Isaiah, especially Isa 40–66. Ulrich Berges (Berges 2022, 282) investigates instances of conspicuous similarity between Isaiah and Psalms. He infers (based on consonance, rarity, and explainability,

42 Weber (2021, 248) rightly remarks that inclusion of an earlier composition in a cluster foregrounds certain aspects, pushing certain others to the background. The complexity of a psalm may, consequently, be reduced when certain aspects are not considered as contributing to the broader context.

43 See the might by which he was “girded” (W & , *niphal*) in Ps 65:7 and the strength with which he “girded” (W & *hithpael*) himself in Ps 93:1; also references to his “power” (A) in Ps 66:3 and Pss 93:1; 96:6, 7; and 99:4.

44 See Ps 65:8 and Ps 93:3–4.

45 See M (hiphil) in Ps 65:7 and in Ps 93:1, see also Ps 95:4.

46 See שפט עמים מישור in Ps 67:5 and דין עמים במישורים in Ps 96:10, also שפט־חבל בצדק ועמים במישורים in Ps 98:9.

47 See J D @ D and Z @ L P in Ps 68:6 and > N L H and J D @ D in Ps 94:6–11.

48 See B L Ö, T H P, and > B L Ö in Ps 68:4 and > B L Ö and B L Ö in Ps 97:10–12.

49 See W A in Ps 66:1–2, 4; Ps 68:33; and Ps 98:4–5.

50 See Ps 65:13–14 and Pss 96:11–12; 98:7–8.

51 See J @ L in Ps 68:19 and Ps 93:4.

52 See 8 V @ in Pss 65:3, 5; 68:36; and Ps 96:4.

53 See > @ in Ps 66:4 and Pss 96:9; 97:7; and 99:5 and 9.

54 Both Ps 2:8 and 67:8 are, in turn, reminiscent of Isa 45:22 and 52:10.

see Berges 2022, 281–2), in most instances, a dependence of Isaiah on Psalms,⁵⁵ but there are also instances in which the psalmists may have borrowed from Isaiah (Berges 2022, 290). Perhaps it is safe to accept that the editing of Psalms and Isaiah was done by the same circle of scribes in postexilic Jerusalem who shared ideas, although they also had differing points of view.⁵⁶

The pilgrimage of the nations to Zion is an example of a motif from the Persian period,⁵⁷ one which features in all the psalms of the group. It is true that this motif is also present and described in similar terms in psalms from Book I of the Psalter, for example, in Ps 22:28 (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 139). Psalm 22:28 refers to “all the ends of the earth” (TWADSSdF) and says that they will remember and “turn” to YHWH, also that “all the families of the nations” will “worship” (>B) before YHWH. These phrases indeed have exact parallels in the cluster of Pss 65–68. However, the motif could have been added to Ps 22 simultaneously with the compilation of the cluster Pss 65–68.⁵⁸ Michael Lyons (2015, 645) confirms that these verses are an editorial expansion because of their affinities with Isa 40–55 and Isa 56–66. He argues that Ps 22 constitutes a collectivising interpretation of the Isaian servant figure (Lyons 2015, 647). In his view, Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–55) is contextualised in Ps 22 in a way that was influenced by the argument of Isa 54 and 56–66, “in which a righteous community (the ‘servants’) will suffer and be vindicated like the individual servant.” He groups Ps 22 with Pss 69 and 102 as psalms that share the motifs and salvation-historical situation depicted in Isa 40–66 (Lyons 2015, 651). It is true that only these three psalms share the same argument structure he summarises (Lyons 2015, 651–52),⁵⁹ but these elements are also found in the cluster under discussion.⁶⁰ The proximity of Pss 65–68 to Ps 69 also favours the idea that the

55 See also his 2017 essay (Berges 2017, 11–33) in which he traces some common themes, motifs, and epithets from the Psalms to Isaiah.

56 Berges (2022, 280) says that it seems reasonable that groups of scribes worked in contact with one another at the temple in Jerusalem. The similarities in wording and theological ideas resulted from “skilled writers who created a network of cross-references on purpose and with intellectual delight.” They represented comparable theological viewpoints, but also often differed from one another, creating a polyphony of voices. The total number of people involved in such scribal activity could, for reasons of finance, lack of literacy, and the low total population of Jerusalem (about 3000 people), not have been more than about 150, according to Berges (2017, 16).

57 See Christopher Jones’s arguments for dating Isa 60 in the early fifth century. He says that all the major motifs in Isa 60 address early Persian period realities (Jones 2014, 613). The pilgrimage of nations to Jerusalem with a tribute to the temple is a prominent motif in Isa 60.

