

# Happiness Manifested in Book I of the Psalter\*

Sora Kang

BaekSeok University, Korea  
sorakang@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The eight אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר sayings in Book I of the Psalter (1–41), forming a prominent structure at the beginning (Pss 1–2), the middle (Pss 32–34), and the end (Pss 40–41), evidence structural unity and purposeful arrangement. The first (Pss 1–2) and the last clusters (Pss 40–41) present two foundations for happiness in life: delighting in God’s instruction and trusting in God. The second cluster of אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר sayings (Pss 32–34) resolves the issue of sin by declaring God’s forgiveness (Ps 32), God’s election of his own people (Ps 33), and by offering instructions for wisdom and happiness in life (Ps 34). These compositional links allow for more holistic readings of Book I and indeed, the whole Psalter. (*Keywords: Psalms, ’ashrei sayings, structural and linguistic approaches*)

## I. Introduction

The term אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר (“how happy” or “how blessed”)<sup>1</sup> in Psalm 1:1 calls for the reader’s attention because it is the opening word of the Psalter<sup>2</sup> and because it is distributed in places of particular attention in the Psal-

\* This article is a summary of my dissertation, “Reading Book I of the Psalter through the אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר Sayings” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2007).

<sup>1</sup> The term אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר is found 26 times in 19 psalms in the book of Psalms (Pss 1:1; 2:12; 32:1, 2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4, 5, 12; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1, 2; 127:5; 128:1, 2; 137:8, 9; 144:15 [2x]; 146:5). Versification hereinafter follows the standard versification of the English Bible.

<sup>2</sup> As noted in *Midrash Tehillim*, the Psalter takes up at the opening the very word אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר that Moses said to bless Israel (אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר־יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ) before his death (Deut 33:29). Thus the tenor of blessing and happiness continues in the Psalter. See W. G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (2 vols.; YJS 13; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959). The same idea may hold for the first word μακάριος (the Greek equivalent to אֲשֶׁר־אֵשֶׁר) with which Jesus begins the eight beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12) in his sermon on the mount.

ter.<sup>3</sup> The אֲשֶׁר sayings in Book I, in particular, demonstrate a pronounced structure more amenable to formal study than those in the other collections. These sayings occur in the beginning (Pss 1–2) and at the end of the collection (Pss 40–41), as well as in between the two (Pss 32–34). The אֲשֶׁר statements in Psalms 1–2 and Psalms 40–41, constituting an *inclusio*, serve to frame a unit of Book I.

According to James L. Mays, the beginning of the Psalter with an אֲשֶׁר saying invites the reader to “read and use the entire book as a guide to a blessed life.”<sup>4</sup> Recently W. A. VanGemen and J. C. McCann have carried further the possibility of reading the Psalter (esp. Book I) from the perspective of happiness. In his 2002 article “Psalm 32 in Romans 4:1-8,” VanGemen suggests a way to read Book I, following “the story line” manifested in the eight אֲשֶׁר sayings in the collection.<sup>5</sup> Inspired by Mays’s conclusion that the Psalter invites the reader to happy living, McCann has briefly examined the eight beatitudes in Book I stressing human happiness through delighting in God’s instruction and consideration of the poor.<sup>6</sup>

Based on VanGemen’s and McCann’s proposals, I will investigate the eight אֲשֶׁר sayings in Book I for a new understanding of Book I in its present shape. The methodological bases for the article are primarily Brevard Childs’s canonical approach and linguistic and exegetical analyses.<sup>7</sup> Before dealing with the texts in which the אֲשֶׁר sayings appear, I

<sup>3</sup> The term אֲשֶׁר appears in the first two psalms of the Psalter (Pss 1 and 2), in the closing psalms of Books I, III, and IV (Pss 41, 89, and 106), and in the opening (Ps 146) of the concluding five psalms of the Psalter (Pss 146-150).

<sup>4</sup> J. L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 40, 41.

<sup>5</sup> W. A. VanGemen, “Psalm 32 in Romans 4:1-8” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the ETS, Toronto, 21 Nov. 2002), 14; see also W. A. VanGemen, *Psalms* (rev. ed.; EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 80-1.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. McCann, “The Shape of Book I of the Psalter and the Shape of Human Happiness,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. P. W. Flint and P. D. Miller; VTSup 99; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 340-48.

<sup>7</sup> B. S. Childs, “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, and P. D. Miller; Garden City: Doubleday, 1976); and B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 504-25. Childs has championed the significance of the present, final form of the book of Psalms by highlighting the implications of the way in which the Psalter was finally collected and established as canonical Scripture, as well as of the way in which it was given its present shape and structure. Childs’s canonical approach has made a remarkable impact on Psalms scholarship, in that it has provided an impetus for academicians to search for ways to read the Psalter as a unified whole by focusing on issues such as its arrangement, its editorial purpose, and its overall themes, as well as on the interrelationships between ad-

will discuss the usage and characteristics of the term אֲשֶׁרִי and the אֲשֶׁרִי sayings in the Old Testament with particular emphasis on the Psalter. Then I will examine the first cluster of the אֲשֶׁרִי sayings (Pss 1–2) and then the last cluster (Pss 40–41) prior to the second cluster (Pss 32–34) in order to see whether the first and the last clusters (that form an inclusio marking the structural boundary of Book I) as a whole address any particular, shared message to the collection. This study will demonstrate that the אֲשֶׁרִי sayings in Book I present clues for happiness in life in terms of the three relationships of the psalmist, that is, with God, with others, and with the self.

