

## Psalm 91 and its Wisdom Connections

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper investigates the literary and theological provenance of Ps 91. It is shown that Ps 91 (in its present form) was composed by someone who had access to Proverbs, in particular Prov 3, while Ps 91 itself played a role in the composition of Job 5:17–26. As part of the "trptych" formed by Pss 90, 91 and 92, the psalm was intended to strengthen the conviction of its author that Yahweh is able and willing to provide protection to the individual believer who attaches himself or herself wholeheartedly to his or her God, saving the true and wise believer from the fate that will befall the wicked fools.*

### A INTRODUCTION

This paper is an investigation of the literary and theological provenance of Ps 91. The psalm is considered by many to contain remnants of an old liturgy<sup>1</sup> in which a believer is promised protection against misfortune. In its present shape, however, the psalm certainly does not represent the pristine form of such a liturgy, since it displays clear influence from the book of Proverbs, in particular from Prov 3. Together with Prov 3 it in turn also influenced the composition of Job 5:17–26. Psalm 91 is not an argumentative text, but in its present shape it approaches wisdom teaching which sought to convince individual worshippers of Yahweh's protection for the righteous individual and of vindication of such believers when the "wicked" would be judged by Yahweh. It was therefore probably crafted by the wisdom-oriented editors of the Psalter with their em-

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<sup>1</sup> Corinna Körting, "Text and Context – Ps 91 and 11QPsaPa," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (ed. Erich Zenger; BETL 238; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 567, gives an overview of proposed *Settings in Life*. Erich Zenger, "Psalm 91," in Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100* (vol. 2 of *Die Psalmen*; HTKNT; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2000), 619, notes the various temple motifs and the alteration of speakers which, in his view, point to a temple-liturgical background. He nevertheless (619–620) describes it as a literary staging ("Inszenierung") of an original cultic ritual which played a role in the establishment of personal piety since it was probably created for private recitation in the Temple. The suppliant would thus "play out" the different voices in the psalm on his or her own. Zenger also notes (621–622) that the spatial references of protection ("dwell," "abide," "hiding-place," "refuge," "stronghold") do not require the suppliant to be in the temple, since Yahweh *is* a protecting temple and stronghold to him according to the psalm. Pirmin Hugger, *Jahwe meine Zuflucht: Gestalt und Theologie des 91: Psalms* (Münsterschwarzacher Studien 13; Munsterschwarzach: Vier-Turme-Verlag, 1971), 18 similarly describes it as an echo of an ancient cultic instruction in which an Israelite is called upon to worship the God of his Fathers ("Shaddai") now also in Jerusalem.

phasis on trust in Yahweh and their expectation that the patient, faithful, righteous (and thus wise) worshipper will be protected and absolved by Yahweh.

The modus operandi of the paper will be to discuss the poetic and literary features of the psalm briefly and then to trace its connections with Proverbs and Job, arguing that it was influenced by Proverbs, but must antedate the book of Job, since the author of Job seems to have had both Prov 3 and Ps 91 available.

## B THE TEXT AND POETIC FEATURES OF PSALM 91

I	A	1	יֵשֵׁב בְּסִתְרֵי עֲלִיּוֹן בְּצֵל שְׁדֵי יִתְלוֹנֵן: אָמַר לַיהוָה מַחְסֵי וּמְצוּדָתִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתַי־בָּבוֹ:	<sup>1</sup> He who lives in the hiding-place of the Most High will abide in the shadow of Shaddai.
		2	כִּי הוּא יִצִּילֵךְ מִפֶּחַ יָקוּשׁ מִדְּבַר הַמוֹת: בְּאַבְרָתוֹ   יִסֶּד לְךָ וְתַחַת־כַּנְפָּיו תִּחְסֶה צִנָּה וְסַחֲרָה אֲמַתּוֹ:	<sup>2</sup> I say to Yahweh: "You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I trust." <sup>3</sup> Certainly, he will rescue you from the trap of the fowler, from the deadly plague. <sup>4</sup> With his pinion he will cover you and under his wings you will find refuge, his faithfulness is a shield and a protecting wall.
	B	3	לֹא־תִירָא מִפֶּחַד לַיְלָה מִחֵץ יְעוֹף יוֹמָם: מִדְּבַר בְּאֶפֶל יְהֵלֵךְ מִקְטֹב יִשׁוּד צְהָרִים: יִפֹּל מִצִּדְּךָ   אֶלֶף וְרִבְבָה מִיְמִינֶךָ אֶלֶיךָ לֹא יִגָּשׁ: רַק בְּעֵינֶיךָ תִּבְטֹחַ וְשַׁלַּמְתָּ רְשָׁעִים תִּרְאֶה:	<sup>5</sup> You shall not fear the terror of the night, nor an arrow that flies during the day; <sup>6</sup> nor pestilence that spreads in darkness, nor an epidemic that devastates at midday. <sup>7</sup> A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand: towards you it will not approach. <sup>8</sup> Only with your eyes will you look on and see the retribution of the wicked.
	C	5	כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה מַחְסֵי עֲלִיּוֹן שָׁמַתָּ מְעוֹנֶךָ: לֹא־תֵאָנֶה אֵלֶיךָ רָעָה וְנִגַּע לֹא־יִקְרַב בְּאֹהֶלֶךָ:	<sup>9</sup> "Certainly, you Yahweh, are my refuge!" The most High you made your dwelling; <sup>10</sup> therefore no disaster will befall you and no affliction will come near your tent.
	E	9	כִּי מִלְּאֲכִיו יִצְוֶה־לְךָ לְשׁוֹמְרֶיךָ בְּכָל־דְּרָכֶיךָ: עַל־כַּפְּיָם יִשְׁאוּנֶךָ פְּזוֹתֶיךָ בְּאֶבֶן רִגְלֶיךָ: עַל־שַׁחַל וּפְתָן תִּדְרֹךְ תִּרְמֹס כְּפִיר וְתַנִּין:	<sup>11</sup> For he shall command his angels concerning you to protect you in all your ways. <sup>12</sup> They will lift you up on their hands, so that you do not strike your foot against a stone. <sup>13</sup> You shall tread on the lion and the cobra; the young lion and the serpent you shall trample.
	F	11	כִּי בִי חָשַׁק וְאַפְלֹטָהוּ	<sup>14</sup> Because he attaches himself to me, therefore I will deliver him:
	G	14		