58 Seybold (1996, 99) calls Ps 28:28–32 a “Fortschreibung.”

59 Only these three psalms have (a) a description of an individual’s suffering (Pss 22:2–22a; 69:2–30; 102:2–12; and 24–25); (b) thanksgiving for deliverance (Ps 22:22b–25 [of the individual]; 22:27 [of other sufferers]; 69:31 [of the individual]; 69:33–34 [of other sufferers]; 102:18, 21); (c) an expectation of the universal acknowledgement of YHWH (Pss 22:28–32; 69:35–37; 102:13, 16, 19, 22–23).

60 Concerning *suffering*, the psalmist refers to the time when he was in trouble (66:14), also that iniquities prevailed against him (65:4). God “tested” and “tried” the Israelites (66:10–12). The cluster contains *thanksgiving* for what God “has done” for the psalmist (66:16) and about the group that God

editors who composed Ps 69 also played a role in the compilation of the cluster Pss 65–68.

The pilgrimage of the nations to Israel features prominently in Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah. The notes in Pss 65–68 seem to depend on the descriptions in such exilic and postexilic prophetic texts. The formulation stating that “all flesh” should come to God in Zion in Ps 65:2–3 is reminiscent of the future expectation in Isaiah 40:5 that the glory of YHWH will be revealed, and “all flesh” shall see it together. Isaiah 66:23 says, “all flesh (WÖ: dF) shall come (8@D) to worship (Z@ZÑ>H) before me.” It is possible that the expression “all flesh should come” (8: DWÖ: dF) in Ps 65:3 and the phrase “all the earth worships you” in Ps 66:4 (@ZÑD) together allude to Isaiah 66:23.⁶¹

The bringing of tribute was possibly also an idea inspired by prophetic texts. The prediction in Ps 68:32 that “nobles shall come from Egypt” and that “Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God” is reminiscent of Isa 45:14, which says, “The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabaeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down (@ZÑD) to you. They will make supplication to you, saying: Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him.”

Another motif in the cluster which points to its redaction in the Persian period is God’s care for the *personae miserae*. They are mentioned in Ps 68:6–7, and God’s care for the DP is described in Ps 68:11. Similar to the pilgrimage of the nations, this motif is also present in Ps 22, namely in verses 25–27. The editors who compiled Pss 25–34 into a cluster had similar concerns for the destitute as those displayed in this cluster.⁶² The editors were probably the same people at work in this cluster of psalms, or the groups of editors had close contact. Dirk Sager points out that not all psalms referring to the “poor” can be characterised as psalms of the poor (Sager 2003, 54). According to Johannes Bremer (2016, 369), the term DP in Ps 68:11 does not represent the “theology of the poor” but refers to Israel as a nation and its experiences during exile. On the other hand, Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 164) describe Ps 68:6–7 as an example of the “theology of the poor.” They note the distinctive features it displays here, however. God acts as the father and protector of the *personae miserae*, especially those with no family member who can help them. Instead of the foreigner in the usual triad of fatherless, widowed, and landless persons, the “solitary” person (<BD) receives attention here

had kept their soul among the living (66:9). There is an expectation of the *universal acknowledgement of YHWH* conspicuously mentioned in all the members of the cluster (65:6, 9; 66:4; 67:3, 4, 5, 6, 8; 68:30, 32, 33).

61 The whole chapter of Isa 66:1–24 seems to have influenced the theology of this cluster (rather than the other way round). See the use of 8@ in Ps 65:3 and Isa 66:23; V@W in Ps 65:6 and Isa 66:19; P: Ö in Ps 65:5 and Isa 66:11; Ö@ in Ps 68:4 and Isa 66:10 and 14; also compare Ps 68:3–4 and 18 with Isa 66:14–15.

62 The cluster consisting of Pss 25–34 is framed by two psalms in which terminology from the theology of the poor defines the psalmist and his in-group. See Bremer (2017, 188–89).

(68:7). In Ps 25:16, the psalmist refers to himself as being “lonely” or “solitary” and “afflicted” (DP@IBD). According to Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 164), Ps 68:7⁶³ is also “close to” Ps 27:10, where the psalmist says his father and mother have forsaken him, but YHWH will take him in.⁶⁴ The reference to the עני in Ps 68:11, Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 165) describe as “a trace of the piety of the poor that characterizes the second Davidic Psalter.” According to them, “it is located in time before the developed piety of the poor in the second strophe and is related to Ps 72:4, but is older than Ps 74:19; 76:10; 82:3; or 10:14, 18 and Deut 10:18.”

