

Annotated History – The Implications of Reading Psalm 34 in Conjunction with 1 Samuel 21-26 and Vice Versa

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ABSTRACT

In a late phase of redaction, some of the psalms in the first and second Davidic Psalter were supplied with headings that contain biographical references to David. One of these psalms is Psalm 34. The shared traits between Psalm 34 and the account of David's flight from Saul are investigated in detail. It is shown that 1 Samuel 24-26 should be included in the comparison. The editorial effect of the link between David's life and Psalm 34 on the understanding of Psalm 34 is discussed, as well as the influence of reading Psalm 34 in conjunction with this part of David's history. The conclusion is reached that Psalm 34 does not only serve to present David as an example and object of identification for those who read the Psalms, but that he in the first place lends authority to the exhortations directed at believers to stay true to the code of conduct of the poor pious people. Because of this connection, the image of David is enhanced, so that he takes on the roles of wisdom teacher, theologian, suffering servant, and inspired author as well.

A INTRODUCTION

Psalm 34 is one of thirteen psalms in the Book of Psalms with a heading which contextualises it¹ during the life of David. These are Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142. The majority of these headings are found in the second collection of the Davidic Psalms (Pss 43-72) with a high concentration in the series of Psalms 51-63. Eight² of these 13 psalms establish a connection

¹ Depending on the time when a heading was attached to a psalm, the intention might have been to provide a hermeneutic context for that psalm only, or for a series of psalms. As a result of the interconnecting of individual psalms by the editors in various stages of its growth, the heading of Ps 34 seems to apply at least also to Ps 35.

² Ps 7 is sometimes included in the list (reading שׁוֹעַ as שׁוֹעַ, see 1 Sam 9:1; Weber 2001:71), but the consensus seems to be that the exilic redaction intended a connec-

to the life of David during the time of his flight from Saul (34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 63, and 142). Since the headings are not arranged chronologically in terms of David's life, one can surmise that the headings did not play a role in the arrangement of the individual psalms. They were probably added when the collection was more or less finished.

The intention with the heading assigned to Psalm 34 (as it now stands in the Masoretic Tradition) could be to establish a connection between the psalm and the life of David at the *beginning* of that stage of his life when he fled from Saul:

לְדוֹד בְּשִׁנּוּתָו אֶת־טָעַמוֹ לִפְנֵי אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וַיַּגְּרַשׁ הָוֶה וַיַּלְּךָ :

Of David, when he changed his sense before Abimelech, and he chased him away, and he went.

The heading appears to be an ambiguous nominal statement ('Of David...')³ with a three-fold temporal clause ('...when A and B and C') referring to a specific incident in the life of David. It is evident that it is an addition to the poetic text, since it is a note *on* the poem, written in terse prose. A few questions arise: By whom was this heading inserted, when did it happen, and what was the purpose of this addition? To answer briefly, one can say that it was done during the process of editing the Psalter; that it was done by a Deuteronomistic editor or a 'Davidising' editor of the Psalter; and that it was probably done in order to uphold David as an example for all believers, or to interlock the Psalter with the Early Prophetic Books, or even to give effect to a combination of these purposes.

Each question has to be investigated one by one. The implications of each possible answer need to be explored in detail. For example, by adding the

tion between Ps 3:1 and Ps 7:1, pointing towards David's flight from Absalom instead (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:75).

³ It is uncertain what the original intention was with לְדוֹד; whether it was meant to designate the psalm as one which should be read 'in connection with David' or whether it was meant to identify him as the author ('of David' with ellipsis of the genre 'A prayer' or 'A psalm' or 'A song', etc. before the personal name). Kleer (1993:86) considers it to have implied that a psalm with this prescript should be read 'auf David hin', in other words, as an invitation to step into a 'Schicksalsgemeinschaft' with David, to identify with him. According to Kleer, it signifies the identity crisis of the exilic period and was originally not meant to indicate David as the author. Weber (1995:274-275) similarly considers the ל in the heading of Ps 77 (לְאָסָף) to have been understood as a *lamed auctoris* only in the late post-exilic time, while it could earlier have served as a mark of registration, ownership, or dedication. Its interpretation as designating the name of the author he describes as a 'Bedeutungseinengung des Zugehörkeitsverhältnisses'.

heading, the psalm established a connection with the (Deuteronomistic) history of David. It is as though the story about David's rise to kingship was annotated. An additional dialogue now complements the narrative text – not so much a dialogue between David and YHWH, but David's words to his troop of followers *about* YHWH.⁴ In the words of this 'prayer of thanksgiving', David now seems to express his thoughts about the role of YHWH in his life, encouraging his followers to share in his experience that YHWH is good and that he saves those who fear him. The theological point of view of the narrative of 2 Samuel is thus also expanded. The connection between the *Ketubim* and the *Nebi'im* is strengthened. For these reasons it would be worthwhile to explore the hermeneutic possibilities created by this addition.

B PSALM 34 – ITS BIRTH, GROWTH, AND LITERARY SETTING

Psalm 34 is an alphabetic wisdom psalm, written in the guise of a prayer of thanksgiving of an individual.⁵ It shows significant similarities to Psalms 25 and 37⁶ in the themes it addresses, the vocabulary it uses, and the theological point of view it displays. In addition to this, it seems to stand in a special relationship to Psalms 69, 86, and 145.

The connection with Psalm 25 is quite important for understanding Psalm 34, since both have the same deviating alphabetic structure (they lack a \aleph -line and have an additional \beth -line added after the \daleth -line which was possibly the original conclusion).⁷ This peculiar form seems to have been devised to spell the stem $\aleph\daleth\aleph$ with the first letters of the first, middle, and final verse lines, creating a kind of 'watermark' that designates Psalms 25 and 34 as twins, which should be read together. The first, middle, and last letter of the first verse line of Psalm 34 (leaving the *matres lectionis* out of consideration) similarly spells $\aleph\daleth\aleph$.⁸ Psalm 25 is thus also a wisdom psalm, but one which was

⁴ Ps 34 is the only wisdom-related text to receive a David-biographical heading. The heading probably indicates that semantic and thematic parallels with the history of David were regarded as more important pointers than the Gattung of the psalm was.

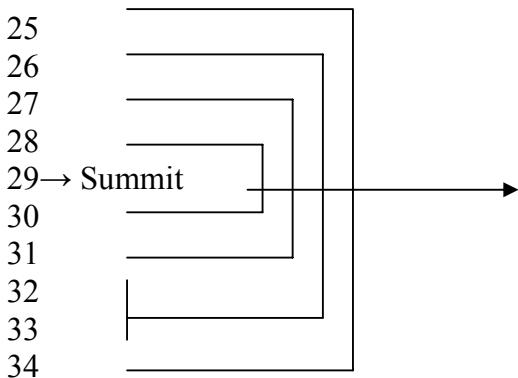
⁵ Weber (2001:165) observes that the psalm begins in the style of an individual thanksgiving, but unfolds further on more and more as a typical wisdom instruction about the correct pious conduct.

⁶ For more detail on the relationship between the three psalms, see Botha 2007.

⁷ For a discussion of the connections between Pss 25 and 34 and their implications for the composition of Pss 25-34, see Hossfeld & Zenger (1994) and Zenger (1998:20-22). See also Schildenberger (1981).

⁸ For a detailed discussion of this and other features which prove the immense interest of the author of Ps 34 in creating alphabetic patterns, see the articles of Ceresko (1985) and Auffret (1988, especially 27-31).

composed in the guise of a supplication for forgiveness of sins.⁹ It has been shown that Psalms 25-34 form a sub-group of the first Davidic psalms. In this sub-unit, the psalms are arranged concentrically around its zenith or summit, Psalm 29,¹⁰ with the first half being supplications and the second half being prayers of thanksgiving:



Apart from the fact that it is steeped in wisdom terminology and makes effective use of typical wisdom aphorisms to convey its message, Psalm 34 is conspicuous in its usage of a wide variety of epithets to demarcate the profile of the in-group. Together with characteristics pointing to a (post-exilic) wisdom context,¹¹ the designations of the in-group in the psalm point towards a post-

⁹ Weber (2001:133) describes it as consisting of a reworked individual prayer ('überarbeitetes individuelles Bittgebet', vv. 1-7; 15-22) into which wisdom reflections ('weisheitliche Überlegungen', vv. 8-14) were inserted. Ps 25 has two נ-lines and the first of these probably originally began with נ. Weber (2001:133) suggests נ, 'take my misery and...' but this is improbable, since נ is a description of which the author seems proud. It looks more certain that the last verse of Ps 25 was added later, since there is a literary-critical break between v. 21 and v. 22, implying that the form of Ps 34 was possibly adapted to create an analogy with Ps 25.