	אֲשַׁגְּבֶהוּ כִּי־יֵדַע שְׁמִי:	I will make him inaccessible because he knows my name.
15	יִקְרָאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֶהוּ	<sup>15</sup> He shall call to me and I will answer him:
	עִמּוֹ־אֲנִי בְצָרָה	I am with him in distress;
	אֶחְלֹצֶהוּ וְאֶכְבְּדֶהוּ:	I will deliver him and grant him honour.
16	אֶרְדֵּי יָמִים אֲשַׁבֵּעֵהוּ	<sup>16</sup> With length of days I will satisfy him
	וְאֶרְאֶהוּ בִישׁוּעָתִי:	and let him see my salvation.

There is a general consensus about the demarcation of vv. 1–2 and 14–16 as separate units in the psalm. Apart from that, the opinions differ widely.<sup>2</sup> A number of investigators isolate v. 9 from v. 10 (or even 9a from 9b–10),<sup>3</sup> but there is no justification for doing this.<sup>4</sup> The use of כִּי to demarcate the beginning of strophes B, E, F, and G; the semantic fields within each strophe; the parallel and chiasmic structures formed; the subjects and objects of verbs; and (consequently) the sound patterns of assonance, alliteration and rhyme<sup>5</sup> help to de-

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Auffret, “‘Je suis avec lui.’ Étude structurelle du psaume 91,” in *Voyez de vos yeux: Étude structurelle de vingt psaumes, dont le psaume 119* (ed. Pierre Auffret; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1993), 280, gives a summary overview of the segmentation proposed by nine investigators, and there is little agreement. Auffret himself does not work with strophes, but finds connections between single verses and groups of verses that form complex chiasmic patterns. He identifies two ensembles, vv. 1–13 and 14–16, which form internal patterns but also display external correspondences. The segmentation proposed here is based on different premises. Jan P. Fokkelman, *The Psalms in Form: The Hebrew Psalter in its Poetic Shape* (Leiden: Deo, 2002), 101, has the exact same division of strophes proposed here, but do not indicate any combinations of strophes into stanzas.

<sup>3</sup> So, for instance, Andreas Wagner, “Ps 91 – Bekenntnis zu Jahwe,” in *Primäre und sekundäre Religion als Kategorie der Religionsgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (ed. Andreas Wagner; BZAW 364; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 80–81 who isolates v. 9a as the centre of the psalm and demarcates an outer frame (vv. 1–2 and 14–16) and two inner strophes (vv. 3–8 and 10–13) around this central confession (“zentraler Bekenntnisakt”). Wagner’s brave but very improbable suggestion is that the psalm presents us with a liturgy through which a polytheist who “sits in the shade” (= lives in the sphere of influence) of Elyon and Shaddai (separate deities from Yahweh!) can profess conversion to Yahweh alone. According to him, v. 9b is a theological explanation about how the relationship between Yahweh and the deities under whose protection the person who is not a Yahweh worshipper finds himself, should be seen (88). The worshipper is able to convert to Yahwism since Yahweh has made Elyon his “home,” thus has been united with him! (89). “Jahwe *ist* Eljon, wie er auch andere Götter *ist*” (91).

<sup>4</sup> The Masoretes had no problem to read the two cola of v. 9 as one verse line. Verse 9b is linked to 10 through the repetition of the suffix 2 m s.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the alliteration of *b*, *s* and *l* sounds in strophe A; the rhyme of *on* in strophe A; the alliteration of *s*, *t*, and *ch* sounds in strophe B; and the conspicuous sound pattern resulting from the five *pi‘el* first person singular verb forms with third person masculine singular suffixes in strophe G.

marcate seven strophes. The demarcation of stanzas usually depends on the importance attached by investigators to the identification of speakers and addressees and the perceived performative function of strophes.<sup>6</sup> There seems to be enough reason, however, to divide the psalm into two stanzas which have a number of things in parallel, although not all of them are in the same sequence.<sup>7</sup> If vv. 1–8 are demarcated as stanza I and vv. 9–16 as stanza II, the result is two stanzas of equal length which both have at the beginning a promise of protection (vv. 1 and 10) and an affirmation that Yahweh is considered to be the only assurance of safety (vv. 2 and 9a),<sup>8</sup> followed by a series of promises that the individual believer will be rescued from threats (B, 3–4 and G, 14–16 respectively) and will be protected against all kinds of disaster (C, 5–6; F, 11–13 respectively). Verse 8 and v. 16 cover the topics of retribution and salvation antithetically since the motif of “seeing” establishes a connection between them (הִרְאֶה is used in both with “retribution” and “salvation” as the two objects). The last strophe of the second stanza develops from a third person promise about what Yahweh will do into a first person pronouncement of Yahweh (G, 14–16).<sup>9</sup> Strophe A is therefore parallel to strophe E; strophe B forms a parallel to strophe G; and strophe C forms a parallel to strophe F. Although strophe G is parallel to B, it also forms a climax in which Yahweh makes eight promises of protection (in contrast to the six things promised in B), using seven verbs and

<sup>6</sup> A favourite segmentation according to this criterion (performative function) is 1–2, 3–13, and 14–16. Verse 1 would then be a description of those people who make a confession in v. 2; 3–13 are described as a didactic poem reminiscent of wisdom teaching; while 14–16 contain an oracle. See, e.g., Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen II* (BKAT 15/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 635.

