

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

## Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

---

Doctor of Theology Dissertation

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

---

5-1-1994

### When God Becomes Your Enemy- The Theology of the Complaint Psalms

Ingvar Floysvik

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir\_floysviki@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/thd>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Floysvik, Ingvar, "When God Becomes Your Enemy- The Theology of the Complaint Psalms" (1994). *Doctor of Theology Dissertation*. 112.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/thd/112>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Theology Dissertation by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

WHEN GOD BECOMES YOUR ENEMY: THE THEOLOGY  
OF THE COMPLAINT PSALMS

---

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Theology

---

by

Ingvar Fløysvik

May 1994

Approved by

Paul R. Rasler

Advisor

Arthur D. Bacon

Reader

Jaap P. Rens

Reader

© Copyright by:

**Ingvar Fløysvik**

**1994**

To

Helga,

Hanna, Pål, and Marion



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my advisor Dr. Paul R. Raabe for many useful suggestions along the way and for quick and thorough responses to materials submitted to him. He has been most helpful throughout the work with this dissertation. Also I would like to thank the readers, Dr. Jacob A. O. Preus III, who spent much time trying to correct my poor English, and Dr. Arthur D. Bacon.

The Director of Graduate Studies at Concordia Seminary, Dr. Wayne E. Schmidt, has been very supportive, making sure that every practical matter during my stay here would run as smooth as possible. Very much to his credit, it has been a pleasure to be an overseas student at the Graduate School of Concordia Seminary.

I want to thank Norwegian Lutheran Mission which has given full financial support during my studies.

In a work on the Old Testament, where one is so dependent on the Hebrew language, it is also appropriate to thank Dr. Ebbe E. Knudsen, Director to the Semitic Institute at the University of Oslo, who taught me Hebrew.

Finally, much of the credit for this work goes to my wife, Helga, who has had to bear more than her share of the responsibilities for home and family and has done so with a loving attitude and an excellent manner.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	vi
 Chapter		
1.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Introduction .....	1
	Text and Translation .....	5
	Terminology .....	6
	The Subgenre of the "Complaint Psalms" .....	8
	Structure and Interpretation .....	12
	Theological Questions .....	15
2.	THE TEXTS .....	17
	Psalm 6 .....	17
	Text .....	17
	Translation .....	18
	Translation Notes .....	18
	Structure .....	31
	Strophes .....	31
	Stanzas .....	33
	Progression in Content and Mood .....	34
	The Problem .....	40
	The Prayer .....	41
	The Appeal .....	41
	Psalm 44 .....	43
	Text .....	43
	Translation .....	44
	Translation Notes .....	46
	Structure .....	58
	Strophes .....	58
	Stanzas .....	59
	Progression in Content and Mood .....	60
	The Problem .....	68
	The Prayer .....	68
	The Appeal .....	68
	Psalm 74 .....	70
	Text .....	70
	Translation .....	71

Translation Notes . . . . .	72
Structure . . . . .	90
Stanzas . . . . .	90
Progression in Content and Mood . . . . .	92
The Problem . . . . .	100
The Prayer . . . . .	100
The Appeal . . . . .	101
Psalm 88 . . . . .	103
Text . . . . .	103
Translation . . . . .	104
Translation Notes . . . . .	105
Structure . . . . .	119
Stanzas . . . . .	119
Progression in Content and Mood . . . . .	120
The Problem . . . . .	126
The Prayer . . . . .	127
The Appeal . . . . .	127
Psalm 90 . . . . .	128
Text . . . . .	128
Translation . . . . .	129
Translation Notes . . . . .	130
Structure . . . . .	143
Strophes . . . . .	143
Stanzas . . . . .	145
Progression in Content and Mood . . . . .	146
The Problem . . . . .	152
The Prayer . . . . .	152
The Appeal . . . . .	153
 3. THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS . . . . .	 154
Introduction . . . . .	154
Structure and the Progression in Content and Mood . . . . .	154
The Problem . . . . .	158
Disasters Interpreted as Caused by God's Wrath . . . . .	158
The Wrath of God as Heart of the Problem . . . . .	161
The Character of Divine Wrath . . . . .	164
General . . . . .	164
Words for Divine Wrath . . . . .	166
God as Absent and Indifferent . . . . .	169
God as Actively Hostile . . . . .	173
The Absence and Active Hostility of God Viewed Together . . . . .	176
Why is God Angry? . . . . .	177

The Prayer .....	181
Presuppositions for the Prayer .....	181
The Contents of the Prayer .....	187
The Appeal .....	191
Appeal to Yahweh's Abiding Character .....	191
Appeal to Yahweh's Relation to His People and to the Individual .....	200
Appeal to Yahweh's Reputation .....	205
Other Appeals .....	206
Conclusion .....	208
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	212

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <u>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u>
BHS	<u>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</u>
CBQ	<u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u>
Even-Shoshan	<u>A New Concordance to the Old Testament</u>
GKC	<u>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</u>
JBL	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
Jastrow	<u>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature</u>
Joüon - Muraoka	<u>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</u>
JSOT	<u>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</u>
KB	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, <u>Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</u> (3rd. edition)
KTU	<u>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</u>
TWAT	<u>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</u>
Waltke - O'Connor	<u>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</u>
ZAW	<u>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>
ZTK	<u>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</u>
§	Paragraph (The grammars are referred to by paragraph rather than by page)

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The experience of being forgotten, rejected or even attacked by God has been very real for people of all times. An untimely death in the family, prolonged sickness, unfair treatment in the community or in court, or on the larger scale, natural disasters, war and persecution, these and other catastrophes may make individuals or whole communities experience God as an enemy. Readers of the Bible recognize that in some psalms the psalmists share these experiences. They complain to God that he has abandoned them or that he is angry with them. The present dissertation is an investigation into the theology of precisely these psalms. We will approach them with the question: What does a faithful in ancient Israel do when he experiences God as an enemy? What are the theological assumptions underlying these psalms?

This aim also puts some limitations on the scope and focus of this study. It is first of all a study of the theology in a particular group of psalms within the Hebrew Psalter. We do not claim to write a theology of the book of Psalms. Nor do we presume to cover all the literature in the Hebrew Bible where God is viewed as

hostile. The relationship between the book of Job,<sup>1</sup> the book of Lamentations, and several complaints in the book of Jeremiah to the complaint psalms, would certainly be a most interesting and valuable study. But it would exceed the limits of what it is possible to do in this dissertation. Therefore the target for the study is limited to the complaint psalms. This is a study of Hebrew psalms and not a comparative study. Mesopotamia has a very ancient and rich lament literature, some items of which show distinct similarities to the body investigated here.<sup>2</sup> Also Egypt has handed down to us some lament psalms.<sup>3</sup> It is our conviction, however, that we have to work with the psalms in their own context first and evaluate their precise function in the religious system where they belong before a meaningful comparison across ethnic and religious borders can be made. This has not always been observed in comparative studies, with the result that superficial parallels have been highlighted while possible differences in function have been ignored. Our aim is to study the theological assumptions of ancient Israelite believers. The use of these psalms in the New Testament,<sup>4</sup> by the

---

<sup>1</sup>For the theology of the book of Job, see P. R. Raabe, "Human Suffering in Biblical Context," Concordia Journal 15 (1989): 139-155.

<sup>2</sup>A good example and a fine piece of literature is "Prayer of Lamentation to Ishtar," J. B. Pritchard, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd. edition with supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 383-385.

<sup>3</sup>As far as we know, the excavations in Ugarit or any other Northwest Semitic remains have so far not brought us any piece of lament literature.

<sup>4</sup>For example Psalm 22 was quoted by Jesus on the cross. This raises interesting hermeneutical questions for a Christian reading of these psalms. As we look for the theology of the psalms in their Old Testament context, these questions would be outside the scope of this study.

church fathers, or by the reformers,<sup>5</sup> will therefore not be dealt with. We will work merely within an Old Testamental framework and aim to answer the question mentioned above. Though the books on Psalms are legion, as far as we know, no one has approached the complaint psalms specifically to investigate how the believers of ancient Israel handled God's anger.

We have selected five psalms as subjects for in depth study: Psalms 6, 44, 74, 88, and 90. These psalms are representative for the body of psalms where God is experienced as an enemy. Psalms 6 and 88 are individual psalms where a near-death experience, probably associated with severe sickness, is central. Examples of similar psalms are Psalms 13, 22, and to some extent Psalm 42-43. Psalm 44 is occasioned by military defeat, as are Psalms 60, 80, and 89. Psalm 74 looks back on the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. This feature is shared by Psalm 79. Finally Psalm 90 is a psalm where no external disaster is described but where the problem is life under God's wrath. Psalm 39 has some similarity with this psalm. Psalm 90 further shows a certain "wisdom"-character, as does Psalm 9-10.<sup>6</sup>

This dissertation consists of three chapters. In the first we present the issues, explain our method, and survey some of the background in contemporary scholarship. The second chapter presents the texts, translation, translation notes, structure and

---

<sup>5</sup>For example the importance of these psalms for Martin Luther's distinction between Deus revelatus and Deus absconditus would be an interesting question indeed, which could serve as a topic for a dissertation in historical theology.

<sup>6</sup>See G. Castellino, Libro dei Salmi (Rome: Marietti, 1955), 772-784. Castellino groups Psalm 9-10 under "Salmi sapienziali," wisdom psalms.



progression in content and mood of the psalms. In this chapter we will further ask what are the problems, the content of the prayers, and the appeals presented in the five psalms investigated here. In chapter 3 we will look for the theological assumptions in these psalms, particularly with reference to the description of the problems, the nature and content of the prayers, and the appeals employed in order to persuade Yahweh to change his course of action concerning them. In this chapter we will also make use of evidence from the complaint psalms which were not included in chapter 2. From this we will try to answer the question: what did the faithful in ancient Israel do when they experienced God as against them.

It is our hope that this investigation also may be of some help for those who struggle with these kinds of questions themselves in their life situation. May the psalmists' prayer become their prayer.

We have not tried to ascertain the particular occasion that led to the writing of the individual psalms, except for Psalm 74, where the destruction of the temple in 586/7 seems clearly to form part of the background. We have also not looked for a cultic setting for the psalms. No doubt there was a particular situation that caused a particular psalm to be composed, and we are convinced that the psalms functioned in the worship life of the individual and the community; if not they would hardly have been handed down to us. But precisely because they were intended for use in worship, they usually exhibit a generalized language that is applicable to different situations. Thus it is not necessary to define, for example, the particular disease from which the psalmist in Psalm 88 suffers in order to appreciate the mood and the

theological assumptions of the psalm. Similarly, we need not know which war was lost in Psalm 44 in order to understand how the psalmist interpreted this defeat and what this interpretation assumes about God.

The psalms in the Hebrew Psalter were written by different people over a period of several hundred years. It may thus appear a bit hazardous to approach them with a synchronic method. However, a diachronic approach would face almost insurmountable difficulties. There is at present no consensus as to the dating of the psalms. A psalm that is assumed to date from earlier years of the divided monarchy by one scholar may well be regarded as late post-exilic by another.<sup>7</sup> However, since the psalms chosen for this study all share the features that they protest God's treatment of his people or the individual, addressing this protest to God while still claiming him as their God, we think the corpus is homogeneous enough to make a synchronic method adequate.

### Text and Translation

The text found in this thesis is the Masoretic Text as printed in Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). We take a very cautious attitude to word emendations,

---

<sup>7</sup>Unfortunately the superscriptions of the psalms give us little help in ascertaining a date for the psalms that can be generally accepted by the scholarly community. These titles are usually regarded as late and not reliable as to authorship and date of the individual psalms. Now, the practice of adding a colophon to a poem or another piece of literature as it is written down, is very well known from Mesopotamian and Ugaritic sources well before the time when the Biblical psalms were written. There is accordingly no reason why for example King David, provided he wrote psalms, could not have recorded these with colophons. However, with our present knowledge there is also no evidence he did. The titles then may well be reliable, but can as well be late and of less historical value. We simply do not know.

sensing that though quite a few can claim to make a smoother reading, the probability of ever having been part of the text is slight for the vast majority. Recent commentaries are also generally more reluctant to emend than those written in the earlier part of this century. The third edition of Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament (KB) is also more restrictive than the first and second, and BHS is more careful than Kittel's editions of the Hebrew Bible. We do not emend metri causa since one now often speaks of a prevailing pattern rather than a consistent meter in Hebrew poetry. The few emendations advocated here are put in brackets.

How to understand, and translate, the Hebrew verbs as to tempus is not an easy question for poetry. We have tried to make use of the insights from the grammars, but in the end it is probably fair to say with H. Ringgren: "What follows from all this is that one . . . is left to try to ascertain the most likely progression and choose Swedish [in our case English] tempus accordingly. In many cases the result is uncertain."<sup>8</sup>

Bible references in this dissertation refer to the Hebrew Bible. The verse numbering in most English translations vary slightly from this. The translations given in this dissertation are our own unless otherwise is said.

### Terminology

The Complaint psalms are psalms in which God is partly or totally blamed for

---

<sup>8</sup>"Följden av allt detta blir att man . . . måste försöka finna ut det sannolika händelseförloppet och välja svenskt tempus därefter. I många fall blir resultatet osäkert." H. Ringgren, Psaltaren 1-41, Kommentar till Gamla Testamentet (Uppsala: EFS-förlaget, 1987), 185.

the distress the people or the individual currently experiences. These psalms are further subdivided into "complaints of the community," and "complaints of the individual."

We have retained the term Lament psalms in the sense in which it is traditionally used in Old Testament scholarship. This is done out of convenience; the term is inadequate. C. C. Broyles' suggestion "Psalms of appeal" is much better, but since experimentation with technical terms makes a work more difficult to read, and since promotion of new terminology is not an aim of this dissertation, we found it wise to stick to the familiar.

When the word Psalmist is used in this study, it refers to the "I," or the person who speaks in the psalm. It is not thereby meant that this "I" is necessarily identical with the composer of the psalm. S. Mowinckel is probably right when he says that many psalms, for example some of the psalms that describe the "I" as suffering from severe sickness, are written for the person who was to use it, rather than by himself.<sup>9</sup>

A Colon is a unit of text, usually a clause, with two, three or four stresses.

A Bicolon is a combination of two cola, a tricolon a combination of three cola, and a tetracolon a combination of four cola.

In two parallel cola the first colon may be called the A-colon and the second the B-colon. Similarly, if two words are parallel, the first may be called the A-word, the second the B-word.

---

<sup>9</sup>S. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2 vols. translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962; reprint Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 2:133-141.

A Strophe is sometimes a bicolon, tricolon, or tetracolon but usually a combination of two or more of these that exhibits a semantic and/or syntactic unity.

A Stanza is a major subdivision of a poem which comprises one or more strophes.<sup>10</sup> P. R. Raabe has shown that the stanzaic structure in the Biblical psalms tends to be symmetrical. The psalmists generally work with stanzas of equal size, counted in cola, or some combination of full-stanzas and half-stanzas. There is, however, also freedom for variation.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Subgenre of the "Complaint Psalms"

According to H. Gunkel the main types or genres into which the psalms of the Hebrew Psalter belong are "hymns," "laments of the community," "thanksgivings of the individual" and "laments of the individual."<sup>12</sup> In addition there are smaller genres (for example "royal psalms"), mixed forms, and later developments. This division is by and large followed also by Mowinckel. However, his stress on a cultic setting makes him group together psalms which strictly speaking do not belong to the same

---

<sup>10</sup>This terminology follows that of P. R. Raabe, Psalm Structures: A Study of Psalms with Refrains, JSOT Supplement Series 104 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 11-12, "verse" and "section" are used in a non-technical way in our paper. When the word "verse" is used, it refers to the Masoretic verse division as found in BHS.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 175. Raabe mentions as an example of stanza-length variation Psalm 42-43 where the middle stanza is three cola longer than the other two.

<sup>12</sup>H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels, Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 27.

genre. Thus the royal psalms "comprise nearly all kinds of psalms,"<sup>13</sup> whereas for psalms connected with "the Enthronement Festival of Yahweh," "we are at once forced outside the narrow circle of the enthronement hymns proper."<sup>14</sup> Whereas Gunkel regarded nearly all "I"-psalms as individual,<sup>15</sup> Mowinckel, taking a middle course between Gunkel on one hand and extreme advocates of a collective interpretation on the other, maintains that some psalms in "I"-form are indeed collective, that is, the king or another leader speaks on behalf of the whole people.<sup>16</sup> C. Westermann builds on Gunkel, but subsumes Gunkel's "hymns" and "thanksgivings of the individual" under "Psalms of praise," and "laments" under "Psalms of petition."<sup>17</sup> He maintains that all the "smaller categories" are to be included in these two categories or derived from them.<sup>18</sup>

It is a bit puzzling that the so-called lament psalms are called "lament psalms," for they are not laments. With this observation we come to E. S. Gerstenberger. A mourning song for the dead is a dirge, and a mourning song for a fallen city is a

---

<sup>13</sup>S. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962; reprint Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 1:47.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 1:107.

<sup>15</sup>See e.g. Einleitung in die Psalmen, 123.

<sup>16</sup>Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 1:226.

<sup>17</sup>C. Westermann, Praise and Lament in the Psalms, translated by K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 33.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 35.

lamentation,<sup>19</sup> but "A COMPLAINT, either individual or collective, was articulated when the final blow had not yet fallen, when there still was time to argue a case before Yahweh."<sup>20</sup> He thus calls the "lament psalms" "complaint psalms."