¹⁰ Pss 32 and 33 have to be read in conjunction with Ps 26, since there is one psalm too many in the group 30-34. It is possible that Ps 32 was originally intended to serve this function alone, for it seems to have been dove-tailed with Ps 34, but that Ps 33 was inserted between these two as a kind of afterthought which disturbed the symmetry.

¹¹ Cf. the alphabetic form, the wisdom aphorisms, the תֹּבוֹ-saying, the autobiographical confession (v. 7), the importance of the 'fear' of YHWH, the pedagogical question (v. 13), etc. Richards (1986:177) also lists the focus on sensual qualities – the senses, and especially hearing, are dominant concepts in Ps 34, according to him. Roberts (1973) has shown that the motif of the 'young lions' (Ps 34:11) was at home in wisdom literature even before the time of Israel. Ps 34 shares many of its wisdom characteristics with Pss 25 and 37. For the wisdom character of Ps 37, see Irsigler (1999:261). Weber (2008:199) draws attention to the connection between the formula

exilic context of (internal) conflict. These descriptions might have been inserted at a later stage, during a phase or various phases of editing to prepare it for use by specific groups of people. However, if one accepts the argument that at least some of these descriptions are original, then a time of composition of the psalm pointing to the post-exilic era becomes a possibility. Its origin cannot be isolated from the broad movement of ‘sapientialising’ of the Psalter. The latter is not only evidenced by the insertion of wisdom psalms into already existing collections of psalms, but also by the insertion of Psalm 1 as a kind of introduction to the Psalter¹² or the use of Psalm 73, or 90, or 119, or later perhaps Psalm 145 as a conclusion to the Psalter. The following translation of the psalm, with a proposal of how its poetic structure should be seen, will be used in the subsequent discussion of its features:

		לְדוֹד בְּשִׁנּוֹתָו	Of David, when he changed his sense before
		אֶת־שְׁעָמוֹ לִפְנֵי אַבִימֶלֶךְ	Abimelech and he chased him away and he
		וּגְרַשְׁתָּו וַיַּלְךָ:	went.
I	A	² אָבְרָכָה אֶת־יְהוָה בְּכָל־עֵת	I will praise YHWH the whole time,
		תִּמְדֵר תְּהִלָּתוֹ בְּפִי:	always his praise will be in my mouth.
	ב	³ בְּיְהוָה חַתְּחַלֵּל נֶפֶשִׁי:	In YHWH my soul will glory
		וַיְשִׁמְעוּ עֲנוּם וְשָׁמָחוּ:	the humble will hear (it) and be glad.
	ג	⁴ גָּדְלוּ לִיהוָה אָחִי	Praise YHWH with me,
		וְגַרְזָמָנָה שָׁבָנוּ יְהֹוָה:	and let us exalt his name together.
B	ד	⁵ דָּרַשְׁתִּי אֶת־יְהוָה וְעַנְנִי:	I sought YHWH and he answered me
		וּמְכַלֵּן גָּנוֹרָתוֹ הַצְּלָמִי:	and from all my fears he delivered me.
	ה	⁶ הַבִּיטּוּ אַלְיוּ וְנָהָרִי	They looked to him and were radiant,
		וּפְנֵיכֶם אַלְיָהֶרֶת:	and their faces were not ashamed.
	ו	⁷ זֹה עַנִּי קָרָא וַיְהִי שָׁמַעַנּוּ	This is a wretched person: he called and
		וּמְכַלֵּן אַרוֹתָיו הַשְׁיָעָן:	YHWH listened,
	ח	⁸ חָנֵה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה	and from all his troubles he saved him.
		סְבִיבָה לִירָאָיו וַיְחַלֵּצֵם:	The angel of YHWH encamps
C	ט	⁹ טָעַמָּה וְרָאוּ כִּרְטוֹב יְהֹוָה	around those who fear him and rescues them.
		אֲשֶׁר־הַגָּבֵר יַחֲסַה־בָּו:	Taste and see that YHWH is good;
	י	¹⁰ וְרָאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה קָרְשִׁיו:	happy is the man who takes refuge in him.
		כִּירָאֵין מַחְסֹרֶר לִירָאָיו:	Fear YHWH, his holy ones,
	כ	¹¹ כְּפִירִים רָשָׁו וְרָעָבוֹ	for there is no want for those who fear him.
		וְרָשִׁי יְהֹהָ לְאִיחָסְרוֹ כְּלָטוֹב:	Young lions have need and are hungry,
			but those who seek YHWH have no lack of
			anything good.

of blessing and the concept of refuge (v. 9) which is prominent in Pss 1-2, and, as a matter of fact, in the whole of Book I of the Psalter.

¹² On the ‘sapientialising’ of the Psalter, see Füglistner (1988:354-360).

II	D	ל	לֹכֶדֶבְּנִים שָׁמָעוּרִלִי ¹²	Come, sons, listen to me –
		ר	רֹאשׁ תְּהִנָּה אֶלְמְדָכָם: ¹³	the fear of YHWH I will teach you.
	m	מ	מִירְהָאִישׁ הַחַפְזִים חַיִם ¹³	Who is the man who delights in life,
		אַהֲבָה מְפִים לְרָאֹות טֻובָה: ¹⁴	who loves days to see the good?	
	n	נ	גַּזֵּר לְשׁוֹנָךְ מְרַעָה: ¹⁴	Keep your tongue from evil
		וְשִׁפְתָּךְ מְרַבֵּר מְרַמָּה: ¹⁵	and your lips from speaking deceit.	
	s	ס	סֹור מְרַע וְעַשְׂה-טֹוב ¹⁵	Turn away from evil and do good,
		בְּקַשׁ שְׁלֹום וְרַפָּהָה: ¹⁶	seek peace and pursue it.	
E	ע	ע	עַיִן יְהֹנָה אֶל-צְדִיקִים ¹⁶	The eyes of YHWH are toward the righteous
		אֲזֹנוֹנוֹ אֶל-שְׁוּעָבָם: ¹⁷	and his ears toward their cry.	
	p	פ	פָנִי יְהֹנָה בְּעַשִׁי רַע ¹⁷	The face of YHWH is against the evildoers
		לְהַכְרִית מְאָרֶץ זְכָרָם: ¹⁸	to cut their memory from the land.	
	צ	צ	צַעַקְוּ וַיְהִנָּה שְׁמַעַן ¹⁸	They cry and YHWH listens
		וּמִכְלַצְרוֹתָם הַצִּילָם: ¹⁹	and from all their troubles he saves them.	
F	ק	ק	קָרוּבָה יְהֹנָה לְשִׁבְרִילָב ¹⁹	YHWH is near to the broken-hearted
		וְאַתְּ-דָכְאִירָוָה יוֹשִׁיעָה: ²⁰	and those crushed in spirit he saves.	
	r	ר	רַבּוֹת רַעֲוֹת צְדִיקָה: ²⁰	Many are the troubles of a righteous,
		וּמִכְלָם וַיְלַא יְהֹנָה: ²¹	but from them all YHWH saves him.	
	ש	ש	שְׁמַר כָּל-עַצְמֹתָיו ²¹	He keeps all his bones,
		אַחַת מְתֻנָּה לֹא נִשְׁבָּרָה: ²²	not one of them is broken.	
G	ת	ת	תְּמֻוֹתָה רַעַשׁ רַעַה ²²	Evil kills the wicked
		וַיְשַׁנְּאֵי צְדִיקָה אַשְׁמָה: ²²	and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.	
	p	פ	פּוֹדֵה יְהֹנָה נִפְשֵׁעַ עֲבָדָיו ²³	YHWH ransoms the life of his servants
		וְלֹא יִאָשְׁמוּ כָל-הַחֲסִים בָּו: ²³	and no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.	

