

THE BOOK OF PSALMS WITHIN THE CANONICAL PROCESS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

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The fact that the book of Psalms has a long and complex history within the life of the people of ancient Israel is obvious to any reader who takes the time and effort to look at the facts. Though the psalms are frequently referred to as the “Psalms of David,” David is actually designated as the author in less than half of the 150 psalms in the MT book of Psalms. Other designated authors include Moses (Psalm 90), Solomon (Psalms 72, 127), the “sons of Korah” (Psalms 42–49, 84–85, 87–88), Asaph (Psalms 50, 73–83), and Ethan the Ezrahite (Psalm 89), and many of the psalms are without any designation so far as authorship is concerned. Moreover some psalms, like Psalm 137, clearly presuppose the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and are written from the perspective of the Babylonian exile, which took place centuries after the time of David. Thus though David plays a significant role in the development of the Psalter and perhaps may even still be seen—at least in the broadest sense—as the “author” of the Psalms we have in our Bible, the Psalms enjoyed a life of their own. And the collection of the Psalms within the life of ancient Israel continued to grow long after the death of David within the canonical process that produced the HB as we now know it.

This paper is an attempt to trace the broad outline of the history of the canonical process in ancient Israel as it relates to the Psalter. As we will see, this task cannot be done without discussing the history of the Pentateuch as well. It will be argued that we can identify at least three stages in that canonical process: (1) a preexilic Davidic Psalter, which is now preserved largely within books 1 and 5 of the MT; (2) a “Deuteronomic Psalter,” which appears to have been structured around the number seventeen and includes books 1, 3, 4 and 5; and (3) the Pentateuchal Psalter, which may well have been promulgated as late as the time of Ezra, in which book 2 (the so-called Elohistic Psalter) was inserted to complete the canonical collection.

Through the centuries scholars have commented on the fact that the book of Psalms is pentateuchal in structure. Like the Pentateuch, the Psalms are divided into five books. Book 1 contains Psalms 1–41, book 2 Psalms 42–72, book 3 Psalms 73–89, book 4 Psalms 90–106, and book 5 Psalms 107–150. In each case the book is concluded by a benediction, which is expanded in the

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case of book 5. But attempts to explain this pentateuchal phenomenon in relation to the structure and content of the Pentateuch itself have not been convincing to many scholars. Moreover specific data in the Biblical text sometimes remain to be explained. For instance, why should book 2 end with the statement, "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended," when at least eighteen psalms of David are to be found in books 3–5?

My own research in the canonical process within ancient Israel and the early Church has raised a series of relevant questions. The thesis I have been testing in a variety of ways for some years now is that of positing a seventeen-book canon of sacred Scripture, which lies behind the present arrangement of twenty-two or twenty-four books in the OT, depending on how one chooses to count them.¹ Josephus, and others after him until the time of Jerome in the fourth century, argued that there were twenty-two books in the OT. In the third century Origen went so far as to claim that the reason there were twenty-two books in the OT is that there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. That curious line of reasoning is found rather widely among early Christian scholars who addressed the matter. Meanwhile in rabbinic Judaism scholars counted twenty-four books (and sometimes twenty-six), though the number and the order of the canonical books under consideration actually remains the same.

The numbers seventeen and twenty-six were sacred numbers in ancient Israel, as C. J. Labuschagne has shown.² The numbers appear to be determined from the numerical value of the divine name YHWH in the Hebrew language: Y = 10, H = 5, and W = 6 in terms of the normal numerical values assigned to letters in the Hebrew alphabet. When these numbers are added, Y (10) + H (5) + W (6) + H (5) = 26. When the sum of the digits in these same numbers is added, (10 = 1 + 0) + 5 + 6 + 5 = 17. In other words, the numbers seventeen and twenty-six are associated with God's personal name.

I have argued elsewhere that the simplest version of the canon of the OT is a seventeen-book structure in which the books are grouped in four structures of four books each, arranged around the book of Deuteronomy at the center:³

Genesis	Leviticus		Joshua
Exodus	Numbers		Judges
		Deuteronomy	
Isaiah	Ezekiel		Psalms
Jeremiah	The Twelve		Proverbs
			Samuel Kings Job <i>Mēgillôt</i>

The term *Mēgillôt* refers to the five festal scrolls of ancient Judaism: Ruth (Weeks/Pentecost), Song of Songs (Passover), Ecclesiastes (Booths), Lamentations (9th of Ab, the date of the destruction of the temple) and Esther (Purim).