## II. The Usage and Characteristics of the אֲשֶׁרִי Sayings

The word אֲשֶׁרִי is a masculine, plural construct form of אֲשֶׁר or אֲשֶׁרִי (“happiness,” “blessedness”).<sup>8</sup> English versions commonly translate אֲשֶׁרִי in Psalm 1:1, for example, as “happy” or “blessed.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it is more literal and appropriate to render it “how happy,” “how blessed,” or

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adjacent psalms, groups, and collections. The transition toward a holistic reading relates closely to developments in linguistics, in which focus has moved from the level of the sentence to that of discourse. As linguistics has thrived and contributed to many areas, various literary and linguistic theories (e.g., stylistics, rhetorical studies, structural analysis, syntactics, semantics, pragmatics, semiotics) have also been applied to Hebrew poetry and have offered new perspectives for understanding the book of Psalms. See D. M. Howard, “Recent Trends in Psalms Study,” in *The Faith of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (ed. D. W. Baker and B. T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 344-55; D. M. Howard, “The Psalms and Current Study,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (ed. D. Firth and P. S. Johnston; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 23-40; P. D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 16-17; and W. R. Bodine, “Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers* (ed. W. R. Bodine; SBLSS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the term אֲשֶׁרִי, see F. Hauck and G. Bertram, “μακάριος,” *TDNT* 4:362-70; W. Janzen, “*‘ašrê* in the Old Testament,” *HTR* 58 (1965): 215-26; H. Cazelles, “אֲשֶׁרִי,” *TDOT* 1:445-48; J. Dupont, *La bonne nouvelle* (vol. 2 of *Les Béatitudes*; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 328-38; M. L. Brown, “אֲשֶׁרִי,” *NIDOTTE* 1:571; Michael A. Grisanti, “אֲשֶׁרִי II,” *NIDOTTE* 1:568-69; E. H. Merrill, “אֲשֶׁרִי I,” *NIDOTTE* 1:567-68; B. T. Viviano, “Eight Beatitudes at Qumran and in Matthew? A New Publication from Cave Four,” *SEÅ* 58 (1993): 72-74; M. Sæbø, “אֲשֶׁרִי,” *TLOT* 1:195-97.

<sup>9</sup> “Happy” (NRSV, NIV, NJPS), “blessed” (ASV, ESV, KJV, NIRV, NIV, NKJV). Note some versions like NRSV and YLT use a single word for the translation of אֲשֶׁרִי throughout the OT (“happy” and “O the happiness of,” respectively). Most versions, however, utilize two or more different words/phrases according to contexts.

“O the happiness of” as in some English versions<sup>10</sup> because אֲשֶׁר־ generally introduces a sentence such as an exclamatory wish or an interjectory beginning.<sup>11</sup> As these renderings indicate, אֲשֶׁר־ expresses one’s stative sense of being happy, underscoring a secular sense of happiness, yet the term does not exclude a spiritual and religious notion, as in references to those who live pious lives depicted in the wisdom literature and in the Psalter.

In the Old Testament, the expression אֲשֶׁר־ (45x in total) occurs mostly in the books of Psalms (26x) and Proverbs (8x).<sup>12</sup> It usually appears in a plural construct form and begins a sentence or an independent clause (38x). At times, however, it occurs with a pronominal suffix attached (7x).<sup>13</sup> In the Psalter, particularly, אֲשֶׁר־ is found twenty-six times in nineteen psalms. The form אֲשֶׁר־ itself appears twenty-five times whereas a suffixed אֲשֶׁר־ occurs once. All of these forms occur at the beginning of a sentence. Besides, eleven out of the nineteen psalms in which אֲשֶׁר־ appears either open or close with an אֲשֶׁר־ passage (or a double fold אֲשֶׁר־ passage).<sup>14</sup>

Concerning the structure, the אֲשֶׁר־ formula in the Old Testament often accompanies a noun phrase (29x) or a participle phrase (10x). Specifically, the אֲשֶׁר־ statements (26x) in the book of Psalms are most frequently followed by a noun phrase (15x) which consists of a collective noun (e.g., אִישׁ, אָדָם, גִּבּוֹר, אֲנוּשׁ, עָם, גּוֹי, and כָּל) followed by either a relative clause (7x), a participial phrase (3x), a verbal phrase (2x), a nominal phrase (1x), or an adjective (2x).<sup>15</sup> In the Psalter and other books, the contents following or preceding the word אֲשֶׁר־ describe its addressees and characterize the specific grounds of their happiness. It is

<sup>10</sup> “How happy” (HCSB), “how blessed” (NASB), “O the happiness of” (YLT).

<sup>11</sup> GKC §93i; *IBHS* §40.2a, 40.2.3b. See also BDB §835; Joüon §89l.