<sup>7</sup> Körting, “Text and Context,” 570, says that the confession of complete trust in God, the Most High, in vv. 2 and 9a “seems to divide the psalm into two parts that prove why the trust is justified.” Pieter van der Lugt, *Strofische Structuren in de Bijbels-Hebreeuwse Poëzie: De Geschiedenis van het Onderzoek en Een Bijdrage tot de Theorievorming omtrent de Strofenbouw van de Psalmen* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1980), 350 describes the psalm as consisting of two (equal) halves in which הִרְאֶה serves as refrain word, with antithesis between 8b and 16b. The same structure is also proposed by Beat Weber, *Die Psalmen 73 bis 150* (vol. 2 of *Werkbuch Psalmen*; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 123.

<sup>8</sup> Strophes A and E form a chiasmic parallel – note the repetition of “Most High” and the parallel formed by the two words for “dwelling.” The order of the pronouncement of protection (vv. 1 and 10; note the verbs of habitation and the noun “tent”) and of the personal confession (vv. 2 and 9) is inverted in Stanza II.

<sup>9</sup> Zenger, “Psalm 91,” 618, distinguishes three parts: 1–2, 3–13, and 14–16 on the basis of alteration of speakers. He, however, ignores the fact that Yahweh is mentioned in the third person in v. 1 and addressed in the second person in v. 2. He translates the first verse as a relative sentence: “As one who dwells in the protection of the Most High ... I say ...” He does confirm that the beginning and end of the sections consisting of 3–8 and 9–13 form a parallel.

one nominal pronouncement. As Zenger notes,<sup>10</sup> there is escalation (“Steigerung”) in this final strophe, since not only protection and rescue are promised, but also fullness of life and well-being. Beat Weber points out the connection between the keyword “call” in v. 15 and the confessions in the two strophes which open each of the stanzas (strophes A and E) to argue that the oracle at the end of the psalm is given a “bundling” effect.<sup>11</sup> This last strophe (G) thus serves as a summary of all that precede in more ways than one: It repeats the promise of deliverance (B) and the promise of inaccessibility (D and E); while it also takes up the theme of a personal relationship (A and E). It is also vital to note the development in the psalm marked by the use of כִּי: As Corinna Körting notes,<sup>12</sup> this particle is used three times to introduce a statement about Yahweh – in v. 3, by a non-specified speaker who talks about God in the third person (כִּי הוּא); in v. 9 it is the suppliant who says “כִּי אֶתֶּה,” and then in v. 14, Yahweh himself says “כִּי כִּי.” There is a movement from a neutral “he” to a direct address of Yahweh and then a pronouncement by Yahweh about the suppliant. The direct address in v. 9 is the necessary preparation for the divine speech.<sup>13</sup> A schematic representation looks like this:

I	A	1–2	Yahweh as a safe haven; a confession	
	B	3–4	Rescue and protection	
	C	5–6	No need for fear of threats	
	D	7–8	The worshipper singled out	
II	E	9–10	A confession; Yahweh as a safe haven	
	F	11–13	Protection on the ways of life	
	G	14–16	Rescue, protection and blessing	

Each stanza has one occurrence of each of the following Hebrew words: יהוה (A and E); עליין (A and E); and מחסה (A and E). The prepositions בְּ (6 times in each stanza) and לְ (twice in each stanza) and the negation לֹא (twice in each stanza) seem to be distributed proportionately. The preposition מִן is used eight times in stanza I to describe the things Yahweh will rescue the suppliant from (B, twice) or protect him against (C, four times) or the ways in which he will be singled out (D, twice). This use of מִן binds the strophes of stanza I together, while it does not occur in stanza II at all. Each stanza has two series of threats separated by a promise of protection: In stanza I we have the trap of the fowler and the deadly plague, followed by the protection offered by Yahweh’s pinion and wings and his faithfulness as a shield and protecting wall, and then the threat found at different times of day (the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that spreads in darkness, and the epidemic that dev-

<sup>10</sup> Zenger, “Psalm 91,” 619

<sup>11</sup> Weber, *Die Psalmen 73 bis 150*, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Körting, “Text and Context,” 571. She refers to these as three instances of the asseverative use of כִּי, but I read the occurrence in v. 14 as causal.

<sup>13</sup> Körting, “Text and Context,” 572.

astates at midday). These threats are bound together as things one might fear and by the two instances of merismus (of time) connecting them.<sup>14</sup> In stanza II there is mention of a disaster that might befall one and the affliction that might approach one's tent (10). This is followed by the promise about the protection provided by Yahweh's angels, and then a second series of threats, namely a stone, a lion and a cobra, a young lion and a serpent. The overarching metaphor in this strophe is that of travel (note the repetition of the root דָּרַךְ in vv. 11 and 13 and also the root רָמַס) and this binds the threats together as things one might bump into or step on.

### C PSALM 91 AS A PRODUCT OF WISDOM THINKING

Erich Zenger<sup>15</sup> writes that Ps 91 was taken up within the OT by both Job and Proverbs and actualized in a meaningful way. He begins by referring to Job 5:17–26 where Eliphaz provides an extended beatitude which shows a number of similarities with Ps 91. The whole speech (from 4:1–5:27) is concluded in 5:27 with the remark that what was said is true because it is the result of an investigation (הִנֵּה-זָאת חִקְרֵנוּהָ “look, this we have investigated ...”). Zenger considers the scope of the “investigation” to have included Ps 91. In the case of the contacts of Ps 91 with Proverbs, Zenger<sup>16</sup> argues that the wisdom teacher who authored Prov 3:21–26 lauds the protective and life-saving power of wisdom by transposing the actions of Yahweh as they are described in Ps 91 to wisdom. He calls this a “theologizing of wisdom.”<sup>17</sup>

A thorough analysis of the evidence suggests that Zenger is probably correct in asserting that Ps 91 has had an influence on Job 5:17–26. This is not the whole truth, however, since Prov 3 has had an even greater influence on Job 5:17–26, and it has also had a similar influence on the wording of Ps 91. Zenger is therefore not correct in tracing influence from Ps 91 to Prov 3; it is exactly the opposite.<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 3 (the whole chapter) can be viewed as the donor text.<sup>19</sup> It (together with other parts of Proverbs<sup>20</sup> and other wisdom-related

<sup>14</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 455, also thinks this is merism for dangers which may occur at any time, day or night.