¹ See D. L. Christensen, "Josephus and the Twenty-Two-Book Canon of Sacred Scripture," *JETS* 29/1 (March 1986) 37–46.

² C. J. Labuschagne, *Vertellen met getallen: Functie en symboliek van getallen in de bijbelse oudheid* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij, 1992).

³ See n. 1 above and D. L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (WBC 6A; Dallas: Word, 1991) li–lv.

The importance of the number seventeen within the canonical process in ancient Israel is suggested by the following chart of the ages of the patriarchs at the time of their deaths in the book of Genesis:

<i>Patriarch</i>	<i>Age at death</i>	<i>Sum of digits</i>
Abraham	175 = 7×5^2	7 + 5 + 5 = 17
Isaac	180 = 5×6^2	5 + 6 + 6 = 17
Jacob	147 = 3×7^2	3 + 7 + 7 = 17

Nahum Sarna noted that the ages of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the time of their deaths in the Genesis narrative fit the above numerical pattern,⁴ and C. J. Labuschagne subsequently pointed out that in all three cases the sum of the digits used in the formula add up to the number seventeen.⁵ Labuschagne also suggested that the life span of Joseph (and Joshua as well) may also be related to this numerical schema in that $110 = 5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2$.

The significance of the number seventeen in the Psalter emerged from the simple observation that books 3 and 4 each contain seventeen psalms. It was not easy to see how the number seventeen applied to the remainder of the Psalter, however, until I realized that the present pentateuchal structure of the Psalter probably emerged later in time when the Pentateuch itself received its present form, perhaps in the time of Ezra. The seventeen-book canon of the OT is the "Deuteronomic" canon of the sixth century BC—that is, the exilic and early postexilic era in ancient Israel.

If book 2 is taken as a secondary insertion to complete the Psalter in its present pentateuchal structure, the resulting numerical data are most suggestive: an original "Deuteronomic Psalter" made up of 119 psalms, which is 17×7 . Two collections of seventeen psalms (books 3 and 4) were framed by breaking apart what could be called the original Davidic Psalter (books 1 and 5), which are made up of 85 psalms ($= 17 \times 5$). Of these 85 psalms, 51 ($= 17 \times 3$) belong to David and 34 ($= 17 \times 2$) to other authors. It would appear that an original Davidic Psalter, which is largely preexilic in date and preserved in books 1 and 5 of the MT, was edited into a "Deuteronomic Psalter," which was put together in the exilic or early postexilic period and features the number seventeen—made by splitting the Davidic Psalter into two parts after Psalm 41, which serve as a frame around two collections of seventeen psalms (books 3 and 4). The present Pentateuchal Psalter was formed by inserting another collection of 31 psalms (book 2), which may have originated in ancient sanctuaries other than Jerusalem such as that in Dan and/or Bethel of an earlier era.⁶ It was this final edited form of the Psalter that was made to correspond to the reading of the Pentateuch.

⁴ N. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 84.

⁵ C. Labuschagne, "The Literary and Theological Function of Divine Speech in the Pentateuch," VTSup 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1985) 171.

⁶ M. D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982), argues that the Korah Psalms originated in Dan. H. P. Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph* (SBLDS

It should be noted that in Babylonian Judaism a system for the public reading of the Torah in synagogue services was developed such that the entire Pentateuch was read through each calendar year. In 1893, however, Adolf Büchler drew scholarly attention to an alternate system in Palestinian Judaism, in which the Pentateuch was read in a three-year cycle.⁷ This so-called triennial lectionary cycle was generally replaced in Judaism after the second century AD by the annual Babylonian cycle.