<sup>12</sup> Outside these two books, it is found in Deut, Job, Eccl and Dan (1x each); 1 Kgs, 2 Chr (2x each); and Isa (3x).

<sup>13</sup> In this case, it appears not only at the beginning of a sentence (Deut 33:29; Isa 32:20; Ps 128:2; and Eccl 10:17), but also at the closing (Prov 4:21; 16:20; and 29:18).

<sup>14</sup> Pss 1, 32, 41, 112, 119, and 128 begin with אֲשֶׁר־, whereas Pss 2, 84, 127, 137, and 144 end with it. In particular, Pss 32, 119, and 128 open with a twofold אֲשֶׁר־ passage, whereas Pss 137 and 144 close with it.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Ps 1:1; 33:12; 40:4; 94:12; 127:5; 144:15 (2x) (noun + relative clause); Ps 2:12; 84:12; 89:15 (noun + ptc. phrase); Ps 32:1; 34:8 (noun + verb phrase); Ps 84:5 (noun + noun phrase); Ps 112:1; 128:1 (noun + adj.). Note that in other passages (11x) in the Psalter, the אֲשֶׁר־ saying stands by itself (Ps 128:2) or precedes a participle phrase (Pss 32:1; 41:1; 84:4; 106:3; 119:2), a relative clause (Pss 137:8, 9; 146:5), an adjective (Ps 119:1), or a verb (Ps 65:4)

striking that the  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  statements are never addressed to God, but always to people.<sup>16</sup> As for the speakers of the  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  sayings in the Old Testament, people are the most frequent speakers of the statements while God and angels rarely pronounce the  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  sayings.<sup>17</sup> The people as either the recipients or the speakers of the  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  sayings are usually unidentified.<sup>18</sup>

When considering the intention of the speakers the  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  statements, one notes that the  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  sayings generally represent the illocutionary speech act of stating a beatitude.<sup>19</sup> However, an utterance with  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  allows the speaker to produce several other illocutionary acts.<sup>20</sup> Uttering  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$ , the speaker can express his or her intention (i.e., illocutionary forces<sup>21</sup>) of congratulating, commending (expressives), affirming (assertives), advising, or encouraging people (directives).<sup>22</sup> By pronouncing  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  on people, the speaker sometimes congratulates them on account of favorable circumstances such as personal well-being, fecundity, wisdom, and God's special care and discipline.<sup>23</sup> At times the addresser commends people for certain admirable attitudes or qualities

<sup>16</sup> Note that there is one instance (Eccl 10:17) in which things ( $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$ ) are used as the referent of  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$ . However, it is obvious that  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  does not refer to the land itself, but to the residents of the land.

<sup>17</sup> The angel as the speaker of an  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  saying is attested once in the prophetic message delivered to Daniel (Dan 12:12). As for God as the addresser, there are four verses (Isa 30:18; 32:20; 56:2; and Ps 2:12e) in which God may be considered to speak the  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  pronouncements. All of them appear in the divine oracles. Among these four, however, Isa 56:2 and Ps 2:12e seem likely to be direct words from God, whereas the other two verses seem to be prophetic words.

<sup>18</sup> The recipients are usually people in general rather than specific characters and the speakers are psalmists whose identifications are seemingly unclear to us.

<sup>19</sup> The beatitude beginning with  $\text{ׁוְאֵלֹהִים}$  is an expression and an act of congratulation or commendation (R. Collins, *ABD* 1:629).

<sup>20</sup> An illocutionary act is a complete speech act, characterized by a particular illocutionary force.

<sup>21</sup> The illocutionary force is the speaker's intention behind the production of an illocutionary act. See J. R. Searle and D. Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1, 7-9, 20-1. See also D. Vanderveken, *Meaning and Speech Acts I: Principle of Language Use* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 103-36.

<sup>22</sup> The terms in the parentheses are from Searle's five types of illocutionary points (expressives, directives, declaratives, assertives, and commissives) which classify all the illocutionary acts. See J. R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Searle and Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., personal well-being (Isa 32:20; Ps 128:2), fecundity (Ps 127:5), wisdom (1 Kgs 10:8; 2 Chr 9:7), God's special care and discipline (Deut 33:29; Pss 32:1; 33:12; 94:12; 144:15).

(either ethical or spiritual), the descriptions of which are rather ideal and conditional.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, the speaker not only affirms the happiness of those who conduct a godly life, but also advises and encourages the listener to attain happiness by living such a life—the life of maintaining a favorable relationship with God and with people as well as striving after wisdom in everyday life situations. In the Psalter, the אֲשֶׁר־ sayings are primarily employed to exhort the reader to live a pious life because such indirect persuasions entail the perlocutionary effect that the reader is to decide to live an ethical and godly life.

### III. Psalms 1 and 2

When read separately as the first and the second psalms of the Psalter, the texts of Psalms 1 and 2 display unique messages: the happiness of the righteous (Ps 1) and the reign of God and the establishment of the Davidic kingship (Ps 2). However, the two psalms may be taken as a combined introduction to Book I (and to the Psalter) as they lack titles and are bounded together by the אֲשֶׁר־ sayings (1:1; 2:12).