I have discussed and analysed the poetic form and techniques in an earlier contribution (cf. Botha 1997).¹³ The descriptions used for the in-group¹⁴ are the following: ‘the humble’ (עַנְוִים, v. 3b);¹⁵ ‘a wretched person’, a self-indication

¹³ Liebreich (1956:183) understood the repetition of key words to be the principle of segmentation of the psalm. His segmentation coincides with the major segments of my analysis as represented above.

¹⁴ See in this regard also the intertextual investigation of Eriksson (1991:20-24).

¹⁵ The plural of עַנְוָה, which is difficult to distinguish from עַיִן. Both are used to refer to members of the same group in this psalm, so that they are probably intended to be more or less synonyms (cf. Martin-Achard 1976:343, and the following note).

of the author (*ענִי*, v. 7a);¹⁶ ‘those who fear him (YHWH)’ (יְרָאֵי), vv. 8b and 10b); ‘the man who takes refuge in him’ (הָגָבֵר יְחִסֵּה־בָּבוֹ), v. 9b); ‘his holy ones’ (קָדְשֵׁי, v. 10a); ‘those who seek YHWH’ (דָּרְשֵׁי יְהוָה), v. 11b); ‘sons’, a typical form of address of a wisdom teacher for his students (בְּנִים), v. 12a); ‘the righteous’ (צָדִיקִים), v. 16a, cf. the generic use of the singular form in vv. 20a and 22b); ‘the broken-hearted’ (נְשָׁבֵר־לְבָב, v. 19a); ‘those crushed in spirit’ (דָּרוֹחַ, v. 19b); and ‘his servants’ (עֲבָדִים), v. 23a).

Some of these terms are widely used in the psalms and can be described as typical of the Psalter in general, for instance, ‘righteous’¹⁷ and the concept of ‘taking refuge’, חִסָּה.¹⁸ The word in verse 3 that is translated here with ‘the humble’, (*ענִים*), is a word found par excellence in the psalms (with more than 50 percent of the occurrences of *ענִי* in the Hebrew Bible). It occurs only once in the Pentateuch, in Numbers 12:3, where it is used to describe Moses as the meekest person on earth, in a context where he is singled out by YHWH as the greatest prophet who ever lived, to whom YHWH has spoken mouth to mouth and face to face (cf. Num 12:6-8). What is of interest is that its occurrence in the Psalter is significantly prominent in those psalms that are singled out by Hossfeld & Zenger as post-exilic additions of the fifth century and later.¹⁹ The stem *ענִי* is much more evenly spread throughout the Hebrew Bible, but Job (13%), the Psalter (34%), Proverbs (8%), and Isaiah (12%) stand out in terms of the number of times it occurs in each of these books in relation to all other occurrences. When both *ענִי* and *ענִים* occur in a psalm one can assume a synonymous understanding of the two terms, for example in Psalms 9, 10, 22, 25, 34, 37, 69. Moreover, these examples suggest that they were either late crea-

¹⁶ Martin-Achard (1976:343) suggests ‘arm, ellend, erbärmlich, unglücklich’ (‘poor, afflicted, wretched, unfortunate’). The post-exilic meaning of ‘humble’ suggested by HALOT (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, computer version by BibleWorks, no 7149) is probably more correct, and the intention seems to be to designate a particular form of piety.

¹⁷ Twenty-five percent (40 in total) of all occurrences in the Hebrew Bible is in the Psalms, although 35 percent (55 in total) is in Proverbs. It is clearly a typical wisdom term.

¹⁸ Sixty percent (25 instances) of all occurrences of the stem חִסָּה is found in the Psalter.

¹⁹ Pss 9-10 (added in Hellenistic times, when the ‘poor’ referred to the whole of Israel – cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:15); Ps 22 (a late pre-exilic psalm, cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:14); Pss 25, 34, 37 (psalms inserted by a post-exilic redaction called that of the poor piety – ‘poor’ was now a religious description, 5th to 4th century, cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:14); Ps 69 (part of the end-composition of the so-called Second Davidic Psalms, consisting of Pss 69-72, composed in the 5th century – cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 2000:30-31), Ps 76 (composed by the Asaphite theologians in the 5th century, cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 2000:30) and in Pss 147 and 149 (part of the final Hallel of the Psalter).

tions or psalms that were edited in post-exilic times from the perspective of ‘poor piety’.²⁰

The specific form for the description ‘those who fear him’ (יראיו) shows the same tendency of being used in psalms that were added to the collection in post-exilic times. Furthermore, there is an overlap with the psalms in which the stem ענו is found.²¹ The specific combination of שבר and לְבָב in the expression נִשְׁבְּרִי-לְבָב (‘the broken-hearted’) is found in only a small number of biblical contexts,²² namely Psalm 34:19, Psalm 51:19 (רוּחַ נִשְׁבְּרָה לְבָבָנִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְכָּה), Psalm 69:21 (חֶרְפָּה שְׁבָרָה לְבֵבִי), Psalm 147:3 (שְׁבוּרִי לְבָב), Isaiah 61:1 (נִשְׁבָּר לְבֵבִי), and Jeremiah 23:9 (נִשְׁבָּר לְבֵבִי). Proverbs 18:12 provides insight into the meaning of the combination of the two words, although the two stems are linked only implicitly: ‘Before the breaking, a man’s heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour’. It clearly shows that ‘broken-hearted’ implies the opposite of haughtiness, thus humility or meekness.

As Psalm 34:19b and the example of Psalm 51:19 show, is sometimes used in a parallel expression, and Isaiah 65:14 should thus also be quoted:

הִנֵּה עֲבָדִי יְרַנוּ מִשְׁבָּב לְבָב וְאַתֶּם תְּצַעַקׁוּ מִכָּבֵב לְבָב וּמִשְׁבָּר רוּחַ תִּלְילְיוּ
Behold, my servants shall shout joyfully with a glad heart, but you
shall cry out because of the pain of the heart, and because of the
breaking of the spirit you shall wail.

Yet another relevant context from Isaiah is Isa 57:15:

מִרְוָם וּקְרוֹשׁ אַשְׁכּוֹן וְאַתְּדָכָא וּשְׁפֵלָרְוִיחַ לְהַחְיוֹת רֹיחַ
שְׁפָלִים וְלְהַחְיוֹת לְבָב נִדְכָּאִים
I (YHWH) dwell in a high and holy place, and (also) with the
crushed and humble of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the hum-
ble and to revive the heart of the crushed.

²⁰ As Levin (1993:370) remarks, alphabetic psalms could not be edited extensively because of the constraints of their form. Many of the descriptive terms for the in-group in Ps 34 are singled out by Levin (1993:374) as signifying a post-exilic Jewish piety.

²¹ יְרַאֵי is found in Pss 22; 25; 33; 34, 85; 103; 111; 145; and 147. עַנוּ is found in Pss 9; 10; 22; 25; 34; 37; 69; 76; 147; and 149 (the numbers of psalms that have both are underlined).

²² It is unclear whether Ezek 6:9 should be included. If the *pi’el* was used, it could have been considered another instance of a combination of the two stems.

This context is significant for the understanding (and possibly the dating) of Psalm 34, since Psalm 34:19 forms a kind of parallel to it. Psalm 34:19a states where YHWH is to be found (close to the broken-hearted), while Isaiah 57:15a does the same (in a high and holy place, but also with the crushed and humble of spirit). The second colon of both verses describes the effect of YHWH's presence in the lives of his humble followers: to save those who are crushed in spirit (Ps 34:19b), to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the crushed (Isa 57:15b).

