

Honor and Shame in the Psalter

Dustin Shramek

In the beginning there was no shame, only honor. At the creation of man we are told, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25).¹ Indeed, there was great honor given to mankind, for they were the only creatures created in the image of God and it was to man that God gave dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). When Adam ate from the forbidden tree, he not only brought guilt upon all his progeny, but he also brought shame. Shame, which was once unheard of in the Garden, is now universal.

The Psalter is a book of songs, a book of poetry. In it we see displayed the whole range of human emotion. It is no wonder then, that we also see the exultation of honor and the fear of shame. In this paper we will first seek to understand what shame and honor are, especially in the Psalms. Then we will try to make sense of their significance in the Psalter in order that we might see their true significance in the redemptive plan of God.

What Are Honor and Shame?

The question of how to define *honor*² and *shame* is difficult. They can mean many different things in different contexts. We can speak of the glory or honor of men (“O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?” [Ps 4:2a]) or the glory of God (“Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory” [Ps 24:10]). Glory or honor is something that

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² The most common word for *honor* in the Psalter is כבוד (*kvd*). However, it is usually translated *glory*. The words *glory* and *honor* are not always interchangeable, but often they are.

can be ascribed (“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” [Ps 29:2a]) or something given (“The LORD bestows favor and honor” [Ps 84:11]).

The main Hebrew word translated as *glory* or *honor*³ has at its root the meaning of “heavy”.⁴ This idea of something being heavy carries with it a sense of weightiness and thus worthiness. Most clearly this is seen in the depictions of God and his glory. For example, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). When we see the heavens we see the masterful work of a great Creator and therefore we see that this Creator is worthy of glory and honor.

When we read of the glory of man we see that this glory is not something that resides in him as it does in God. Rather it is given (as noted above in Ps 84:11) and it is a blessing.⁵ Psalm 8 is a good example of this, “You have made [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5). The glory and honor of man is something that God gave when he created mankind.

Another very important aspect of honor is relationship within a community. David McIlroy says, “Honour is a relational concept. It is a way of maintaining a group’s reputation and identity.”⁶ Joseph Hellerman describes the importance of community in relationship to honor this

³ See footnote 2.

⁴ “We may take as a working hypothesis that ‘weight’ is the central meaning of which the other uses are applications” (C. John Collins, “כָּבֵד” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 2, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 577. See Psalms 32:4 and 38:4 for examples of this word simply meaning “heavy.”

⁵ See the discussion in Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press; Copenhagen: V. Pio. Povl Branner, 1926), pp. 214-221.

⁶ David McIlroy, “Honour and Shame,” *Cambridge Papers: Towards a Biblical Mind* 14/2 (2005), 2.

way, “The collectivist nature of ancient society in fact necessitates that one’s personal claim to honor is ultimately inconsequential apart from group affirmation.”⁷ There must be a recognition of honor by others for someone to truly be honored, meaning; someone cannot honor himself if no one joins him. We see this collective call for honoring God throughout the Psalms, “Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength” (Ps 96:7).

Shame, on the other hand, is more than just an absence of honor. It is both a feeling and a state of being.⁸ To be shamed is to be abased and dishonored, to be rejected from the community. To feel ashamed is to feel the pain and embarrassment of the disapproval and rejection. We feel the power of shame in Psalm 44. “You [God] have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies . . . You have made us a byword among the nations. . . All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face at the sound of the taunter and reviler. . .” (Ps 44:9, 14, 15-16).

In order to fully understand both honor and shame, we must see that they are both experienced in relationship with others. This will be flushed out more below, but we can already see it in the verses quoted. In Psalm 44 the psalmist feels the shame of being rejected by God, that is, he has been pushed away from God’s presence so that God is no longer going out with their armies (he is no longer acting for them). The king in Psalm 21 is given great honor, “[The king’s] glory is great through your salvation; splendor and majesty you bestow on him. For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence” (Ps 21:5-6).