<sup>15</sup> Zenger, “Psalm 91,” 625.

<sup>16</sup> Zenger, “Psalm 91,” 625.

<sup>17</sup> German “Theologisierung der Weisheit.” See Zenger, “Psalm 91,” 625.

<sup>18</sup> Zenger might have been influenced by the 1971 publication of Pirmin Hugger, *Jahwe meine Zuflucht*, 282–6, who states that the author of Job knew Ps 91, while the author of Prov 3:21–26 produced an echo of Ps 91. He is right about the first deduction, but wrong about the second as will be argued below.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes sur les rédactions bibliques à l'époque perse* (Transeuphratène Supplément 14; Paris: Gabalda, 2008), 81, also traces Ps 91:5 back to Prov 3:25 and Ps 91:12 to Prov 3:23. In view of Gosse's thorough analysis and proof that Proverbs in its current form exerted a major influence on

texts) exerted a major influence on the present wording of Ps 91 and similarly inspired the composition of Job 5:17–26. Psalm 91 secondarily then also had an influence on the wording of Job 5:17–26.

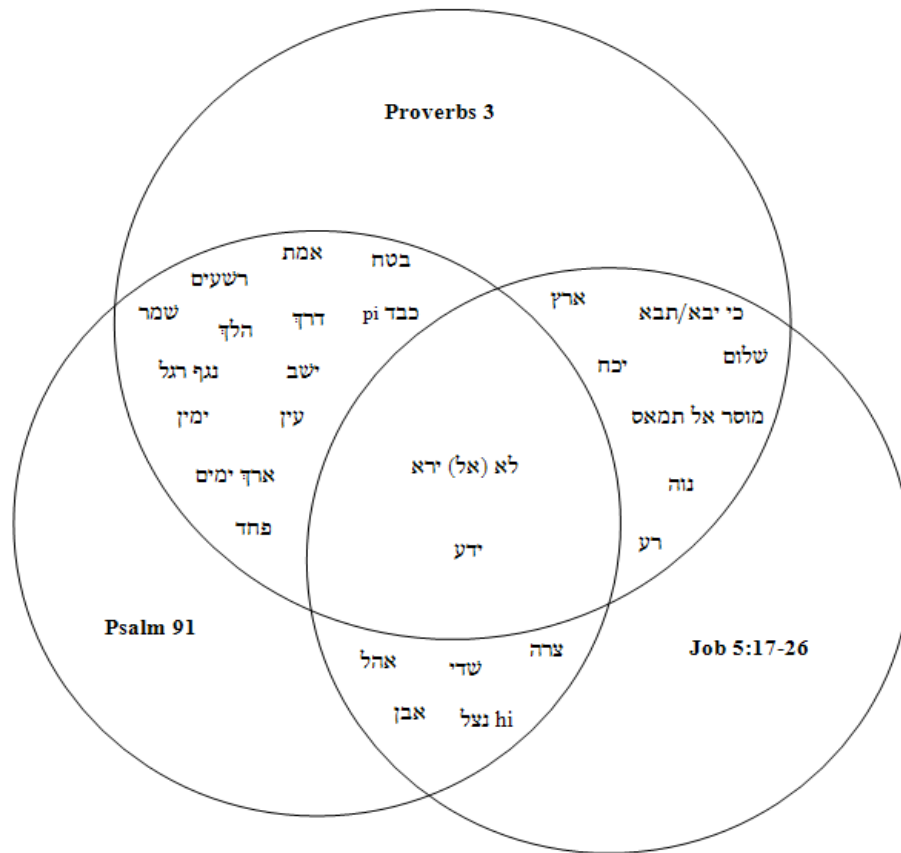
The evidence for this conclusion is presented by the shared vocabulary between the three texts. A schematic representation of the intersection of significant words shared by the three texts is reproduced below.

It is important to note that the Job beatitude was basically inspired by Prov 3 and that Ps 91 exerted a *secondary* influence on Job 5:17–26. The motif of not having to fear a calamity, which is shared by all three texts, derives from Proverbs and was not acquired by the author of Job 5 from Ps 91. This can be seen from the fact that the phrase “you will not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, *when it comes*” in Prov 3:25 is contracted into “and (you) shall not fear destruction *when it comes*” in Job 5:21. The Job text and Prov 3 also share more similarities than Ps 91 and the Job text.

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the Psalter – having had an effect on almost each and every psalm – the present investigation serves as a corroboration of his findings.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the motif of fear for calamity and distress (רעה, פחד) already in Prov 1:26, 27, and 33; and in this regard also Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes*, 81 n.128. The motif of knowing Yahweh's name (Ps 91:14) is related to the wisdom theme of knowledge of wisdom (e.g. Prov 1:2, 23) and of God (Prov 2:5); the road imagery (הלך and רגל, דרך) is typical of Proverbs (cf. Prov 1:11, 15; 2:8, 9, 12, 13, 20); protection of the road of Yahweh's faithful is also present in Prov 2:8; the motif of call and answer (ענה, קרא) is found in Prov 1:28 (see also Prov 2:3); retribution as satiating (שבוע) is found in Prov 1:33; the retribution of the wicked (רשעים) is also mentioned in Prov 2:22; and, finally, deliverance from (with נצל) and protection (with נצר, שמר) against threats are also present in Proverbs 2 (vv. 8, 11, 16).



