I.   Introduction: Dating the Psalms in the past

A. In the pre-critical period, the heading on some of the Psalms were used to date individual Psalms. People understood "A Psalm of David" or "A Psalm of Asaph" to be attributions of authorship.

B. In the critical period, scholars came to believe that the heading on an individual Psalm did not originate with the author of the Psalm, but were added much later when it was collected into the Psalter. Thus scholars saw little if any value in the Psalm headings. (Ridderbos 1031)

C. In the mid-nineteenth century, many scholars tended to date the majority of Psalms either in the post-exilic period or Maccabean period.

D. More recent studies have demonstrated that many of the Psalms are most likely pre-exilic. The reasons will be discussed below.

II.   Issues and criteria for dating of individual Psalms.

A. One of the traditional ways of dating an individual Psalm was to identify an author or historical event in the Psalm title, if it had a title. In more recent times, many scholars questioned the historical value of Psalm titles, believing them to be a much later addition (Hempel 943). Issues surrounding the reliability of the titles are as follows:

1. It is likely that most of the headings of the Psalms were from a much earlier time than the Maccabean period because of the difficulty the LXX translators had translating some of the terms in them (Archer 492). Some examples are as follows: (Note: [a- -a] -- "meaning of Hebrew uncertain)
    a. The phrase - "To the choir director", used repeatedly throughout the Psalms.
        (1) NASB - "To the chior director"
        (2) Tanak - "To the leader"
        (3) LXX - Ei" to tel o" - "Unto the end" or "For the end"
    b. Psalm 4
        (1) LXX - "For the end, a song of David among the Psalms"
        (2) Tanak - "[a-]For the leader, with instrumental music[-a], a Psalm of David"
        (3) NASB - "For the chior director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of David"
    c. Psalm 5
        (1) LXX - "For the end, a Psalm of David, concerning her that inherits"
        (2) Tanak - "[a-]For the leader, with instrumental music on the *sheminith*[-a] A Psalm of David"
        (3) NASB - "For the chior director; for flute accompaniment. A Psalm of David"
    d. Psalm 6
        (1) LXX - "For the end, a Psalm of David among the hymns for the eighth"
        (2) Tanak - "[a-]For the leader, with instrumental music on the *sheminith*.[-a] A Psalm of David"
        (3) NASB - "For the chior director; with stringed instruments, upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David"

- e. Psalm 8
    - (1) LXX - "For the end, concerning the wine presses, a Psalm of David"
    - (2) Tanak - "ᵃ⁻For the leader on the *gittith*.⁻ᵃ A Psalm of David"
    - (3) NASB - "For the chior director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of David"
- f. Psalm 9
    - (1) LXX - "For the end, concerning the secrets of the son, a Psalm of David"
    - (2) Tanak - "ᵃ⁻For the leader, *almuth labben*.⁻ᵃ A Psalm of David"
    - (3) NASB - "For the chior director; on Muth-labben. A Psalm of David"
- g. Psalm 11 (10, LXX)
    - (1) LXX - "For the end, A Psalm of David"
    - (2) Tanak - "For the leader. Of David"
    - (3) NASB - "For the choir director. A *Psalm* of David"
- h. Psalm 12 (11, LXX)
    - (1) LXX - "For the end, a Psalm of David, upon the eighth"
    - (2) Tanak - " ᵃ⁻For the leader; on the *sheminith*.⁻ᵃ A Psalm of David"
    - (3) NASB - "For the choir director; upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David."
- i. Psalm 16 (15, LXX)
    - (1) LXX - "A writing of David"
    - (2) Tanak - "A *michtam*ᵃ of David."
    - (3) NASB - "Mikhtam of David"
- j. Psalm 22 (21, LXX)
    - (1) LXX - "For the end, concerning the morning aid, a Psalm of David"
    - (2) Tanak - "For the leader; on ᵃ⁻*ayyeleth ha-shahar*⁻ᵃ. A Psalm of David"
    - (3) NASB - "For the choir director; upon aijeleth hashshahar. A Psalm of David"
- k. Psalm 32 (31, LXX)
    - (1) LXX - "*A Psalm* of instruction by David"
    - (2) Tanak - "Of David. ᵃ⁻*A maskil*.⁻ᵃ"
    - (3) NASB - "*A Psalm* of David. A Maskil."