Many words in Psalm 34 are used to interlock the psalm with those preceding and following, probably displaying the hand of an editor who made small changes to the surrounding psalms to embed Psalm 34 in its current position. Examples of these words are תָהַלָה, 'praise' (cf. 33:1, 34:2, and 35:28); תָמִיד, 'always' (cf. 34:2 and 35:27); הַלְל, *pi*, praise (cf. 34:3, 35:18); בָשָׂר, 'be glad' (cf. 32:11, 33:21, 34:3, and four times in 35, but referring to the enemy, etc).²³

The theological context of the description of the in-group of Ps 34 thus seems to be located in the wisdom psalms (e.g. Pss 25, 37, and 145), in the later additions to earlier collections of the Psalter (e.g. Pss 9-10, the additions to Ps 69, and Pss 86 and 147), and in the last part of Isaiah. At least four of the epithets used in Psalm 34 to refer to the in-group ('wretched', 'humble', 'broken-hearted', and 'crushed in spirit') point towards the semantic field of humbleness and meekness, or a complete absence of haughtiness, as an important qualification of the in-group.

One final expression that needs to be investigated, albeit briefly, is the reference to the in-group as the 'servants' of YHWH. Although the plural of עבד is more common in the second half of the Psalter,²⁴ it occurs only once in each of the first two books of the Psalter (in Ps 34:23 in Book I, Pss 1-41; and in Ps 69:37 in Book II, Pss 42-72). Both these verses have been described as editorial additions to the particular psalms where they occur.²⁵ What is more significant, though, is the similarity of this particular religious use of עבדים between the Psalter and the last part of Isaiah.²⁶ There seems to be significant

²³ Auffret (1988:23-27) has provided us with a detailed study of the connections between Ps 33 and Ps 34, proving that they have an intricate compositional relationship.

²⁴ Only up to and inclusive of Ps 135, where it occurs three times.

²⁵ See Berges (2000:173-175) and Groenewald (2003:744).

²⁶ The verses in Isaiah where it occurs are: Isa 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15, and 66:14.

connecting lines between Psalm 34 and Trito-Isaiah – in both the body of the psalm and in the final verse, which was possibly later added to the psalm.²⁷

The literary and theological background for the interpretation of Psalm 34 has now been demarcated. What remains in this section is to establish more or less when it was written, and more or less when the heading was attached to it. From the investigation of the epithets for the in-group it has become clear that the time of composition of Psalm 34 must be relatively close to the time when Psalms 25 and 37 were created, since they have so many features in common. The connections between Psalm 34 and Psalm 86 appear less close,²⁸ while the relationship with Psalm 145 seems to be in the ‘wrong’ direction, since Psalm 145 appears to be the later text. Similar to Psalm 86, it adapts and incorporates material from diverse sources,²⁹ *inter alia* from the threesome of Psalms 25, 34, and 37. In this regard it is more similar in genre to Psalms 1 and 119. Both display a kind of ‘anthological’ style, using phrases and motifs from other biblical texts to create a new composition.

The time of origin of Psalm 34 must also be located relatively close to or after the time when Trito-Isaiah was created or (more likely) edited by the so-called ‘servants of YHWH’, since the humbleness and contriteness of the servants in Isaiah are also used to describe the in-group of Psalm 34. There can be little doubt that the time of its origin was in the post-exilic era. There is a distinct possibility that the author(s) of Psalm 34 was or were members of the Levite circles³⁰ who suffered estrangement, humiliation, financial hardship, and loss of land through the actions of the priestly hierarchy in the time after the return from exile. In Psalms 25, 34, and 37, the issues of humiliation,³¹ possession of the land,³² lack of food,³³ attacks from the enemy,³⁴ control over aggres-

²⁷ See for example the similarities between Ps 34:19 (YHWH is near to the broken-hearted and those crushed in spirit he saves) and Isa 57:15 (I dwell in the high and holy place, also with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones), Isa 61:1 (YHWH has anointed me to bring good tidings to the humble; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted), and Isa 65:14 (behold, my servants shall shout joyfully with a glad heart, but you shall cry out with a heavy heart, and you shall wail with a broken spirit).

²⁸ Hossfeld & Zenger (2000:32) in any case consider it to be a creation of the final editors of the Psalter (‘dieser gehört erst zur Schlussredaktion des Psalters’).

²⁹ Ps 145:8, for instance, has connections with Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 9:17, 31; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; Joel 2:13; Prov 14:29; 16:32; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3. Zenger (1997:9) notes that it was inspired in the first place by Pss 103 and 104.

³⁰ See in this regard, Füglister (1988:381) and Groenewald (2003:753).

³¹ Pss 25:2-3; 34:6; 37:19.

³² Pss 25:13; cf. 34:17; 37:7, 9, 11, 18, 22, 27, 29, 34.

³³ Pss 34:10-11; 37:4-5, 16, 19, 25-26.

sion,³⁵ humility,³⁶ care for the needy,³⁷ punishment of the wicked (especially through eradication of their progeny),³⁸ trust in YHWH,³⁹ and protection by YHWH⁴⁰ keep cropping up.

According to Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:14), Psalms 25, 34, and 37 were integrated into an existing collection (consisting of Pss 3-41 without these three and some others) by a post-exilic redaction that is known as that of 'poor piety'.⁴¹ The time is given as the fifth to fourth century. The object of the editors was to portray the poor in the psalms as representing the 'true Israel' who was suffering from the enmity and attacks of wicked people. Their theological point of view was that these 'spiritually poor' people (the description of the 'poor' would now designate a religious category, namely 'pious people') would succeed in their resistance against the enemy, because YHWH's world order (described in Ps 19, the expansion of Ps 18 in verses 26-32, and the wisdom psalms 25, 34, 37, and 39) would eventually be established (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:14-15).

Before the end of the Persian period, the collection of Psalms 3-41 was most likely attached to several other collections which would constitute the 'second Davidic Psalter', to form the 'Messianic Psalter' of Psalms 2-89.⁴² Analogous to what the Asaphite⁴³ editors did to the small Davidic collection of Psalms 51-72, the first 'Davidic Psalter' was 'Davidised' by ascribing individual psalms from the collection to David (Hossfeld & Zenger 2000:33). According to Kleer (1996:92), it is possible to infer that Psalm 34 (as well as Ps 3) received its heading at this stage, since it is constructed also with ֙ plus infinitive, like *all* the biographical headings in the second Davidic Psalter. By attaching the royal Psalms 2 and 89 as a frame for the collection 2-89, the editors gave a 'royal theological' perspective to the collection.⁴⁴ Davidic Kingship is

³⁴ Pss 25:17-19, cf. 34:22; 37:12, 14, 32, 35.

³⁵ Pss 34:14-15; 37:1, 3, 7-8, 27, 37.

³⁶ Pss 25:9, 16; 34:3, 19; 37:7, 37.

³⁷ Ps 37:21-22; 26.

³⁸ Ps 34:17, cf. 22; 37:2, 9-10, 15, 20, 22, 28, 34, 36, and 38.

³⁹ Pss 25:2-3, 5, 20, 21; 34:9, 23; 37:3, 34, 39-40.

⁴⁰ Pss 25:5, 15, 20; 34:5, 7-8, 16, 18, 20-21, 23; 37:17, 23-24, 28; 33, 39-40.

⁴¹ The psalms added to the collection by these editors are supposed to have been Pss 16, 19, 23, 25, 33, 34, 37, 39, and 40. See Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:14).

⁴² Zenger (1997:97) calls the collection of psalms which existed at about 300 B.C. (ending with Ps 89) the 'Messianic Psalter', which had an anti-imperialistic objective.

⁴³ See Hossfeld & Zenger (2000:30).

⁴⁴ Running from the 'birth' of the king (Ps 2:7) to the 'death' of kingship in Ps 89. See Hossfeld & Zenger (2000:33).