⁷ Joseph H. Hellerman, “Challenging the Authority of Jesus: Mark 11:27-33 and Mediterranean Notions of Honor and Shame,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43/2 (June, 2000), 218.

⁸ “The key ideas with regard to shame are disgrace and exposure. Disgrace is the loss of approval, of status and of respect . . . However, shame is also what we feel when we are exposed” (David McIlroy, “Honour and Shame,” *Cambridge Papers: Towards a Biblical Mind* 14/2 [2005], 3).

“For the individual, what gives honor is the praise and approval of the community. Thus, loss of that social favor through rejection and abandonment by that community leads to shame.”⁹ Being put to shame, whether by the community or by God, is being rejected and pushed away. Being honored is being received and welcomed; it is being lifted up into relationship.

The Honor of Man

We must understand that when mankind was created, we were created in a position of honor. We were exalted over the rest of creation, for we alone were created in the image of God. We had a special position before God in which we were able to live in his presence, near to him in the Garden of Eden. Of course, this special position was lost and shame entered the world, but we must not let sin cause us to forget the honor of being made in the image of God.

Psalm 8 is very helpful in drawing our eyes to the wonder of the honor given to men. “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens” (Ps 8:1). David begins with the declaration that God’s name is majestic and his glory is so great that it is above the heavens. There is none like God who created all things. He is above all and he is the one with the greatest honor.

It is the truth that God is high above all things that causes David to wonder, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him” (Ps 8:3-4)? The heavens do declare the glory of God and thus they also declare the insignificance of man. Yet, God is mindful of man and cares for him. God not only notices man, but he thinks about him, remembers him, and cares for him. This is stunning.

⁹ Nancy R. Bowen, “Damage and Healing: Shame and Honor in the Old Testament” *Koinonia Journal* III.2, 31.

What is even more amazing is the place that God has assigned to man in the universe. “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (Ps 8:5-6). Yes humans are nothing more than grasshoppers in comparison to God, indeed, they are less than that (see Isaiah 40). And yet God has set man over all things and made him only a little lower than the “heavenly beings”.¹⁰

The Shame of Sin

Because of our sin we are enemies of God and we boast in our perceived greatness. “For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, ‘There is no God’” (Ps 10:3-4). We have rebelled against the worthy one, the one worthy of all glory and honor. Such rebellion is shameful.

Sin brings shame. We feel the shame of our sin so we seek to cover ourselves as Adam and Eve did, believing that we can hide our sin. Yet before a holy God we are exposed and not only do we feel shame, we are put to shame. “The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods” (Ps 97:6-7). The heavens make clear that God is glorious and yet we have all turned away so that none does good (Ps 53:1). We have “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and

¹⁰ The word translated as “heavenly beings” is *elohim*, which is the same word that is commonly used to refer to God himself. It could then, be translated as “You made him a little lower than God” (my translation, see also NASB, NLT, and RSV).

reptiles” (Rom 1:23). All who worship anyone other than YHWH will be put to shame; they will be brought low and rejected by him, pushed out of his presence. “For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them” (Ps 53:5).

This shaming of the wicked has a purpose; it is not an end in itself. “Let [God’s enemies] be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace, that they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth” (Ps 83:17-18). The wicked are shamed so that they might know that only God is worthy of the honor they had sought for themselves. The wrath of God serves the glory of God.¹¹

The Honor of the King – God’s Anointed One

The king naturally holds a position of honor—he is the king. It is clear, however, in the Hebrew Bible that the honor of the king is entirely dependent upon God for he is the one who chooses who is to be king. He is the one who chose Saul and gave him the kingdom. When Saul disobeyed, God is the one who dishonored him and took the kingdom and gave it to another more honorable than Saul. David never forgot that the blessing of being king over God’s people was a gift of God.

O LORD, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults! You have given him his heart’s desire and have not withheld the request of his lips. For you meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold upon his head. He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever. His glory is great through your salvation; splendor and majesty you bestow on him. For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved (Ps 21:1-7).