Thus when read in view of each other, Psalms 1 and 2 demonstrate their close relationship through lexical, semantic, structural, and other features. The relationship holds true also for the אֲשֶׁר־ sayings in the two psalms (1:1 and 2:12e). In Psalm 1 the nature of happiness is elaborated to a considerable extent since the focus of the psalm is on the happiness of the godly. The psalm begins with the negative assertion that the happiness of the man lies in his refusal to participate in the activities (הִלָּךְ, עֲמַד, יֹשֵׁב) of the ungodly (v. 1).<sup>25</sup> The negative description in verse 1 is parallel to the positive depiction in verse 2 that the happy man delights (יִפְיֵן) in and meditates (הִגִּיד) on God's torah day and night. The happy person is, then, envisaged as a tree which is transplanted by the water channels, yields fruit, and remains green (v. 3). This person is identified with one of the righteous ones (צַדִּיקִים) (v. 5) and is promised with God's care and protection (v. 6).

In Psalm 2 the nature of happiness is less specified since the אֲשֶׁר־ saying occurs at the closing of the psalm (v. 12e) and since the psalm primarily aims to manifest the reign of God and to authorize the Davidic kingship. Psalm 2 begins with a series of rhetorical questions (vv. 1-2) challenging the presumptuous, futile coalescence of the rulers of the

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Pss 1:2; 2:12; 84:5; 119:2; 146:5; Prov 14:21; 16:20; 28:14; Isa 56:2.

<sup>25</sup> According to Berlin, a singular-plural alternation (the righteous in the singular in vv. 1-3 vs. the wicked in the plural in vv. 4-5) is utilized to create a morphological parallelism. See A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 49, 45.



nations to plot against Yahweh and his anointed one. The rhetorical questions are followed by God's reaction to the international leaders that he has installed his anointed as king (vv. 4-6), God's decree to the newly king that he will give him an authority to govern the nations (vv. 7-9), and finally God's warning to the rulers of the nation that they should submit to him and to the newly king (vv. 10-12). It is at the end that the אֱשֶׁר־יִשְׁׁרָאֵל saying appears and proclaims happiness of all who take refuge (חַסֵּה) in God (2:12).

The disparity between Psalms 1 and 2 with reference to happiness is solved when the two אֱשֶׁר־יִשְׁׁרָאֵל sayings are interpreted in the light of each other within the texts of the two psalms. Read together, the אֱשֶׁר־יִשְׁׁרָאֵל sayings in the two psalms imply that Book I (or the Psalter) is about, and serves to further, happiness for God's people.<sup>26</sup> Specifically, the two psalms introduce delighting in God's instruction and taking refuge in God as two fundamental elements to attain happiness in life. Presenting the clues of happiness, the two psalms encourage the reader to live such a life and to cherish its promises.

In addition, Psalms 1 and 2 disclose who is the godly person that happiness awaits. On the one hand, the psalms exemplify the anointed Davidic king (Ps 2) as an ideal individual who conforms to God's teaching (Ps 1), takes refuge in God (Ps 2), and is promised happiness (Ps 1-2). On the other hand, the two psalms democratize kingship as they identify the Davidic king with the individuals of Israel (e.g., אִישׁ [1:1], צַדִּיקִים [1:5, 6], כֹּל [2:12e]). The presentation of the king (i.e., David) as an example of the godly and the democratizing emphasis continues in the rest of the psalms as the exemplified David is constantly identified with the individual of faith.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> So McCann, "The Shape of Book I," 342.

<sup>27</sup> See P. D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. C. McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 91-92; P. D. Miller, "Kingship, Torah Obedience, and Prayer: The Theology of Psalms 15-24," in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (ed. K. Seybold and E. Zenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 130; J. L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 121-23; Mays, *Psalms*, 49; B. S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 (1971): 148-49; Childs, "Reflections," 384; and Childs, *Introduction*, 520-22; J. A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (SBLABib 17; Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 280-89; R. Rendtorff, "The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. P. W. Flint and P. D. Miller; VTSup 99; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 63.

#### IV. Psalms 40 and 41

The אֲשַׁר־י statements in Psalms 40 and 41<sup>28</sup> present trust in God and consideration of the needy as ways to happiness in life. As the אֲשַׁר־י sayings appear in the two psalms, Psalms 40 and 41 form both structural and thematic inclusions with Psalms 1 and 2. The אֲשַׁר־י statements introduced in these four psalms are represented in a chiasmic structure as follows:

- A happiness in delighting in God's torah, not associating with the ways of the wicked (1:1-2)
- B happiness in taking refuge in God (2:12)
- B' happiness in trusting God (40:4)
- A' happiness in having concern for the needy (41:1)

The message implied in this structure is that happy living lies in one's striving for the right relationship toward God and toward others. The four psalms present specific guidelines to claim happiness in two directions accordingly: (1) commit to God's teaching and trust in him who is the King (toward God: Pss 1, 2, and 40), and (2) do not associate with the ways of the wicked but have regard for those in need (toward others: Pss 1 and 41).<sup>29</sup>