‘democratised’ in Psalm 89, since the promise to David the ‘servant’ of YHWH is transferred to the ‘servants’ of YHWH.⁴⁵

It seems clear that Psalm 34 had originally only the heading לְדוֹד, like many other psalms.⁴⁶ The heading was in all probability not intended to designate David as the author, but to suggest that it is a psalm ‘about David’. The way in which the rest of the heading was attached to לְדוֹד⁴⁷ suggests that it is a later addition. The similarities with the story of David’s flight from Saul imply that the heading was linked once the books of Samuel were finalised. An example of a similar process is the creation of the heading of Psalm 18 where the summary description made by the editor of Samuel in 2 Samuel 22:1 was brought over to create the heading of the psalm (cf. Kleer 1996:27).⁴⁸ In both Psalm 18 and Psalm 34 the heading now implies unambiguously that David formulated the prayer at a specific time during his life.

C THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PSALM 34 AND 1 SAMUEL

Scholarly research has pointed out a number of connections between Psalm 34 and 1 Samuel. Apart from the words taken over from 1 Samuel 21 and 22 used as markers in the heading of Psalm 34 (שְׁנִיה pi, טַעַם, הַלְוָד), the following deserves to be noted.⁴⁹ First, Psalm 34:9 uses the verb טַעַט, to ‘taste’ (*Taste and see that YHWH is good*), although it does not have the same sense as the noun טַעַם (*discernment, good sense, sanity*) found in 1 Samuel 21:14 and in the heading of the psalm. Second, the similarity between 1 Samuel 23:27 and Psalm 34:8 has also been noticed: The messenger (מֶלֶךְ) arriving to call Saul away from his pursuit of David, serves a protective function comparable to the angel (מַלְאָךְ) which the psalmist refers to as encamping around those who fear YHWH (Ps 34:8).

⁴⁵ See Ps 89:40 and Ps 89:51 and the discussion in Berges (2000) and Tucker (2003).

⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, however, it has been asserted that the psalms which only have the heading לְדוֹד were those who received it *after* the addition of biographical headings to certain psalms. See Ballhorn (1995:20).

⁴⁷ The heading was added without any disturbance by attaching an imperfect verb used in 1 Sam 21:13 as an infinitive construct to form a circumstantial introduction, and by hitching two other *waw*-consecutive verbs onto it. The second of these (יְלִיל) is found in the narrative, but the other seems to be based on a deduction of what is implicit in the narrative (וַיִּגְרַשְׁהוּ). On this description, see below for more detail.

⁴⁸ This is the view of Kleer, but some would argue that Ps 18 was brought over from 2 Sam 22.

⁴⁹ See Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:213) and Kleer (1996:91-92).

Another proposed similarity is found in the use of the stem **הָלַל** in 1 Samuel 22:1 (III *hitpo*, ‘to behave as if mad’) and Psalm 34:3 (II *pi*, ‘to praise’).⁵⁰ This proposal appears to be rather forced, though. A similar case is the sarcastic remark of Achish that he has no need of madmen (1 Sam 21:16, ‘am I someone who is lacking – **חָסָר** *cst* – madmen?’) and the statement in Psalm 34:11 that those who seek YHWH ‘have no lack (**לֹא-יִחָסְרוּ**) of anything good’.⁵¹ The cryptic note ‘and he went’ at the end of the heading (**וַיֵּלֶךְ**) refers to 1 Samuel 22:1 and 5, but also to 1 Samuel 23:5, indicating that the ongoing narrative is also relevant.⁵² It thus points towards more connections between the contexts (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:213 and Kleer 1996:92). One such connection with the wider context which has been noted is YHWH’s response to David and to the suppliant, ‘and he answered me’ (**וַיַּעֲנֵנִי**, Ps 34:5, cf. 1 Sam 23:4, ‘and he answered him’). The many escapes of David also form a parallel to the theme of the psalm which refers to the several times (“all my fears”, “all his troubles”) the speaker was saved by YHWH as proof of YHWH’s goodness towards those who are persecuted and suffering (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:213).

The cryptic note ‘and he went’ (**וַיֵּלֶךְ**) in the heading thus seems to be multifaceted. It is not only the conclusion of an episode in which David was terrified,⁵³ but also the beginning of a chain of new episodes (1 Sam 22:1, 5 and 23:5 all with **וַיֵּלֶךְ**). The episode (in 1 Sam 21) which this form concludes in 1 Samuel 22:1 is the one in which David’s life was threatened by the people of king Achish⁵⁴ of the Philistines. They recognised David as the renowned killer of the Philistines, and he had to ‘change his sense’, feign madness by scribbling⁵⁵ on the doors of the (palace)⁵⁶ gate, and letting his spittle run down into

⁵⁰ So already Skehan (1952:226).

⁵¹ Kent Richards (1986:17) refers to the historical connection of the psalm to the narrative of 1 Sam 21:10-15 as being ‘strained’. However, if the wider context of David’s flight from beginning to end is considered, the psalm and the history seem to be integrated very well.

⁵² This was already suggested by Slomovic (1979:370).

⁵³ See the remark in the psalm that YHWH delivered the suppliant from ‘all his fears’, a thematic similarity with David being ‘very afraid’ in the narrative.

⁵⁴ The heading of Ps 34 creates confusion between Achish, king of the Philistines in Gath with whom David spent quite some time, and Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar, with whom both Abraham and Isaac spent some time. It may also be possible that **אַכִּישׁ מֶלֶךְ** in 1 Sam 21:11 were simply read as **אַבִּימֶלֶךְ**, or that confusion arose because of **אַחִימֶלֶךְ**, the priest who unwittingly helped David.

⁵⁵ See the discussion in HALOT s.v. **חָוָה** I *pi*, ‘to make a mark, scribble’. It is a denominative verb from **חַוָּה**.

⁵⁶ Achish wants to keep him from entering the palace (cf. 1 Sam 21:15).

his beard. Achish did not chase David away,⁵⁷ but simply protested to his servants that he did not have a ‘lack’ of madmen. The next word then is וַיַּלְאַת in 1 Samuel 22:1, describing David’s ‘escape’ to the cave of Adullam.

One can argue that the editor who inserted the heading in Psalm 34:1 had the whole history of David’s flight before Saul in mind. It is possible that he edited one or both contexts to integrate the psalm into the narrative of David’s many narrow escapes and vice versa. 1 Samuel 26:24 can serve as an example. David – after having spared the life of Saul – expresses the wish that YHWH should protect him: ‘May he save me from all distress’ (וַיַּאֲלֵנִי מִכֶּל־צְרָחָה). As the implied author of Psalm 34, David would then be confirming in verse 18 that YHWH indeed protected him when he states that YHWH ‘saves the righteous from all their distress’ (וּמִכֶּל־צְרוֹתָם הַצִּילָם). The same idea is expressed in Psalm 34:7 as a personal confession:

זה עני קָרָא וַיַּהֲנֵה שָׁמַע וּמִכֶּל־צְרוֹתָיו הַוְשִׁיעָיו

‘This is a wretched/poor person: he called and YHWH listened, and from all his troubles/distress he saved him’.

In the context of the heading, it is *inter alia* this prayer of David in 1 Samuel 26:24 that has been answered.

The earlier history of David may also be relevant for a search for connections with Psalm 34. For an observant reader the self-description of the author (‘this is a wretched/poor person’ – v. 7) alludes to David’s words to the servants of Saul earlier in his life, before he had to flee. In 1 Samuel 18:23 he told them that it is no trivial matter to become the son-in-law of the king, seeing that he is a ‘poor and insignificant man’ (אָנֹכִי אִישׁ־רֹשׁ וּנְקָלָה). Now it is true that the first person speaker in Psalm 34 does not refer to himself as a **שָׁׁנָה**; on the contrary, he describes the ‘young lions’ as being ‘needy’ (רְשִׁיא) in Psalm 34:11, while those who seek YHWH in contrast have ‘no lack of anything good’. But the words **שָׁׁנָה** and **עַנִּי** are used as a synonymous word-pair in Psalm 82:3, so that the connection does not seem far-fetched.