C. C. Broyles finds that the most characteristic of the so-called lament psalms is that they are appeals.<sup>21</sup> Looking at the "God-laments," the laments where the psalmist laments not the situation in and of itself, nor the enemies, but the way God deals with the psalmist, Broyles finds that some psalms contain statements showing that God is just in his severe treatment. In other psalms, however, there is given no justification for God's course of action. These unexplained God-laments are what Broyles describes as "complaints," and the psalms in which they appear, he calls "complaint psalms."<sup>22</sup> He surveys the different elements of the lament psalms and shows that these are somewhat different from the rest of the lament psalms. For example, the element, "God's actions in the past" is found only in the complaint psalms.<sup>23</sup> He further compares the interpretation of the distress and finds that in the complaint psalms God is regarded as partly responsible for the misery, whereas in the other lament psalms the blame for the trouble is laid on the enemies, on ones own sin,

---

<sup>19</sup>E. S. Gerstenberger, Psalms, part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature XIV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 10.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>21</sup>C. C. Broyles, The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 52 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 37-40.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 42-43, see also pages 51-53.

or on other causes, but not on God.<sup>24</sup> He concludes that whereas the other lament psalms argue with God and plead with him, the complaint psalms argue against God. He thus suggests that the genre of "Psalms of appeal" is subdivided into subgenres of "Psalms of plea," and "Psalms of complaint."<sup>25</sup> To the complaint psalms he assigns eleven communal psalms, Psalms 9-10 (regarded as one psalm), 44, 60, 74, 77, 79, 80, 85, 89, 90, and 108,<sup>26</sup> and eight individual psalms, Psalms 6, 13, 22, 35, 39, 42-43 (regarded as one psalm), 88, and 102.<sup>27</sup>

For our purposes it is not important whether Broyles' criteria for defining literary subgenres are adequate or not. In any case he has provided us with a limited corpus of psalms that share the key characteristic that they protest against what the psalmists experience as unjust or unintelligible treatment by God. Since we want to

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 111-131.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 52. He defines "genre" in this way: "a shared pattern of communication, usually shaped in a particular social context, that signals certain expectations on how a text/speech is to be understood" (pages 25-26).

<sup>26</sup>I cannot see that Psalm 108 should be included in this category. The psalm is formed by removing the complaint-section from Psalm 60 and replacing it with praise from Psalm 57. What remains from Psalm 60 is an oracle of salvation and a section which Castellino rightly calls "la rinata speranza," the revived hope (Libro dei Salmi, 335). I think Bentzen has understood these verses correctly: V. 11 is a question of doubt concerning the oracle in the preceding verses. This is followed up with a new question in v. 12. These two verses thus expresses doubt, not complaint. V. 13 is then a prayer for victory. Finally, in v. 14 the faith breaks through and trusts in God's help. A. Bentzen, Fortolkning til de Gammeltestamentlige Salmer (Copenhagen: Gad, 1939), 348. A. Maillot and A. Lelièvre, Les Psaumes, 3 vols. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1972, 1966, and 1969), 3:63, say about Psalme 108: "La double omission de la supplication individuelle au début du Ps. 57, et de la lamentation collective au début du Ps. 60, font du Ps. 108 un magnifique chant d'actions de grâces en l'honneur de YHWH, le vainqueur des nations."

<sup>27</sup>Broyles, The Conflict of Faith, 135-211.



investigate how the ancient Israelite believers dealt with a situation where God was experienced as an enemy, this corpus serves well as a basis for our study.<sup>28</sup>

### Structure and Interpretation

Against those who feel that the traditional language and phraseology of the psalms together with their cultic and often collective/communal use make them impersonal and ritualistic, Mowinckel has argued that the psalms nevertheless are personal creations and reflect personal convictions, personal feelings, personal experiences and the poet's own imagination.<sup>29</sup> Each psalm, to a large degree made up of traditional material, is nevertheless a new and unique poem. If we take a look at Westermann's tables over the structural elements in public and individual laments, we at once notice that the different typical parts found in psalms of these genres do not necessarily follow each other in a fixed sequence.<sup>30</sup> This observation underlines the same truth: If we will interpret a poem properly, the task is not merely to find and examine the different elements typical for the genre.

---

<sup>28</sup>We have seen above that the term Complaint psalms is used with different meanings by Gerstenberger and Broyles. In this paper the term refers to the corpus of psalms which Broyles has included in his subgenre of "complaint psalms" minus Psalm 108.

<sup>29</sup>Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:126-143.

<sup>30</sup>Westermann, Praise and Lament, 53-54 and 66-69. In Psalm 74 the "vow of praise," "let the poor and needy praise thy name," does not end the psalm, and would hardly have been called so at all if the schema had not required so. In Psalm 6 he will also be seen bouncing back and forth to fill in the blanks. See M. Weiss' criticism in "Die Methode der "Total-Interpretation," Supplement to Vetus Testamentum 22 (1971): 97-98, and The Bible from Within (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 281-285.

M. Weiss has advanced what he calls the method of "total interpretation." He stresses that structure and content of a poem constitute a unity:

Da die Aufgabe des dichterischen Werkes Gedanken, Lehren, Gefühle usw., nicht mitzuteilen, sondern zu gestalten ist, spricht es seine Wahrheit nicht in den einzelnen Aussagen, sondern ausschliesslich in der Einheit des Gestaltung, als Ganzes aus. D[as].h[eißt]., die Dichtung macht ihren Sinngehalt nur in dieser ihrer konkreten, einmaligen Gestalt offenbar, in dieser Wortprägung, in diesem Satzbau, in diesem Rhythmus und allein in diesem besonderen Verhältnis der Teile untereinander und der Teile zum Ganzen - kurz: in dieser Struktur.<sup>31</sup>

Weiss tries to follow the thoughts and moods throughout the poem, paying close attention to the relation between the different elements, contrasts, intensification, use of recurring theme words, Leitwörter, and other devices that create the exact mood and thoughts which the poet wanted to express. In short, he wants to read each psalms as a whole and as poetry.

R. Alter has a fine discussion of the narrativity of Biblical poetry.<sup>32</sup> He shows that even though true narrative poems (epics) hardly exist in the Hebrew Bible, there is a narrativity that draws the metaphors forward. The two cola in parallelism are usually not exactly synonymous. The point is not just to state the same in another way:

If, however, one recognizes that the semantic orientating of the system of apparent repetitions - let us say, cautiously, in two-thirds of the cases - is toward a focusing, a heightening, a concretization, a development of meaning, it is possible to see that movement generated between versets [in our terminology: cola] is then

---

<sup>31</sup>Weiss, "Total-Interpretation," 92.

<sup>32</sup>R. Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 27-61.

carried on from line to line into the structure of the poem.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, Raabe has made clear the importance of the stanzaic structure of a psalm for the understanding of the flow of thought in the psalm. He makes the observation that the major turning points of a psalm occur between stanzas.<sup>34</sup> The movement from start to finish in a psalm is "in stages corresponding to their sections [in psalms with no refrain: corresponding to their stanzas]." Thus he argues: "First the reader should focus on each stanza with its own integrity and then investigate the relationship between the stanzas."<sup>35</sup>

Taking the cue from these insights, after having provided a translation and translation notes, we will try to ascertain the structure of each psalm. Some of the psalms exhibit both strophes and stanzas, while in others there is no subdivision between the stanza and the individual bicola or tricola. This investigation of the stanzaic structure will then form the basis for our study of the progression in content and mood. We will try to trace the movement from colon to colon within the stanza, and the way the stanzas relate to each other. We will pay attention to the place and function of different elements in the poem, as well as to recurring words and phrases. In short: We will approach each of the five psalms which are selected for in depth study as a unique creation. Yet these five are also typical of the general category

---

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 29. Good treatments of parallelism are found in J. Kugel, The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1-58, and A. Berlin, The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

<sup>34</sup>Raabe, Psalm Structures, 183-186.

<sup>35</sup>Raabe, Psalm Structures, 187.

"psalms of complaint."

### Theological Questions

The psalms are not a series of dogmatic statements. Those which form the subject for the present investigation, the complaint psalms, are not even composed primarily to say something about God. They are rather prayers addressed to God. But that does not mean that they have no theology. Often this theology is seen on the level of assumptions underlying what is said rather than explicit formulations.

We have seen above that in these psalms the psalmists come before God with problems to which they want him to attend. If so, the first question to ask is how they present their problems. Let us say a person suffered from a certain disease. This disease could, with different assumptions, be depicted as caused by a viral infection, as evidence of an attack by evil spirits, as a result of a curse by an enemy, as a consequence of former sins either by the sufferer or by his ancestors, or as a punishment from God. The reason that it was bad could be that it stopped the person's career plans, that it prevented him from leisure activities, or that it stigmatized him in the society. The way the problem is presented discloses the composer's "value system," his "world view," and also his assumptions about God.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, in these psalms the psalmists want something from God. For one thing, the very fact that they can address God and expect him to respond assumes

---

<sup>36</sup>Even if God was left totally out of the problem, that would still betray what was thought about God: It would depict a God that either was assigned to a special religious sphere or did not exist at all.

something about God. For example it would make little sense to pray to a mere cosmic force.<sup>37</sup> Not only that they pray, but also what they pray for, is important. What do they want from God? Is it primarily health, food, victory over enemies, and a life in wealth and fame, or are other matters more crucial for them? Has God any role in their wishes, or is he simply the source from which they can have their wishes fulfilled?

Thirdly, what do they say to God to cause him to change his course of action and grant them what they want? What kind of arguments are thought to move him? This will tell us much about what kind of God they regard their God to be, and what kind of relationship exists between them and God. What do they expect from God and why should he do it?

Thus investigation of the problem, the prayer, and the appeal will give us a good picture of the theological assumptions operative in the complaint psalms, and so reveal how faithful in ancient Israel responded when they experienced God as an enemy.

---

<sup>37</sup>It is interesting to note that religions throughout the world tend to personalize crucial or potentially dangerous natural forces. There is (was at least) no way to influence the sea, the weather or the fertility of women. A sea god, a storm god, or a fertility goddess can be given sacrifices and approached in prayer.

- 9a. וְהָיָה כְּמַלְאכֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לְפָנָיו וְלֹא יִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 9b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 10a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 10b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 7a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 7b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 7c. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 8a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 8b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 5a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 5b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 5c. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 6a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 6b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 2a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 2b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 3a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 3b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 4a. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
- 4b. וְיִשְׁבּוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ

1. לְמַנְצֵה בְּנִימֵנוּ עַל-הַשְּׁמַיִם מִיְמֵנוּ לְדָד

Text

Psalms 6

THE TEXTS

CHAPTER 2

## Translation

1. For the musical director. With stringed instruments, on the eighth, a psalm of David.
  
- 2a. O Yahweh, do not in your anger reproach me,  
 b. and do not in your wrath correct me!
- 3a. Be gracious to me, O Yahweh, for I am feeble.  
 b. Heal me, O Yahweh, for my bones are terrified ,
- 4a. and my soul is very terrified -  
 b. but you, O Yahweh, until when?
  
- 5a. Turn around, O Yahweh,  
 b. deliver my life!  
 c. Save me for the sake of your steadfast love!
- 6a. For there is not in Death remembrance of you;  
 b. in Sheol, who praises you?
  
- 7a. I am weary of my sighing.  
 b. I flood my bed all night;  
 c. with my tears I drench my couch.
- 8a. My eye has become dim from distress;  
 b. it has grown old because of all my enemies.
  
- 9a. Turn aside from me all you who do injustice,  
 b. for Yahweh has heard the sound of my weeping.
- 10a. Yahweh has heard my supplication,  
 b. Yahweh has received my prayer.
- 11a. All my foes will be put to shame and be very terrified,  
 b. they will turn back, they will be put to shame suddenly.

## Translation Notes

- v. 1. בנגינות - "with stringed instruments"

The phrase is found in Psalm superscriptions in Ps. 4:1; 54:1; 55:1; 67:1 and 76:1 (and Ps. 61:1). It is the word used as a technical musical term also in Hab. 3:19.

It means string music in Isa. 38:20 and Lam. 5:14, and apparently taunt song in Ps.

69:13; Job 30:9 and Lam. 3:14. In Ps. 77:7 it appears to mean either plain "song" or to need emendation.<sup>1</sup>

v. 1. על-השמינית - "on the eighth"

The term is found also Ps. 12:1 and 1 Chron. 15:21. Several suggestions have been given. H. J. Kraus, A. Maillot and A. Lelièvre think the title means "on eight-stringed instrument." J. Calès, L. Jacquet and F. Delitzsch, among others, suggest "on the octave" - a deeper octave than al-alamoth. S. Mowinckel takes it to refer to the conclusive eighth ritual act of the New Year Festival, immediately preceding the announcement of Yahweh's answer and promise.<sup>2</sup> None of the suggestions is conclusive. Thus we translate the Hebrew and refrain from filling in any explanatory glosses.

v. 1. לדוד - "of David"

The preposition ל can have several meanings. Mowinckel argues that the natural translation of the phrase is "for David". He finds support for this in the heading of Psalm 102: "a prayer of the afflicted," that is, for the use of someone in a

---

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:210.

<sup>2</sup>H. J. Kraus, Psalms 1-59, translated by H. C. Oswald. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 31; A. Maillot and A. Lelièvre, Les Psaumes, Traduction, notes et commentaires (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1972), première partie, 39; J. Calès, Le livre des Psaumes, 2 vols. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et ses fils, 1936), 1:128; L. Jacquet, Les Psaumes et le coeur de l'homme, 3 vols. (Gembloux: Duculot, 1975-1977), 1:274; F. Delitzsch, Psalms, 3 vols. Commentary on the Old Testament. translated by F. Bolton. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1871; reprint, 1975), 1:131; Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:215-216. See further KB, 1445.



such situation. Thus these psalms were used by David or by a king of the house of David. He says, "such information was a good recommendation for the psalm; a psalm which helped . . . David, must needs be pleasing to God and effective, useful prayer."<sup>3</sup> Mowinckel thinks the expression later was misunderstood to refer to the author. This in turn produced the description of the situation found in the headings of several psalms.<sup>4</sup> However, since such a change in understanding cannot be traced, and because the description of the situation found in some psalms (for example Ps. 3:1 and 7:1) makes it clear what is meant there, it appears more natural to translate "of David," implying authorship, even in such psalms where there is no description of the situation.<sup>5</sup> David further is said to have composed poems (2 Sam. 1:17-27; 3:33-34). On the other hand we find it by no means implausible that many of these psalms would be used at the court of the royal house he founded.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 1:77; cf. Psalmenstudien 6:72-81. It should be noted that Mowinckel held this view independent of the "evidence" from Mari once thought supporting it. He advances the theory before the reference to Mari was brought forward. In the above quoted work p. 77, note 110 he says the "evidence" from Mari is refuted by Tadmor.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Kraus, Psalms 1-59, 22-23.

<sup>6</sup>A related, though not identical, question is when the psalm was written. For different views see M. Buxton, The Psalms (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938), 555-559; Kraus, Psalms 1-59, 161; Jacquet, Les Psaumes, 1:277, and J. F. Brug, Psalms, 2 vols., The People's Bible (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 1:58. Different answers to the question of whether the psalm is dependant on Jeremiah is given by Calès, Le livre des Psaumes, 1: 133 and J. Coppens, "Les Psaumes 6 et 41 Dèpendent-ils du livre de Jérémie?" Hebrew Union College Annual 32 (1961): 217-226.

v. 2a and b. אל-באפך תוכיחני ואל-ברחמתך תיסרני - "do not in your anger reproach me, and do not in your wrath correct me"

יכר is sometimes used with reference to the court. If the subject is the judge (or the king as judge), the verb overlaps with שפט, "judge" (Isa. 2:4; 11:4 and Micah 4:3).<sup>7</sup> When it applies to one of the parties, it connotes "putting forward a complaint" or "argue the case" (see Gen. 21:25 and Job 13:3). Outside the court, the verb often means "reproach" (Job. 13:10; Prov. 3:12 and 15:12). יסר is often used of the teaching and disciplining of a child with the goal that the child shall be a God-fearing, and useful, member of the society (Prov. 19:18 and 29:17). Often it connotes correcting (Deut. 21:18) The two verbs are used together in Ps. 38:2; 94:10; Jer. 2:19, all with God as subject, and Prov. 9:7. Ps. 38:2 is almost identical with Ps. 6:2. There the psalmist confesses that the reproach and correction is required by sin. The choice of verbs probably is intended to imply some kind of sin or unfaithfulness as the reason why God became angry also in Psalm 6.<sup>8</sup>

Note that the prepositional phrase is placed between אל and the verb for emphasis in both colons.<sup>9</sup> This construction is also found in Ps. 38:2 and Isa. 64:8,

---

<sup>7</sup>A. Even-Shoshan, A New Concordance of the Old Testament, 2nd. edition, (Jerusalem: "Kiryat Sefer" Publishing House, 1993, distributed by Baker Book House) (below referred as "Even-Shoshan"), 466, assigns this meaning to the verb even in our verse, as well as in Ps. 38:2 and 94:10.