Considered within the frame of Book I and in conjunction with Psalms 1-2, Psalms 40 and 41 appear to have their own distinctive characteristics: Psalm 40 is reinforcing and reflexive; Psalm 41 is complementary, responding, and directing. Psalm 40 reinforces the semantic features introduced in Psalms 1-2 by repeating and extending them, the effect of which is to take the reader back to Psalms 1-2 in which the fundamental elements to happiness are introduced. Psalm 40 is strongly connected to the theme of trust in God, which is first introduced in Psalm 2. The psalm expands the issue of trusting God, incorporating it into the other major issue of the psalm (i.e., God's deliverance) and ultimately presenting trusting God as a key factor to bring God's redemp-

<sup>28</sup> Pss 40 and 41 contain elements of both lament and thanksgiving. The main themes are trust in God and God's deliverance (Ps 40) and happiness in having concern for the needy (Ps 41).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. McCann, "The Shape of Book I," 343-45; J. C. McCann, *The Book of Psalms* (NIB 4; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 848. Although McCann, "The Shape of Book I," 343, has noticed the orientations of the self to God and to others in these psalms, he stresses such distinctiveness particularly demonstrated between Pss 1 and 41, since he views the beatitudes in Pss 1 and 41 as "an appropriate frame" for Book I (McCann, *The Book of Psalms*, 848). While I agree with McCann reading Book I with the notion of happiness, I take the אֲשַׁר־י sayings in Pss 1-2 and 40-41 as a frame.



tion (40:1-4). In addition, the psalm includes similar illustrations of torah piety demonstrated in Psalm 1. Psalm 40:8, although not attached to the **יְשֻׁרִים** saying, illustrates torah piety as the psalmist's expression of his commitment to God: the psalmist preserves God's teaching (**תּוֹרַת**) in his inmost parts and he delights (**יִפְתַּח**) to do God's will. Psalms 1:2 and 40:8 are the only collocations in the psalms in Book I (and in the entire Psalter) in which **תּוֹרַת** and **יִפְתַּח** are placed side by side in a single verse portraying the psalmist's delight in God's torah. The wordplays in the two psalms signify that the psalmist who relies on God's teaching (40:8) is certainly categorized as a godly individual (1:1-3). Accordingly, God's promise for the righteous who delight in God's teaching (1:1, 3, 6) is affirmed in the act of God's redemption of the psalmist (40:1-3).

As Psalm 40 reminds the reader of trusting God and torah piety depicted in Psalms 1–2, Psalm 41 does not repeat the two elements in relation to happiness. Instead, Psalm 41 introduces a new feature to cherish happiness, that is, consideration for those in need. Happiness in having regard for others in Psalm 41 is complementary and harmonizes with happiness in torah piety and trusting God in Psalms 1, 2, and 40, as the former conveys the psalmist's relationship toward other people and the latter carries the psalmist's relationship toward God.<sup>30</sup>

Particularly, Psalm 41 demonstrates a reciprocal connection to Psalms 1 and 40, as the psalms reveal that those who show their concern for the needy (41:1) are “practitioners of God's word” (1:2; 40:8), as VanGemeren rightly points out.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the responsive interaction is manifested in the relationship of the psalmist toward God by way of lexical and semantic association of the terms **יִפְתַּח** (“to delight”) and **יָדַע** (“to know”). The illustration that the psalmist delights (**יִפְתַּח**) in God's torah, which is first described in Psalm 1:2 and repeated similarly in Psalm 40:8, finds its corresponding description in Psalm 41:11 that God delights (**יִפְתַּח**) in the psalmist.<sup>32</sup> The illustration of the divine acknowl-

<sup>30</sup> McCann has already observed the complementary character between happiness in Ps 1 and that in Ps 41, defining the former as “openness to God's instruction” and the latter as “openness to the needs of others” (McCann, *The Book of Psalms*, 848; McCann, “The Shape of Book I,” 344). Yet his focus is on Pss 1 and 41 (as a frame of Book I) and on Pss 1 and 2 (as an introduction to the Psalter). Thus he pays little attention to the connection of Ps 40 to the other three psalms. He also does not develop an argument of the first two and the last two psalms as a whole.

<sup>31</sup> VanGemeren, “Psalm 32 in Romans 4:1-8,” 15.

<sup>32</sup> McCann, *The Book of Psalms*, 848, scrutinizes the reciprocal relation between Pss 1 and 41 by way of the root **יִפְתַּח**, stating that the effect of the verbal linkage is “to articulate the mutuality of the relationship between God and humanity. Nevertheless, McCann does not comment the link of **יִפְתַּח** in Ps 40 to

edgement (יָדַע) of the psalmist, which is first expressed in Psalm 1:5 and similarly depicted in Psalm 40:8, finds its complementary description in Psalm 41:11 that the psalmist recognizes (יָדַע) God's being pleased with him. In this way, the theme of torah piety does not explicitly surface in Psalm 41, but its trace remains in the shared vocabulary. The other theme, trusting God, is not explicitly stated in the psalm either; instead, it is implied in the psalmist's plea and in his conviction of God's deliverance and protection.