It is God who gives the king his heart’s desire (v. 2). God is the one who sets a crown of fine gold upon his head (v. 3). God is the one who sets him up as king. It is through God’s

¹¹ This is important to note for the grace of God in honoring us also serves the glory of God.

salvation that the glory of the king is great, for God is the one who gives him splendor and majesty.

God will exalt his king over all his enemies and give him great glory. “[In Zion] I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.¹² His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine” (Ps 132:17-18). The enemies of the king are shamed, but the king himself is honored with a shining crown.

God promised David that his descendants would reign over his people and that one would come whose kingdom would not end. “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (2 Sam 7:12-14).

In Psalm 2 we see that the Lord’s anointed is to be greater than all the kings for they are commanded to “kiss the Son” (Ps 2:11), that is, pay homage to him and honor him as the king who reigns over them. It is to the King of Israel that God says, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:7-8). The King of Israel was never to only rule over the tiny sliver of land in Palestine. He was (and is!) to rule the whole world.

We know that the Son of David, and thus the Son of God, is Jesus Christ. He was declared the Son of God at his birth (Luke 1:32-33), his baptism (Mat 3:17), his transfiguration (Mat 17:5) and ultimately at his resurrection (Rom 1:3-4). He is the King of Kings, the one who has been given all authority in heaven and earth, the one who has been highly exalted and given

¹² The Hebrew word translated as “anointed” is מָשִׁיחַ (*māšîaḥ* – *Messiah* or *Christ*).

a name above all names (Php 2:9-11). He is the one who fully triumphs over his enemies so that David says, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Ps 110:1).

What greater honor is there than sitting at the right hand of the LORD?¹³ What greater honor is there than having all your enemies disgraced before you so that they become the thing upon which you set your feet?¹⁴

Honor Coming through the Shaming of Your Enemies

As noted above the honor of the king is enhanced because his enemies are shamed. They are the ones who are disgraced while he is the one lifted up and exalted. We see this refrain throughout the psalms of David as he asks God to rescue him and put his enemies to shame. “O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous” (Ps 25:2-3). “Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life! Let them be turned back and disappointed who devise evil against me” (Ps 35:4)!

The path of honor often goes through the shame of our enemies. We often miss this idea when we think about issues such as deliverance and salvation. In order to be delivered from our enemies, our enemies must be made powerless, they must be defeated. Our deliverance

¹³ Note how being honored is at the same time being brought near.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note here the shaming ritual in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. If a Levite died without bearing a son, it was his brother’s duty to take his husband’s wife and raise up a son for him. If he refused the wife would go to the elders and tell them. If he still refuses “then his brother’s wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, ‘So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother’s house’” (Deut 25:9). In both instances we see the shame someone receives by having sandals placed upon him.

requires their defeat. So, too, when it comes to honor. Our honor must come through the shame of another.¹⁵

Some dispute the necessity of others being put to shame in order for honor to be restored. For example, Nancy Bowen makes the following contrast:

In contrast to the perspective that the restoration of honor is accomplished by God's grace, there is the perspective that the way honor is restored is by shaming the shamer. Because Israel has shamed YHWH by going after other gods, so YHWH shall shame Israel. As the nations shamed Israel, so shall the nations be shamed in return. The psalmist petitions God to shame his enemies as they have shamed the psalmist. "Let those who rejoice at my calamity be put shame and confusion; let those who exalt themselves against me be clothed with shame and dishonor" (Ps 35:26).¹⁶ The root of such prayers is not only that the petitioner not be put to shame, but be vindicated, that is honored, by having his enemies put to shame.¹⁷

Bowen speaks of a contrast between two perspectives on how honor is restored (one through grace and the other through shaming the shamer) because she sees the restoration of honor as completely independent from any other act. It is something God freely does apart from a sacrifice or mediator. She writes,

From the perspective of the healing of shame through the restoration of honor, healing is accomplished strictly through an act of grace by God toward Israel. Sacrifice is not needed for the restoration of honor in the Old Testament. One does not bring a 'shame offering' to the priest. Nor is this restoration mediated through another. It is simply stated that God will accomplish or has accomplished it.¹⁸

¹⁵ This would not be true if sin had never entered the world, but with a world of sin—which needs to be punished and put to shame—being honored implies another being put to shame.