<sup>8</sup>See further G. Mayer, "יכר," TWAT, 3:620-628, and R. D. Branson, "יסר," TWAT, 3:688-697.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. GKC, § 152h, though Briggs thinks the purpose is to make the suffixes of the verbs end the colons so as to create rhyme. C. A. and E. G. Briggs, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. (Edinburgh: T &T. Clark, 1906-1907), 1:49.

where it is a prayer against God's wrath, and Jer. 15:15. See also Jer. 10:24: יסרני "correct me, Yahweh, but only with justice, not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing."

v. 3a. חנני - "be gracious to me"

The root חנן, when it is used on the interhuman level, is used in situations where one party is, or is asked to be, "favorably disposed" toward the other party. It may refer to the particular situation in which a favorable disposition was needed (Gen. 30:27; 47:29). In other cases it connotes a party's continuous disposition toward another (Ruth 2:2, 10 and 13, Esther 2:17 and 5:2). In Exod. 34:6 Yahweh reveals himself to Moses as a "compassionate and gracious [חנן] God." The imperative with suffix for first person singular is used 18<sup>10</sup> times in the Psalms (for example 4:2; 31:10; 41:5, 11), and nowhere else in the Old Testament. The consequences of the certainty that Yahweh has heard the psalmist's תחנון, "supplication," indicate that we should understand the verb in v. 3 not as referring to the following prayer for restoration of health only. It is rather a prayer that the psalmist may once again be allowed to experience God's gracious disposition toward him as his lasting relation to God. Unlike what is said of God's חסד, it is never said God should do something because of his grace or because he is gracious. Ps. 51:3 asks God to be gracious because of his steadfast love.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>If חנני, the peculiar form found only in Ps. 9:14, is included.

<sup>11</sup>See further D. N. Freedmann and J. Lundbom, "חנן, חן, חנינה, תחנון, תחנון," TWAT, 3:23-40.

## v. 3b. אמלל - "feeble"

Technically the adjective is a hapax, but it is clearly related to pual of אמל, "be or grow feeble, languish," which is mostly used with inanimate subjects, such as areas (Nah. 1:4), walls (Lam. 2:8), the earth (Isa. 33:9), but also with personal subjects (1 Sam. 2:5; Hos. 4:3).

## v. 3d. נבהלו - "are terrified"

BHS apparatus mentions two proposals for emendations, נבלו, "wither and fall," used of humans for example in Exod. 18:18; Ps. 18:46, and בלו, "are worn out," compare Ps. 32:3. Both would fit the context well. The scribe could then be thought to have been influenced by 4a and thus miscopied the word. On the other hand בהל may be regarded as a key word in this Psalm, since it occurs again in v. 11. Also, neither the Septuagint (LXX) nor any other ancient version knew another text than the Masoretic Text (MT). Thirdly, the text as it stands makes perfect sense. We therefore retain MT.

## v. 5a. שובה - "turn around"

W. L. Holladay places this and Isa. 63:17 and Ps. 90:13 together in his group 7e: imperative with God as subject and without qualification or immediate context. "Here the faithful ask God to change the total direction of his activity, that they may be saved"<sup>12</sup> The imperative is sometimes taken to mean: "return (to me)," implying that

---

<sup>12</sup>W. L. A. Holladay, The Root Šubh in the Old Testament (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 77. His group 7 covers emotions, attitudes, vows, oaths, deeds as the expression of a person. On p. 117 he notes that these passages might be interpreted at a

God has been absent.<sup>13</sup> The phrase שׁוּב מִחַרוֹן אַפּוֹ which is used with God as subject in Exod. 32:12; 2 Kings 23:26 and Jonah 3:9, however, makes it more probable that Gunkel is right when he renders: "vom Zorn ablassen." In Ps. 90:13 שׁוּב is parallel to נָחַם, "repent," which seems further the understanding that God is asked to turn away from his wrath.<sup>14</sup>

v. 5c. לְמַעַן חֶסֶדְךָ - "for the sake of your steadfast love"

See our discussion in chapter 3.<sup>15</sup>

v. 6a. אֵין בְּמוֹת זְכָרְךָ - there is not in Death remembrance of you

Note that the prepositional phrase is placed between אֵין and its nomen rectum. Though this is more common than between אֵל and the jussive,<sup>16</sup> see Ps. 5:10 and 32:2, it still puts the stress on the prepositional phrase.

"Death" is capitalized since it has the article and is parallel to Sheol, and thus connotes the nether world. For this meaning see Job 28:22; 30:23; Prov. 5:5; and 7:27.

---

"covenant usage," but "are better considered within the pattern of the total encounter in prayer than within the discursive framework of the covenantal idea."

<sup>13</sup>For example Delitzsch, Psalms, 1:134 and Kraus, Psalms 1-59, 162.

<sup>14</sup>H. Gunkel, Die Psalmen übersetzt und erklärt, Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 23. See our discussion of the repentance of God in chapter 3, pp. 182-183.

<sup>15</sup>Pp. 191-199.

<sup>16</sup>See v. 2 above.

"Death" and "Sheol" are found together in 2 Sam. 22:6; Ps. 18:6; and 49:15.<sup>17</sup>

v. 6a. זָכַר - "remembrance of you"

The noun is derived from זָכַר, "think of, be mindful of, remember." This verb in the qal is used with God as subject 68 times. In 23 of these God thinks of/remembers humans, in another 12 he is mindful of the covenant. Of the 100 times the qal is used with human subject, the object in 69 cases is God, his salvific deeds etc.<sup>18</sup> Of 23 occurrences the noun is used 12 times with human antecedent, 9 of which talks about the memory of the ungodly or the enemies of God's people being forgotten or blotted out (Isa. 26:14; Ps. 34:17). Two times speak of the memory of the righteous, and one of Ephraim in the future when Yahweh has restored him. With one exception,<sup>19</sup> the remaining occurrences refer to God. It is closely related to God's name (Exod. 3:15; Hos. 12:6). It is related to God's self-revelation (Psalm 97) and his actions in the past (Exod. 3:15 [his "remembrance" is not only Yahweh, but also: "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"]; Ps. 135:1-14). It is object for praise (Ps. 30:5; 145:7).

The divine זָכַר in the cultus is the revelation of Yahweh's name: His active presence, His character, and His saving deeds of the בְּרִית (cf. also Ps. 111:4). Israel's response to the זָכַר, by which Yahweh makes Himself and His deeds to

---

<sup>17</sup>All these and several others are indefinite. For a use with the article (and כּ), see Hab. 2:5; Cant. 8:6.

<sup>18</sup>H. Eising, "זָכַר, זָכַר, זָכָר, זָכָר," TWAT, 2:575.

<sup>19</sup>Esther 9:28 speaks of the remembrance of the events which underlie the purim festival.

be remembered in the present, is one of confession, praise, and thanksgiving.<sup>20</sup>

In our verse the where  $\text{אִין זְכָרְךָ}$  is parallel to  $\text{מִי יוֹדֶה-לְךָ}$ , "who praises you," the focus seems to be on the human response. We have therefore taken the suffix as objective. However, the whole picture is entailed: The dead are not object of Yahweh's self-revelation. They are never reminded of his gracious works in the past. The mutual relation experienced in worship by the living, does not exist in Sheol.<sup>21</sup>

v. 7a.  $\text{יִגְעֲתִי בְּאַנְחוֹתַי}$  - "I am weary of"

We understand the preposition  $\text{בְּ}$  here as giving the cause for the verbal action.<sup>22</sup> The same phrase is found also in Jer. 45:3. Ps. 69:4 is identical but for the object,  $\text{קִרְאִי}$ , "my calling" (construct infinitive with suffix).

BHS thinks several words are missing after "my sighing." But there is no textual evidence for this. In Jer. 45:3 the parallel colon is  $\text{וּמְנוּחָה לֹא מִצְאֵתִי}$ , "and I find no rest." But whether that or any other clause originally stood in Psalm 6, there is no way to tell.

---

<sup>20</sup>A. G. Ludwig, "Remembrance and Re-Presentation in Israel's Worship" (Master of Sacred Theology Theses, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1991), 55. See further his discussion of the remembrance of the name of Yahweh, *ibid.*, 51-60.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Gunkel, Psalmen, 23: "das Gedenken Gottes im Hymnus" and the translation given by Maillot and Lelièvre: "Car on ne te rend pas de culte dans la mort" (Les Psaumes, 1:39. LXX points as participle of  $\text{זָכַר}$ , to which see Dahood, Psalms, 1:38, cf. Ps. 119:38 and 2 Sam. 23:3.

<sup>22</sup>KB, 101. This sense is number 19 in his list over different meanings for the preposition.

v. 8a. עששח - "has become dim"

The meaning of this word (compare Ps. 31:10, 11) is uncertain. "Grow dark," "grow weak, waste away,"<sup>23</sup> and "swell,"<sup>24</sup> have all been suggested as possible meanings. "Swell" is the remotest parallel to עתקה of the three. The other two are both nice parallels, but the first is difficult in Psalm 31. Thus we follow Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (BDB) and understand it as "waste away," but because an eye wastes away by not seeing clearly any more, we translate: "has become dim."

v. 8b. עתקה - "It has grown old"

The qal is used three other times in the Bible, all in Job, in 21:7 it is used with human subject and simply means grow old of years, become an old man (and thus attain a long life). In 14:18 and 18:4 the subject is a mountain which erodes. Thus we shall probably think of the eye as in some way withering away.

The conjecture, suggested by Fenton,<sup>25</sup> to read עקתי, "my eyeball," from Ugaritic 'q, is unnecessary, because the colons are already parallel. Secondly, the meaning of the Ugaritic word is also not beyond doubt.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>BDB, 799.

<sup>24</sup>L. Delekat, "Zum hebräischen Wörterbuch", Vetus Testamentum 14 (1964): 52-55.

<sup>25</sup>T. L. Fenton, "Ugaritica-Biblica", Ugarit-Forschungen 1 (1969): 66-67.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. J. C. L. Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1977), 86, note 3.



v. 8b. בכֹּל־צוֹרָי - "because of all my enemies"

כֹּ is taken in the same sense as in 7a (see note to that place). There is no need to change to מִכָּל because of Peshitta, as LXX also witness to MT. Gunkel proposes to emend צוֹרָי and read צָרָתִי to make the two colons parallel.<sup>27</sup> This conjecture lacks textual evidence, and the psalmist seems to have put "all my enemies" at the end of this line to prepare for the following where the enemies figure very importantly. These arguments can also be applied to M. Dahood's suggestion לִבִּי צָרָי, "my heart . . . for pining," from Ugaritic s.r.r.t. and Akkadian surrū.<sup>28</sup> We are not told who the enemies are.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 21, 23. So also e.g. Jacquet, Les Psaumes, 1:274 and BHS apparatus.

<sup>28</sup>Dahood, Psalmen, 1:38. It has further been pointed out that the alleged Ugaritic evidence does not support the hypothesis, see P. C. Craigie, Psalms 1-50, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 90, note 8b.

<sup>29</sup>The identity of the enemies in the individual lament psalms has been hotly debated for a long time. Early in this century it was fashionable to look for the answers in conflicting parties of (late) post-exilic Juda. A different approach was proposed by Mowinckel in Psalmenstudien 1. He there argued that the enemies were sorcerers which were thought to have caused the sickness (esp. pp. 76-81). H. Birkeland, on the other hand, thought that most, or all of the so-called individual laments were in fact royal psalms (arguing from psalms that are undoubtedly royal and finding similarities to them in the rest). Thus the enemies were national enemies and the "sickness" distress caused by defeat or an advancing powerful enemy (Die Feinde des Individuums in der Israelitischen Psalmenliteratur. Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns forlag, 1933). See e.g. his treatment of Psalm 22, pp. 216-228. Psalm 6 is treated briefly on p. 311. This work caused Mowinckel to moderate his view, while maintaining that Birkeland went too far by pressing all psalms into his royal interpretation (Psalms in Israels Worship 2:250, Note XXVIII). H. Schmidt (Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament. Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1928) takes his cue from the attitude, e.g. found among Job's friends, that sickness is caused by sin, and from 1 Kings 8:31-32: The accused can take an oath before Yahweh and then Yahweh will judge in the case. He argues that neighbors and townpeople will use sickness as evidence for the sick being guilty of crimes which have happened in the

v. 9b. פְּעֹלֵי אָוֶן - "all you who do injustice"

The expression is found for example in Ps. 5:6; 14:4 and 28:3. Mowinckel in the 1920s advanced the theory that this phrase means: "doers of sorcery."<sup>30</sup> He thought they were looked upon as those who caused the sickness. Now, it is not said in our psalm that the enemies/doers of āwen caused the sickness, and it has proved very difficult to substantiate the claim anywhere. The theory apparently has not gained many followers. Later Mowinckel also moderated his thesis by allowing for a more general meaning of the word as a secondary development.<sup>31</sup> Our translation is in line with the traditional and apparently at present prevailing understanding of the phrase and the one which seems to fit the texts best.

v. 11a. יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּבְהֲלוּ מֵאֵד - "will be put to shame and be very terrified"

יִבְשׁוּ is not so much "to feel ashamed" (though see Ezek. 16:63) as it is to be put to shame. The worshippers of idols are put to shame when it becomes evident that the

---

vicinity and never been solved and thus bring this sick person to court. The lament psalm is then the sick's appeal to Yahweh. O. Keel (Feinde und Gottesleugner. Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien 7. Stuttgart: Verlag Katolisches Bibelwerk, 1969) uses xenophobia as an explanation model. One's own fear is projected on the enemies. Thus the enemies, whoever they were and however they were, are always painted as the רָשָׁע - the ungodly, which means that there is no way to ascertain who the enemies in each case are. Finally we should mention G. W. Anderson ("Enemies and Evildoers in the Book of Psalms," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 48 (1965-66): 18-29) who, after surveying different views, concludes: "We must . . . allow for a wide range of interpretation, taking the assaults of national enemies, the bane of illness in national leader or private individual, the potent words of slander or derision, and a variety of cultic acts and situations"(p. 29).

<sup>30</sup>Mowinckel, Psalmstudien 1 (the whole volume).

<sup>31</sup>Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:7.

idols are unable to help them (Isa. 1:29), those who trusted foreign powers are put to shame when these powers do not help them (Isa. 20:5). In the psalms an individual or the people often pray to Yahweh that he may not let them down (Ps. 22:6; 25:20; 31:2). On the other hand, the enemies must fail in their scheme and thus be put to shame (Ps. 31:18; 129:5 and in our psalm).<sup>32</sup>

BHS apparatus suggests that יבשו ׀ be deleted. Gunkel, on the other hand, keeps this phrase but deletes the second יבשו in this verse.<sup>33</sup> It seems to us, however, there may be a deliberate structure of the verse. The two verbs in the middle both reflect verbs used earlier in the psalm. In v. 3-4 the psalmist was terrified, now the enemies will be. In v. 5 Yahweh was asked to turn around from his wrath and deliver the psalmist. Now that he has done so, the enemies will have to turn around and leave the psalmist. These two verbs are then framed by "they will be put to shame." There seems also to be a play on consonants: יבשו . . . יבשו, יבשו. A further argument for keeping the word is that it is difficult to account for how it accidentally became added. Finally MT is here also supported by the versions.

In view of the preceding verses we take the verbs in this verse as imperfects, not as jussives. The Psalmist is sure these things will happen, though jussives cannot be entirely ruled out, since you often have swinging back and forth between confessions of faith and prayer.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup>See H. Seebaß, "בושה, בוש, בוש, בוש," *TWAT*, 1:568-580.

<sup>33</sup>Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 21, 23.

<sup>34</sup>So e.g. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 90; Briggs, *Book of Psalms*, 1:46, and the Norwegian translations of the Bible. Contra Dahood, *Psalms*, 1:37.

v. 11c.  $\gamma\gamma$  - "suddenly"

We understand the word as a temporal accusative.<sup>35</sup> Dahood, on the other hand, takes  $\gamma\gamma$  as a name for the underworld. He gives Ps. 9:18 and 31:18 as examples of the thought that the enemies shall be sent down to Sheol (correct). For the meaning of the word he gives Num. 16:21; Ps. 73:19 and Job 21:13. In all these cases the traditional translation of  $\gamma\gamma$  is both possible and natural. In our opinion Dahood's conjectured meaning thus remains at best doubtful. This is even more true about N. Airoldi's<sup>36</sup> understanding of the verse. He makes Dahood's understanding of  $\gamma\gamma$  his starting point and tries to find a translation of  $\tau\aleph\aleph$  that can make it parallel to this. Thus he repoints  $\tau(\gamma)\aleph\aleph$ , "from ruin," so also in v. 4a. Thus, as Dahood's translation can not be substantiated, Airoldi's loses its very foundation.

### Structure

#### Strophes

The psalm has four strophes: vv. 2-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-11. C. A. and E. G. Briggs notice the rhyme created by the personal suffixes throughout the psalm.<sup>37</sup>

Vv. 2-4 opens with a vocative followed by negative jussives and imperatives addressing Yahweh. They are followed by  $\gamma\gamma$  clauses. V. 3 has an ABA'B'-

---

<sup>35</sup>Cf. GKC, § 118i-k. See Isa. 47:9; Jer. 4:20 and Job 34:20.

<sup>36</sup>Dahood, Psalms, 1:38. N. Airoldi, "Note critiche al Salmo 6," Rivista Biblica 16 (1968): 285-289.

<sup>37</sup>Book of Psalms, 1:46-47, though admittedly he makes the rhyme even better than it is.

structure.<sup>38</sup> V. 4a further stands chiastically to v. 3d.<sup>39</sup> Knitting vv. 3-4a so closely together singles out v. 4b. The psalmist sort of pauses after v. 4a, gathers his breath and then shouts: But you, O Yahweh: How long?<sup>40</sup>

Vv. 5-6: Three imperatives addressed to Yahweh are followed by a double motivation, first by a prepositional phrase, then by ׀.

---

<sup>38</sup>For this see J. T. Willis, "Alternating (ABA'B') Parallelism in the Old Testament Psalms and Prophetic Literature," in Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, ed. E. R. Follis, JSOT Supplement Series 40. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 49-76, though he does not count this verse among his 199 instances of alternating structure.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. N. W. Lund, Chiasmus in the New Testament (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina press, 1942), 39. Lund extends the chiasmus from v. 3b to 4b (and Smit Sibinga argues from this that 4b belongs to strophe 1 (J. Smit Sibinga, "Gedicht en getal. Over de compositie van Psalm 6, Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift 42 (1988): 185-207, see page 190)), but that seems forced. For the effect of this chiasm, see further A. Mirsky, "Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew," Semitics 5 (1977): 9-23.