Büchler's interest focused on the reading of the Law and Prophets in a triennial cycle. The reading of the Torah began with the reading of Gen 1:1–6:8 in the four Sabbaths of the spring month of Nisan, which is the first month in the Jewish numbering of the months. In this triennial cycle Genesis would have commenced at the beginning of the first month of the first year, Exodus about the 15th of the eleventh month (Shebat) of the first year, Leviticus at the beginning of the seventh month (Tishri) in the second year, Numbers about the 15th of the eleventh month (Shebat) in the second year, and Deuteronomy at the beginning of the sixth month (Elul) of the third year.

Büchler posited a simple model for explaining the *haftaroth* readings from the Prophets that accompany the readings of the Torah in the synagogue services. Originally these readings appear to have been single verses that were selected from various texts in the Prophets to correspond with the regular readings from the Torah. In time these passages were expanded into more lengthy readings.

Edward G. King examined the Psalter in light of Büchler's thesis with fascinating results.⁸ Unfortunately his insights were not easily reconciled with the conclusions and underlying presuppositions of the method of form criticism as it was developing in the study of the Psalms. The result was that the work of Büchler and King was largely ignored within the mainstream of Biblical scholarship, particularly in Christian circles.

The two diagrams below will help to clarify King's conclusions.⁹ The first diagram explains the division of the Pentateuch into *sēdārīm* on the triennial system, as Büchler had shown some years earlier. The readings in the three years are represented by three concentric circles, and the cycle is taken as beginning in Nisan 1. The triennial cycle accords in a striking manner with Jewish traditions in which numerous incidents traditionally associated with certain dates are found to come around in the cycle to the very dates assigned by the tradition. These precise dates were evolved by the rabbis from the cycle of Sabbath readings.

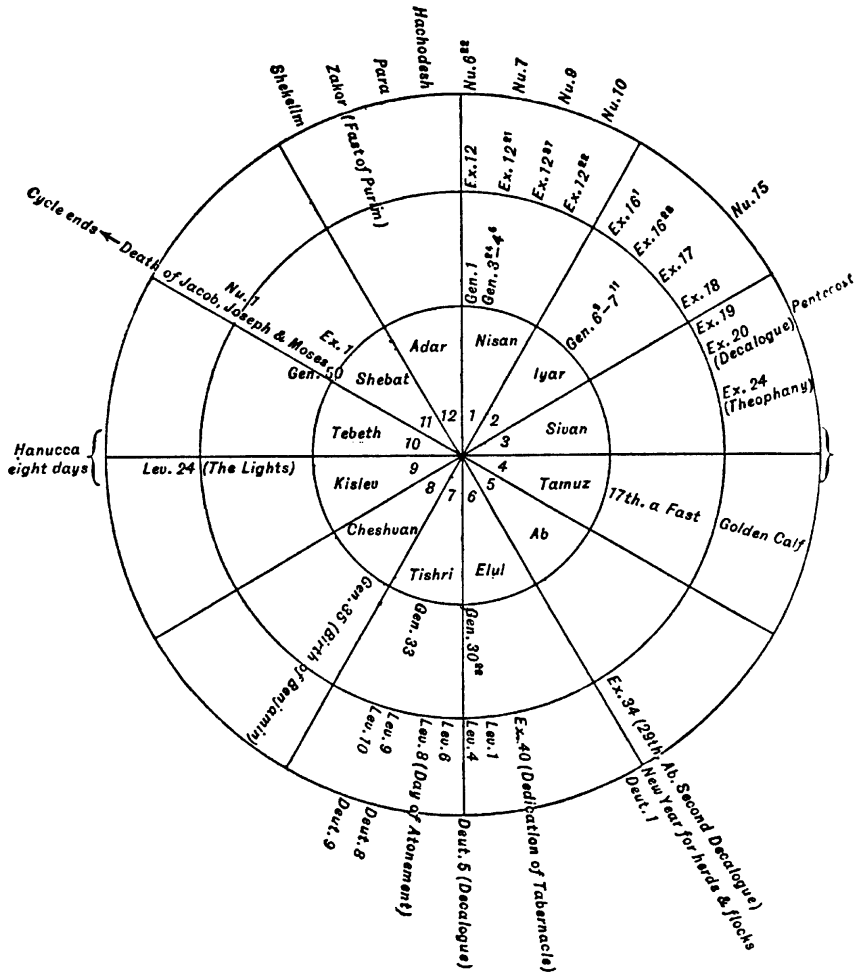
88; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), places the Asaph Psalms in what he calls the Ephraimite tradition, which may have originated in Bethel.