### V. Psalms 32–34

As wisdom psalms or psalms of thanksgiving (Pss 32 and 34) and as hymns of praise (Ps 33), Psalms 32–34 speak about happiness in receiving God's forgiveness, happiness of being God's chosen, and ways to wisdom, respectively. Compared with the אָשְׁרֵי sayings of Psalms 1–2 and 40–41, the אָשְׁרֵי saying of Psalm 34 repeats the theme of trust in God, but the אָשְׁרֵי sayings of Psalms 32–33 introduce new elements to attain happiness in life, that is, receiving God's forgiveness of sin and being God's chosen people.

Psalm 32 sets off with the two אָשְׁרֵי sayings<sup>33</sup> that proclaim the blessing of God's forgiveness of sin. The twofold אָשְׁרֵי saying serves as a conclusive remark stemming from the psalmist's personal experience (vv. 3-5) and from the lessons of the experience (vv. 6-10) illustrated in the subsequent strophes.<sup>34</sup> The thematic emphasis surfaces through occurrences of several terms related to pardon of sin (e.g., sin, forgiveness, confession)<sup>35</sup> and to blessing (e.g., happiness, instruction, joy)<sup>36</sup> throughout the psalm. These terms merge into a pattern by means of a particular literary technique of the threefold reiteration of the similar terms.<sup>37</sup> Such patterns strengthen the overall theme of happiness in receiving divine pardon for sin.

חֲפִיץ in Pss 1 and 41.

<sup>33</sup> The double אָשְׁרֵי saying in Ps 32 is the first example in the Psalter and the only example in Book I.

<sup>34</sup> So R. J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 210.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., (1) terms for sin (vv. 1-2, 5): פָּשַׁע ("transgression": 2x), חַטָּאָה ("sin"), עָוֹן ("iniquity": 3x), and חַטָּאת ("sin": 2x); (2) verbs for forgiving (vv. 1-2, 5, 6): נָשָׂא ("to lift": 2x), כָּסָה ("to cover"), לֹא חָשַׁב ("not to think"), and פָּלַל ("to pray"); (3) verbs for confessing (v. 5): יָדַע ("to acknowledged"), לֹא כָסָה ("not to cover"), and יָרַד ("to cast").

<sup>36</sup> E.g. (1) terms for happiness and joy (vv. 1-2, 11): אָשְׁרֵי ("how happy"), שָׂמַח ("to rejoice"), גִּיל ("to rejoice"), and רָנַן ("to give ringing cry"); (2) verbs for instructing (v. 8): שִׁבַּל ("to instruct"), יָרָה ("to teach"), and יַעֲזֵב ("to counsel").

<sup>37</sup> The pattern of a threefold reiteration of similar terms or descriptions

The issue of God's forgiveness of sin functions as an important trajectory in the progression of the אָשָׁם sayings in Book I.<sup>38</sup> Psalms 1 and 2 portray the psalmist as an ideal, godly individual, yet they witness the existence of the wicked where the righteous are around. Thus the two psalms imply a tension between the godly and the ungodly. The tension between the two groups surfaces in Psalm 3 and continues in the following psalms. The psalmist keeps representing himself before God as a godly, blameless person and accuses the wicked of their evil activities. However, the portrayal of the psalmist as the sinner<sup>39</sup> in Psalm 32 signals another conflict in Book I—the conflict within the psalmist himself, that is, between the godly psalmist and the sinful psalmist. In this situation, it is phenomenal that Psalm 32 declares the blessing of divine forgiveness, since God's pardon resolves both the issue of the psalmist's sin and the tension between the pious self and the sinful self. The announcement of God's forgiveness (Ps 32:1-2) brings the psalmist back to a right relationship with God.

The אָשָׁם saying in Psalm 33 proclaims happiness of being God's elected people. The structure of Psalm 33 demonstrates a concentric move toward the אָשָׁם saying as follows:

- A Praise Yahweh (vv. 1-3)
- B Basis for praise to Yahweh the creator and the ruler (vv. 4-7)
- C Yahweh is the creator and the ruler of all humankind (vv. 8-11)
- D Happiness of being God's elected people (v. 12)
- C' Yahweh is the ruler and the creator of all humankind (vv. 13-15)
- B' Basis for hope in Yahweh the deliverer and the protector (vv. 16-19)
- A' Hope in Yahweh (vv. 20-22)

The strophes before and after the אָשָׁם saying (v. 12) provide grounds for happiness of being God's chosen people by underscoring that Yahweh who has elected his own people is the creator and the ruler of all mankind (vv. 4-11, 13-15) and that as the ruler of his own people Yahweh cares for, delivers, and protects his people (vv. 16-19). Such grounds lead God's elected people to praise him (vv. 1-3) and to put their hope in God (vv. 20-22).

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appears in each strophe: the terms for forgiveness and sin (vv. 1-2a), the terms for confession and for sin (v. 5abd), descriptions about God (v. 7abc), the terms for instructing (v. 8abc), the terms for praise (v. 11abc), and the terms for the righteous (vv. 6a, 11bc).

<sup>38</sup> See VanGemenen, "Psalm 32 in Romans 4:1-8," 24-26. I am indebted to VanGemenen for the idea of the significance of the function of sin in the אָשָׁם sayings in the Book.

<sup>39</sup> Prior to Ps 32, Pss 19 and 25 indicate the sin of the psalmist.