<sup>40</sup>The observation that v. 4b. is not interwoven into the structure of either the preceding or the following, has caused much uncertainty whether it should be taken with v. 4a or with v. 5. V. 4b. is taken with strophe 2 e.g. by T. P. Wahl (Strophic Structure of Individual Laments in Psalms Books I and II (Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1976. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1984), 78-79), Calès (Le livre des Psaumes, 1:128), and Briggs (Book of Psalms, 1:46-47). Wahl argues as follows: A close relationship between ׀ and ׀ is suggested by Ps. 90:13a; Jer. 31:21; Prov. 1:22-23; Neh. 2:6. Further, there is a coherence of topic between v. 4b and v. 6. E.g. H. Gunkel (Psalmen, 21), Smit Sibinga ("Gedicht en getal," 185-207), Craigie (Psalms 1-50, 92), and BHS put the division after verse 4. We feel v. 4b belongs together with the preceding, making a contrast to the miserable state of "I" (my bones, my soul) with the emphatic "but you." Further, D. N. Freedmann voices the "impression" that conjunction is not used at the beginning of the first colon in Standard Hebrew poetry ("Another Look at Biblical Hebrew poetry," in Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, ed. E. R. Follis. JSOT Supplement Series 40. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 24), though see Ps. 74:12.

M. Girard (Les Psaumes: Analyse structurelle et interprétation 1-50 (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1984), 83) takes vv. 2-5 together, suggesting an ABA'B'A"-structure. However, in view of the clear ABA'B'-structure of v. 3, it seems strange to take vv. 2-3a as A and let 3b, which syntactically is closely connected to 3a, count as B.

Vv. 7-8: A perfect and two imperfect verbal clauses with "I" as subject and two perfects with "my eye" as subject, all describing the psalmist's distress.<sup>41</sup>

Vv. 9-11: Those "who do injustice" are addressed by an imperative. Again the reason for stating the imperative is introduced by כִּי. תַרְחַנְתִּי, "my supplication," picks up v. 3 וְרַחֵם, "be gracious to me." With the psalmist's attention focused on this reason, he "forgets" those he was addressing and meditates on the result of what he just stated. The result is given by 4 imperfects, one of which (יִבְרַחֲלוּ) picks up vv. 3-4.<sup>42</sup>

### Stanzas

The two first strophes clearly belong together in one stanza, both because of the similarity of structure (imperatives + כִּי clauses), and because of the latter taking the former a bit further (sickness to death, which is then used for a new argument).

Likewise the last two make one stanza, the reasons for which are given in our

---

<sup>41</sup>BHS, Delitzsch (Psalms, 1:133) and Craigie (Psalms 1-50, 93) (and Smit Sibinga, but see below) takes vv. 5-8 as one single strophe. But whereas v. 6 took the "terrified bones" to its climax by indicating death as imminent, with v. 7 we are back to a picture of the distress, though now comparable to being dead. V. 7-8 thus connect both to vv. 3-4 and to v. 6. Smit Sibinga singles out v. 8 as not belonging to any strophe, being characterized by the subject "my eye" ("Gedicht en Getal," 200-202). But we saw the variation from "I" to "my bones" to "my soul" in vv. 3-4 - which no one doubts belong to the same strophe, so a variation from "I" to "my eye" is not surprising. Looking at the content, vv. 7 and 8 clearly belong together.

<sup>42</sup>Wahl, Strophic Structure, 74, singles out v. 11 by itself, but in view of the sliding movement through v. 10 it is best to take v. 11 together with vv. 9-10. So BHS, and e.g. Briggs, Book of Psalms, 1:48; Gunkel, Psalmen, 21; and J. Ridderbos (De Psalmen, 2 vols., Commentaar op het Oude Testament (Kampen: N. V. Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1955), 1:51).

treatment of the progression in content and mood below.

The psalm thus has a very symmetrical structure. The first and the fourth strophe contain 6 cola each. The second and third strophe have 5 cola each. The two stanzas are, accordingly, of equal length, 11 cola each.

#### Progression in Content and Mood

The Psalm is generally regarded as an individual lament,<sup>43</sup> more precisely a psalm of sickness.<sup>44</sup> Broyles assigns it to the subgenre of the complaints of the individual.<sup>45</sup> The psalm contains most of the elements of the genre of lament: address to God, complaint, petition, and expression of trust. However, every individual psalm is "special," and we thus have to pay attention to the progression in content and mood in this particular psalm.

In the first stanza there are only two actors, Yahweh and "I." "I" is the speaker. The whole stanza is addressed to Yahweh. The psalm opens with two negative petitions, "do not in your anger reproach me and do not in your wrath correct me! The underlined words are stressed by being put between the negation-marker and the verb. The psalmist knows he is a sinner deserving Yahweh's chastisement. His choice of verbs tells as much. We are not allowed to take the fact that no specific sins are

---

<sup>43</sup>Different: Buitenwieser, The Psalms, 560; Briggs, Book of Psalms, 1:46. Birkeland, Die Feinde des Individuums, 311-312, thinks the "individual" here is the king.

<sup>44</sup>J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 1:52 + 55, and Birkeland (previous note) think of distress brought about by the enemies rather than bodily sickness. But it is doubtful whether the verb rāphā' would be used if the main problem were the enemies.

<sup>45</sup>C. C. Broyles, The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms, 179.

numbered as revealing a shallow conscience or lack of penitence. The problem for him, however, is that Yahweh deals with him in his wrath, rather than in his mercy.<sup>46</sup> The two negative petitions are followed by two positive ones, each followed by a ׀ clause. The imperatives ask Yahweh to be gracious and to heal, the latter functioning as a specifying of the former, and the ׀ clauses give the reason why the psalmist needs this:<sup>47</sup> because he is feeble and because his bones are terrified. The latter verb has often been emended (see translation notes above) or assigned a special meaning that was thought more suitable for bones.<sup>48</sup> We think the psalmist means to say he is terrified. He is feeble, sick and understands his state as being under God's wrath. V. 6 further shows death approaching. He is scared and the fear takes hold of his very body. Thus we see "for my bones are terrified" intensifies "for I am feeble" in v. 3a, just as "Heal me" (v. 3b) specified "be gracious to me" (v. 3a). The verb is then repeated and strengthened in v. 4a: "and my soul ("my very self") is very terrified".

---

<sup>46</sup>So Gunkel, Psalmen, 22, and H. C. Leupold, Exposition of the Psalms (Wartburg Press, 1959; Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 84. Contra Calès, Le livre des Psaumes, 1:130; L. Sabourin, The Psalms, Their Origin and Meaning, 2 vols. (Staten Island: Alba House, 1974), 2:8-9. In Jer. 10:24 the meaning is clearly: It is all right you punish me, but do it not in wrath. Here the prayer for grace immediately following indicates that the question of a sensible punishment is not in the picture for the psalmist. Craigie, (Psalms 1-50, 92) thinks the psalmist merely asks Yahweh not to punish him for approaching him in prayer (cf. Gen. 18:30,32). However, the context, especially the "how long" of v. 4b tells us the wrath is experienced as a present reality, not only as a possibility. The prayer is for God to stop reproaching the psalmist.

<sup>47</sup>For the use of kî in prayers, see A. Aejmelaeus, The Traditional prayer in the Psalms (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 68-79.

<sup>48</sup>Thus Airoldi, "Note Critiche al Salmo 6," 285, translates "le mie membra sono deperite," my limbs waste away.



With his own distress thus laid bare, the psalmist takes a breath and turns his eyes to God: (ה)אתה, "but you"! The key to the whole situation lies in Yahweh. Thus the name Yahweh is repeated four times in these few lines (at the head of the two negative petitions in v. 2, with each of the positive petitions in v. 3 and now finally with the question: "How long?"). The psalmist is totally helpless. His future lies with Yahweh. "How long" lets a beam of hope come through; the psalmist does not think Yahweh's wrath will last forever, but he is concerned for how long. On the other hand, it also points forward to the end of the second strophe; will his life end in death? Finally, this phrase makes it crystal clear that the negative petitions in v. 2 do not portray some hypothetical situation to be prevented but the present situation which the psalmist wants to end.

The second strophe of the stanza begins with three positive petitions. As there was an increase in the distress depicted by the verbs in last strophe, so we see a development in the petitions here, as if the psalmist becomes braver in each petition he utters. First he uses an intransitive verb, שׁוּבָה, "turn around," not a definite prayer for help, but only for God to change. The object of the second petition "deliver" is "my life," thus making sort of a chiasm with v. 4: the petition "turn around" echoes the complaint "how long." "O Yahweh" parallels "But you, O Yahweh," and "deliver my life (פְּנֵי)" picks up "and my soul (נַפְשִׁי) is very terrified." The third petition, "save me," is followed by a motivation: "for the sake of your steadfast love." The psalmist cannot point to a reason in himself why God should help, he has above silently admitted to sin, but he knows that Yahweh is characterized by steadfast love

and so he appeals to Yahweh's character. As in strophe 1 the psalmist adds a reason for why he prays. Now he does not speak of his present state, but rather what makes him so terrified: He may have to die soon, under God's wrath, and never more experience the love-relationship with Yahweh in worship and praise. He longs for a life where he can go with God's people to God's temple and praise him, but death is about to deprive him of that hope. However, by pointing at this relationship, the psalmist is also motivating God to do something about his situation. He is not talking about sacred rituals before the wall. He stands in an I - you relationship to Yahweh. Israel's worship was instituted by Yahweh. Yahweh wants to be praised by his people. Thus Yahweh would not let those who praise him end up in a situation where they no longer are able to do so.<sup>49</sup>

What the psalmist wants to be restored to, is a life of continual praise of Yahweh, not simple a continued existence. The experienced "realities" move from Yahweh's wrath, via sickness to death. The prayer is for grace and steadfast love to a life in praise and the hope is Yahweh's steadfast love and will to fellowship.

The second stanza picks up the description of the psalmist's distress in vv. 3-4. Vv. 7-8 contain five complaints, three with "I" as subject, two with "my eye." The first stands by itself. The second is parallel to the third. These two have imperfects, picturing the action as ongoing. The fourth and fifth have perfects, giving the result

---

<sup>49</sup>Cf. J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 1:59. Note the motivation lies in God's will to fellowship.

brought about to his eye. The stress is on tears.<sup>50</sup> He is weary of sighing, he cries all night and his eyes start failing. The purpose of telling this to God is that the psalmist's tears should move God to pity. Notice the contrast between v. 6 and vv. 7-8: The psalmist wants to praise Yahweh, but now he weeps instead. In v. 8b the third group of actors in this psalm, the enemies, are brought in. Who they are we are not told. Perhaps there were people who tried to take advantage of the psalmist's weakness, such people are always around,<sup>51</sup> or maybe they were mockers who would ridicule his claim of having a relationship with Yahweh.<sup>52</sup> "You who do iniquity" in v. 9 would go well with that. Whoever and whatever they were, they were part of the situation that made the psalmist weep till his eyes were failing. We saw the "but you" at the end of the first strophe paved way for the petitions and the appeal to Yahweh's steadfast love in the second. Similarly, the introduction of the enemies at the end of strophe 3 prepares for strophe 4. In the fourth strophe the enemies rather than the sickness, are in focus. The imperative at the very beginning of this strophe is addressed to them, rather than to Yahweh. The strophe is very different in tone from the preceding. How did that come about? I think the key is found in the phrase the psalmist uses for the enemies in v. 9a: "all you who do iniquity." This designation stresses their anti-Yahweh character. Iniquity (whatever the precise connotations of

---

<sup>50</sup>K. Seybold, Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 154, sees the weeping as ritual. Against this view weighs v. 8b: "it has grown old because of all my enemies."

<sup>51</sup>See Ps. 22:19.

<sup>52</sup>See Ps. 22:8-9.

the word) displeases Yahweh, and the participle in construct chain depicts them in the habit of doing this, or as people whose personal character it is to do what God dislikes. As the psalmist focuses on these people, and thinks of his own state, he suddenly knows Yahweh has heard him. Yahweh will not let the doers of iniquity vex him.<sup>53</sup> As in stanza I the imperative is followed by a ׀ clause: Yahweh has heard, paid attention to, his weeping (described in vv. 7-8). Yahweh, to whose steadfast love he appealed in stanza I, knows all about his situation and about what the doers of iniquity do to him. As in v. 4, the psalmist elaborates on the ׀ clause, repeating the verb, but as Airoldi points out,<sup>54</sup> with a different nuance: "Yahweh has heard my supplication," - not only paid attention to, but granted. (We note further the reflection of v.3a. There the psalmist prayed for grace; here he states that Yahweh has heard his petition for grace [תרחנה]). This expansion is then again brought in chiasmic parallelism to a second expansion: "Yahweh has received my prayer." We note that

---

<sup>53</sup>See M. Weiss, The Bible from Within, 312-313. This "rapid change of mood" has been differently interpreted. J. Begrich, "Das priestliche Heilsorakel", Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 52 (1934): 81-92, thinks a priestly oracle of salvation comes between the complaint and the assurance. A. Weiser, The Psalms, A Commentary, The Old Testament Library. (London: SCM Press, 1962), 133, suggests that the whole psalm "was uttered after the cult community had partaken of the general assurance of salvation." E. K. Kim, The Rapid Change of Mood in the Lament Psalm, Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1985, finds the background in the holy war tradition. Like Kim we see the psalm composed as a whole, not in a pre-oracle/post-oracle fashion. We think there is a close connection between the appeal of the psalm and the assurance, not as a sort of self-suggestion, but by giving attention to Yahweh and his chesedh (that the name Yahweh is mentioned eight times in this short psalm seems to support this).

<sup>54</sup>Airoldi, "Note Critiche al Salmo 6", 288-289 notes the parallelism with yiqqāch gives to šāma the meaning "esaudire" (Latin: exaudire).

the name Yahweh is repeated twice. Yahweh had brought about the miserable situation; Yahweh has made it cease. The enemies are made to be bystanders in this psalm. We have no verb describing their actions against the psalmist. The only actions assigned to them are those followed by Yahweh's intervention: they will be put to shame, and so forth. Then the psalmist's focus slides from giving the reason he could order the enemies to depart to speaking about them in third person on the foundation of the fact that Yahweh has heard. The psalmist boldly states in four imperfects that the foes will be terrified and put to shame. "They will be put to shame . . . be suddenly put to shame" encloses the verse. Their scheme will fail. They will stand with shame as failures in what they tried to accomplish. The second verb, יבחלו ("will be very terrified"), picks up vv. 3-4. I was very terrified, now the enemies will be. ושב picks up v. 5a. Since Yahweh has turned around from his wrath toward me, now my enemies will turn around and leave. Notice also the connection between the very last word in this verse and v. 4. There the psalmist asked "how long," here he has received the answer: the enemies will be put to shame רגע, "suddenly."

### The Problem

The physical distress in Psalm 6 seems to be bodily sickness (see vv. 3, 7-8), though the language is too general to say anything about what kind of sickness. Perhaps this is deliberate, to make the psalm available for many sorts of distress. Fear is very present. The psalmist is terrorized by the thought that he may have to end his life under Yahweh's wrath and go down to Sheol, forever excluded from the praise-

relation to Yahweh (vv. 3-4 and v. 6). The enemies or doers of injustice play an obscure role in the psalm. They are clearly part of the distress, but no action on their part is described. The cause of the distress is Yahweh's wrath: "O Yahweh, do not reproach me in your anger, nor rebuke me in your wrath!" (v. 2). Thus we also see the wrath is depicted as active. God is actively punishing the psalmist.

### The Prayer

The psalmist asks Yahweh not to punish him (for his sins) in wrath, but rather to be gracious to him and heal him from his sickness and save his life. He fears a death that separates him from Yahweh, and wants to come back into the relationship with Yahweh where he can praise him and worship him. It is worth noticing that there is no explicit prayer for rescue from the enemies, which seems to underscore that they are deliberately marginalized. God is the problem and God is the solution.

### The Appeal

The psalmist describes his distress to Yahweh, clearly with the thought that Yahweh should have compassion. This is confirmed by the last strophe where the psalmist declares that Yahweh has indeed paid attention to his weeping. The reason why there is any point in speaking of one's distress to God, is "for the sake of your steadfast love," an appeal to Yahweh's "personal character." The psalmist grounds the appeal in the relation between the psalmist and Yahweh. He is among those who will praise Yahweh, and this praise pleases Yahweh. Conversely, the psalmist's tears move God to pity. Thus the threatening possibility of death, separated from the praise of

God, is also an argument for Yahweh to act before the curtain falls. Finally, the way the enemies are handled is destined to motivate God to judge them. They are described as persons whose trait it is to do what God dislikes. The emphasis is not on what they have been doing to the psalmist. Thus these are people that Yahweh is expected to punish, independently of their conflict with the psalmist.