2. Attributions of Authorship in the Psalm Titles
   a. Seventy-three Psalm headings contain the phrase: A Psalm **"of David"**.
      - (1) Hebrew for "of David" is לדוד - "lᵉdawid"
      - (2) The preposition "lᵉ" could mean "to", "for", "in regard to", "with reference to"
      - (3) Interpretive possiblities of this phrase (Ridderbos 1032)
         - (a) It designates David as the author of the Psalm
         - (b) The Psalm is "dedicated to David"
         - (c) The Psalm is "for David", a Royal Psalm which belonged to an earlier collection of Davidic Psalms.
         - (d) The Psalm is "about David"
      - (4) It is possible that the phrase "lᵉdawid" is not always an attribution of authorship, though in some cases it could be, especially when the rest of the heading says that David sang the song to the Lord.
      - (5) Several biblical authors apparently understood some of these headings to be attributions of authorship to David.
         - (a) The compilers of the Psalter inserted the comment "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended" at 72:20. Of course it could be argued that this phrase merely referred to an earlier Davidic collection, not authorship of the Psalms in the collection.

             (b) 2 Samuel 23:1 - David is mentioned as "the sweet psalmist of Israel". Although it does not say he authored any of the Psalms in the Psalter, it does reflect his reputation as a Psalmist.

             (c) Matthew 22:45; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:42-44 - Jesus understood David to be the composer of Psalm 110.

             (d) Acts 2:25-28, 43 - Peter understood David to be the composer of Psalm 16 and 110.

             (e) Romans 4:6-8 - Paul understood David to be the author of Psalm 32.

             (f) It could be argued that "David" is the way people eventually referred to the book of Psalms as a collection. However, passages such as Acts 1:20 refer to the Psalter as "the book of Psalms"

       (6) No other book in the Hebrew Bible uses the lamed ("l^e") formula to denote authorship. (Herzog 1313). See Hab. 3:1.

    b.   Other attributions of authorship in the headings (The preposition "l^e" - of"might not denote authorship. See II,A,2,a.)

       (1) Solomon, Psalm 72, 127

       (2) Moses, the man of God, Psalm 90

       (3) Asaph, Psalm 73-83. "of Asaph" is probably in indication that it belonged an earlier Asaphic collection similar to the Korahite collection.

             (a) David and the Levites appointed Asaph as a temple musician, therefore Asaph lived duirng the time of David (I Chr 15:16)

             (b) Some of the Psalms of Asaph speak of the destruction of Jerusalem, which is centuries after Asaph. Ps 74, 79, 80.

       (4) Heman, the Ezrahite, Psalm 88. (I Chr 15:17) There was a Heman appointed by David and the Levites as a musician.

       (5) Ethan, the Ezrahite, Psalm 89. (I Chr 15:17) There was an Ethan appointed by David and the Levites as a musician.

       (6) The Korahites 84, 85, 87, 88

             (a) 2 Chr 20:19 - The Korahites were a guild of singers. This probably does not mean that each Psalm had multiple authors, but that the Korahites collected and perhaps wrote some of these Psalms.

             (b) If the attribution to the Korahites is an attribution of authorship it does not really help to pinpoint dates for these Psalms because we do not know which generation of Korahites wrote the Psalms.

B. The tendency of late19th and early 20th scholarship was to date nearly all the Psalms sometime in the postexilic period, usually the Maccabean period.

    1. Many scholars believed the existence of Aramaisms reflected a late date (Harrison 983)

    2. Many believed the Psalm headings to be conjectures added by later Rabbis and of no value in determining the date of a Psalm.

     a. This assumption was obviously built on the assumption that the Psalms themselves were late. If they were composed at a late date, then the titles had to be even later.

     b. Even after scholars began to see that many of the Psalms were pre-exilic, many still believed that the headings were conjectures by Rabbis in the post-exilic period or later.

          (1) Psalm 139 - This Psalm is ascribed to David. However, the language of the Psalm is late. Therefore the title had to be late. (Kirkpatrick xxxi).

          (2) Psalm 69 - The last few verses seem to reflect the conditions of Judah after the sack of Jerusalem, yet the Psalm is ascribed to David. (Kirkpatrick xxxii). It could be argued, however, that the references to building the cities of Judah do not necessarily presuppose a previous Babylonian invasion.