¹⁶ The text quoted by Bowen (Ps 35:26) is particularly interesting because in it we see three different words all being used that essentially mean the same thing. "Let them be put to *shame* (יְבוֹשָׁוּ *yēbōšū*) and *disappointed* (יַחֲפְרוּ *yachpēru*) altogether . . . let them be clothed with shame and *dishonor* (כְּלִמָּה *kēlimmāh*)."

¹⁷ Nancy R. Bowen, "Damage and Healing: Shame and Honor in the Old Testament" *Koinonia Journal* III.2, 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

She fails on two points here. First she seems not to recognize that the latter (God shaming the shamer) is also entirely dependent upon God's grace. Secondly, she is wrong in saying that honor is restored apart from sacrifice. While there is no 'shame offering' that does not mean sacrifice is not necessary to restore honor. It is precisely through Christ's sacrifice that we are able to be adopted into God's family and called children of God. This is a restoration of honor and it is dependent upon sacrifice—a sacrifice that requires great shame. Honor is restored through the shame of another—both the shame of our enemy (ultimately Satan who was defeated and thus shamed at the cross) and the shame of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Often David was in serious trouble and his enemies surrounded him with boasting. Part of the fear of being shamed is that if the shame came from following God then others who sought to follow God would also be put to shame. We see this in Psalm 69:6, "Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel." So David's prayers of vindication were both for his sake and for the sake of the faith of those who follow God.

Indeed, they are prayers for the sake of God's honor, for in shaming one who takes refuge in God one also shames God himself. This is why God must act. He must rise up for the sake of his name. David cries out in Psalm 109:

Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love! Let them know that this is your hand; you, O LORD, have done it! Let them curse, but you will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad! May my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak! With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise him in the midst of the throng. For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death (Ps 109:26-31).

David cries out for help and salvation. His heart is for his enemies to see that the LORD is on his side, acting on his behalf. He asks for his accusers to be clothed with dishonor. “Shame those who are shaming me!” Yet notice what immediately follows this. “With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise him in the midst of the throng” (v. 30). The result of his deliverance is praise, not to himself, but to God. When God’s people are being shamed and God rises up to act by shaming the shamers, he is acting so that he not only honors his people, but so that he also honors himself. This is what lies behind Psalm 50:15, “[C]all upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Honor, Shame, and Salvation

In western society we most often associate salvation with the forgiveness of our sins—the removal of our guilt and restoration of our innocence. This is certainly a true and important aspect of salvation, but it fails to recognize all that the Gospel accomplishes in our lives. We say yes and amen to 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” But then we pass right over texts like 1 Peter 2:6-7, “For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’ So the honor is for you who believe.”

This is certainly not the perspective of the psalmists. Repeatedly they cry out that they not be put to shame, but that God deliver them. “In you [God] our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame” (Ps 22:4-5). The deliverance that we so long for is intimately tied up in not be put to shame! “Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed” (Ps 34:5).

This is the hope for those who wait on the Lord. This is the hope for those who take refuge in him.

Psalm 25 is a beautiful example of God's salvation working to free us from the guilt of sin as well as its shame. David begins, "To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me" (Ps 25:1-2). Then he also says, "Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions . . . for your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt for it is great" (Ps 25:7, 11).

David is concerned with both guilt *and* shame. It is especially interesting to note what he says after he has asked God to pardon his guilt in verse 11. He speaks of the man who fears the LORD and then tells us what blessings await him—all of them have to do with being honored! "His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land. The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant" (Ps 25:13-14).