David has indeed experienced that YHWH provides for him and his followers, insignificant and poor people, as Psalm 34:10 states.⁵⁸ In 1 Samuel 25

⁵⁷ It seems rather to refer to the incident later on (1 Sam 26:19) where David protests against Saul that those who falsely accuse him of enmity against Saul, are in effect driving him away (גַּרְשֵׁנִי) from his share in YHWH’s inheritance, and are thus trying to force him to worship idols.

⁵⁸ See Ps 34:3 and 7.

he realises that it is not necessary to take by sword that what he and his men need. After politely requesting assistance from Nabal, his men are insulted. David takes an oath to revenge the insult. On his way to punish Nabal, however, Abigail (Nabal's sensible wife) meets him. She provides him in abundance with everything he needs (1 Sam 25:18), thereby confirming the care of YHWH for those who fear him (Ps 34:9-10). Her words restrain him, causing him to turn away from the confrontation. When Nabal dies about ten days later from a kind of apoplexy⁵⁹ after hearing of Abigail's generosity, David is grateful for not having taken revenge himself. He realises that it is YHWH who had kept back 'his servant' from evil, turning the evil of Nabal on his own head (1 Sam 25:39):

את-עֲבָדוֹ חִשֵּׁךְ מַרְעָה וְאֵת רַעַת נְבָל הַשִּׁיבֵּה יְהוָה בְּרַאֲשׁוֹ

He has kept back his servant from evil and the evildoing of Nabal,
YHWH has returned on his own head.

These words sound like the words of the David teaching his followers in Psalm 34:15 to 'Turn away from evil (סֹר מַרְעָה) and do good, seek peace and pursue it'.⁶⁰ Moreover, this episode could have given 'David' the insight to tell his group of followers later in Psalm 34:22:

תִּמְוֹתָת רָשָׁע רָעָה וְשָׁנָאֵי צְדִיק יִאֲשָׁמוֹ

'Evil kills the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned'.

It is YHWH who has prevented 'his servant (עֲבָדִי)' from incurring guilt, as Psalm 34:23 implies: 'YHWH ransoms the life of his servants (עֲבָדִים) and no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned (יִאֲשָׁמוֹ)'. In the narrative in Samuel, it is the wise words of Abigail in the first place that restrain David from 'saving' himself and from incurring blood guilt, although he later acknowledges to YHWH that it is he who worked through her:

**בָּרוֹכָה אַת אָשֵׁר כֹּלְתָנִי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה מִבּוֹא בְּרִמִּים וְהַשֵּׁעָ יְדֵי לֵי
את-עֲבָדוֹ חִשֵּׁךְ מַרְעָה**

and 1 Samuel 25:39

It is significant that David, in praising Abigail's wisdom that kept him from evil, uses the same word which was earlier employed by the narrator to describe his feigned madness, namely **תַּעַם**. He tells Abigail, 'and blessed be

⁵⁹ Nabal's 'heart' dies (1 Sam 25:37) at the time which David set as a deadline (1 Sam 25:22) for his oath to kill him and his male relatives, but he himself dies only ten days later.

⁶⁰ Earlier (1 Sam 24:14), David had warned Saul that 'wicked proceeds from the wicked', quoting a wisdom saying (מִשּׁׁל) just as the author of the psalm seems to be quoting from Proverbs in vv. 12-15.

(ברוך) your discernment (טעמה), and blessed be you (את), who have kept me this day from bloodshed' (1 Sam 25:33). The proximity of the stem טעם and a formula of blessing seems to form a closer parallel with Psalm 34:9, where אישׁר is used together with טעם in the same verse. At the beginning of his flight, David voluntarily changed his discernment to fool his enemies, but here he is able to recognise the discernment of a woman, and wise enough to acknowledge it. It is through this wisdom that 'he' can later exhort and teach his followers through the words of the psalm.

It is clear that the David of the Samuel narrative and the David of Psalm 34 are compatible. When David had Saul in his power on the occasion when Saul went into the cave to relieve himself, David's men told him that YHWH is telling him through this situation to 'do with (your enemy) as is good in your eyes' (וְעָשֵׂת לֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר יִטְבֶּן, 1 Sam 24:5). David does not listen to this false message and refrains from killing Saul. Such restraint can be expected from one who tells his fellow believers in Psalm 34:15 to 'turn away from evil and do good' (סור מִרְעָע וְעַשְׂתָּה-טוֹב) - not 'what is good in your eyes', but simply 'what is good'. Even after only cutting off the end of Saul's robe, David's conscience troubled him (1 Sam 24:6, לִבְדָּךְ אַתָּה). This is the man, according to the heading of Psalm 34, who teaches that YHWH is near to the broken-hearted (קרוב יהוָה לְנַשְׁבָּרֵלֶב, Ps 34:19). It is no wonder then that Saul witnesses to the fact that David is more righteous than himself (1 Sam 24:18). When David asks Saul to acknowledge that there is no evil in his hand (1 Sam 24:12, רָאָה כִּי אֵין בְּ יָדֵי רָעָה), Saul reciprocates: 'You are more righteous than I, for you have rendered to me good (cf. v. 18 עָשֵׂת טוֹבָה), while I have rendered to you evil (הָרָעָה)' (1 Sam 24:17). The antithesis expressed in Psalm 34:15 is present in this pronouncement too, confirming that David is one of the 'righteous' referred to in Psalm 34:16, 20, and 22. Saul's downfall has thus begun, and even though he asks David to swear that he (David) will not cut off his descendants after him (ברת זֶרֶע, 1 Sam 24:22), Psalm 34:17 teaches that 'the face of YHWH is against the evildoers to cut their memory from the land' (כָּרְתָּ זְכָרָה).

David saves the life of Saul for a second time when he visits Saul's camp during the night (1 Sam 26:1-25). Saul slept in the centre of the camp, while his soldiers were encamped around him (הָעָם הַעֲמִים סְבִיבָתָיו, 1 Sam 26:5). David was never caught, the reason being the angel referred to in Psalm 34:8, 'the angel of YHWH encamps around those who fear him' (הָנָּה מַלְאָקֵי יְהוָה סְבִיבָ לִירָאֵי). In this way the stem הנה forms another parallel between the story of David and Psalm 34.

The author of Psalm 34 had a pacifist approach. He admonishes the in-group to turn away from evil and do good, to seek peace and pursue it (v.15). Read in conjunction with Psalm 37, which could have been produced by the

same group of people, it becomes obvious that the ‘poor and afflicted’ should not retaliate, but rather expect YHWH to act on their behalf when they are under threat (Ps 37:12-15, 17). One should refrain from evil, for evil kills the wicked, but YHWH will ransom the life of his servants (Ps 34:15, 22). The story of David’s flight from Saul confirms this approach in one respect – as far as Saul, the anointed of YHWH is concerned, David followed a pacifist approach. Saul gave David reason to kill him on the two occasions when it was in his power to do so, for Saul continually ‘sought’ (שָׁבֵךְ) David and ‘pursued’ (רָצַח) him (1 Sam 23:25). It is therefore significant that the author of Psalm 34:15b advises his followers to ‘seek’ peace and ‘pursue’ it instead (בָּקַשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרָפַחּוּ). David also practiced what he is said to have preached in Psalm 34, for he sought peace with Nabal before the insult: in 1 Samuel 25:6, he instructs his soldiers to tell Nabal ‘peace be to you and peace to your house and peace to all that you possess’ (אָתָּה שְׁלוֹם וְבִתְחַקּ שְׁלוֹם וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ שְׁלוֹם). A threefold blessing of peace can certainly be described as ‘seeking’ peace.

The David of the historical narrative speaks almost with the diction of the David of the wisdom psalm. He tells Saul, ‘See, indeed see, (רָאָה גַם רָאָה) the edge of your robe in my hand... know and see that (דֵּעַ וָרָאָה כִּי) there is no evil in my hand’ (1 Sam 24:12). This sounds very similar to Psalm 34:9, ‘Taste and see (טְעַמּוּ וְרָאוּ) that YHWH is good...’.