*The intersection of important vocabulary in Prov 3, Ps 91 and Job 5:17-26*

The Job text takes up the theme of the benefit of being reproved (תוכחת in Prov 3:11 and יכח in 3:12 and Job 5:17) and of being disciplined by God (the words מוסר יהוה אל-תמאס in Prov 3:11 are changed to מוסר שדי אל-תמאס in Job 5:17). God is often referred to as שדי in Job, but the change could also have been inspired by Ps 91:1 as is the case with a number of other words in this speech in Job. The formula of blessing (אשרי) in Job 5:17 was borrowed from another sub-unit in Prov 3:13, where the theme is the benefit of being in possession of wisdom. Material deriving from two different themes in Prov 3 was thus brought together in Job 5 to compose a piece on the perspective that suffering should be seen as loving discipline by God. According to the Job text, it is also the knowledge of the fact that God cares that will protect the addressee from fearing destruction when it comes (ולא תירא משד כי יבוא in Job 5:20). This idea in turn is a contraction of three statements in Prov 3 – of wisdom preventing one from trembling when one lies down (לא תפחד in Prov 3:24); of being afraid of sudden terror while sleeping (אל-תירא מפחד פתאם in Prov 3:25); and fear of the ruin of the wicked when that comes (משאת רשעים כי תבא in Prov 3:25). In the Proverbs text, this fright is described by implication as something that comes in the night, since there is a logical progression from the idea that



protection is provided through wisdom when one is walking on one's way and wisdom prevents that person from striking his foot; subsequently when he or she lies down (after the day's journey), it protects him or her from being afraid; and, finally, it provides sweet sleep by preventing him or her (during sleep) from a sudden fright and the fear of ruin which will inevitably come to the wicked. Trembling, sudden terror, and the coming ruin of the wicked from Prov 3 have thus been telescoped into "destruction when it comes" in Job 5:20.

The author of the Job text has also abstracted only certain elements from the dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked in Prov 3 and has combined these with other notions found in Prov 3. We have seen this in the combination of the "happy are..." formula with the idea of suffering as discipline and the contraction of **אל־תִּירָא מִפֶּחַד פֶּתָאָם וּמִשְׂאֵת רַשְׁעִים כִּי־תִבָּא** in Prov 3:25 into **ולֹא־תִירָא מִשֹּׁד כִּי יִבֹּא** (Job 5:21). Proverbs 3:33 says, "Yahweh's curse is in the house of the wicked (רשע), but he blesses the dwelling (נוה) of the righteous." The Job text has borrowed the word **נוה**, "dwelling," from this verse, but has combined it with the idea of **שלום**, "peace," which is propagated elsewhere in Prov 3 (3:3 and 17) as one of the blessings of wisdom: "You shall know that your tent is at peace (בִּי־שְׁלוֹם אֶהְלֵךְ), and you shall inspect your dwelling (נוה) and miss nothing" (Job 5:24). The idea to use "tent" in parallel with "dwelling" probably stems from the remark in Ps 91:10 that no plague will come near the "tent" of the petitioner.

The access the author of Job 5 had to Ps 91 can also be seen in other verses. The threatening animals mentioned in Ps 91 ("lion," "cobra," "young lion" and "serpent") seem to be summarised in Job 5:23 with a reference to "the beasts of the field" (see also the "beasts of the earth" in v. 22), a simplification of the psalm text. The vague reference to the "stones of the field" in Job 5:23 as a possible threat which forms a parallel to the "animals" can also be explained best as an element borrowed from Ps 91:12. In the psalm context it fits well with the promise of protection on all the ways of the suppliant, but in the Job text it has been recognised as a *crux interpretum* at least from the time of Rashi.<sup>21</sup> Job 5:23 can, however, be explained satisfactorily as a telescoping of Ps 91:10–13. In those verses the suppliant is promised that the angels will provide protection on all his journeys; they will lift him up to protect him from striking his foot (נגף רגל) against a stone (אבן); and he will tread on lions, cobras, young lions and serpents and trample them down.

The text of Ps 91, in its turn, definitely seems like an extension of the Vorlage in Prov 3. Proverbs 3 promises the protection of wisdom on life's journey (דרך), so that the wise will not strike his foot (נגף רגל, 3:23). Neither a stone nor stones are mentioned. But in Prov 3:26 it is then promised that Yahweh will keep (שמר) the foot (רגל) of the wise person from being captured in a

<sup>21</sup> Adrianus van Selms, *Job Deel I* (POT; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1982), 23.

snare. In Ps 91:11 this is rephrased as Yahweh's commanding his angels to protect the suppliant on all his ways (דרכים),<sup>22</sup> and in v. 12 as a promise that he will be lifted up by the angels as protection against bumping his foot against a stone (נגף באבן רגל). This seems to be a theological and metaphorical extension of the image of a journey and the protection provided by Yahweh in Prov 3. From this psalm verse together with the whole context in Proverbs 3, the author of Job 5 took over the idea of protection and from Ps 91 alone the idea of stones and wild animals as threats. Psalm 91 also has the idea of protection from being caught in a snare, but the wording differs from that used in Prov 3.<sup>23</sup>

The same movement from Prov 3 to Ps 91 and from both these texts to Job 5 can also be seen in the theme of a long life (ארך ימים). Proverbs 3 promises a long and happy life in two different verses. In the first two verses of the chapter, the student of wisdom is promised that attachment to the teaching and commandments of the wisdom teacher will guarantee "length of days ( ארך ) (ימים) and years of life and peace (שלום)." In vv. 13–16, the benefits of wisdom and understanding are compared to the value of silver, gold and corals, and v. 16 again concludes that it holds "length of days" ( ארך ימים)<sup>24</sup> in its right hand and riches and honour (כבוד) in its left. In Ps 91:16, Yahweh promises that he will "satisfy" (שבטע) the suppliant with a long life ( ארך ימים). Job 5:26 also has a promise of a long life, but uses a fresh comparison to good effect: "You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, like a sheaf gathered up in its season." Johannes van der Ploeg<sup>25</sup> refers to Ps 17:15 as containing a parallel to the metaphor of "satisfying" the suppliant used in Ps 91:16. It could also be, however, that the wording of the last verse of Ps 91 was inspired by the supplication in Ps 90:14 by the servants of Yahweh (cf. v. 13) to be "satisfied" each morning with his steadfast love.