1. למנצח לבני-קרח משכיל

- 2a. אלהים באזינו שמעו אלהים באזינו שמעו
- b. אלהים באזינו שמעו
- c. פעל פעלת ביהוים
- d. כי קדי
- 3a. אתה ידו גוים ותרשת ותתעט
- b. תרע לאומים ותשתים
- 4a. כי לא בחרם ירשו ארץ
- b. ותרעם לא-הושעה להם
- c. כי-ימיך וזרעך וזרעך וזרעך
- d. כי רציתם

- 5a. אתה-הוא מלכי אלהים
- b. [מזמור] ישועות יעקב
- 6a. נגנו נגנו נגנו
- b. בשיר קמוס קמוס
- 7a. מוטב איתשחב
- b. ותשועי ותשועי
- 8a. כי הושעתנו וצדקתנו
- b. ומושינו ומושינו
- 9a. אלהים מלכי אלהים
- b. ושיר מלכי אלהים

- 10a. אף-ותחת ותחת ותחת
- b. ואל-תאמא אצמא
- 11a. תישבנו וישבנו
- b. ואל-תאמא אצמא
- 12a. תתנו תאמא
- b. ואל-תאמא אצמא
- 13a. תתנו תאמא
- b. ואל-תאמא אצמא
- 14a. תישבנו וישבנו
- b. ואל-תאמא אצמא
- 15a. תישבנו וישבנו
- b. ואל-תאמא אצמא
- 16a. תישבנו וישבנו
- b. ואל-תאמא אצמא

Text



- b. ובשת פני כסתני  
 17a. מקול מחרף ומגדף  
 b. מפני אויב ומתנקם
- 18a. כל-זאת באתנו ולא שכחנוך  
 b. ולא-שקרנו בבריתך  
 19a. לא-נסוג אחור לבנו  
 b. ותט אשרינו מני ארחך  
 20a. כי דכיתנו במקום תנים  
 b. ותכס עלינו בצלמות  
 21a. אם-שכחנו שם אלהינו  
 b. ונפרש כפינו לאל זר  
 22a. הלא אלהים יחקר-זאת  
 b. כי-הוא ידע תעלמות לב  
 23a. כי-עליך הרגנו כל-היום  
 b. נחשבנו כצאן טבחה
- 24a. עורה למה תישן אדני  
 b. הקיצה אל-תזנח לנצח  
 25a. למה-פניך תסתיר  
 b. תשכח ענינו ולחצנו  
 26a. כי שחה לעפר נפשנו  
 b. דבקה לארץ בטננו  
 27a. קומה עזרתה לנו  
 b. ופדנו למען חסדך

#### Translation

1. For the musical director. For the sons of Korah. A Maskil.
- 2a. O God, with our ears we have heard;  
 b. our fathers have told us:  
 c. A deed you did in their days,  
 d. in days of old.
- 3a. You with your hand dispossessed nations but planted them,  
 b. you broke the peoples but made them send forth shoots.
- 4a. For not by their sword did they take possession of the land,  
 b. and their arm did not gain victory for them.  
 c. No, for it was your right hand and your arm and the light of your face,  
 d. because you were well-disposed toward them.

- 5a. You are my king, O God;  
b. the one who appoints the victories of Jacob.
- 6a. With you we push down our enemies;  
b. in your name we trample under foot those who rise up against us.
- 7a. For not in my bow do I trust,  
b. and my sword does not save me.
- 8a. No, for you saved us from our enemies,  
b. and those who hate us you have put to shame.
- 9a. In God we boast all the time,  
b. and praise your name for ever. Selah.
- 10a. But you have rejected (us) and brought disgrace on us,  
b. and did not go out with our armies!
- 11a. You made us retreat from the enemy,  
b. and those who hate us plundered for themselves.
- 12a. You delivered us up like sheep for food,  
b. and among the nations you scattered us.
- 13a. You sold your people for nothing,  
b. and did not set the price for them high.
- 14a. You made us a reproach to our neighbors,  
b. a scorn and derision to those who surround us.
- 15a. You made us a proverb among the nations,  
b. a shaking of the head among the peoples.
- 16a. All the time my disgrace is before me,  
b. and the shame of my face covers me,
- 17a. because of the voice of the reproacher and reviler,  
b. because of the presence of the foe and avenger.
- 18a. All this has come upon us, even though we have not forgotten you,  
b. nor been unfaithful to your covenant.
- 19a. Our heart did not draw back,  
b. nor did our steps stray from your path, -
- 20a. that you have crushed us in a place of jackals,  
b. and covered over us with darkness.
- 21a. If we had forgotten the name of our God,  
b. and spread our hands to a strange god,
- 22a. would God not discover this?  
b. For he knows the secrets of the heart.
- 23a. No, for on account of you we are killed all the time,  
b. we are regarded as sheep for slaughtering.
- 24a. Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?

- b. Awake! Do not reject forever!
- 25a. Why do you hide Your face,
  - b. forget our misery and our affliction?
- 26a. For bowed down to the dust is our soul,
  - b. our belly sticks to the ground.
- 27a. Arise for our help,
  - b. and redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!

#### Translation Notes

- v. 1. לבני קרח משכיל - "for the sons of Korah. A Maskil"

According to 1 Chron. 9:17-24 and 26:1-19 the Korahites were gatekeepers in the temple and responsible for guarding the thresholds. In 2 Chron. 20:19 they stand up in the public worship and praise Yahweh with loud voice. Several psalms are assigned to them: Psalms 42-49 (if Ps. 42-43 is regarded as one psalm), 84-85, 87-88.<sup>55</sup> The meaning of the term "Maskil" is still obscure.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup>Cf. M. J. Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," Journal of Biblical Literature 82 (1963): 382-392. M. D. Goulder, The Psalms of the Sons of Korah, JSOT Supplement Series 20 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982) thinks these psalms were composed by Danite clergy before the fall of the Northern Kingdom and became "Jerusalemized" as the Korahites later rose to prominence at the Jerusalem temple. Psalm 44 has been variously dated. For different views see H. M. Parker Jr., "Artaxerxes III Ochus and Psalm 44," The Jewish Quarterly Review 68 (1978): 152-168 (344 BC), Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:66 (At the time of David (2 Sam. 8:5-14)), E. Vogt, "Psalmus 44 et Tragoedia Ezechiae regis," Verbum Domini 45 (1967): 193-200 (time of Hezekiah). See further Beaucamp, Le Psautier, 1:191-192. An exilic date appears to us to be less than likely, given the strong profession of innocence. In all probability the psalm is pre-exilic, but whether it refers to the campaign of Sancherib (701), to the battle at Megiddo (609), or to another lost war, is not possible to ascertain.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Weiser, The Psalms, 281; Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:209; and Kraus, Psalms 1-59, 32.

## v. 3a. אַתָּה יָדְךָ - "you with your hand"

BHS suggests reading בְּיָדְךָ, "with your hand." In favor of this solution may be said that it makes the cola more even, and that אַתָּה is absent in LXX. On the other hand, LXX most certainly did not read a preposition before "hand," and LXX further attests the same verse division as MT. Finally, even though the construction sounds strange to us, it is a well attested idiom in Hebrew poetry:

A peculiar idiom, and always confined to poetic language, is the not infrequent occurrence of two subjects in a verbal sentence, one of the person and the other of the thing. The latter then serves - whether it precedes or follows - to state the instrument, organ, or member by which the action in question is performed, and may be most often rendered in English by an adverb, as a nearer definition of the manner of the action.<sup>57</sup>

## v. 3b. תָּרַע - "You broke"

MT points as hiphil of רָעַע I, "do evil, treat badly, harm." BHS and KB want to repoint it to read qal from רָעַע II, a root that is common in Aramaic and corresponds to Hebrew רָצַץ. That the Aramaic influence was felt long before the time of the exile is now well established. More important, the qal of this verb is attested in Biblical Hebrew 10 times,<sup>58</sup> for example Ps. 2:9; Isa. 8:9; Prov. 11:15. That later Jewish tradition would tend to read the more common Hebrew homonym is plausible.

---

<sup>57</sup>GKC, § 144,l. Examples are Ps. 3:5; 27:7; Ps. 60:7; Hab. 3:15, § 144,m. So M. Girard, Les Psaumes: Analyse structurelle et interprétation: 1-50, Recherches Nouvelle série-2. (Montréal: Bellarmin - Paris: Cerf, 1984), 353. Jacquet, Les Psaumes et coeur de l'homme, 2:22 emends. Calès, Le livre des Psaumes, 1:458 and 462, retains Mt, but connects the phrase to v. 2, and translates: "Aux jour d'autrefois, - de ta propre main."

<sup>58</sup>Even-Shoshan, 1088.

The Aramaic meaning fits the context somewhat better.

v. 3b. ותשלחם - "but made them send forth shoots"

The suffix is ambiguous, but parallelism seems to demand that "our fathers" is the object. The rendering given above follows Dahood. He parses it as a piel of a denominative verb from שָׁלַח "sprout, shoot."<sup>59</sup> Whether that is correct or not, the verb is sometimes used with plants sending forth their shoots (Ps. 80:12; Jer. 17:8; Ezek. 17:6).<sup>60</sup>

v. 4a+c. כִּי . . . כִּי

The first כִּי is used as indirect explanation, and as such does not state the cause for what is actually said in the previous verse but rather the reason for saying it. The second כִּי introduces a positive alternative after a negative statement.<sup>61</sup>

v. 4d. ואור פניך - "and the light of your face"

The phrase is applied to Yahweh also in Ps. 4:7 and 89:16. The corresponding verbal phrase, האיר פניו is used nine times in the Old Testament, eight with God as subject. It stands parallel to the verb רָוַח in Num. 6:25 and Ps. 67:2. In Psalm 80 the phrase: האיר פניך ונושעה, "let your face shine, that we may be saved," is used three

---

<sup>59</sup>Dahood, Psalms, 1:263,265.

<sup>60</sup>So also Leupold, Exposition of the Psalms, 346. For different translations, see Girard, Les Psaumes, 353; Sabourin, The Psalms, 2:145, and Weiser, The Psalms, 353.

<sup>61</sup>See A. Aejmelaeus, "Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew," Journal of Biblical Literature 105/2 (1986): 193-209. For the first כִּי in v. 4 see page 203; for the second, see page 200.

times (vv. 4, 8, and 20). Similarly, Ps. 31:17 has the phrase parallel to הושיעני - "save me". Thus our phrase seems to indicate that Yahweh is favorably disposed so that he is gracious and saves. This is corroborated by the secular use in Prov. 16:15: "In the light of the king's face is life, and his favor (רצונו) is like clouds of late rain."

v. 5a. אתה-הוא מלכי - "You are my king"

This is what Waltke - O'Connor call an "identifying clause." The particular use of הוא serves to single out the subject and contrast it with other possible alternatives, thus we have underlined the subject for emphasis. The contrast in our verse is not with other gods, but rather is a strong affirmation that my God is none other than he who performed the mighty deeds for the fathers.<sup>62</sup>

v. 5b. [מצורה] - "the one who appoints"

MT has imperative. But we are now in the part of the psalm where the psalmist says that the God of the fathers is the God of the people still and he is even now the same as before, so as later to create a contrast with what the people currently experience from God. LXX reads participle. We think the MT text here is a result of haplography, and with the BHS apparatus read a participle like LXX.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup>Waltke - O'Connor, § 16.3.3b and c. See also Joüon - Muraoka, § 154j.

<sup>63</sup>So Calès, *Le livre des Psaumes*, 1:458 and 462 and E. Beaucamp, *Le Psautier*, 2 vols. Sources Bibliques (Paris: Gabalda, 1976), 1:190. Weiser, *The Psalms*, 353, retains MT. Another possible solution is proposed by Dahood, *Psalms*, 1:263,265. He simply moves the mem from אלהים over to make מצורה אלהי, lets the suffix do double duty and translates: "my God, my Commander" (and then takes ישועות to mean "Savior."

v. 9a. באלהים הללנו - "In God we boast"

הלל in the usual sense "praise" does not take ך with the object. BHS and KB want us to read hithpael, "make one's boast of" (an established meaning of hithpael of this verb). BDB takes it in a similar sense, but refrains from suggesting emendation. That will also be our course, that is, assigning a hithpael meaning without deciding whether piel could be used with this nuance.

v. 10a. אף-זנחתה ותכלימנו - "But you have rejected (us) and brought disgrace on us"

For אף with adversative function, see also Ps. 58:3. The suffix of the second verb does double duty also for the first.

v. 11b. שסו למו - "plundered for themselves"

Neither שסה nor the related שסס are elsewhere used with reflexive pronoun (unlike הלך, see Gen. 12:1). We thus think the pronoun here is used to stress the inability of Israel to interfere with what they were doing. The enemies could do exactly what they wanted.<sup>64</sup>

v. 13a. בלא-הון - "for nothing"

Literally: "for not-wealth". For ך with מכר to denote the price: Amos 2:6; Joel 4:3.

---

<sup>64</sup>So e.g. Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:63, 69-70; F. Nötscher, Die Psalmen, Echter-Bibel (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1953), 87, and Craigie, Psalm 1-50, 330. For the preterital use of imperfect in vv. 10-15, cf. Joüon - Muraoka, § 113h.

v. 13b. ולא רבית במחיריהם - "and you have not set the price for them high."

Or: "and you did not increase (your wealth) by their price." רבה is used in piel in Judg. 9:29; Ezek. 19:2 and Lam. 2:22, all with direct object. Thus our verse will stand out against the other three instances no matter how we translate. We have taken ך as introducing the object.

v. 15b. מנוד-ראש בלאמים - "a shaking of the head among the peoples"

We understand מנוד-ראש as an expression of mockery, compare הניע ראש 2 Kings 19:21; Ps. 22:8.<sup>65</sup> The Leningrad codex has בל-אמים, which does not make sense. The majority of Hebrew manuscripts have the text we have given above.

v. 16b. ובשי פני - "and the shame of my face"

For this phrase, see Jer. 7:19; Dan. 9:7-8; Ezra 9:7 and 2 Chron. 32:21.

v. 17a+b. מפני . . . מקול - "because of the voice of . . . because of the presence of"

It is possible to translate מפני "because of."<sup>66</sup> However, the parallelism with מקול seems to require a corresponding translation of the two phrases.<sup>67</sup>

v. 19a. לא-נסוג אחר - "did not draw back"

The phrase has the connotation "become disloyal." For this meaning in a

---

<sup>65</sup>Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 331 takes it as a gesture of sorrow. In favor of this is the frequent use of the verb נוד in the meaning "shake one's head in mourning" (Job 2:11; Jer. 16:5; 22:10). The context seems, though, to require a reference to mocking rather than mourning rites. The substantive מנוד is a hapax.

<sup>66</sup>So Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 331.

<sup>67</sup>So Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:63, and Nötscher, Die Psalmen, 87.



secular context, see Jer. 38:22 (where it is used with אחרור); for disloyalty to Yahweh, see Ps. 78:57; Isa. 59:13.<sup>68</sup>

v. 19b. ותט אשרינו "nor did our steps stray"

The form of the verb seems to be either third person feminine singular or second person masculine singular of נטה in the qal conjugation. The subject is feminine plural, but it is not unusual that plural names of animals or things, and abstracts, are construed with feminine singular (Ps. 37:31; Jer. 4:14).<sup>69</sup>

v. 20a and 23a. כי . . . כי - "that . . . no for"

With RSV we understand the first כי as consecutive (Gen. 40:15; Ps. 8:5). On the other hand, "on account of you" in v. 23 is probably intended as the antithesis to what is argued in vv. 21-22: The reason does not lie with us. Thus the כי in v. 23 introduces a positive alternative after a negative statement (vv. 4 and 8).<sup>70</sup>

v. 20a. במקום תנים - "at a place of jackals"

Jackals are desert animals and often belong to the picture of places having become ruins and wilderness after a divine judgment (Isa. 34:12-15; Jer. 10:22; 49:33).

Either the battle was held at a desolate place, or the battlefield was felt to be a

---

<sup>68</sup>See further F. Reiterer, "סוג," TWAT, 5:769-774, and BK, 703.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. for this GKC, § 145k. Many manuscripts read אשרנו, "our step", feminine singular. LXX seems to read hiphil 2nd. person masculin singular, and takes God as subject.

<sup>70</sup>For the a consecutive use of כי, see Joüon - Muraoka, § 169e. For the use in v. 23, see Aejmelaes, "Function and Interpretation of כי," 200.

desolate place as the armies had left and only the corpses remained there. Some have taken תַּנִּיחַ here as a variant of תַּנִּיךְ, "the dragon" (compare Ezek. 29:3 and 32:2). A few manuscripts actually have תַּנִּיךְ. M. Girard translates: "le lieu du monstre (marin)". He understands this place to be the nether world and thus parallel to v. 20b. E. Beaucamp takes בַּמְקוֹם to mean "à la place de," an understanding that he shares with Gunkel. Dahood suggests a new word division: בְּמִקְּ מִתְּנִיחַ, "festering of loins".<sup>71</sup>

v. 20b. בַּצְּלִמּוֹת - "with deep darkness"

Ever since LXX the traditional translation of this word has been "shadow of death," taking it as a compound of צַל and מוֹת. The main problem with this translation is that the meaning appears not to fit most of the occurrences in the Old Testament. The phrase חֹשֶׁךְ וּצְלִמּוֹת is found four times. In addition, there are six places where חֹשֶׁךְ, "darkness," and צְלִמּוֹת are parallel, always with חֹשֶׁךְ placed first. Only once is the word parallel to מוֹת, "death." Thus it would appear צְלִמּוֹת must be a word that narrows down or intensifies חֹשֶׁךְ. Luther simply translated the word "Finsterness," "darkness." Further, compound words are very rare in Hebrew (except in proper names). Now, in cognate languages there exists words meaning "black, dark" that apparently are "derived" from the root צַלַם. KB<sup>72</sup> and probably a majority of Biblical scholars derive צְלִמּוֹת from this root, translating "deep darkness." Some

---

<sup>71</sup>Girard, *Psaumes*, 354; Beaucamp, *Le Psautier*, 1:190-191; Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 184,188; Dahood, *Psalmen*, 1:267.