⁷ A. Büchler, "The Reading of the Law and Prophets in a Triennial Cycle," *JQR* 5 (1893) 420–468; *JQR* 6 (1894) 1–73.

⁸ E. G. King, "The Influence of the Triennial Cycle upon the Psalter," *JTS* 5 (1904) 203–213. See also I. Abrahams, "E. G. King on 'The Influence of the Triennial Cycle upon the Psalter,'" *JQR* 16 (1904) 420–423.

⁹ The diagrams are taken from I. Abrahams in *JQR* 16 (1904) 580–581.

Diagram 1



Some illustrations are useful at this point. As King put it: “In the first year of the cycle the readings from Genesis would have reached chap. xi, i.e. the Story of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues, at the season of Pentecost. Now it is certain that the writer of Acts ii associated the Confusion of Tongues with the Day of Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit being a reversal of the curse of Babel.”¹⁰ Again in the second year of the cycle the Decalogue is read on Pentecost—whence, as Büchler suggested, the traditional association with Pentecost of the giving of the Law. It is curious too that Exodus 34

¹⁰ King, “Influence” 205.

comes around to the 29th of Ab, exactly eighty days after the 6th of Sivan (Pentecost), and the eighty days are accounted for by the two periods of forty before and after the sin of the golden calf. Now Exodus 34 “will be found to contain the elements of a second Decalogue by J, originally independent of the Decalogue by E in Exodus xx. Thus the 29th of Ab practically marks a second giving of the Law, and we may note the fact that, in the third year of the cycle, Deuteronomy began on that day.”¹¹

It is interesting to note that in this system the reading of the first, third and fifth books of the Pentateuch ended on the same day, namely the first Sabbath of the eleventh month (Shebat). In this tradition the deaths of Jacob, Joseph and Moses are reported on this same date at the conclusion of the first and third years of the cycle of readings.

One should also note that the editor of Deuteronomy agrees with this tradition, for he assigns the book of Deuteronomy to the first day of the eleventh month: “And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel” (Deut 1:3). The Song of Moses and the death of Moses are evidently placed on the same day (31:22; 32:48 ff.). Indeed the book of Deuteronomy is but the episode of one day between Num 37:12–15 and Deut 32:48–52. The appendix containing the Song of Moses and the Blessing of Moses would then supply Sabbath readings for the remaining Sabbaths in Shebat and Adar.