Then he comes back to his need for forgiveness in verse 18, "Consider my affliction and my trouble and forgive all my sins." Yet, even in this verse he speaks of affliction and trouble, which most certainly are concerned, at least in part, with shame. So he cries out again in verse 20, "Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you."

David properly understood his need. He knew that he needed deliverance from both guilt and shame. And he knew that only God could accomplish it. Our hope is that as we take refuge in God he removes our sin and our shame. Our hope lies in the fact that "though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar" (Ps 138:6). In our humble leaning on God rather than ourselves, God shows us his regard. This is in contrast to his

relationship with the haughty whom “he knows from afar.” Honor and shame are tied into relationship. The haughty who think they have honor are removed from relationship with God, while the lowly who recognize their lack of honor before God are brought near to him. The lowly rejoice for “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory” (Ps 73:24).

The sons of Korah sum it up best, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you” (Ps 84:11-12). It is God who bestows favor and honor and therefore the one who trust in him is truly blessed.

Honor through the Shame of the Messiah

We know that Jesus Christ endured great shame as he was crucified on the cross. And yet because of his willingness to endure the cross he was exalted to the position of greatest honor in the universe—the right hand of God the Father. On the cross Jesus not only bore our guilt, but he also took upon himself our shame. He was willingly stripped, mocked, beaten, and crucified among criminals. Imagine the shame of hanging naked among common criminals waiting for death as those below hurl insults.

Jesus tells us that the whole Old Testament is a book about him (see Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). When reading the Psalms we remember that we are reading a book that is ultimately about Jesus. This is not difficult when we read psalms that are explicitly quoted by New Testament authors who apply them to Jesus. Many psalms are messianic psalms that speak in part to what David or the original author was experiencing, but ultimately they find their fulfillment in the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. What is remarkable is that in many of these

messianic psalms we see the promise of one who will willingly bear the shame of God's people so that they might be honored by being brought near to God.

Psalm 22 begins with these familiar words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" David had felt pushed away from God—forsaken. For the King of Israel to be forsaken of God is incredibly shameful. He is the one anointed to be king by God himself and yet he is forsaken. David knows that his fathers trusted in God and were not put to shame (Ps 22:5) and so he cries out for he is nothing more than a worm, scorned and despised (v. 6), and mocked by all (v.7-8). In his cries for deliverance he had confidence of God's salvation, "For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him" (Ps 22:24). There is hope of not being put to shame, for God does listen to the afflicted, to the shamed who cry out to him.

There are many verses in the psalm that are either quoted directly or alluded to in the New Testament concerning Jesus' suffering and death (v. 1 being the most notable). Certainly we ought not to interpret this psalm solely as a prediction of Christ's death; we must see it in the context of David's life and suffering as well, not to mention the way in which it would have given encouragement to the people of God before Jesus came. However, at the same time, we truly do need to see this as being fulfilled in Christ. He is the one crying out, who has felt forsaken. He is the one being put to shame and in quoting the opening verse of this psalm on the cross, he is also the one who is pointing towards a future hope. "I will tell of your name to my brothers in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (Ps 25:22).

In Psalm 69 David is concerned about not only his own honor, but the honor of all who hope in God. This psalm too is looking forward to Jesus.

Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who see you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's son. For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me (Ps 69:6-9).

This text is quite clearly also speaking of Jesus for John quotes the beginning of verse 9 in John 2:17 and Paul quotes the latter part of verse 9 in Romans 15:3. It is on Jesus that our reproaches have fallen and this text makes clear the reason he bears this reproach. It is for God's sake. It is not an accident, but a willing bearing of another's shame in order that they may not be put to shame.

Psalm 89 closes book three of the Psalter. It begins with a reminder, "You have said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: "I will establish your offspring forever; and build your throne for all generations"'" (Ps 89:3-4). God had made a covenant with David and will keep his offspring on the throne of Israel. And the God who made this promise is no ordinary god like those of the peoples surrounding them. "For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him" (Ps 89:6-7)? He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth.