The conclusion of Book II of the Psalms was edited by a group of people who considered themselves “the poor” and “the servants.” Their editing is visible in Ps 69:34, where they say that YHWH hears the “poor” (JID@8) and does not despise his people who are “prisoners” (@YD8).⁶⁵ Since the “prisoners” (JID@8) are also mentioned in Ps 68:7, it seems possible that the “needy” (DP) in Ps 68:11 refers to the same group to which the editors felt attached. Psalm 68:6–7, where the “fatherless,” the “widows,” the “solitary,” and the “prisoners” (JID@8) are mentioned, refer to the return from exile. It also seems to have been inspired by Isa 61:1, where the good news of liberty to captives is announced: to the “poor” (JID), the “broken-hearted” (:H@VÑN), the “captives” (JID@Ñ), and those who are “bound” (JID@8). When the Israelites who settled in the promised land are called “the needy” (DP) in Ps 68:11, the term may do double duty to describe the returned exiles.

In Ps 72, the “poor people” (JPaDDP) of Israel are mentioned in verse 4, the “poor” (M@8) and the “needy” (DP) in verse 12, and the “weak” (H) and the “poor” (M@8) in verse 13. Psalm 72 is thought to have been changed into a “psalm of the poor” through a “deliberate intervention” by a group of editors (Bremer 2016, 369 n. 1251). It thus seems that the editors of Books I and II inserted references to themselves at the conclusion of those books.⁶⁶ In Ps 40:18, the psalmist (“David”) refers to himself as a “poor and needy” (M@8@DP) person. The recurrence of the DP in Pss 68:11; 69:30; 70:6; and 72:2, 4 and 12 and of the M@8 in Pss 69:34; 70:6; 72:4, 12, and 13 is thus significant. The editors of the cluster, who had access to much of Isaiah in its present form, must have been doing their work in the fourth to third centuries BCE.

Conclusion

When the psalms of the cluster Pss 65–68 are read together, a coherent picture of the possibility of a world in equilibrium is revealed. The purpose of the psalms and the

63 They refer to Ps 68:4, but this is an obvious error.

64 In Isa 63:16 and 64:8, YHWH is reminded that he called the people to life by referring to him as their father (rather than Abraham being their “father”).

65 Ps 22:25 states in a comparable way that YHWH “has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him.”

66 Ps 41:2 calls the one who pays attention to the “poor” or “helpless” (H) blessed.

meaning of some obscure verses also become clearer.⁶⁷ A world in which everything is in order will become a reality when God graciously blesses Israel and makes his face shine upon them, causing his way to be known on earth (67:2–3). This blessing will cause the nations to be glad and sing for joy since they will recognise that God judges the peoples with equity and guides the nations upon the earth (67:5).⁶⁸ This particular verse (Ps 67:5) is arithmetically the “middle” verse of the cluster. It is perhaps no coincidence that it is also the poetic and theological centre of Ps 67.⁶⁹ Weber (2001, 298) describes Ps 67:5 as the centre of the psalm, which causes God’s governing and judging functions, emanating from his covenantal people, and being aimed toward the world of nations, as the focus of the psalm in terms of its (the psalm’s) contents and theology.

Psalm 67:5 could also be described as the theological centre of the cluster. God’s initiative to bless Israel will inspire the nations to the ends of the world to accept his guidance and be filled with fear of him. The cluster should thus be read from the perspective of Ps 67:5. When Ps 67:7 says that the earth has yielded its increase, it implies that God is in control of nature, as was demonstrated in Ps 65:10–14 and confessed in Ps 68:8–11. When Ps 67:5 refers to YHWH as judging the peoples with equity and guiding the nations upon earth, it acknowledges his power through which he established the mountains and stilled the tumult of the peoples, as was described in Ps 65:7–8, and to his keeping a watchful eye on the rebellious nations as described in Ps 66:7. It also looks forward to when God will rise to scatter his enemies, as envisaged in Pss 66:3 and 68:2–3 and 31. The cluster’s focus is, however, not on the final judgement but on all nations joining in worshipping YHWH in Zion (65:3, 6, 9; 66:1; 4, 8; 67:4, 5, 6, 8; 68:30, 32, and 33). It will be the dawn of a time of prosperity (65:10–14; 66:12; 67:7; 68:9–11) when God will take care of the *personae miserae* as a father and relative (68:6–7, 11). This is a perspective with true cosmological implications.

67 Especially when attempts to treat each psalm as a liturgy for some celebration in the cult are compared to a contextual reading. I think, for example, of Goldingay (2007, loc.161), who finds that the contextual exegesis of individual psalms involves “too much imagination in the connecting of too few dots.” He remains convinced that “the main focus of psalm study needs to be the individual psalm.” His segmentation and translation of some verses (e.g., of Ps 65:1–3) demonstrate a lack of the perspective provided by the context of the cluster.

68 See also Botha’s conclusion about the purpose of Ps 67 (Botha 2004, 377).

69 See the demarcation of Weber (2001, 297–98), who understands the refrain in vv. 4 and 6 as a frame around the centre, and vv. 2–3 as parallel to vv. 7–8. See also Weber’s (1993) more extensive discussion of the text and structure of Ps 67 in his notes on Walter Beyerlin’s (1992) analysis of Ps 67.

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