D READING PSALM 34 IN THE LIGHT OF DAVID’S LIFE

The investigation in the previous section has made it sufficiently clear that the intention with the heading was not to point only towards a single incident in the life of David when he was supposed to have written the psalm. The incident reflected is merely the beginning of a phase. The psalm is related to the entire history, in spite of the temporal construction in the heading. For example, the heading of Psalm 18 relates that psalm to David’s whole life. The impression is that the psalm has been written at the end of his career. However, the heading states that David ‘spoke’ the words of this ‘song’ ‘on the day YHWH saved him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul’.⁶¹

Psalm 34 should therefore be read as a summary of David’s reflections on the whole history of his flight from Saul, beginning on the day⁶² when he fled from Saul and arrived at Achish, but continuing at least to the incident de-

⁶¹ Ballhorn (1995:17) interprets the heading of Ps 18 as simply referring to his whole life, despite the implicit tension between the general qualification at the beginning (‘from the hand of all his enemies’) and the more specific one which comes second (‘from the hand of Saul’).

⁶² See 1 Sam 21:10.

scribed in 1 Samuel 26.⁶³ During these years, David obtained experience of YHWH's beneficial presence in his life. He learned that YHWH is indeed near to those who fear him and who have the right frame of mind (cf. Ps 34:19). Time and again he experienced YHWH's beneficial intervention – a saving, delivering, rescuing, and ransoming experience (cf. vv. 5, 7, 18-20, and 23). He has experienced YHWH's care, that those who fear YHWH have no lack of anything good and are saved from all their distress (cf. vv. 9-11, 13). It is from that experience that he can invite his followers to praise YHWH with him, and to experience for themselves that he is no exception, that everyone who has a similar attitude and spiritual disposition will similarly experience that God is good (vv. 12-23).

His flight from Saul has endowed David with wisdom. In fact, he had some wisdom beforehand, for he knew how to restrain himself and refused to kill Saul when the opportunity repeatedly occurred. As a wise person he sought and pursued peace in the face of a pursuer who sought his life (v. 15b). But he only gained some wisdom through the intervention of YHWH. When he was on the verge of killing a fool who had insulted him (together with his whole household), YHWH sent a woman to soothe his anger with wise words. It is that wisdom which he gained in the presence of Abigail that he is thought to share with his followers: 'Turn away from evil and do good' – not what is good in your own eyes, but in the eyes of God (v. 15a). Take refuge in YHWH, and you will not incur guilt upon yourself (v. 23). For he has also experienced what Psalm 34:22 teaches in the maxim of what constitutes a wise person: Evil kills the wicked. YHWH intervenes on behalf of those who fear him, and therefore it is not necessary to take matters into one's own hands. In spilling innocent blood, one incurs guilt (cf. Ezek 22:4). YHWH's face is against the evildoers, and that is enough (Ps 34:17).⁶⁴

The purpose (and the effect) of the heading of Psalm 34:1 are therefore not primarily as Ballhorn and Kleer have stated, to facilitate identification of the individual or collective reader or listener with David (Ballhorn 1995:24;

⁶³ It was shown above that the verb *שָׁמַע* in the heading is possibly a reflection of 1 Sam 26:19, while David's prayer that YHWH would 'rescue him from all distress' in 1 Sam 26:24 shows a connection to the confession in Ps 34:7b that YHWH has listened and 'has rescued' the suppliant 'from all distress'. Richards (1986:177) also suggests that the whole history of the time when Israel had two messiahs – the one illegal and powerful, the other legal but powerless – should be kept in mind.

⁶⁴ The David of the Samuel narrative formulates this in his own words when he says 'YHWH rewards each person for his righteousness and loyalty' (1 Sam 26:23).

Kleer 1996:116)⁶⁵ or simply to give examples from David's life which might prompt one to use the psalm as a prayer (Ballhorn 1995:24; Kleer 1996:117). Psalm 34 is not a prayer in the real sense. The headings serve rather to strengthen the impact of the psalm as an exhortation to people to stay members of the in-group of pious people, those who fear YHWH, who seek him, who regard themselves as צדיקים, ענוים and עבדים of YHWH. In exhorting them, David as the implied author of Psalm 34 speaks from a position of authority gained through experience of difficult times. He should know the truth of the motivational aphorisms provided in Psalm 34, for he was there: YHWH saved him, took care of him, and thereby proved his proximity to the broken-hearted and the crushed in spirit (Ps 34:19). Trust in YHWH and his righteousness can therefore be recommended.

E READING DAVID'S HISTORY IN THE LIGHT OF PSALM 34

1 David the theologian

In the part of the Deuteronomistic History to which the heading of Psalm 34 refers, YHWH is present. The fact that YHWH controls his life is evident from David's words to the king of Moab⁶⁶ and to Abigail, the wife of Nabal.⁶⁷ Although David does not hesitate to lie to a priest,⁶⁸ he later thrice consults YHWH who answers him on each question.⁶⁹ YHWH even gives instructions to David through the prophet Gad without David having consulted him (1 Sam 22:5). In his discussions with Saul, David refers to the role of YHWH as the final judge of who is righteous and loyal.⁷⁰ He acknowledges to Abigail that she was the instrument of YHWH who prevented him from spilling blood.⁷¹ David recognises in Nabal's death the punishment of YHWH, who returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head.⁷²

⁶⁵ This is not to say that the other psalms with a biographical heading were not intended to hold David up as an exemplar of spirituality. Cf. Allen's investigation of the redactional function of Ps 19 (Allen 1986).

⁶⁶ See 1 Sam 22:3, 'until I know what God intends for me'.

⁶⁷ 1 Sam 25:32, 'Blessed be YHWH, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today'. See vv. 34 and 39.

⁶⁸ He lies about his mission, about the fact that he is alone, and about the holiness of the soldiers who are supposed to accompany him. See 1 Sam 21:1-5. David consequently finds himself in a tight spot, carrying the unique sword of the greatest Philistine hero (whom he killed) to a Philistine city!

⁶⁹ 1 Sam 23:2, 4, 10-12.

⁷⁰ 1 Sam 24:11, 13, 16.

⁷¹ 1 Sam 25:34.

⁷² 1 Sam 25:39.

The narrator in the story also does not hesitate to make his own theology manifest, for he explicitly tells the reader that it was YHWH who struck Nabal and caused him to die.⁷³ YHWH is also present in the language of all the characters – that of David, Saul, Saul's son Jonathan, David's soldiers, and Nabal's wife. They all take the role of YHWH into consideration in the formulating of covenant formulas, oaths, blessings, and in the interpretation of events.

It should be noted that the books of Samuel were given a hermeneutical frame with the insertion of the song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) at the beginning and the song of David (2 Sam 22) at the end. The theological vision of this poetic *inclusio* could be described as referring to the decisive role of YHWH in human intrigues.⁷⁴ It would therefore not be correct to suppose that the psalm brings a 'theological dimension' to the history of David. The theology is already there, and it is the same theology that is reflected in the psalm. But there is a difference. The theological statements made in the psalm are more direct: 'YHWH is good', 'YHWH is near to the broken-hearted', 'the face of YHWH is against the evildoers', and 'the eyes of YHWH are toward the righteous'. These are not merely statements about what YHWH has done – like those found in the books of Samuel – but statements about the *character* of YHWH, the character which determines his actions. Through the insight of Psalm 34, we thus encounter David the theologian in history. As Richards (1968:179) remarks, the heading of Psalm 34 points in the first instance to 1 Samuel 21:10-15, where there is no mention of the activity of YHWH. It seems strange that 'David' would want to give thanks for this (humiliating) rescue. But David the theologian of Psalm 34 recognises the hand of God also in this, the most mundane of episodes in the life of David.

2 David the wisdom teacher

In terms of wisdom, one can possibly assert that Psalm 34 modifies the profile of David. The David of Ps 34 speaks from hindsight. He is more certain of the outcome of his doubtful existence. He is more convinced that YHWH will protect him, and he is no longer terrified as was the case a number of times

⁷³ 1 Sam 25:38. In 1 Sam 26:12 the narrator tells the audience that Abner and Saul did not wake up when David and Abisai took Saul's spear and his water jug, because YHWH let a deep sleep (*תַּתְּהִלָּה*) fall on them. This sounds very much like an explicating redactional addition, but it may have been part of the 'original' text.