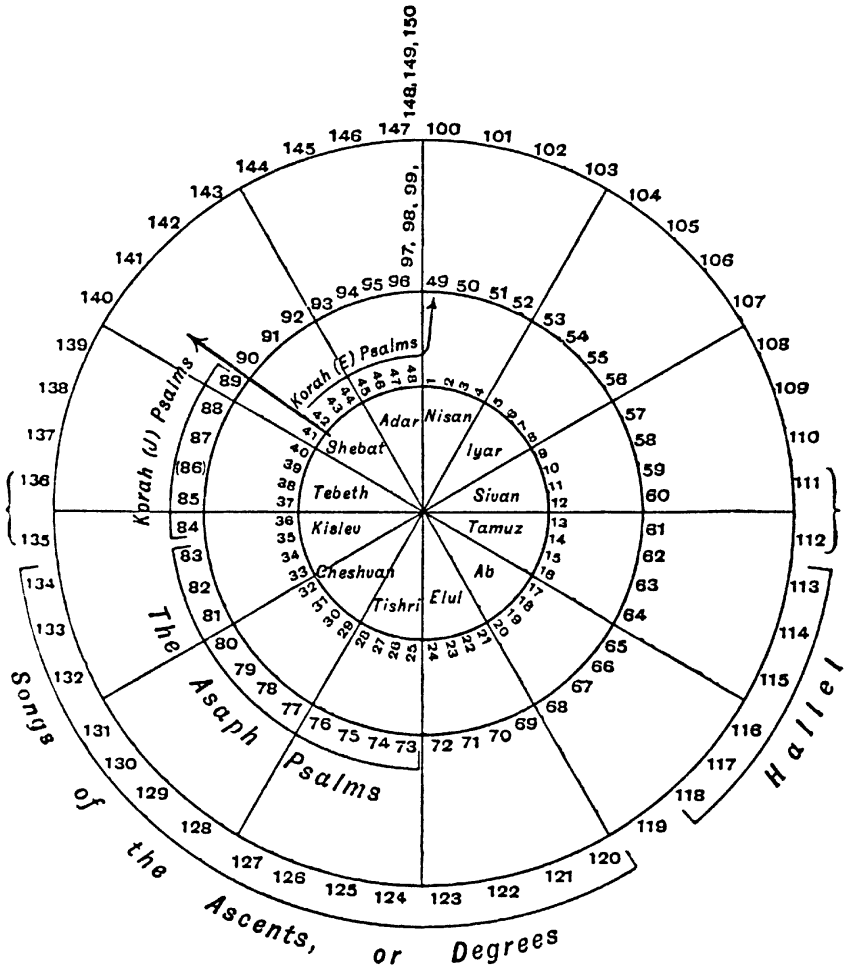
If we now turn our attention to the second diagram, we have King’s attempt to arrange the Psalter for a triennial cycle of 147 to 150 Sabbaths. The structure is indeed suggestive, particularly as emended by the observations of Norman Snaith.¹² In the first place, we note that the first and third books of the Psalter end in Shebat, exactly as the first and third books of the Pentateuch end in Shebat. We also note that the second book of the Psalter ends (Psalm 72) at the close of Elul, exactly as the second Book of the Pentateuch ends at the close of Elul. Moreover the benediction at the end of this second book takes on new meaning when we hear it in connection with the closing words of Exodus and the closing year, which would have been heard in the same service of public worship. The prayer “May the whole earth be filled with his glory” (Ps 72:19) is to be compared with the words of Exod 40:34: “And the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.” We may also compare the words “The prayers of David, the Son of Jesse, are ended” with the words “So Moses ended the work” (40:33).

The Asaph Psalms (73–83) would begin in the seventh month—that is, at the Feast of Asiph—at the season when in the first year of the cycle Gen 30:22 ff. was read, which tells of the birth of Joseph and derives the name from the root ³sp. King argues that the Asaph Psalms were connected with this season of the Asiph and with the house of Joseph. In the second year of the cycle Leviticus began at this season, and the Asaph Psalms are essentially “Levitical” Psalms.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² N. Snaith, “The Triennial Cycle and the Psalter,” ZAW 51 (1933) 302–307.

Diagram 2



Again it is interesting to note the position of Psalm 90 in the triennial cycle, for we find that it comes at the very time that tradition associated with the death of Moses. The title of this psalm, "A prayer of Moses the man of God," should be compared to the heading of the Blessing of Moses in Deut 33:1: "This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death." The two texts were read on the same occasion in the worship experience of the people of ancient Israel.

By way of conclusion for this paper I would like to suggest an historical analogy that may help us understand how the structure of the Pentateuch, and the Psalter in turn, came to reflect the actual cultic calendar in the life

of the people of ancient Israel. In 1971 R. Helms explored the structure of *The Code of Handsome Lake* in terms of the use of this particular text in the festivals of the Six Nations' tribal assemblies of the Iroquois in upper New York and southeastern Canada of the nineteenth century.¹³

After their defeat in the French and Indian War the Iroquois lost hope. As Arthur Parker put it, the "crushing blow of Sullivan's campaign was yet felt [in 1800]. The national order of the Confederacy was destroyed. Poverty, the sting of defeat, the loss of ancestral homes, the memory of broken promises, and the hostility of the white settlers all conspired to bring despair."¹⁴ Against this background *The Code of Handsome Lake* emerged as the "Bible of the Iroquois." After the death of Handsome Lake this collection of 130 oracles became a sacred document in the life of that people.