The proclamation of happiness for God's people brings together the addressees of the אֱשֶׁרִי sayings in Book I (i.e., the godly individuals, the forgiven sinners) under the category of God's covenantal people. The אֱשֶׁרִי statement in Psalm 33 shows that all the clues for happy living are based on such a covenantal relationship with God, who is the creator and the ruler of the world.

Psalm 34 describes the exhortations to wisdom with projection of the dual theme of trusting and fearing God, both of which are integrated with God's deliverance. The psalmist's retrospective report with the praise (vv. 1-7) serves as proof that trust and fear are closely tied to God's redemption. Based on the psalmist's personal witness, the exhortations (vv. 8-22) make general statements including instructions for wisdom and outcomes of the response to the instructions.

The אֱשֶׁרִי saying in verse 8c assures blessing for those who seek (דָּרַשׁ [2x]), look to (נִבְטָא), call (קָרָא), and take refuge in (חָסָה) God (vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 10)—those who trust God. Trusting God and the blessings that follow provide a semantic coherence through a literary construction of an inclusio with the phrase “taking refuge in Yahweh” and the description of reward at the beginning (v. 8) and the closing (v. 22) of the entire wisdom section (vv. 8-22).

In addition, trusting God extends its scope in conjunction with the theme of fearing God. The dual theme of trusting and fearing God is juxtaposed in verses 8-9. Then in verse 10b the dual theme recurs integrated with God's deliverance: those who seek (דָּרַשׁ) God will lack (חָסַר) nothing. The verb דָּרַשׁ (“to seek”) signifies trust. It recalls verse 4 (I sought God, and he delivered me) linking the idea of trusting God to God's deliverance. The root חָסַר (“to lack”) is reminiscent of חָסָה (“to take refuge”) due to similar consonants (ח, ס). The repetition of טוֹב (“good”) in verse 10b echoes trust in God in verse 8 (by taking refuge in Yahweh, taste and see that God is good [טוֹב]). Furthermore, the reuse of the root חָסַר connects verse 10b (those who seek God lack [חָסַר] no good thing) to verse 9b (those who fear God lack [חָסַר] nothing), to represent close association of trusting with fearing God.

Happiness in trust and fear of God in Psalm 34 serve as guidelines to live as God's people. As the community is reminded that they are the people with whom God established a covenant relationship (Psalm 33), Psalm 34 provides the people with fundamental elements (i.e., trusting and fearing God) both for happy living and for living as God's people. Trust and fear of God recall the introduction (Psalms 1–2) which presents commitment to torah and trust in God as two essential steps for happy, wise living.

Compared with the אֱשֶׁרִי sayings of Psalms 1–2, and 40–41, the אֱשֶׁרִי saying of Psalm 34 reassures that trust in God is a fundamental

ground for human happiness. And the  $\text{ׁוְיִשְׁׁרְךָ}$  sayings of Psalms 32 and 33 stand out since they suggest for the first time direction (or orientation) from God toward people (i.e., forgiving, electing), whereas other  $\text{ׁוְיִשְׁׁרְךָ}$  sayings suggest direction from people either toward God (i.e., obeying, trusting) or toward others (i.e., having regard). The  $\text{ׁוְיִשְׁׁרְךָ}$  sayings of Psalms 32–33 demonstrate that human happiness is to be attainable not simply through human orientations toward God and to others, but through God’s direct intervention for humans.

## VI. Conclusion

The Psalter opens up the path to happiness and wisdom in life through the  $\text{ׁוְיִשְׁׁרְךָ}$  sayings. Each  $\text{ׁוְיִשְׁׁרְךָ}$  saying in the Psalter entails God’s promises of justice, deliverance, guidance, care, and protection. In comparison with the other books in the Psalter, Book I represents happiness framed by the dual theme of torah piety and trust in God. Happiness in delighting in God’s teaching and taking refuge in God in the first two psalms (Pss 1:1-2; 2:12) binds Book I with happiness in trusting God and considering the poor in the last two psalms in the collection (Pss 40:4; 41:1). The structured inclusio of Psalms 1–2 and 40–41 demonstrates that those who delight in God’s instruction (Ps 1:1-2) and rely on him (Pss 2:12; 40:4) are those who take care of the needy (Ps 41:1) and those in whom God delights (Ps 41:11).

Given torah piety and trusting in God as the two fundamental ways to attain happiness, however, Book I ironically develops the issue of sin of the godly. The righteous in Book I, on the one hand, maintain integrity walking in the way of God and thus they are promised God’s vindication and protection. On the other hand, they suffer not only from afflictions of the wicked, but also from their own sinfulness. The issue of sin reaches its peak in Psalm 32. The psalm finds the psalmist sinful and troubled not because of the wicked enemies, but because of his own sin and because of God’s chastisement of his sin and unrepentance (32:3-4). In such a situation, proclamation of God’s forgiveness of sin resolves the psalmist’s conflict between the sinful self and the pious self. The forgiven sinner returns to the right relationship with God and to the life of the godly. In the midst of laments and disorientation in Book I, divine forgiveness brings enormous joy and happiness.