<sup>72</sup>KB, 964.

scholars have criticized this derivation, though, preferring the traditional one.<sup>73</sup> The word is attested in Ugaritic, but there is no agreement as to which conclusions may be drawn from the Ugaritic.

Both "the jackals and "deep darkness" evoke strong negative connotations (for the latter, see Isa. 9:1; Amos 5:8; Job 38:17). In Jer. 2:6 we find the expression בארץ ציה וצלמות, "in a land of drought and deep darkness," which is precisely where we would find jackals.

LXX and a few Hebrew manuscripts make צלמות the subject of the clause.

vv. 21a-22a. אם-שכחנו . . . הלא אלהים יחקר-זאת - "if we had forgotten . . .

would God not discover this?"

Another possibility would be with Jacquet to take אן in the meaning "certainly not" as in Isa. 22:14; Ps. 89:36; and 132:3, 4.<sup>74</sup> Jacquet translates vv. 21-22: "Nul

---

<sup>73</sup>D. W. Thomas, "צִלְמוֹת in the Old Testament," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7 (1962):191-200 (He comes close to the meaning generally assigned to the word by modern scholarship, though, since he understand "shadow of death" to mean "deadly darkness." He is apparently followed by Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 331), J. Barr, "Philology and Exegesis: some general remarks with illustrations from Job," *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 33 (1974):39-61, and W. L. Michel, "šLMWT, "Deep Darkness" or "Shadow of Death"? *Biblical Research* 29 (1984):5-20. Michel maintains the meaning of "šalmāweth" as "shadow of death" or "shelter of Mot" as an epithet of the underworld is appropriate in most of occurrences. He seems to confuse meaning and reference. He is right that "šalmaweth" sometimes (but by no means always, e.g. Job 24:17; 28:3) refers to the nether world (e.g. Job 10:21-22). However, the parallels with חֹשֶׁךְ, "darkness," even in these contexts (Job 3:5; 10:21), show that the meaning is in the general area of "darkness." He further argues the root šLM - "dark" is rare or not attested in Hebrew. That, however, carries little weight since it is quite normal in languages that one word only from a certain root survives. See further H. Niehr, "צלמות," *TWAT*, 6:1056-1059.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Joüon - Muraoka, § 165j.

n'a donc oublié le Nom de notre Dieu, ni tendu les mains vers un dieu étranger. Est-ce que Dieu sur ce point se serait mépris, Lui qui connaît les arcanes du cœur?"<sup>75</sup>

v. 21b. ונפרש כפינו לאל זר - "and spread our hands to a strange god"

But for one instance (Prov. 31:20) פרש כפים always denotes prayer, and except for our verse, always (10 times) to Yahweh.

v. 24. אל תזנח - "Do not reject"

R. Yaron has argued that this verb should be connected to Accadian zenû, "to be angry," rather than be given the traditional translation "reject." His main argument is that the verb often stands without an object, and further that it sometimes is parallel "to be angry." Apart from Hos. 8:3, 5 and Lam. 2:7 his suggested translation would seem to be possible, but so is the traditional one. The Accadian word was known already by BDB,<sup>76</sup> where it is said that it is not connected to the Hebrew verb.

Neither KB, nor the article on the word in Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament (TWAT)<sup>77</sup> has taken up Yaron's suggestion. Further study seems to be needed on this word. We, accordingly, follow the traditional translation, while at the same time not ruling out the one suggested by Yaron.

v. 25. למה-פניך תסתיר - "Why do you hide your face?"

When Yahweh hides his face, he does not listen to prayer, Ps. 69:17-18; 88:14-

---

<sup>75</sup>Jacquet, Les Psaumes, 2:23 and 27.

<sup>76</sup>BDB, 276.

<sup>77</sup>KB, 265; H. Ringgren, "זנח," TWAT, 2:619-621.

15; 102:2-3; 143:6-7; Micah 3:4. He does not pay attention to their situation (Ps. 10:11). In Ps. 13:2 as in our verse the expression is parallel to שכח, "forget." Deut. 31:17 tells us that when Yahweh hides his face, the people will be לאכל, "for consumption," and will experience much misery (רעות רבות). When Yahweh hides his face, people are terrified (Ps. 30:8; 104:29). S. E. Balentine<sup>78</sup> has shown that the phrase is used mainly in two contexts, judgment in the prophetic writings and lament in the Psalms.

v. 26. כי שחה לעפר נפשנו דבקה לארץ בטננו - "for bowed down to the dust is our soul, our belly sticks to the ground

Falling to the ground is a posture taken after Israel lost against Ai (Joshua 7:6), while the six men in Ezekiel's vision were killing the people of Jerusalem (Ezek. 9:8), when Pelatiah son of Benayah died (Ezek. 11:13). In all these cases the posture is accompanied by fervent prayer to Yahweh not to destroy his people. In Joshua 7:6 Joshua and the elders remained on the ground until the evening. This picture fits well with the self-description of the people in our verse. They lie there struck by the serious blow Yahweh had administered to them, and they lie there to beg God to save his people. It is a posture of mourning,<sup>79</sup> but mourning taken before the face of God

---

<sup>78</sup>S. E. Balentine, The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. See also L. Perlitt, "Die Verborgenheit Gottes," in Probleme biblischer Theologie. Festschrift G. von Rad, ed. H. W. Wolf (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971), 367-382.

<sup>79</sup>M. I. Gruber, Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East, 2 vols. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 463-465, 474-479. Gruber argues it is a posture of mourning and not a posture of prayer. The references he give, however, are

to obtain delivery.

v. 27a. קומה עזרתה לנו - "Arise for our help"

For the particular form of עזרה see Ps. 63:8 and 94:17. With Delitzsch we understand לנו עזרתה to give the purpose for the action requested by the preceding imperative.<sup>80</sup> An alternative would be to repoint as second person singular perfect of עזר and understand it as precatative perfect (Deut. 6:5).<sup>81</sup>

v. 27b. ופדנו למען חסדך - "and redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love"

With human subject the verb פדה is used about the redemption of firstborn. When God killed the firstborn of the Egyptian he passed over the firstborn of the Israelites. Therefore all firstborn males, both of humans and livestock, are to be consecrated to Yahweh (Exod. 13:12). All the firstborn boys should be redeemed by paying redemption money (Exod. 13:13; Num. 3:46-48),<sup>82</sup> a donkey could be redeemed by a lamb (Exod. 13:13).<sup>83</sup> Apart from this particular use the word is generally used with God as subject and either Israel or an individual in Israel as its object (2 Sam. 7:23; Ps. 25:22; 49:16; 71:23). When the object for the redemption is

---

all accompanied with prayer.

<sup>80</sup>Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:72.

<sup>81</sup>So Dahood, Psalms, 1:268.

<sup>82</sup>That is, only for the firstborn who exceeded the number of Levites, since God had accepted the Levites instead of the firstborn (Num. 3:45-46).

<sup>83</sup>A special case is 1 Sam. 14:45 where the people redeemed Jonathan after he without knowing had transgressed his father's oath.

the people, the reference is very often to the exodus event (Deut. 13:6; Micah 6:4; 1 Chron. 17:21). Since the word with God as subject is not found in the context of the sacrifices, the point of analogy is probably not the redemption sum,<sup>84</sup> but the hopeless state of being handed over in which the object was before the redemption, and that God acted alone with no human cooperation.<sup>85</sup>

### Structure

#### Strophes

The psalm seems to have five strophes, vv. 2-4, 5-9, 10-17, 18-23, and 24-27.

Vv. 2-4: The fathers have told what God has done in their days. The strophe starts with the vocative "O God."

Vv. 5-9: The first colon of the second strophe connects to the vocative in the beginning of the first strophe, but now it is a strong affirmation that the God who performed the mighty deeds for the father, he and none other is "my king." Notice the first person singular here and in v. 7. V. 6 has בָּךְ and בַּשֶּׁמֶךְ; v. 9: בַּאֱלֹהִים and וְשִׁמְךָ, thus framing vv. 6-9. Vv. 7-8 pick up v. 4 both in content, חָרַב and the root יָסַע, and form: "... וְ... כִּי ... וְלֹא ... לֹא כִּי ..."

Vv. 10-17: The strophe has six bicola (vv. 10-15) and one tetracolon (vv. 16-17). Vv. 10 and 13 have A וְלֹא B. Vv. 11 and 12 have chiasmic parallelism. All the bicola except v. 10 begin with an imperfect second person singular. Vv. 11-13 have a

---

<sup>84</sup>In the New Testament of course it is. God gave his own son as the "redemption money" (Mark 10:45).

<sup>85</sup>For לִמְעַן חֲסֹדְךָ see our discussion in chapter 3, pp. 191-199.

perfect in the second colon. In v. 10 the first colon has perfect, the second imperfect. The subject matter is the defeat in battle, and then, from v. 14, the shame brought about by the military defeat. In vv. 14-15 the verb of the first colon does double duty also for the second. Vv. 16-17 form a tetracolon: AA'BB'. These two verses are in first person singular, as is vv. 5 and 7.

Vv. 18-23: The strophe forms an ABA'B' pattern. The people insist on their innocence (vv. 18-19), this is picked up by vv. 21-22 where it is stated God would surely have found it out if they had sinned. V. 20, a bicolon starting with כִּי, says God has smitten them in spite of their innocence. Finally v. 23, again a bicolon starting with כִּי, blames their misery on God.

Vv. 24-27: Petitions (vv. 24,27) frame complaint (vv. 25-26). V. 25 may be picking up on v. 4 (אֲרוּר פְּנִיךָ) and is certainly referring to vv. 18 and 21 (לֹא שִׁכַחְנוּךָ).

### Stanzas

The psalm consists of three stanzas, and the structure can be laid out as follows:

God is for the people (vv. 2-9) - God's past actions.

God gave the fathers the land and gave them victories against their enemies (vv. 2-4).

The God of the fathers is our God too (vv. 5-9).

God is against the people (vv. 10-23) - God's present actions.

God has let us suffer defeat in war and the shame which follows from the defeat (vv. 10-17).

God has done this to us even though we have been faithful to him (vv. 18-23).

Petition that God return to being for his people (vv. 24-27) - God's future



actions.<sup>86</sup>

Stanza I has 20 cola, stanza II 28 cola, whereas stanza III has only 8 cola. Thus the first and the last stanza together are exactly as long as the middle stanza.

Several words in stanza II pick up on the first stanza: צַר and מִשְׁנֵאֵינוּ (v. 11) reflect v. 8 (the former is also found in v. 6). גּוֹיִם and לְאֻמִּים (v. 15) remind us of v. 3. Further, בִּשְׁתַּ פְּנֵי (v. 16) picks up on הִבִּישׁוֹת of v. 8. These similarities heighten the contrast between the "ideal" and the "reality" or between the past and the present.

An interesting feature of the structure of this psalm is the alternation between first person plural and first person singular in the second and third strophe. In strophe 2 "I" and "we" alternates, in strophe 3 the "I" section is placed at the end of the strophe. There is thus a parallel contrast between the "I" sections in the two strophes and between the "we" sections.

### Progression in Content and Mood

The psalm is generally regarded as an communal lament and includes most of the elements associated with that genre. Broyles,<sup>87</sup> has assigns it to the subgenre of the complaint of the community. However, every psalm is unique, and we must try to trace how this complaint is put forward in this particular psalm.

The whole psalm is addressed to God. The speaker seems to be an individual

---

<sup>86</sup>Similar, though not identical: Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 332. Several scholars divide the psalm i four stanzas, taking vv. 18-23 as stanza III, and vv. 24-27 as the fourth. So e.g. Gunkel, Die Psalmen, 184, J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 2:20-21, Briggs, the Book of Psalms, 1:374-375, and Girard, Psaumes, 353-362.

<sup>87</sup>Broyles, The Conflict of Faith, 139-144.

speaking on behalf of the people. The psalm has a hymnic introduction. V. 2 opens with a vocative, "O God." Then the people recall how the fathers have told them about God's mighty works in past. The phrase "you with your hand" stresses that the deeds to be related were performed by God and God alone. The things God did with his hand are then presented in an ABA'B' pattern, where A and A' tell what he did to the nations/the peoples: He dispossessed them and broke them, B and B' what he did to Israel: He planted and made them send forth shoots (i.e. made them thrive and inhabit larger and larger areas in the land). V. 4 goes on to rule out any merit on the part of the fathers: It was not by (נ) their sword that they inherited the land; their arm did not save them. The latter verb does double duty also for the rest of the verse: "No, it was your right hand and your arm [note the contrast with "their arm" and also the way this line underscores "you, with your hand"] and the light of your face [that is God's favor and blessing, see our translation note to this verse, and Num. 6:24-26], because you were well-disposed toward them." In v. 5 the psalmist shows how God's actions in the past are relevant for himself and for the people now: "You [who with your hand did all this (v. 3)] are my king, O God, who appoints the victories of Jacob." His God and king is the same who did those mighty works of past. The phrase "victories of Jacob" skillfully connects past and present. God gave "Jacob" victories in the past, but the people is still "Jacob." They can still expect the same. Note the first person singular here and in v. 7. The psalmist lets his personal confession and that of the people interchange, thus exemplifying that what is true for

the people is true for the individual in the people.<sup>88</sup> V. 6 draws the consequences of this important fact, with the little word  $\text{ךָ}$  as crucial: By you we shall push down (like a bull) our enemies, by your name we shall trample on those who raise against us. With the same God as the fathers had, there should be nothing to fear! V. 7 is structurally like v. 4ab. "Not in ( $\text{ךָ}$ ) my bow do I trust [the preposition both ties to v. 4 and contrasts v. 6] my sword [the word of v. 4a but syntactically equivalent to "their arm" in v. 4b] does not save [same verb as v. 4b] me." In v. 4 the verb does double duty, here it is repeated: "No, you saved us from our enemies, and those who hate us you have put to shame (v. 8)." Here the same past actions of God is seen in the light of the confession in v. 5. God is the same, the people is the same, thus it can be said: "You saved us." The stanza is rounded off with: "In ( $\text{ךָ}$ ) God we boast all day, and your name we will praise forever," picking up on v. 6  $\text{ךָ}$  - "by you" and "in your name." The victory comes from God; the boast is in God. The ground for the boasting is God's deeds for "Jacob" in the days of the fathers. Therefore the people now boast in God all the time. "In God" also connects to "O God" in the first line of the stanza. God is what this stanza is all about.

Stanza II puts the current distress, in bold contrast to how it should be according to stanza I. Vv. 10-13 retells what happened on the battlefield: You have

---

<sup>88</sup>Mowinckel has suggested that the singular sections were spoken by the king or "one of the leading men of the congregation, such as the High Priest, or the governor, or the chairman of the council" (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:226, cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 332). This may be so, but it is easier to see an individual praying on behalf of all for the whole psalm. We note that both the confession and the complaint of the "I" accords fully with the praise and the description of the distress of the "we."

rejected us and brought shame on us. This is spelled out more concretely in the second colon: "You did not go out with our armies." The next verse reverses the confident statement of v. 8: "You made us retreat from our enemies [rather than save us from them]; those who hate us plundered for themselves [instead of being put to shame by you]." Vv. 11-15 all begin with second person singular imperfects, thus hammering home that God is the source of this misery. Notice that the military defeat and its consequences are depicted as active actions of God: You did this to us, you did that to us. V. 12 plays on the metaphor of God as Israel's shepherd (for example Ps. 23:1 and Ezekiel 34): "You delivered us up like sheep for food." No one took notice that sheep raised for food were slaughtered, being slaughtered was the very purpose for which they were raised.<sup>89</sup> God, the shepherd of Israel, has now treated his people like they were just meant for being killed. Instead of saving them in the land which he has given them as inheritance, he spread them among the nations (that is, they were taken as prisoners of war), reversing the situation from v. 3. He sold his people (to become slaves) and he did so for a very low price. It is as they were of so little value to him that the most important was to get rid of them. Whether he is paid anything for the trade, matters little.<sup>90</sup> It should not be like this. The phrase "your people" assumes a covenant relationship between God and his people (this thought is picked up in v. 18). It serves to remind God who "we" are.

Vv. 14-17 describe the results of the defeat: "You made us a reproach among

---

<sup>89</sup>Bentzen, De gammeltestamentlige salmer, 242.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 242.

our neighbors." This is strengthened with two synonyms in the second colon (the verb doing double duty). V. 15 reflects (and thus effectively contrasts) v. 3. In the past you dispossessed the nations and planted our fathers, now you have made us a proverb among the nations; then you broke the peoples and made the fathers send forth shoots, now you have made (the verb doing double duty) us a shaking of the head among the peoples. Again the psalm switches over into first person singular as to let every single member of the people say: This is how I experience it right now. In v. 9 it was said the people boasted in God כּל-היום, "all the time." Here "my disgrace is before me" כּל-היום. Probably the phrase כּל-היום is meant to do double duty also for the second colon: "and the shame of my face covers me," that is "it has overwhelmed my entire inward and outward being."<sup>91</sup> This is a far cry from what is said in v. 8b: "those who hate us you have put to shame." The reason for this vivid consciousness of shame is given in v. 17: "because of the voice of the reproacher and reviler, because of the presence of the foe and avenger."