At the outset Handsome Lake was a prime example of the deterioration of the Iroquois people. He was a minor chief and a virtual alcoholic invalid by middle age. One night, however, as he lay looking up at the stars, Handsome Lake prayerfully thanked "the Great Ruler that he can see them, for he knows that he, the Great Ruler, has made them. Now it comes to him that because of these new thoughts he may obtain help to arise from his bed."¹⁵ While Handsome Lake was in the midst of his reverie his relatives, sitting outside, suddenly heard him exclaim "Nio!" ("So be it!"). Handsome Lake rose from his bed, walked outside and fell down apparently dead. But fifteen hours later he awakened from a trance and described a wonderful vision: "I saw three men clothed in fine clean raiment. Their cheeks were painted red. . . . Never before have I seen such handsome commanding men." The visitors healed Handsome Lake, telling him that from henceforth "we shall continually reveal things unto you. We, the servants of him who made us, say that as he employed us to come unto you to reveal his will, so you must carry it to your people."¹⁶

Those three angelic visitors delivered to Handsome Lake a series of 130 oracles, which eventually became *The Code of Handsome Lake*. During the lifetime of Handsome Lake this code became the basis of what Anthony Wallace has called a "revitalization movement," "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort of members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."¹⁷

What had happened to Handsome Lake in this instance was typical of a process Wallace demonstrated in other settings. During what Wallace calls the "personality transformation" of persons like Handsome Lake, a "supernatural being appears to the prophet-to-be, explains his own and society's troubles as being entirely or partly a result of the violation of certain rules,

¹³ R. Helms, "The Code of Handsome Lake: A Literary Study of Prophecy," *Genre* 4 (1971) 18-38.

¹⁴ A. C. Parker, "The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet," *Education Department Bulletin of the New York State Museum* 530 (November 1, 1912) 10. This work was reprinted in *Parker on the Iroquois* (ed. W. N. Fenton; Syracuse, 1968). I owe this reference to R. Helms, "Code" 36.

¹⁵ Helms, "Code" 19.

¹⁶ Parker, "Code" 24-25.

¹⁷ A. F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956) 265, 269.

and promises individual and social revitalization if the injunctions are followed and the rituals practiced, but personal and social catastrophe if they are not.”¹⁸ As Helms has noted, Handsome Lake’s very first oracle follows this pattern: “Now the beings spoke, saying, ‘We must now relate our message. We will uncover the evil upon the earth and show how men spoil the laws the Great Ruler has made and thereby make him angry.’”¹⁹

“Revitalization movements are evidently not unusual phenomena,” Wallace continues, “but are recurrent features in human history.”²⁰ Indeed, according to Helms, Wallace “concludes that the revitalization movement is so inevitable a facet of human history that it could be called a ‘behavioral unit’” in terms of social psychology.²¹

During his lifetime Handsome Lake taught the laws he had received through divine revelation within the context of seasonal ritual activities, which of course is fitting for an agrarian society. Thus *The Code of Handsome Lake* became a vital part of a thanksgiving ceremony corresponding to the beginning, middle, ending, or continuation of the vegetation cycle. Each ritual had its appointed time and circumstances:

Now another message to tell your people. The Creator has sanctioned four dances for producing a joyful spirit, and he has placed them in the keeping of certain “keepers of the ceremonies,” who have authority over them. The Creator ordered that on certain times and occasions there should be thanksgiving ceremonies. At such times all must thank the Creator that they live. After that, let the chief thank him for the ground and things on the ground and then upward to the sky and the heaven-world where he is.²²

The Code of Handsome Lake enabled the Iroquois to make drastic changes in their culture: from the hunting and gathering life of old to a settled, house-building and crop-raising existence. But in the course of time Handsome Lake died, and the function of authority for maintaining the new life of that community shifted from the prophet to a prophetic book. The book was an attempt to reproduce in literary form the functions and messages of a working prophet, arranged in such a way that the procession of oracles reproduces the functional pattern of his career. That is to say, as Helms has put it, “the prophetic book is a literary prophet-surrogate; whatever the pattern or the prophetic function (if there is such a typical pattern), the prophetic book will be in the form of that pattern, writ small.”²³

During his own lifetime Handsome Lake was aware of the fact that his *Code* had taken the form of the tripartite nature of the prophetic undertaking of his own life. In one of his visions he relates that “the messengers told me that my life journey would be in three stages, and when I entered the third I would enter into the eternity of the New World, the land of our Creator.”²⁴

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 270.