3. Many of the Psalms reflect an individualized spirituality. Many scholars believed that early spirituality was corporate and cultic, and that individualized spirituality was a later development. (McCann 643)

4. Many of the historical events alluded to in the Psalms fit events of the Maccabean period (Herzog 1311)

5. However, many scholars now recognize that many of the Psalms were likely composed at a much earlier date.

     a. The *fifteenth century* ugaritic texts discovered at Ras-Shammra exhibit a strong Aramaic flavor. The influence of Aramaic, then, goes back at least to the middle of the of the 2nd millenium B.C. Therefore, the existence of Aramisms is not a solid indicator of date. (Archer 489)

     b. Because the language is late does not necessarily mean a Psalm was late. There was a tendency to modernize language of Psalms for pedagogical aims, as well as preserve archaic forms (Hempel 943)

     c. Some headings on the Psalms refer to events in David's life that are not mentioned anywhere else in scripture. This casts doubt on the assumption that later Rabbi's simply attributed Psalms to events in David's life mentioned in scripture. (Archer, 491)

          (1) Psalm 7 - David sang a song concerning Cush, a Benjamite

          (2) Psalm 56 - The Philistines seize David.

          (3) Psalm 60 - David smote 12,000 of Edom in the Valley of Salt

     d. Discovery of many non-Biblical Psalms in the ancient Near East, which pre-dates Israel, shows the same individualized spirituality and personal qualities found in the canonical Psalms. Therefore, individualized spirituality in a Psalm does not indicate a late date of that Psalm.(Herzog 1313)

     e. The LXX has the same order and number of Psalms as the Hebrew Psalter. Therefore, the Psalter, which includes the Psalms within the Psalter, has to be at least as old as the LXX. (Hempel)

     f. Stylistic, theological, and linguistic differences between the canonical and non-canonical Psalms from cave 4 at Qumran (4QH) are so

different that it is highly unlikely that any of the canonical Psalms originated from the Maccabean period (Herzog 1312)

g. The Psalter is completely lacking in Greek overtones both linguistically and theologically. (Herzog 1312)

h. Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that the order and content of books 1 to 3 of the canonical Psalter were fixed. Books four and five were still being compiled at this time. (Holladay 77) If the headings were later interpretive additions, why were they not added in books 4 and 5? It is reasonable to assume that the titles were early and not late additions.

C. One way of dating a Psalm is by dating it to the latest datable element it contains (Patton 644)

1. One problem with this simplistic method is it overlooks the fact that some Psalms have been adapted for later use (Laato, 26)

2. Several Psalms either have a parallel history or have been reworked for later use.

   a. Psalm 14 and 53 are nearly identical except one uses the name YHWH and the other uses ELOHIM. This indicates two parallel traditions for this Psalm.

   b. Psalm 40:13-17 and Psalm 70 are nearly identical. Evidently, Psalm 70 existed independently and was later added as a conclusion to Psalm 40.

   c. It is possible that Psalm 29 was originally a Cannanite hymn that was adapted for Hebrew worship (Holladay 21).

      (1) The Psalm mentions thunder, lightning and storm, which are manifestations of the Canaanite god, Ba'al, in Ugaritic texts.

      (2) If one substitutes "Ba'al for Yahweh" in the Hebrew text, some alliterations become evident:

      (3) One example in V.3:
          qol yahweh al-hammayim becomes
          qol ba'al al-hammayim

      (4) This may indicate that this Psalm existed in an earlier form, but was edited and incorporated for worship of Yahweh. This Psalm could have been used a counter-statement to an older Cannanite hymn. It is not Ba'al who thunders and is powerful, it is Yahweh.

3. This evidence demonstrates the obvious weakness in merely dating a Psalm by its latest datable element. A part of a Psalm may have existed independently as another completely different Psalm. A Psalm might be adapted for contemporary use among the Hebrews.

D. Liguistic features have been used to date a Psalm.

1. There was both a northern and southern dialect in Biblical Hebrew, which is detectable in the Old Testament. For example, Hosea, a book originating in the north, reflects a northern dialect. Some of the Psalms also reflect at northern dialect (Holladay 27). Psalms that reflect a northern dialect could be dated from the divided monarchy up to the Assyrian invasion of Israel.

   a. Psalms that exhibit a northern dialect are: 9-10; 16; 29; 36; 42-49; 84; 85; 87; 88; 53; 58; 50; 73-83; 116; 132; 133; 140; 141. (Rendsburg)

        b. Of course, it could be said that the northern dialect existed before the divided monarchy. Therefore this is not likely a strong indicator of date.

        c. Some Psalms with a northern dialect were obviously written for and sung in the southern kingdom. Psalms 48,74, 79, and 84 all speak in reference to Jerusalem or Zion, indicating a southern perspective. Either these were written in the North before the divided monarchy, or by a Northerner after the divided monarchy, who remained loyal to Jerusalem. So the existence of a northern dialect may not be adequate to pinpoint a date for a Psalm.

2. The term "most high" used for God is an old one. Genesis 14 reflects this usage. However, some Psalms use "Yahweh" and "Most High" interchangeably or combine the two, such as Psalm 7, 9, 18, and others.