There are also other similarities between Prov 3 and Ps 91. Together with those already mentioned and the fact that Prov 3 seems to have inspired Job 5:17–26, they can be used to argue that Prov 3 was available to an editor who wished to use an existing psalm text to extend the influence of wisdom to the Psalter. In this regard Ps 91 now reads as an exposition and a refinement of material found in Proverbs. Proverbs 1:33, for instance, promises that "whoever listens to me (lady wisdom) will dwell secure (ישכן בטח) and will be at ease, without dread of disaster (שאנן מפחד רעה)." Proverbs 3:5 further admonishes

<sup>22</sup> Exod 23:20, a "Mosaic" text, forms a close parallel to the wording in Ps 91:11: "Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have determined."

<sup>23</sup> Prov 3:26 ושומר רגלך מלכוד and Ps 91:3 הוא יצילך מפח יקוש.

<sup>24</sup> The notion of "prolonging one's life" (יארך ימים) is typical of Deuteronomy, but the genitive of description ימים ארך is found twice in Prov 3.

<sup>25</sup> Johannes P. M. van der Ploeg, *Psalm 76 t/m 150* (vol. 2 of *Psalmen*; BOT; Roermond: J. J. Romen & Zonen, 1974), 123.

the student to "trust (בטח) in Yahweh" and not to lean on his own understanding; while 3:23 promises the one who embraces wisdom that he will "walk on his way securely (לבטח)" and that he will not "strike" his foot (רגל לא תגוף). Verse 25 repeats the promise about the absence of fear for a calamity, describing it as fear for a sudden terror (אל־תִּירָא מִפֶּחַד פֶּתָאִים). These sentiments are echoed in Ps 91 when the one who seeks shelter with Yahweh and who trusts (בטח) in him is promised a safe dwelling (using synonyms for words found in Prov 1:33, namely יֶשֶׁב and לֵיִן, 91:1–2) and also that he will not "fear the terror of the night" (לֹא־תִירָא מִפֶּחַד לַיְלָה, 91:5) or "strike his foot against a stone" (פִּן־תִּגַּף בְּאֲבֵן רֶגֶלְךָ, 91:12). The image of a road, the safe-guarding of the feet on this road, the promise of a long life, and the promise of receiving honour which are found in both contexts, enhance the feeling of literary dependence. Some of these shared elements are found more than once in Prov 3 and some of them also elsewhere in Proverbs.<sup>26</sup> The meaning of Ps 91:14, "I will make him inaccessible (שֹׁגֵב *pi'el*) since he knows my name (שֵׁם)" becomes clearer when it is read in conjunction with Prov 18:10, "The name (שֵׁם) of Yahweh is a tower of strength, the righteous person runs into it and becomes inaccessible (שֹׁגֵב *nip'al*)."

All of this strengthens the notion that Ps 91 was composed or edited from the perspective of Proverbs (and not the other way round). The psalm text also appears to be a logical and theological development of Proverbs: Trembling when one lies down and fear of a sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked in Prov 3 are expanded into fear for the terror of the night; the arrow that flies during the day;<sup>27</sup> the pestilence that stalks in darkness; and the destruction that wastes at noonday. Fear for the ruin of the wicked in Prov 3 is described more prosaic in Ps 91 as only perceiving the recompense of the wicked. Yahweh's direct involvement to keep one's foot from a trap as it is promised in Prov 3 is softened into a description of Yahweh's commanding his *angels* to

<sup>26</sup> "Length of days" (Prov 3:2, 16 and Ps 91:16); "foot" (Prov 3:23, 26; see also Prov 1:15 and 16, and Ps 91:12); and "trembling/terror" (Prov 3:24, 25; see also Prov 1:26, 27, 33 and Ps 91:5) are all found twice in Prov 3, but only once in Ps 91. This serves as a strong suggestion that the donor text is Proverbs and the donee text Ps 91.

<sup>27</sup> In Ps 11:2 it is the wicked who shoot arrows at the upright in heart "in the dark." In Ps 91, "night" and "day"; "darkness" (אֶפְלָל as in Ps 11:2) and "noonday" are meristic descriptions for any time of night or day (so also Weber, *Die Psalmen 73 bis 150*, 125). It is therefore doubtful whether the poet had a midday demon in mind as Hans-Joachim Kraus and Klaus Seybold, among others, has suggested. Cf. Kraus, *Psalmen II*, 638, and Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT I/15; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), 363. This is not to deny that the psalm was used from early in its existence as an apotropaic text against the threat of demons, as is demonstrated by its use in Qumran. See in this regard Hermann Lichtenberger, "Ps 91 und die Exorzismen in 11QPsAp<sup>a</sup>," in *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der israelitisch-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt* (ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger and K. F. Diethard Römheld; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2003), 416–421.

guard one in all one's ways, while the promise to the wise that he will not strike his foot is expanded in Ps 91 to striking one's foot against a stone. Such an explication is in line with the psalm text's inclination to list various dangers, while in Prov 3 it is merely part of the metaphor of life as a journey.