¹⁹ Helms, “Code” 21, who is quoting from Parker, “Code” 27 (section 1 of the *Code*).

²⁰ Wallace, “Revitalization” 267.

²¹ Helms, “Code” 21.

²² *Ibid.* 27.

²³ *Ibid.* 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 28–29 (section 48 of the *Code*).

This three-part division is basic to understanding his book, which was actually written down after his death.

The Code of Handsome Lake became the mythos or verbal basis for two Iroquois calendrical rituals: one at the September meeting of the Six Nations of the Iroquois, and the other at the annual New Year festival during the moon *Niskowukni* (January 15 to February 15). On these two occasions *The Code of Handsome Lake* was recited in its entirety to the assembly. According to Parker, “the time consumed in reciting the *Gaiwiiio* (the Code) is always three days.”²⁵ In other words the form of the ritual recitation of the *Code* and the stages of the prophetic career correspond. They are in fact functions of each other.

Helms has demonstrated the fact that the structure of the prophetic book known as *The Code of Handsome Lake* and the rituals with which it is associated are the same. The ritual recitation took place in the morning, for Iroquois taboo restricts all sacred activity to those hours before noon. The 130 oracles are divided into three sections, each with its own dominant theme. The first day is spent in recitation and discussion of oracles 1–19, which present and denounce the inadequacies and evils of the Iroquois people before Handsome Lake’s revelations. These oracles include positive commands for reform, the denunciation and prohibition of alcohol, the proscription of witches, the commandment of monogamy, and denunciation of sexual misconduct. This section corresponds to what Wallace has designated the “existing culture” stage.

Beginning with oracle 20 on the second day the major theme shifts. The tone of the denunciation of social evils increases steadily as the sense of culture-wide sin grows in intensity until it becomes obvious that section 2 is primarily about the end of the world itself. Listen to the words of oracle 38: “If all the world would repent the earth would become as new again. Because of sin the underworld is crumbling with decay. The world is full of sin. Truly this is so.”²⁶ The first explicit prediction of an *eschaton* appears in the very next oracle: “We, the messengers of the Creator, are of the opinion that the world will continue for three generations longer. . . . Then will *Gaiwiiio* (the Code) be fulfilled.”²⁷

When the faithful hear that the world will end, they also hear words of comfort: “Now another message for your people. You have had the constant fear that the white race would exterminate you. The Creator will care for his real people.”²⁸

Some will follow the teaching of the *Code* and some will not. Those who refuse to heed these words will be destroyed in a series of apocalyptic catastrophes that are described in the concluding oracles of day two—namely, oracles 70–77. Section 2 ends with one final apocalyptic oracle: “Now another message. Now we think that when the end comes the earth will be de-

²⁵ Ibid. 29, which quotes Parker, “Code” 6.

²⁶ Helms, “Code” 30.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. (section 44 of the *Code*).

stroyed by fire and not one upon it will escape, for all the earth will be enveloped in flames and all those who refuse to believe in *Gaiwiiio* (the Code) will be in it.”²⁹ Note that only those who do not accept the *Code* will be in the final conflagration. All believers leave the world at the time of the great destruction. The old world’s end will be equivalent to their translation into the New World: “Now another message. Now there will be some who enter into a sleep. When they lie down they will be in health, and as they sleep the Creator will withdraw their lives for they are true. To the faithful this will happen.”³⁰

With oracle 77 there is no place to go but up. The stage is set for the third day of the ritual and the introduction of a new theme. The recitation of the third day begins with a vision of a man in heaven: “In his earth-life he cleansed himself each day, visited and enjoyed himself in his best clothing. He was ever good to his fellow beings, and so he is blessed and will receive the reward reserved for him by his Creator.”³¹ The recitation continues with a cosmological vision of the world under divine control: the New World, with its two sections—one inhabited by the unbelievers in torment, the other by the faithful in bliss.

It should be clear from this brief description of the content of *The Code of Handsome Lake* that its three-part division corresponds to the tripartite division of the prophet’s own career, divided into sections of moribundity, destruction, and final bliss. There is, however, an even more basic parallel, as Helms has noted, in that the form of the *Code* recitation corresponds to the form of the New Year ritual itself.