3. A characteristic of Hebrew poetry is that it has a tendency to preserve archaic terms (Parker 38). This is common among most ancient near-Eastern inscriptions. There are royal epithets and building inscriptions that have remained unchanged in language and forms for over a thousand years in the ancient near East. -(Laato 27)

E. Although the pre-exilic and post-exilic faith was basically the same, there was a shift in the emphases of the motifs in the faith (Holladay 61). Identifying the presence of these motifs in a Psalm may help to date it.

1. In the pre-exilic period, some of the Psalms assume the real existence of other "gods". However, in the post-exilic period, the LORD is the only God that existed. Some of the later Psalms still refer to other "gods", but the reference is strictly traditional and does not assume their actual existence.

2. A henotheistic attitude would have existed in the pre-exilic period, but in the post-exilic period, the Hebrews understood that God is not confined to a place.

3. In the pre-exilic period, God would commonly be depicted as a warrior. In the post-exilic period, there is no more army. Therefore this motif would have faded in the post-exilic psalms.

4. The post-exilic period marked a renewed interest in "Torah". However, the nuance behind "Torah" had changed. The older nuance of meaning simply meant "instruction" or "teaching". However, the new meaning carried the idea of "law", meaning a codified body of legal material.

F. Allusions to historical events or circumstances

1. Several Psalms mention a king. These most likely originated during the monarchy.

2. Some Psalms refer to the temple or tabernacle

        a. One could assume that mention of the tabernacle would assume that the Psalm was prior to the time of Solomon.

        b. References to the Temple could refer either to the first or second temple.

        c. Problem: Temple and Tabernacle are used interchangeably

            (1) I Samuel 1:9 - "temple *(heykal)* of the Lord" (NASB). This is clearly the tabernacle, not the temple that Solomon built.

        (2) Psalm 27:4-5 - The "house of the Lord", "temple" and "tabernacle" are all used interchangeably

3. Some Psalms refer to foreign invasions. Of course, Israel's history contains many foreign invasions. This often doesn't help much in dating a Psalm.
4. A couple of Psalms refer to the exile, indicating an exilic or post-exilic date.
5. Problem: If a Psalm is written to commemorate an event, it does not necessitate that it was written contemporary to the event.

G. Psalms that are intertextually related to other Biblical material. (Holladay 40-41)
   1. Jeremiah 12:1b-2; 17:5-8, and Psalm 1
   2. Holladay cites several more loose parallels in phrases between the Psalms and Jeremiah. (41-45) However, it is a risky venture to decide if the Psalmist borrows from Jeremiah, or Jeremiah borrows from the Psalmist, or whether the phrase was simply "in the air"
   3. Jeremiah 10:25, and Psalm 79:6-7
   4. Amos 9:2-3; Jeremiah 23:23-24, and Psalm 139:7-12. Amos uses the material ironically. The Psalm must be prior to the prophet since irony is not characteristic of the Psalms (Holladay 41)
   5. 2 Samuel 22, and Psalm 18 - This Psalm is attributed to David in 2 Sam 22:1.

III.   My try on dating some of the Psalms
A. Psalms that can possibly be dated to a general time frame in history.
   1. Psalm 1 - Post-exilic. Law seems to refer to a code
   2. Psalm 2 - From the monarchy. Mentions the king on Zion whom God established
   3. Psalm 7 - Pre-exilic. God is depicted as fighting for his people.
   4. Psalm 9-10 (originally one Psalm) - Pre-exilic. God is depicted as warrior who dwells in Zion.
   5. Psalm 16 - United Monarchy. Peter attributes this Psalm to David in Acts 2.
   6. Psalm 17 - Pre-exilic. The Psalmists prays the God will deliver with his sword.
   7. Psalm 18 - From the united monarchy, Davidic. It is attributed to David in 2 Sam 22:1
   8. Psalm 19 - Post-exilic. The later half of the psalm uses "torah" parallel to "precepts" and "commandment", imply torah is not just "instruction" but "law".
   9. Psalm 21 - From the monarchy. The Psalmist mentions the king.
   10. Psalm 24 - From the united monarchy. Speaks of the Lord coming into the everlasting doors, probably the temple. The Lord is strong and mighty in battle and is the Lord of "hosts" (armies).
   11. Psalms 29 - Pre-exilic, possibly pre-monarchy. The phrase in verse 1"sons of gods" is very old, reflecting a polytheistic world-view.
   12. Psalm 32 - United monarchy - Paul understood David to be the author in Rom 4.
   13. Psalm 60 - Pre-exilic - The invasions do not imply a destruction of Jerusalem.
   14. Psalm 68 - United Monarchy. God is depicted as warrior, and mention is made of the procession into the sanctuary. The Psalmist mentions both southern and northern tribes.
   15. Psalm 72 - The Monarchy - This Psalm is a prayer for the king.
   16. Psalm 74 - Exilic - Destruction of the sanctuary, a prayer for justice.