⁷⁴ See in this regard Bailey (1995:216-217). Bailey sees the function of the poetic *inclusio* as that of presenting 'an orthodox view of YHWH, in spite of the experiences of the exile' (1995:219).

during his flight from Saul (1 Sam 21:12; cf. 23:3 and 26).⁷⁵ He can testify confidently that he was delivered from all his fears (Ps 34:5). He can call on his followers to praise YHWH with him and to share his experience of YHWH's goodness.

In view of its heading, Psalm 34 portrays David as a wisdom teacher. The Deuteronomistic History undoubtedly is not oblivious to David's wisdom. Wisdom forms the link between Samuel and Psalm 34. For example, David quotes a wisdom aphorism (חָסֵד, 1 Sam 24:14). He praises the wisdom of a woman (מִשְׁׁלָה, 1 Sam 25:33),⁷⁶ proving that he also excelled in this skill similar to his son, Solomon. But in Psalm 34 he turns into a proper wisdom teacher, drawing on his experience in life to teach that the fear of YHWH truly is the beginning of wisdom (Ps 34:12) and the guarantee of success (Ps 34:10). The representation of David's wisdom gained influence in the time between the testaments, since he is explicitly described in the Qumran Psalm scroll 11QPs^a Coll. XXVII: 2-3 as a wise person (מְכֹרֶן) who had insight (נְבוּן).⁷⁷

3 David the humble leader

One of the most important contributions that Psalm 34 makes to the understanding of David's history is perhaps the image it creates of David as a man of peace and not only of war. 1 Samuel 27 reveals David to be cunning and ruthless. While he was (some time after the humiliating experience of 1 Sam 21) staying with Achish, he pretended to make raids into Israelite territory, but in reality attacked the Canaanites in the vicinity. In this way he brought Achish to trust him, since the Philistine king thought that David had made himself so hated among the Israelites that he would never be accepted by them (1 Sam 27:12). But to keep this up, David had to exterminate entire communities, leaving no one alive or able to tell (1 Sam 27:9). The portrayal of such ruthlessness clashes with the spiritual background of Psalm 34, which was composed in a post-exilic wisdom setting of 'poor piety'. As a result, the character of David is adapted.⁷⁸ David and his group are described (in view of the head-

⁷⁵ The second and third text does not explicitly state that David was afraid, but it strongly suggests this was the case (Slomovic 1979:370).

⁷⁶ See the use of the word in wisdom contexts such as Job 12:20, Ps 119:66, Prov 11:22. About the last text mentioned ('a beautiful woman without insight'), it should be remarked that it is perhaps significant that Abigail was both pretty and wise (cf. 1 Sam 25:3, טֹבַת-שְׁכָל וַיַּפְתַּח הָאָר).

⁷⁷ On this, see Füglister (1988:360).

⁷⁸ Ballhorn (1995:17-18) also mentions the idealised characterisation of David through the insertion of Ps 18 in 2 Sam 22, displaying the end perspective of the Deuteronomistic editors of Samuel.

ing of the psalm) as ‘humble’, ‘poor’, ‘broken-hearted’ and ‘crushed in spirit’. It was illustrated above that these epithets all point to a humble disposition.

While David is depicted in Samuel as a man who shows immense respect for the anointed of YHWH, he cannot be described as meek. Only with regard to Saul, as an anointed, did he show restraint. He had a chance on two occasions to kill Saul, and was encouraged by his followers to do so in the name of YHWH, but he prayed to be preserved from doing that (1 Sam 24:7). His approach to Nabal is also depicted as being polite and respectful. But he would not stand an insult. When his request was rebuffed, he took an oath that he would exterminate within one day all the men in Nabal’s household (1 Sam 25:22). Because of Abigail’s wise and polite intervention, it did not happen. The psalm largely contributes to the portrait of David the picture of a reasonable man, who could forgive and who would deviate from evil intentions. After all his experiences, David is the one who can categorically state that he is an **עַנְיָן**, that one should not speak evil and should always seek peace and pursue it, rather than take revenge.

4 David the suffering servant

In the Deuteronomistic History, David is portrayed as the unjustly persecuted. A number of times he protests that he is innocent of any wrongdoing. He complains to Saul that he was driven from the community of those who fear YHWH (1 Sam 26:19), with the implication that he is suffering because of this.

The author of Psalm 34 describes himself and his group in words that suggest innocent suffering. Their profile is reminiscent of that of the ‘servants’ of YHWH in Trito-Isaiah. As their leader had to suffer humiliation, and acquired an appearance that caused people to hide their faces,⁷⁹ so David was humiliated by having had to ‘change his perception’. He had to pretend to be insane.⁸⁰ The psalm also speaks of the joy of the in-group and the fact that they will no longer be ashamed (v. 3 and v. 6), forming a parallel to the ‘servants’ in Trito-Isaiah⁸¹ to which the psalm alludes. In this way, Psalm 34 suggests that David is indeed suffering, but that there will also be a triumph.

⁷⁹ Isa 53:2-3.

⁸⁰ A beard was a symbol of manly honour in Ancient Israel (cf. Lev 13:45; 2 Sam 10:4-5; and Ps 133:2). It was appropriate to have oil running down one’s beard, but definitely not spittle, since it would make one unclean.

⁸¹ See the parallels especially to Isa 66:5, and Blenkinsopp’s discussion of its background in post-exilic Judah (Blenkinsopp 1990:7-11). See also Beuken (1990:76-81) and Eriksson (1991:25). Eriksson (1991:31) concludes that it is difficult to confirm a direct connection with Isaiah 66; but it seems that the corroborating evidence is strongly suggestive of this.

The fact that Ps 18 was inserted (and edited) in 2 Sam 22, and the fact that Ps 18 was given a similar heading as in the narrative context, provide a hermeneutic for reading the psalms which are related to the life of David, of which Ps 34 is the first. It suggests that all the following situations of distress in the Psalter should be read from the perspective of the final triumph of David.⁸²

5 David the inspired author

One last aspect worth mentioning is that David is also portrayed through the connection with Psalm 34 as an accomplished author. Psalm 34 is a literary product, written by an able poet-theologian.⁸³ Its form and contents display a high regard for written artistry.⁸⁴ The association of David with the psalm adds this dimension to his character.

F CONCLUSION

One of the most important accomplishments of the editor who inserted the heading above Psalm 34 was to strengthen the connections between the Psalter and the Early Prophets. As individual psalms were embedded in a literary context through small changes to the text of that psalm as well as its neighbours, small adaptations to a psalm such as Psalm 34 and the context in 1 Samuel to which it is connected, interlocked the two texts and thus also the two parts of the canon.

Furthermore, the psalm was changed into a kind of literary video clip that provides an annotation to the history of David in Samuel. Subsequently, the psalm received new meaning, and new facets were added to the portrayal of the character of David in the books of Samuel. Instead of discarding the headings of these psalms as spurious and meaningless, one should recognise the rich contribution they make towards broadening the hermeneutic horizon of both texts.

⁸² See Ballhorn (1995:18): ‘bei jedem Davidsgebet steht dem Israeliten die gesamte Davidsgeschichte vor Augen’. It is significant that the vast majority of psalms in the so-called Davidic collections are individual laments and thanksgiving psalms. Füglister (1988:370) remarks that this indicates that ‘David ist, als “Jahwes Knecht”, der exemplarisch Leidende, der, auch als Sünder, aufgrund seines Betens von seinem Gott aus all seinen Nöten errettet wird’.

⁸³ See the arguments of Ceresko (1985:99) that Ps 34 originated in a literate milieu, since its ‘appeal is more to the eye and to the mind than to the ear’.

⁸⁴ In this regard, see the articles of Ceresko (1985), Auffret (1988) and the book of Eriksson (1991), especially p 46.

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