New Year ritual is a typical ceremony among tribal cultures the world over. As Helms put it:

Annual renewal of man’s and nature’s lease on life must be fought for, worked for; the weapon or tool is what anthropologists call the rite of intensification. The death of the year is a time of intense crisis in primitive culture; the end of the crop cycle and hibernation and migration of game leave many a group near starvation by the end of winter, and the changing pattern of the seasons necessitates drastic changes in the pattern of group life, causing painful strains and stresses in human interaction. There must be an absolute guarantee that spring will come, with its attendant reinvigoration of nature and society.³²

This guarantee is achieved through religious ritual that anthropologists call “rites of intensification.”

Among the Iroquois such rites of intensification occurred at the New Year of midwinter festival in the celebrated White Dog Sacrifice, in which a dog was strangled and ceremonially burned as an offering to the Great Ruler. Helms called attention to the parallel to “the Hebrew Yom Kippur,”

²⁹ Ibid. 31 (section 77 of the *Code*).

³⁰ Ibid. (section 75 of the *Code*).

³¹ Ibid. 31–32 (section 78 of the *Code*).

³² Ibid. 32–33.

where one also encounters ritual fasting, work stoppage, scapegoat expulsion, and bullock sin-offering. We may generalize with Helms

and say that the regularly recurring crisis of the death of the year presents a grave threat to the stability of the group; the threat is met and overcome by the ordering of group energies into ritual actions whose manifest function is the assurance of the continuation of the natural cycle, and whose latent function is the releasing of anxiety over whether nature *will* continue its cycle, and the countering of the disruptions these anxieties create. Cultural crisis of the sort described by Wallace as a period of cultural distortion evokes, in a parallel way, the ritual activity of prophetism. That is to say, rites of intensification and the revitalization movement of human culture's parallel answers to parallel kinds of crisis.³³

Handsome Lake died in 1815. Sometime after that date it became evident to his followers that his oracles, which had been put to memory by many of the faithful over the years of his mission, needed repetition from time to time in the hearing of the entire populace. It is not at all surprising that the content and structure of *The Code of Handsome Lake* should thus parallel the structure of the Iroquois New Year festival. Nor should it surprise us today to realize that the structure and content of the Pentateuch on a much grander scale, and the Psalter as well, parallels the calendar of sacred worship in ancient Israel in which these five Books of Moses, together with the Psalms, were read in a triennial lectionary cycle.

³³ Ibid. 36.

Students of the Psalms are not agreed on the antiquity and reliability of these superscriptions. That many of them are at least preexilic appears evident from the fact that the Septuagint translators were sometimes unclear as to their meaning. Furthermore, the practice of attaching titles, including the name of the author, is ancient. On the other hand, comparison between the Septuagint and the Hebrew texts shows that the content of some titles was still subject to change well into the postexilic period. Most discussion centers on categories 1 and 6 above. To complicate matters, there is evidence within the Psalter that at least some of the psalms were subjected to editorial revision in the course of their transmission. The fact that the book of Psalms has a long and complex history within the life of the people of ancient Israel is obvious to any reader who takes the time and effort to look at the facts. Though the psalms are frequently referred to as the "Psalms of David," David is actually designated as the author in less than half of the 150 psalms in the MT book of Psalms. The importance of the number seventeen within the canonical process in ancient Israel is suggested by the following chart of the ages of the patriarchs at the time of their deaths in the book of Genesis: Patriarch Abraham Isaac Jacob Age 175 180 147 at death = 7 52 = 5 62 = 3 72 Sum of digits 7 + 5 + 5 = 17 5 + 6 + 6 = 17. The Book of Psalms, commonly referred to simply as Psalms, the Psalter or "the Psalms", is the first book of the Ketuvim ("Writings"), the third section of the Hebrew Bible, and thus a book of the Christian Old Testament. The title is derived from the Greek translation, ᾠδὴν ᾠδῶν, psalmoi, meaning "instrumental music" and, by extension, "the words accompanying the music". The book is an anthology of individual psalms, with 150 in the Jewish and Western Christian tradition and more in the Eastern