It is by God's favor that "our horn is exalted" (Ps 89:18). The honor of Israel lies in the hands of almighty God. And he has honored them by lifting up David and making him king over his people so that they would be triumphant over their enemies. God's promise to the king is, "My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted . . . And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps 89:24,

26). God had promised that David's "offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me" (Ps 89:36).

Yet the reality at the time of this psalm was that God had cast them away, indeed, God was "full of wrath against [his] anointed (Ps 89:38). He had "defiled [the king's] crown in the dust" so that "he has become the scorn of his neighbors" (Ps 89:39, 41). The psalmist cried out, "You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame" (Ps 89:45). The Davidic king is no longer dominant in the land. He has been carried away and it seems that God has totally cast him off.

"How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire" (Ps 89:45)? Here is the burning question. How long will God hide and Israel be full of shame? "Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked, and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations, with which your enemies mock, O LORD, with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed" (Ps 89:50-51). The end of book three in the Psalter is not promising. The king God had set on the throne had been covered with shame and thus the whole nation was put to shame.

But the good news comes in book four as we see the shift from the Davidic king to YHWH himself. He is the true king.¹⁹ We are to seek our refuge in God as our king. The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will be blessed (Ps 91:1). Satan himself sees this psalm as a reference to the Messiah when he quotes verses 11-12 to Jesus at his temptation in the wilderness (Mat 4:6). Note how God intends to honor this one who takes shelter in him, "When

¹⁹ See Gerald H. Wilson, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* Vol. XLVI, NO. 2 (April 1992): 129-142, for a closer examination of the change in focus between David as King and YHWH as King.

he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him” (Ps 91:15).

The shift in book four of the Psalter means to point us to God as the only one who can be the true Davidic King, the true Messiah who is able to deliver us from our enemies and keep us from being put to shame. In Jesus Christ we see how this comes together for he “was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:3-4). He is the one in whom dwells the whole fullness of deity bodily (Col 2:9).

Conclusion

The Psalms make clear the shame that belongs to those who turn away from God and seek vain idols. We see how God himself will put idolaters to shame. And we see that those who seek their refuge in God will not be put to shame. They will be exalted and brought near to him in relationship. The honor of creation will be restored and even enhanced as they dwell in his holy sanctuary, near to the one who is worthy of most honor.

Yet we also see that the path to honor is a path of shame. Ultimately it is our enemies who are put to shame, but this happens through the shame-bearing of the Messiah, God’s promised king who is nothing less than God himself. God’s honor is at stake in the salvation of his people. Thus he acts with great wisdom and might to remove the shame of his people so that they might be with him, relishing his glory forever and ever.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction & Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.
- _____. *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction & Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.
- Muller, Roland. *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door*. Philadelphia: Xlibris Corporation, 2001.
- Pedersen, Johannes. *Israel: Its Life and Culture*. London: Oxford University Press; Copenhagen: V. Pio. Povl Branner, 1926.
- Stiebert, Johanna *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 346. New York: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2002.
- Wilson, Gerald H. *Psalms*, vol. 1. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zonervan, 2002.

Articles

- Bethel, Lyn M. "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991): 47-76.
- Bowen, Nancy R. "Damage and Healing: Shame and Honor in the Old Testament" *Koinonia Journal* III.2 (1991): 29-36.
- Collins, C. John. "כבוד" in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. vol. 2, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.
- Hellerman, Joseph H. "Challenging the Authority of Jesus: Mark 11:27-33 and Mediterranean Notions of Honor and Shame," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43/2 (2000): 213-228

Mellroy, David, "Honour and Shame," *Cambridge Papers: Towards a Biblical Mind* 14/2 (2005): 1-4.

Nel, Philip J. "בושׁ" in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. vol. 1, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.

Thorpe, Douglas M. "Brokenhearted: Sin, Shame, and the Damaged Self," *Koinonia Journal* III. 2 (1991): 1-28.

Wilson, Gerald H. "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* Vol. XLVI, NO. 2 (April 1992): 129-142.