17. Psalm 76 - Pre-exilic - The Psalmist depicts God as warrior.
18. Psalm 78 - Post-exilic - The last section of the Psalm seems to allude to the restoration of the Judah and Zion.
19. Psalm 79 - Refers to an invasion in which the enemy defiled the temple.
20. Psalm 80 - Before the Assyrian invasion of Samaria.- The Psalmist prayers for northern tribes. He also mentions the Lord being enthroned above the cherubim. and repeatedly appeals to God as the God of hosts.
21. Psalm 82 - Pre-monarchy. The Psalm also reflects a polytheistic world-view.
22. Psalm 110 - Pre-exilic. The Lord is depicted as a warrior.
23. Psalm 119 - Post-exilic. A major emphasis on "Torah" as law.
24. Psalm 126 - Post-exilic. The Lord brought the back the captive of Zion.
25. Psalm 132 - Post-exilic. Seems to be a prayer for restoration of Zion.
26. Psalm 137 - Exilic or post-exilic. This Psalms speaks of the time of the captivity by the rivers of Babylon.
27. Psalm 139 - Pre-exilic. It is used ironically in Amos 9:2-3.

B. The rest of the Psalms have very little if any characteristics that allow one to date them with any confidence.

IV. **There is a wide range of opinion on the dating of many Psalms which demonstrates the difficulties in dating individual Psalms**
   A. "The very timelessness of most of the compositions is such that it is extremely difficult to assign a date to individual Psalms with any degree of confidence" (Harrison 984)
   B. Psalm are very difficult to date for the following reasons. (Finkelstein 162-163)
      1. Psalms are, by nature, devotional literature which makes it easy to place them in a human context but difficult to place in a historical context.
      2. Because Psalm were used and reused for various situations, they lost contact with their historical origin.

Concluding reflection:
Due to the fact that there are serious weaknesses with nearly all of the criteria for dating an individual Psalm with much confidence, I conclude that only a few Psalms can be dated to a general time period. However, this does not greatly impact the use and interpretation of a Psalm. The Psalms were used in Israel, the early church, and continue to be used even today. Psalm use has never ceased. That a Psalm title may mean it is "about" David rather than "by" David helps indicates the universality of a Psalm. For instance, Psalm 51 could easily be sung by Jews, early Christian, and contemporary Christians after reading the story of David and Bathsheba. Psalm 51 is an appeal to God both for forgiveness and a clean heart. It is not limited to ancient Hebrews, but is a living, enduring Psalm to be sung or prayed for all ages. A reading of the account of David and Bathsheba may stimulate reflection and lead naturally into singing or praying Psalm 51. In the absence of a Psalm title, a Psalm is no less powerful as a song or prayer of devotion. Ancient Psalms and modern songs in our songbooks bear this same characteristic. They are not bound by time or space, but are by design general so they can be used and re-used by future generations. Even though we can't date many of the Psalms, it does not mean we can't use them the way they are intended to be used.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archer, Gleason L. Jr. *A Survery of Old Testament Introduction*. 3d ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

Davies, W.D. and Louis Finkelstein. *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. Vol. 1. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Harrison, R.K. *Introduction to the Old Testament: With a Comprehensive Review of Old Testament and a Special Supplement on the Apocrypha*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969.

Hempel, J. "Psalms, Book of ." in *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible,* edited by George A. Buttrick, 3:942-958. New York: Abingdon, 1962.

Herzog, Avigdor. "Psalms, Book of." in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, edited By Cecil Roth, 13:1303-1331. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1982.

Holladay, William L. *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 1996.

Kirkpatrick, A.F. *The Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1902, 1982.

Laato, Antti. "Psalm 132: A Case Study in Methodology." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (January 1999): 24-33.

McCann, J. Clinton Jr. *The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, The New Interpreters Bible, vol. 4:641-1280. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Parker, Harold M. "The Psalms as Historiography." *The Iliff Review* 30 (Spring, 1973): 33-41.

Patton, Corrine L. "Psalm 132: A Methodological Inquiry." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (October 1995): 643-654.

Rendsburg, Gary A. *Lingustic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

Ridderbos, Nicholas H. and Peter C. Craigie. "Psalms." in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3:1029-1040. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986.