The effect of God’s pardon is incorporated into the following two psalms, Psalms 33 and 34. The communal praise of God (Ps 33:1-7) and the declaration of happiness in being God’s people (Ps 33:12) imply that “the community of the godly is the community of sinners whose sins are

forgiven,” as VanGemenen points out.<sup>40</sup> God’s community receives guidelines for wise living (Ps 34:8-22) as Psalm 34 teaches the life of order and wisdom. God’s people are continually encouraged to live in a godly way in the disoriented world (Pss 40–41), striving to conform themselves to the ideal, exemplary individual depicted in Psalms 1–2. Despite ongoing tensions between the godly and the wicked and between the godly self and the sinful self, hope and happiness are there because God forgives, protects, saves, and does justice for his people when they keep on obeying God’s instruction (Pss 1:1-2; 40:8), trusting in him (Pss 2:12; 34:8; 40:4), and caring for others (Ps 41:1).

Given the story suggested through the אֲשֶׁר־יֵאמְרוּ sayings in Book I, the language and message of the אֲשֶׁר־יֵאמְרוּ sayings in Book I serve a didactic and pedagogical function. As Proverbs represents the fear of God as the beginning of wisdom, the Psalter represents reliance on God’s teaching and reliance on God himself as the beginning of happiness in life. Second, the story of the happiness of the godly in Book I indicates that human happiness derives from God’s covenantal intervention. The אֲשֶׁר־יֵאמְרוּ sayings in Psalms 32–33 demonstrate the significant role of God in bestowing blessings on humans: he forgives and he elects his own people. God’s loving, covenantal attitude toward humans restores the shattered relationship between God and humans and repairs conflicting issues in human selves. In response to God’s caring acts, people are to show their commitment to God and maintain it by delighting in his word and taking refuge in him. Third, happiness in life demands consideration for others. The אֲשֶׁר־יֵאמְרוּ sayings in Book I illustrate a move in portraying the psalmist: from the righteous (Pss 1–2) to the sinner (Ps 32) to the poor and needy (Pss 40–41). In Book I the term רָשָׁע (“wicked”) outnumbers צַדִּיק (“righteous”) as the wicked appear frequently in the psalmist’s accusation of them for their oppression and vile activities. Yet the terms for the needy referring to the righteous pervade the collection as well. The godly ones are poor, needy, and weak. Therefore, they need help and attention from others and from God. As God shows himself as an example to care for his people, humans are expected to have regard for others and to have a right relationship with them as well.

In addition, viewed within the entire collocations of the אֲשֶׁר־יֵאמְרוּ sayings in the Psalter, it is significant that the אֲשֶׁר־יֵאמְרוּ sayings in Book I have introduced five out of the six elements for happiness.<sup>41</sup> The last clue for happiness comes to the fore in Book V: prosperity as God’s blessing (Ps

<sup>40</sup> VanGemenen, “Psalm 32 in Romans 4:1-8,” 15.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ps 137:7-8 is excluded in counting because the two אֲשֶׁר־יֵאמְרוּ sayings intend to make an imprecation on Babylon, not to announce clues for happiness in life.



127:5; 128:2). It is an element that seems perfectly suitable in Book V since the collection comprises more psalms of praise. Except for those in Psalms 127:5 and 128:2, the remaining *ʾāšer* sayings in Books II–V repeat and reinforce certain issues for happiness depicted in Book I (i.e., trusting God, torah piety, and being God’s people).<sup>42</sup> The themes of forgiveness of sin and concern for the needy in relation to happiness remain rather unique in Book I, since they do not directly occur in the *ʾāšer* sayings in Books II–V.<sup>43</sup>

In reading the *ʾāšer* sayings in Book I with respect to the interpretation of the Psalter, the story line presented through the *ʾāšer* sayings in Book I credits more to a possibility of the purposeful arrangement of the Psalter and the significance of the placement of certain psalms at the crucial points (i.e., in the beginning, the center, the end). Second, an integrated reading of the *ʾāšer* sayings in order sustains an argument that sequential reading of psalms with similar issues might result in a more comprehensive understanding of the given psalms. Third, the thematic movement of sin and incorporation of the issue of sin into other related themes (i.e., trust, fear of God, deliverance, etc.) demonstrated in Book I support attempts to recognize certain thematic moves and theological incorporation of associated subject matters or genres in part of the Psalter or in the entire Psalter.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Similarly McCann, “The Shape of Book I,” 346.

<sup>43</sup> Yet there are two examples outside Book I (Pss 65:4-5 and 146:5-9) in which the themes of divine pardon and concern for the needy appear in proximity to the *ʾāšer* sayings. Ps 65:4 describes divine forgiveness of sins, which precedes the declaration of the *ʾāšer* saying for those who are invited to God’s courts (65:5). Ps 146:7-9 depicts God’s care for the needy, which follows the declaration of the *ʾāšer* saying for those who trust in God (146:5-6).

<sup>44</sup> E.g., the move from lament to praise or the move from obedience to praise or the move of orientation-disorientation-new orientation (or reorientation) by Brueggemann, or the move from the Davidic covenant and reliance on human king (Pss 2–89) to the eternal kingship of God and reliance on God (Pss 90–145) by Wilson.