#### **D PSALM 91 AS PART OF THE TRIPTYCH<sup>28</sup> FORMED BY PSALMS 90-92**

Psalm 91 is not the only text in its immediate environment to have been composed or edited from a wisdom perspective. Psalms 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, and 94 all display a similar impetus from Proverbs and other wisdom-influenced texts.<sup>29</sup> In Ps 90, it is the eternal existence of Yahweh and the precarious existence of mankind which have close ties with Prov 8:23–25 and 26 (cf. Ps 90:2) and 10:27 (cf. Ps 90:10), as well as 1:7 (cf. Ps 90:11).<sup>30</sup> In the case of Ps 91, Gosse focuses on the absence of fear in the life of the righteous for which he finds connections between Prov 3:25 and Ps 91:5, and also the care for the foot of the wise/righteous to prevent him from striking it against anything as is described in Prov 3:23 and Ps 91:12.<sup>31</sup> In Ps 92, Gosse sees the theme of the stupidity of the ungodly as a wisdom theme (he compares Ps 92:7 with Ps 49:11 and Prov 30:2, and Ps 92:8 with Prov 14:11 and 10:29). According to Gosse, both Pss 93 and 94 have been influenced strongly by Isa 59:15–20 and by Ps 101:8 concerning the intervention of Yahweh against the evildoers. While Prov 30:1–14 also played a role in this, Isa 59:15b–20 served as inspiration for the

<sup>28</sup> Zenger, "Psalm 91," 624 – see also Erich Zenger, "Psalm 91," in Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100* (vol. 2 of *Die Psalmen*; HTKNT; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2000), 614 – describes Pss 90–92 as a "Teilkomposition" which serves as the overture to the Yahweh-King Pss 93–99 + 100.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes*, 80–83. In Ps 89, wisdom influence is detected by Gosse in the theme of the transmission of the teaching of Yahweh from father to child (Ps 89:31–33). After the end of the Davidic dynasty, the Psalms applied the obligation of the king to follow the torah and commandments to the psalmist, as can be seen particularly clearly in Ps 119. Gosse points out the recurrence of the key terms תורה and מצוה in Ps 119 and the occurrence of חקה in Ps 18:23; 89:32, and 119:16. There is also a connection between the theme of "lying" in Ps 89:36, Prov 30:6, and Ps 78:36. In addition to these connections, one could also add the influence of Prov 3:19 on the description of Yahweh's founding heaven and earth in Ps 89:12. See in this regard my essay, Phil J. Botha, "'A World Firmly Established on Water': The Wisdom Foundations of Psalm 24:1–2," in *Weisheit und Schöpfung: Festschrift für James Alfred Loader zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Stefan Fischer and Marianne Grohmann; Wiener Alttestamentliche Studien 7; Wien: Peter Lang, 2010), 7–8.

<sup>30</sup> Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes*, 81. Zenger, "Psalm 90," 605 similarly points out the connections with Prov 8:22–31 and cites the words עמל, ידע, and ראה in addition to חכמה as words which point towards a context of wisdom.

<sup>31</sup> Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes*, 81.

theme of Yahweh's intervention to punish the evildoers and provide justice to his people, a theme which concerns the whole psalm.<sup>32</sup> This description of Gosse shows how pervasive the editorial and or compositional inputs of wisdom-inspired authors in the Persian period were.

Psalm 91 has not been furnished with a heading, but as the second psalm of the fourth book of the Psalter, it can be read as a "Mosaic" text, since its predecessor, Ps 90, is described as "a prayer of Moses, the man of God."<sup>33</sup> There are various connections between Pss 90 and 91, and similar connections between Pss 91 and 92.<sup>34</sup> When one investigates these links, the impression is unavoidable that these psalms have been edited to form a network of connections in which elements in one psalm are informed by and commented upon by elements in the following one.

In Ps 90:1, Yahweh is described as the one who has been the *dwelling* (מעון) of the worshippers from generation to generation. The same word מעון is used in the affirmation in Ps 91:9, "the Most High you have made your *dwelling*."<sup>35</sup> Psalm 90 further has as one of its major themes the frailty of humans and this is expressed inter alia through the contrast of years and days and the repetitive use of "day" and "days" in the psalm as a whole.<sup>36</sup> This theme, clearly inspired by Prov 8:25–26, is taken up again in Ps 91. In that psalm, the believer is promised that early death is reserved for the wicked – that a thousand<sup>37</sup> may fall on one's side and ten thousand on one's right hand, but that the believer will not be affected (91:7–8). The believer will instead be *satisfied* (שבוע) with length of days (ארך ימים v. 16; using the words of Prov 3:2 and 16). But this in turn also takes up the request in Ps 90:14 that Yahweh will *satisfy* (שבוע) his people in the morning with his steadfast love, so that they may rejoice and

<sup>32</sup> Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes*, 82–83.

<sup>33</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 451 says that Ps 91 was "designed for teaching" and that, in this respect, it is like Ps 90 which "is also a prayer with didactic / sermon-ic intention."

<sup>34</sup> See in this regard also Klaus Koenen, *Jahwe wird kommen, zu herrschen über die Erde: Ps 90–110 als Komposition* (BBB 101; Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1995), 54, 56–7; Körting, "Text and Context," 574–5.

<sup>35</sup> This word also has a "Mosaic" connection in Deut 26:15 when Moses uses it to refer to Yahweh's "holy habitation" in heaven.

<sup>36</sup> It occurs seven times in Ps 90 (vv. 4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16). Beat Weber, *Theologie und Spiritualität des Psalters und seiner Psalmen* (vol. 3 of *Werkbuch Psalmen*; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), 186 says that, in the whole of Book IV of the Psalter, pronouncements of human temporality has its strongest emphasis in the beginning, in Ps 90, and that such problematisation of creation decreases in the book as praise for the Creator increases.

<sup>37</sup> The word "thousand" establishes a connection with Ps 90:4 where "thousand" is used to express the timelessness of God. In Ps 91 it is used hyperbolically to express the preservation of the believers.

be glad all their days (בכל־ימינו). Similarly, the counterpoint of the years in which they *saw evil* (ראה רעה) in Ps 90:15 is found in the promise in Ps 91:10 that no *evil* (here translated with "disaster") will "come near" the believer, but that he will *see* (ראה) the "salvation" of Yahweh (v. 16) as well as the "retribution" of the wicked (v. 8) instead.