In the present situation God has acted contrary to the norm set by his deeds in the past. He has not paid attention to the relationship he had established with the people. Could it be that God changed his course of action as a reaction to human infidelity? The fourth strophe in a most emphatic way negates this possibility. The people have not been unfaithful to God: "All this [that is, the things just related] has come upon us even though we have not forgotten you, nor been unfaithful to your covenant. Our heart did not draw back (become disloyal), nor did our steps stray from

---

<sup>91</sup>Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:70.

your path." Disloyalty cannot explain that "you have crushed us at a place of jackals and covered over us with deep darkness"(v. 20).<sup>92</sup> We are crushed. We are in darkest desolation and misery. V. 21 picks up on v. 18-19: If we had done so, God would surely have found out (v. 22b: "for he is the one who knows the secrets of the heart"). The underlying assertion is: But he has not found anything that could give him reason for doing what he has done. Thus the conclusion is drawn: We are not to blame.<sup>93</sup> No, it is on account of you we are killed all the time, (it is on account of you) we are regarded as sheep for slaughtering (v. 23) (compare v.12). God must take the full responsibility for what has happened.<sup>94</sup> There is no offense that can explain

---

<sup>92</sup>See translation notes to v 20a+b, pp. 52-54.

<sup>93</sup>W. O. E. Oesterley remarks: "The unseemly tone of the psalmist's complaint is increased by the assertion of injured innocence (17-19); unlike the far more fitting attitude of many other psalmists when in trouble, whose sense of unworthiness bows their head in humility, we have here a claim of righteousness, and the implication that God has not been dealing fairly with his people." Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 248. But we should not take the statements in this psalm as claiming sinlessness in the theological sense of the word. Yahweh's covenant with Israel included provisions for how the people or an individual should deal with sins and weaknesses. When the people had repented their sins, when they, in their weakness, set their heart to serve Yahweh, when the sacrifices were brought forward in accordance with Yahweh's stipulations, then the people could say: "We have not been unfaithful to your covenant."

<sup>94</sup>Kraus thinks the phrase עלִיךְ הִרְגָנוּ, "on account of you we are killed," implies the suffering comes to the community because it belongs to Yahweh. He says: "Here the "signs of the cross" already rest on the OT people of God (cf. Rom 8:36). Israel is chosen for suffering." Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 448-449. But there is nothing in the psalm that would indicate that the mystery of righteous suffering has found its solution. On the contrary, the following verses very vividly point out that both the mystery and the terror remain. Thus it is more natural to see the statement as an antithesis to the preceding, the implication being: We have not caused this, the blame must be on you - a protest to God. So Jacquet, *Les Psaumes*, 2:23. He translates: "Non, c'est pour Toi qu'on nous égorge tous les jour, qu'on nous . . . ."

his present dealing with his people. This argument is clearly made under the assumption that God can be expected to treat his people fairly. Note the repetition of כּל-הַיּוֹם, "all the time." In v. 9 the people boast in God all the time because of what he did to the people in the days of the fathers, "in days of old." However, in v. 16, as the focus is moved from God's past actions to his present actions, "my disgrace is before me" all the time. In v. 23 we see God is the reason why they are killed all the time. With the people and the psalmist there is no change of attitude from past to present. The "I" confesses that God is his king (v. 5), he trusts in God and not in his own strength (v. 7). "We" boast in God (v. 9). "We" have not been unfaithful (v. 18). Only God's actions and thus the situation for the people and the psalmist have changed.

Thus the foundation is laid for the prayer and complaint in the last stanza. God has not been himself lately. He seems to be sleeping and therefore indifferent to his people: "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake! Do not reject (us) forever!" They want God to cease behaving the way he has been to them lately. The three petitions are followed by two complaints in question form: "Why do you hide your face" (instead of saving us by the light of your face [v. 4])? "Why do you forget our misery and our affliction" (we have not forgotten you [vv. 18, 21])? These are not questions for a reasonable answer. They express bewilderment, inability to understand God's actions in the present. Their function is to protest against God's indifference and want God to end this intolerable state.<sup>95</sup> It should be noted that this

---

<sup>95</sup>See our translation notes to Ps. 74:1a, p. 73, and to Ps. 88:15a, p. 116.

passivity and withdrawing of God is used to describe the same situation which was depicted as God's active negative treatment of the people in the second stanza and in v. 20. God is both indifferent and hostile, at the same time. This explains the urgency of the cries: God, the only possible savior according to stanza I, has rejected his people, has handed them over to their enemies, yea, has himself become their enemy, and has withdrawn from their prayers. But they must get him to change his mind, to be favorable once more. The next verse depicts the people as deeply moved by the distress: "For, bowed down to the dust is our soul [periphrastic for: we], our belly sticks to the ground." Joshua and the elders lie on the ground for hours after the defeat against Ai (Joshua 7:6). Now the people is continuously bowed down to the dust. Like Joshua they took his deep sorrow before Yahweh (Joshua 7:7), so they are persistently before God with their distress. V. 27 contains two petitions: "Arise for our help, and redeem us!" The people is in a situation where they need for God to act toward them in a way analogous to how he acted when he delivered the people from Egypt. He has to go it alone. They are helpless.<sup>96</sup> Whereas v. 24 had an inserted question (or complaint in question form), v. 27 adds a motivation for why God should answer the prayer: "for the sake of your steadfast love," a reference to Yahweh's character. It was unfair of God to crush the people when they were loyal to him. However, the reason given why God should save them is not their innocence but his character.

---

<sup>96</sup>See our translation note, p. 57.



### The Problem

Israel has suffered defeat in war. The enemies are national enemies. Powerless, the people have had to watch them plunder just as they pleased (v. 11b). Now Israel is ridiculed by its neighbors (vv. 14-17). The military defeat and its consequences are interpreted as caused by God. On one hand, God is seen as actively delivering up his people, selling them (vv. 10-13). He has made them a source of mockery. On the other hand, God is depicted as absent, indifferent, hidden (vv. 24-25). To make it worse, the people cannot understand why God is doing this to them. They have been faithful to him (vv. 18-23). Still he has acted contrary to the way they know him from history.

### The Prayer

The people want God to cease being inactive and hidden to their prayers, cease delivering them up to their enemies. They do not want the present situation to go on forever (לנצח, v.24). They want God to go back to his previous way of behavior (vv. 2-9), when he acted according to his covenant, they want the mutual relation between God and his people restored (cf. vv. 6-9). They want God to help them and redeem them from their enemies, that is, provide them victory over them: "Arise for our help, and redeem us" (v. 27).

### The Appeal

The description of God's great saving works in the past (vv. 2-4) and the confession of the people that he still is like he was to the fathers (vv. 5-9), provides a

norm according to which God should act. The argument is that the present situation by no means fits the description (v. 10-17). The people at present is one with the people of past (vv. 5 and 8). God was well-disposed toward the fathers, he should still be so, and still be the one who appoints the victories of Jacob. This relational appeal is supported by reference to God as Israel's shepherd (v. 12) and by the phrase "your people" (v. 13). The implicit allusion to the covenant in v. 13 is made explicit in v. 18: "We have not . . . been unfaithful to your covenant." It is argued that the people have not been unfaithful thus giving occasion for punishing action on God's side (vv. 18-22). The argument is: This is not fair! The misery of the people is appealed to in vv. 25-26: "Why do you hide your face, forget our misery and our affliction? Indeed bowed down to the dust is our soul, our belly sticks to the ground." After hearing this, what should make God act on their behalf is his steadfast love (v. 27).

- 17a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 16a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 15a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 14a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 13a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 12a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 11a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 10a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 9a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 8a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 7a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 6a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 5a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 4a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. וישלח מלכותך
- 3a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- c. וישלח מלכותך
- b. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- 2a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- b. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- 1a. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך
- 1#. גלגל מלכותך כעצמותך

Text

Psalm 74

- b. קיץ וחרף אתה יצרתם
- 18a. זכר-זאת אויב חרף יהוה  
b. ועם נבל נאצו שמך
- 19a. אל-תתן לחית נפש תורד  
b. חית ענייך אל-תשכח לנצח
- 20a. הבט לברית  
b. כי מלאו מחשכי-ארץ נאות חמס
- 21a. אל-ישב דך נכלם  
b. עני ואביון יהללו שמך
- 22a. קומה אלהים ריבה ריבך  
b. זכר חרפתך מני-נבל כל-היום
- 23a. אל-תשכח קול צרריך  
b. שאון קמיד עלה תמיד

#### Translation

1. A Maskil, by Asaph.
- 1a. Why, O God, have you rejected forever,  
b. (why) does your anger fume against the flock you are tending?
- 2a. Remember your congregation, which you acquired in ancient time,  
b. which you redeemed as the tribe of your inheritance,  
c. Mount Zion in which you dwelt.
- 3a. Lift your footsteps to the utter ruins,  
b. to everything which the foe has destroyed in the sanctuary.
- 4a. Your enemies roared within your meeting-place,  
b. they set their own signs as signs.
- 5a. He was known as one who brought up  
b. into the thicket of trees axes;
- 6a. So now her engravings all at once  
b. with ax and clubs they were beating to pieces.
- 7a. They put your sanctuary on fire,  
b. to the ground they profaned the dwelling-place of your name.
- 8a. They said in their hearts: Let's oppress them all!  
b. They burned all the meeting-places of God in the land.
- 9a. Signs for us we do not see, there is no longer a prophet,  
b. and there is not with us anyone who knows how long.
- 10a. How long, O God, will the enemy taunt,  
b. will the foe treat your name irreverently forever?

- 11a. Why do you withdraw your hand, even your right hand? -  
 b. (Get it) out from your lap! End it!
- 12a. O God, my king from ancient time,  
 b. achiever of victories in the midst of the earth.
- 13a. You roused up in your strength the Sea,  
 b. broke the heads of the Tannins on the water.
- 14a. You crushed the heads of Leviathan,  
 b. gave them for food to sea-farers.
- 15a. You divided spring and stream,  
 b. you dried up perennial rivers.
- 16a. Yours is the day, yours is also the night.  
 b. You established moon and sun.
- 17a. You fixed all boundaries of the earth;  
 b. Summer and winter, you formed them.
- 18a. Remember this: the foe taunts, O Yahweh,  
 b. and a worthless people mocks your name!
- 19a. Do not give the soul of your turtle dove to the wild beasts,  
 b. the life of your afflicted ones do not forget forever.
- 20a. Look at the covenant,  
 b. for the hiding places of the land are full of dens of violence.
- 21a. Let not the oppressed turn back ashamed;  
 b. the afflicted and the poor, let them praise your name.
- 22a. Arise, O God, conduct your case!  
 b. Remember the reproach of you from the worthless all day!
- 23a. Do not forget the noise of your enemies,  
 b. the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up constantly.

### Translation Notes

v. 1#. אֲסָפִי - "by Asaph"

Twelve Psalms in the Psalter are assigned to Asaph: Psalm 50 and Psams 73-83.

The Chronicler describes Asaph as one of the chief singers appointed by David. Asaph together with Heman and Ethan was to sound bronze cymbals (1 Chron. 15:19; 16:5).

When David had appointed them, he committed a psalm to Asaph and his associates

(16:7). Now, at the time of David the temple was not yet built, let alone destroyed, and it is thus hard to think the title is intended to imply that Psalm 74 was written at the time of David.<sup>97</sup> "Asaph" probably refers to the Asaph-division of temple singers. Whether we then translate "by Asaph" or "for Asaph," the meaning is not much affected: The psalm originated and was used among the Asaph singers.<sup>98</sup>

The psalm is generally dated in the exile, though a few dissenting voices are heard.<sup>99</sup>

v. 1a. למה אלהים זנחת לנצח - "Why, O God, have you rejected forever"

Phrases starting with למה very often connote reproval (Gen. 12:18; Gen. 31:30; Exod. 2:13; Jer. 44:7) or complaint (Ps. 10:1; 22:2; 44:24; 88:15).<sup>100</sup> The phrase has this nuance in our verse. The psalmist is not primarily asking for God's reasons for rejecting them. He protests against this rejection and anger and wants God to stop

---

<sup>97</sup>J. F. Brug holds the psalm to be written by David's contemporary through prophetic inspiration. J. F. Brug, Psalms, 2 vols. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 2:11.

<sup>98</sup>See further M. J. Buss, "Psalms of Asaph and Korah," Journal of Biblical Literature 82 (1963): 382-392, and Mowinckel, Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:95-97.

<sup>99</sup>Buttenwieser dates the psalm to 344 BC. Buttenwieser, Psalms, 606-616. H. Donner is very careful, but maintains that a Maccabean date is at least possible, H. Donner, "Argumente zur Datierung des 74. Psalms," in Wort, Lied und Gottesspruch: Beiträge zu Psalmen und Propheten. Festschrift für Joseph Ziegler, ed. J. Schreiner (Wurtsburg: Echter Verlag), 41-50.

<sup>100</sup>A. Jepsen has tried to show that למה as opposed to מדוע always had this sense. However, Barr has proved that this is not the case. Both words may have different nuances. The context will thus have to define the meaning more closely. A. Jepsen, "Warum? Eine lexikalische und theologische Studie," in Das ferne und nahe Wort, ed. F. Maass (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann), 106-113; J. Barr, "Why in Biblical Hebrew," Journal of Theological Studies n.s. 36 (1985): 1-33.

it. For the verb  $\text{נָצַח}$  see note to Ps. 44:24. W. A. Young calls attention to a certain ambiguity of the word  $\text{נָצַח}$ , it seems often to move back and forth from "forever" to "totally." This is reflected in his translation of the four instances of the word in this psalm, "unrelentingly" in v. 1, "utter ruins" for  $\text{מִשְׁאוֹת נָצַח}$  in v. 3a, and "forever" in vv. 10 and 19 where the context favors a temporal interpretation.<sup>101</sup> In v. 1 our understanding of the verb  $\text{נָצַח}$  prevents us from following Young's translation, but in the three remaining instances we follow him.

v. 1b.  $\text{יַעֲשֶׂן אַפֶּךָ}$  - "(why) does your anger fume"

The expression probably refers to the sharp breath usually accompanying anger.<sup>102</sup>

v. 2a.  $\text{עֲדַתְךָ קָנִיתָ}$  - "the congregation which you acquired"

This is an asyndetic relative clause.<sup>103</sup>

v. 2c.  $\text{זֶה . . . בּוֹ}$  - "in which"

$\text{זֶה}$  is sometimes used as relative pronoun (Isa. 25:9; Ps. 104:8).<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup>W. A. Young, "Psalm 74: A Methodological and Exegetical Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1974), 62. The Greek translation "eis to telos" has much of the same ambiguity, see P. R. Ackroyd, " $\text{נָצַח}$  -  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ ," Expository Times 80 (1968-69): 126.

<sup>102</sup>See Gruber, Nonverbal Communication, 2:480-481 and 510-513.

<sup>103</sup>Cf. Joüon - Muraoka, § 158a, and GKC, § 155h.

<sup>104</sup>See GKC, § 138g.

v. 3b. כל-הרע אויב בקדש - "to everything which the foe has destroyed in the sanctuary"

This is an asyndetic relative clause, connected to v. 3a. The use of maqfep between כל and הרע in the Masoretic tradition supports this, since כל would have to be stressed if this were an independent sentence.<sup>105</sup>

v. 4b. שמו אותתם אתות - "they set their own signs as signs"

Some commentators think of military standards (compare Num. 2:2). Others maintain that the psalmist speaks of religious abominations so as to make it parallel to v. 9 "our signs".<sup>106</sup> However, the military standards would most probably be the emblem of the victorious god, if an exilic date is accepted, probably Marduk. Thus, the religiously abominable would be present with military standards. The signs in v. 9 could then be their equivalent to the signs of the victorious presence of Marduk, which would be signs that Yahweh is present and will save. Such signs could be his prophetic word or whatever God gave them as a pledge that he would intervene.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup>Young, "Psalm 74," 71-72, takes כל as an adverbial accusative.

<sup>106</sup>Among the former is Beaucamp, Psautier, 2:10: "il y a hissé son blason (= Coat of arms). The latter view is forwarded e.g. by Donner, "Argumente zur Datierung," 43. Somewhere inbetween comes Calès, Psaumes, 2:15: "Ils y ont introduit leurs étendards de guerre et peut-être leurs idoles et les autres emblèmes de leurs superstitions, les substituant aux signes de la présence de Iahvé et de la religion révélée à Israël."

<sup>107</sup>See further Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 98-99, and Gunkel, Psalmen, 324. Contra Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:330-331.



v. 5. יודע כמביא למעלה בסבך-עץ קרדמות - "He was known as one who brought up into the thicket of trees axes"

This and the following verse have been considered very difficult and definitely corrupt. However, the problems sometimes have been overstated. For the translation of these verses we are indebted to R. Sollamo. He calls attention to Hab. 2:17 where Nebuchadnezzar is condemned for "the violence done to Lebanon," taking it to refer to the king's felling program in the forests of this mountain. Nebuchadnezzar boasts of the same in an inscription. Further, the height of Lebanon would explain למעלה. Finally the plural, "axes" (another supposed corruption), would go well with a king using workers.<sup>108</sup> It is also possible that felling a forest was a well known metaphor for crushing an enemy. Compare Jer. 46:22-23 where the prophet says Nebuchadnezzar (v. 13) will come against Egypt with axes (קרדמות) as in Ps. 74:5), like men who cut down trees, and chop down her forest. This can hardly be taken literally, since there was no forest in Egypt. Thus v. 5 could well mean: "The enemy is known as one who destroys kingdoms." Lastly, the traditional translation: "It was known as when someone brings up in the thicket of trees axes" is also by no means impossible.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup>R. Sollamo, "The Simile in Ps 74:5: A Wood-cutter Entering a Forest Wielding Axes," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 54 (1989): 178-187.