Psalm 92 continues the discussion. While the servants of Yahweh ask him in Ps 90:15 to be "*made glad*" (שמח *pi'el*) after years of suffering, the individual worshipper confesses in Ps 92:5 that Yahweh has "*made him glad*" (שמח *pi'el*) by his work of creation. In Ps 90:16 the servants ask Yahweh to let his *work* (פעל) be *shown* to them (ראה *nip'al*), and in Ps 92:6 the individual worshipper praises Yahweh about the greatness of his *works* (מעשה, but the word פעל is also used in v. 5 as a parallel to מעשה). From Ps 91:14, Ps 92 takes up the theme of *knowing* (ידע) Yahweh's *name* (שם) by stating that it is good to praise Yahweh and sing praises to his *name* (שם, 92:2); while a stupid person and a fool are described as those who do not *know* (לא ידע) nor understand the creative *work* (מעשה pl) of God's hands (92:6–7). In Ps 92:2, Yahweh is also addressed as the *Most High* (עליון), the same title which is used in Ps 91:1. Psalm 92 in fact confirms that the supplication of Ps 90:14, that Yahweh would *satisfy* (שבט) the believers in the *morning* (בבקר) with his *steadfast love* (חסד), has been answered, since it describes how good it is to proclaim Yahweh's *steadfast love* (חסד) in the *morning* (בבקר, 92:3). The metaphor of withered grass from Ps 90:5–6 is replaced by the metaphor of a healthy Palm tree and a cedar from the Lebanon in Ps 92:13–16.<sup>38</sup> Psalm 91 is also drawn in, since the proclamation of Yahweh's faithfulness by *night* (בלילה, 92:3) forms a stark contrast to the terror of the *night* (לילה) mentioned in Ps 91:5. The retribution of the impious people is confirmed in Ps 92, where they are also called רשעים (among other names), and it is stated that the worshipper's *eye looked upon* the downfall of his enemies (נבט עין ב, 92:12) as it was promised in Ps 91:8 that he will *see* (ראה) the retribution of the wicked (רשעים) while (only) *looking* with his *eyes* (בעין נבט, 91:8).<sup>39</sup> To sum up: Both Ps 91 and Ps 92 are presented as answers to the specific requests of "Moses" in Ps 90.<sup>40</sup> Psalm 91 addresses the problem of human frailty, promising that those who take refuge in Yahweh will be protected against the things that threaten one's life (using the threats from Deut 32 as specific items) and will be blessed with a long life (taking up the theme from Prov 3). The frailty of human life, lamented in Ps 90, will be seen to have an effect only on the impious, saving the worshipper from this worry as

<sup>38</sup> Zenger, "Psalm 90," 612.

<sup>39</sup> Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 363, calls this a motif from the late chokmatic ethics ("späten weisheitlichen Ethik").

<sup>40</sup> See on this also Zenger, "Psalm 91," 624. According to Zenger, Ps 92 serves as a hymnic song of thanksgiving. Psalm 92 simultaneously situates the individual experience of Ps 91 within the bigger horizon of Yahweh as creator God and the order of justice ("Gerechtigkeitsordnung").

was promised in Prov 3. The righteous will instead have satiation with length of days. Psalm 92, which is described as a song for the Sabbath, exults in the joy of praising the name of the Most High and proclaiming his steadfast love in the morning and his faithfulness by night, forming a stark contrast to the fear experienced by those who do not know the name of Yahweh and confirming that the requests of Ps 90 have been answered for an individual worshipper. The enemy is destined for destruction, but the eyes of the believers will only see this while they will live to bear fruit even in grey-headed old age, full of green leaves (92:15) and not withered like the grass of Ps 90:6.

## E CONCLUSION

The intertextual connections between Prov 3 and Ps 91 and between Pss 90, 91 and 92 are more than mere allusions. The final editors of these psalms established a complex interplay between the various contexts through which they commented on and informed one another. The positive effect which wisdom is said to have on the wise according to Prov 3 is shown by Ps 91 to be the result of the involvement of Yahweh. Yahweh will provide protection for the individual believer against the threats which overtake the wicked. In Ps 90, "Moses" has prayed for the servants of Yahweh and asked him to be merciful towards them. Those requests are answered in the lives of the righteous according to Ps 92. This proves the effectiveness of the protection provided by Yahweh to those individual worshippers who attach themselves to Yahweh, who seek refuge in him, who trust in him alone and who know his name (Ps 91). Yahweh is granting the requests made by "Moses" in Ps 90.

The implication of this investigation is that the literary context of Ps 91 is more important for its interpretation than any conjectural cultic context. Psalm 91 was transformed to become part of a canonical corpus. It is therefore not necessary to consider textual changes in order to harmonize the psalm with an envisaged ritual setting. Neither is it necessary to speculate on the precise character of the threats experienced by an individual or about the nature of the ritual during which protection would have been promised to such a person.<sup>41</sup> The original composition has been requisitioned and refurbished by the wisdom-editors of the Psalter and should be read as a literary creation which seeks

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<sup>41</sup> Beat Weber, *Die Psalmen 73 bis 150*, 125 mentions the possibility that the oracle at the end was pronounced as part of an audition during incubation in the temple by a temple prophet or priest in response to illness, enmity, or some kind of persecution experienced by a worshipper. The original liturgy could have been composed for a king suffering from illness such as Hezekiah, but repetition and variation of pronouncements of protection point, according to him, to a real need for protection and thus a background of intense danger.

to encourage individual believers to trust in Yahweh alone for protection against all kinds of disaster.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> As Corinna Körting, "Text and Context," 567–569, 577 notes, a search for the literary setting of a psalm text is a hypothetical task that can be limiting and should be balanced by an investigation of the function of the psalm text in its literary context. The Psalter is, according to her, the context "that at first offers a key for the understanding of a psalm" (569).



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