<sup>109</sup>For a similar meaning of ידע niph'al, see Gen. 41:21 לא נודע, "it could not be seen," of the seven ugly cows after they had eaten the seven fat ones. KB, 375, proposes to read יגדעו, "they cut." Though the likelihood of an ך becoming a ך may be somewhat greater in some stages of archaic Hebrew script than in the square letters, they were never the letters most vulnerable to confusion. Further, for all its difference and difficulties, the text of LXX clearly witnesses to some form of ידע in the underlying Hebrew.

v. 6. ועת - "So now"

ועת is a defective spelling of ועתה (see Ezek. 23:43).

v. 6. פתוחיה - "her engravings"

LXX has τὰς θύρας αὐτῆς, "her doors,"<sup>110</sup> which is a reading of the consonantal text before the mater letter waw entered. MT has the rarer word, and should be followed. The feminine suffix is odd, since מואדך is masculine. Is the antecedent Zion?

v. 7a. שלחו באש - "have put on fire"

For this idiom, see Judg. 1:8; 20:48; 2 Kings 8:12.<sup>111</sup>

v. 8b. נינם יחד - "let's oppress them all"

This verse is not easy. With BHS apparatus and Even-Shoshan we have taken the word נינם as imperfect first person plural of the verb ינה, with third person plural masculine suffix. Peshitta is seen as supporting this understanding. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (GKC) reads with LXX the substantive ני, "progeny," with suffix.<sup>112</sup> If the Masoretic division of the verse is retained, we would then have to read נשרף, "Let us burn," with LXX instead of MT, שרפו, "They have burned." A third possibility is suggested by Young. He takes שרפו with the preceding and translates: "Let all their

---

<sup>110</sup>So e.g. Briggs, Psalms, 2:153.

<sup>111</sup>For the missing dagesh see GKC, § 20m.

<sup>112</sup>GKC, § 76f.

progeny be burned, all the assemblies of El in the land."<sup>113</sup>

v. 8c. כל מועדי-אל - "all the meeting-places of God"

The word מועד often refers to the religious festivals of Israel (Lev. 23:4-8; Isa. 1:13-14). The phrase אהל מועד, "Tent of Meeting," a phrase that refers to the tabernacle, is used 146 times in the Old Testament. It is difficult to think of either the festivals themselves or the festival assemblies being burned. Thus our verse is often taken to refer to the place (or shrine) where the festivals were celebrated.<sup>114</sup> The plural, however, creates problems with this understanding. A. Gelston evaluates four possible solutions to these difficulties. He rejects the idea that it may refer to non-Yahwistic shrines. That it says "all meeting places" seems further to rule out the understanding that it refers to the many buildings at the temple area. Thirdly, he finds a reference to Yahwistic high places outside Jerusalem difficult because of Josiah's reform and the psalmist's supposed deuteronomistic sympathies. He thus settles for "non-sacrificial Yahwistic cultic centres in Judah," forerunners of the synagogues. He mentions 1 Macc. 3:46 where a "place of prayer" at Mizpah is mentioned. He thinks that should be identified (correctly, I believe) with the site where Gedaliah set up his administration after the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>115</sup> He fails to see, however, that 1 Macc., rather than reflecting an independent tradition, merely refers to the "house of Yahweh"

---

<sup>113</sup>Young, "Psalm 74," 81-85.

<sup>114</sup>See K. Koch, "מועד," TWAT, 4:746.

<sup>115</sup>A. Gelston, "A Note on Psalm LXXIV 8," Vetus Testamentum 34 (1984): 82-86. The reference to Mizpah is on page 85.

in Mizpah, which the book of Jeremiah tells about (Jer. 41:5). To this eighty men came from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria bringing grain offering and incense (the verse cited). Thus it is not absolutely non-sacrificial. The question is whether this clearly legitimate "house of Yahweh" was a spontaneous creation after the temple was destroyed or whether it reflects a tradition of legitimate local cult places, where lesser offerings like the grain and incense offerings were offered, and where people could come to pray and put their questions before God. Still, we do not know whether these (possible) "lower case shrines" were ever called **בַּמְעֵדִים**.

v. 9a. **אוֹתוֹתֵינוּ לֹא רֵאִינוּ** - "signs for us we do not see"

The suffix is an objective genitive.<sup>116</sup> See our note to v. 4b.

v. 11a. **לִמָּה תִּשְׁיֵב יָדְךָ וְיָמִינְךָ** - "Why do you hold back your hand, even your right hand?"

The Masoretes divide the verse after **יָמִינְךָ**, "Your right hand." BHS suggests that the division be moved to follow "Your hand." That gives us the common parallelism of **יָד**, "hand," and **יָמִין**, "right hand" (Ps. 139:10; Judg. 5:26). However, if we do not emend the text, v. 11b is not parallel to 11a. Further, "even your right hand" intensifies the description of God's inactiveness. It thus prepares well for 11b.

v. 11b. **חֵיקְךָ** - "your lap"

We here follow the Qere reading. The Ketiv, **חֵיקְךָ**, is probably a misspelling,

---

<sup>116</sup>GKC, § 135m.

as happens so often with waw and yod.

v. 11b. כלה - "end it!"

LXX renders: εἰς τέλος, "to the end," which does not make much sense here. Many commentators think some form of כלא, "keep/keep back," must be what originally stood in this verse (final aleph and final he sometimes interchange). KB<sup>117</sup> suggests second person imperfect תכלא, whereas BHS wants כלאה. A less radical change could be obtained by reading absolute infinitive, which is a good all purpose form. With this emendation (and another verse division, see above) the two cola of this verse form a nice parallel. However, ancient Israelite poetry is not always that neat, and the MT makes perfect sense as conveying the climax of a complaint: "Why do you hold back your hand, even your right hand? (Get it) out from your lap! End it!"<sup>118</sup>

v. 12a. ואלהים מלכי מקדם - "O God, my king from ancient time"

BHS suggests adding אתה before אלהים, which would go very nicely with the following verses.<sup>119</sup> There is, however, no textual evidence for this. H. D. Hummel

---

<sup>117</sup>KB, 453 and 455.

<sup>118</sup>See Tate, Psalms 51-100, 240 and 243. Another possible translation for the imperative is "destroy (i.e. the enemies)!" So Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:324 and 332. He refers to Ps 59:14 for a parallel use of this imperative. Young, "Psalm 74," 90-92, divides v. 11 like BHS does, but moves כלה to the front of v. 12. He translates: "Why do you hold back your left hand? And your right hand in your bosom? Destroy them, O Elohim, my ancient King."

<sup>119</sup>Apparently first suggested by Gunkel, compare his Psalmen, 320 and 324. It is followed by Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 99, and by others.

suggests to take the mem in מקדם as enclitic and read מלכ-ם קדם, "Ancient King," comparable to Babylonian šar qudmi. He notes that nowhere else in the psalm is the first person singular used.<sup>120</sup> Peshitta has "our God (is) king . . .", Targum: . . .

ואלהא מלכא - "God (is) king . . ." LXX: ὁ δὲ Θεὸς βασιλεὺς ἡμῶν πρὸ αἰῶνος,

"But God, our king from ancient time." For the waw before "God," compare Jer.

11:20.

v. 13a. פוררת - "You roused up"

This verb has been variously translated. LXX translates: ἐκραταίωσας, "You strengthened." The traditional translation is "You split/cut/divided." This translation has the support of the Targum (גזרתא) but is weakly attested in the texts. BDB takes it as פרר II but gives as rationale: "so Ps. 74 seems to require."<sup>121</sup> Several more recent commentaries translate as פרר I: "break, frustrate, annul."<sup>122</sup> Now, this verb is not elsewhere used of breaking an enemy or a thing. It is used of breaking a covenant (Judg. 2:1; Jer. 14:21) or an alliance (1 Kings 15:19), of breaking commandments (Num. 15:31; Ezra 9:14), annulling a vow (Num. 30:9, 14). This

---

<sup>120</sup>H. D. Hummel, "Enclitic MEM in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew," Journal of Biblical Literature 76 (1957): 97.

<sup>121</sup>BDB, 830. Recent scholars preferring this translation: A. A. Anderson, Psalms, 2 vols. New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972), 2:543; Beaucamp, Psaltier, 2 (translation pages in front unnumbered), Jacquet, Les Psaumes, 2:462.

<sup>122</sup>BDB, 830; KB, 916. So Young, "Psalm 74," 97-98 ("shattered"), Tate, Psalms 51-100, 240, 243 ("put down"), Lelievre, "YHWH et la Mer dans les Psaumes", Revue D'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses 56 (1976): 254 (écrasé), M. Weiss, The Bible from Within, 289 ("drove back"), and Dahood, Psalms, 2:199, 204 ("shattered").

sense seems less suitable here.<sup>123</sup> We have followed KB פרר II: "rouse up," from pilpel "move convulsingly, move to and fro" in Middle Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic, supported by Syrian and Arabic cognates.<sup>124</sup>

vv. 13-14. לריתן . . . תנינים . . . ים - "the Sea . . . the Tannins . . . Leviathan"

The Ugaritic Baal myth tells about how Baal defeated Yam, the personified sea, in a contest for kingship. The victory is followed by the building of a palace for Baal.<sup>125</sup> We note that ים in our verse is without the article. This, together with the parallel תנינים, leads us to capitalize the word. The tannins are mentioned in two texts from Ugarit.<sup>126</sup> In the first of these the connection with the Sea is clear. The latter also mentions "Lotan" (= Leviathan). A somewhat similar myth is known from Babylon, where Marduk slays the primordeal sea Tiamat, divides her body and makes heaven from her upper half, earth from her lower. Afterwards all gods acclaim Marduk king and build a palace for him, Esagila, the Marduk temple in Babylon. In the Old Testament we meet Yam several places, for example Isa. 51:10 and Job 7:12. Tannin means "snake" in Exod. 7:9, 10 and 12 and probably also in Deut. 32:33. In Gen. 1:21 the "tannins" are large sea creatures which God created. However, in Isa.

---

<sup>123</sup>Both BDB and KB give "destroy, shatter" as meaning the D-stem of the Akkadean cognate parâru.

<sup>124</sup>KB, 917. So Gunkel, Psalmen, 320, 325, and J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 2:251 (Gij brengt . . . de zee in beweging." What lies behind the translation of Weiser, Psalms, 517, and Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 13, is not easy to say. They both render the verb with: "frightened" without providing a note on this translation.

<sup>125</sup>KTU 1.2-1.4 and also, apparently, 1.1.

<sup>126</sup>KTU 1.3 III 38-47 and 1.5 I 1-6.

27:1; 51:9, and Job 7:12 the reference seem to be sea monsters hostile to Yahweh.

Leviathan is mentioned six times in the Old Testament (Isa. 27:1 (two times), Ps. 104:26, Job 3:8; 40:25, and here). Isa. 27:1 is very similar to KTU 1.5. I 1-2. In Job 41 we may trace the picture of a crocodile, but all the other instances clearly talk of a hostile sea-monster (though made harmless in Psalm 104). H. Donner rightly warns us not to overrate the similarities with the Ugaritic literature.<sup>127</sup> However, I think we can safely say from the Old Testament, the context, and the corroborating evidence from Ugarit and Babylonia that Yam, the Tannins and Leviathan in our text are cosmic powers that challenged Yahweh's kingship and world order but found themselves utterly crushed and subdued. Yahweh reigns unchallenged in the cosmic realm. We should not, however, construct a sustained "creation myth" or "chaos myth," which the Old Testament material does not bear out.

v. 14b. לעם לצי ים - "to sea-farers"

MT has לעם לציים. First, the rendering of לציים is at best uncertain. KB says: Either desert animal or demons. Hollady gives "demons" (as dwellers in ציה). BDB

---

<sup>127</sup>H. Donner, "Ugaritismen in der Psalmenforschung," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 79 (1967): 338-344. He concludes: "Man wird, aufs Ganze gesehen, nicht mehr als das Folgende sagen können: Es hat auf der von Kanaanäern bewohnten palästinisch-syrischen Landbrücke ein Repertoire mythischer Vorstellungen gegeben, die sich zu verschiedenen Zeiten, unter verschiedenen Umständen und an verschiedenen Orten unterschiedlich formieren konnten. Auf dem Wege über die kanaanäische Vorbevölkerung Palästinas hat Israel aus diesem Repertoire ebenso geschöpft, wie es die ugaritischen Mythopoeten des Nordens getan haben. Darin besteht die Gemeinsamkeit. Sie sachgemäß zu interpretieren, ist eine noch nicht erledigte Aufgabe der Alttestamentler und Ugaritologen (p. 344).



settles for an unknown kind of desert animal,<sup>128</sup> Targum for some strange kind of desert bird, LXX lets the Ethiopians have the food. Secondly, the phrase as it stands in MT looks awkward, though not impossible. Delitzsch translates: "to a people [in the same sense as the ants and the rock-badgers in Prov. 30:25-26] to the creatures of the desert." The translation "to the creatures of the desert," given by many commentators, is merely short hand for this.<sup>129</sup> We follow Young and read צי, "ship, fleet." לעם לצי ים or לעם לצי ים is then simply "sea-farers." This would go better with the picture of Leviathan as a sea monster than the traditional reading.<sup>130</sup>

v. 15a+b. אתה בקעת מעין ונחל אתה הובשת נהרות איתן - "You divided spring and stream, you dried up perennial rivers."

The traditional understanding of v. 15a is to the giving of water out of the rock in Exod. 17:6 and Num. 20:8, and 15b to the crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua

---

<sup>128</sup>KB, 956; W. L. Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, 12th. corrected impression (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 305; BDB, 850.

<sup>129</sup>Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:324, 333. Compare Anderson, Psalms, 2:544, Jacquet, Les Psaumes, 2:462, and Tate, Psalms 51-100, 240 (He has a very full note on pp. 243-244). Beaucamp, Psautier, vol. 2, translates: "aux rapaces".

<sup>130</sup>Young, "Psalm 74," 101. A widely adopted but less convincing emendation is suggested by J. Löw, according to KB, 800. He repoints, and redivides, the phrase to ים לעמלצי - where the first is conjectured from Arabic malīs, "slippery." Löw thinks an original aleph have become ayyin in Hebrew (and disappeared in Arabic). Was ist denn glatt und schlüpfrig, lebt im Meer, und frißt Fleisch? - Thus the reading becomes: "to the sharks of the sea." So Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 95-96, Nötscher, Psalmen, 147, and many others.

3).<sup>131</sup> However, there is nothing in v. 15a that points directly toward the wilderness experience, and the plural form of נהרות does not favor the view that it refers primarily to crossing the Jordan.<sup>132</sup> Now the verse is more often taken to refer to the creation. J. A. Emerton takes his starting-point in the fact that the previous verses speak of God's attack on the sea and the dragon, and that 15b also seems to concern hostile action against water. He thus tries to find a negative interpretation that can fit the context. His suggestion is: God cleaved springs, holes in the earth, so the water could flow down to the subterranean sea and let the dry land come forth, that is, the opposite of what is described in Gen. 7:11. The נחל are surface brooks through which another part of the water escaped the dry land. The איתן נהרות are the mighty currents of the cosmic ocean attacked by God.<sup>133</sup> K. Eberlein accepts Emerton's interpretation of 15b but rightly points out, "daß eine solche Vorstellung in keinem Schöpfungstext des ATs begegnet." He further points out that, whereas Gen. 7:11 spoke about "the springs of the great deep," here we hear about "spring and stream." He concludes: "Es dürfte also nicht verfehlt sein, V. 15a in dem Sinne zu verstehen,

---

<sup>131</sup>Briggs, The Book of Psalms, 2:155, Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:333-334. Delitzsch explains the plural in 15b as referring to "the several streams of the one Jordan."

<sup>132</sup>J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 2:261: "Voorts vindt de gedachte, dat in 15a de geschiedenissen van Exod. 14 en Num. 20 worden vermeld in de uitdrukking "bron en beek opengebrouwen" weinig steun. Evenzo kan het "doen verdrogen van sterk vlietende stromen" (vs 15b) moeilijk op de doortocht door de Jordaan zien, vooral vanwege het meervoud: Delitsch' verklaring [see above] is weinig overtuigend." See further Lelièvre, "Yahweh et la Mer": "Donc, rien dans les vts 12-17, ni dans le reste du Ps 74, ne nous pousse à faire un rapprochement avec le passage de la Mer Rouge."(258)

<sup>133</sup>J. A. Emerton, "'Spring and Torrent' in Psalm LXXIV 15," Volume du Congrès: Genève 1965, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 122-133.

daß Jahwe Quelle und Bach als lebenspendende Elemente hat hervorbrechen lassen."<sup>134</sup> We are not so sure that v. 15 should be limited to the creation at all. It refers, as the following verses, to God's activity as the victorious, unrivalled, and universal king. Young calls attention to the ambiguity of the language:

The language of v. 15 is rich and multifaced. We cannot limit the meaning of the verse to a reference to God's acts for the people in the Wilderness, or to an act of original creation, or to God's acts against a hostile enemy. The verse implies all of these and more. Nor can we conclude that v. 15a refers to creation and 15b to the Exodus. Both carry the connotation of God's original creation, his continued granting of fertility or withdrawing of it, and specific acts in the Wilderness.<sup>135</sup>

v. 16b. מאור ושמש - "moon and sun"

מאור, "luminary, lamp," most probably refers to the moon, reflecting "day and night" (16a).<sup>136</sup> Other possibilities are the stars,<sup>137</sup> or to take it as collective for heavenly lights.<sup>138</sup> Gunkel adds a lamedh before מאור and reads "du hast bestimmt zur Leuchte die Sonne."<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup>K. Eberlein, Gott der Schöpfer - Israels Gott (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), 196-197. So also Gunkel, Psalmen, 325.

<sup>135</sup>Young, "Psalm 74," 105.

<sup>136</sup>So Young, "Psalm 74," 106, Tate, Psalms 51-100, 241. Nötscher, Psalmen, 147 translates "Leuchte" but provides a footnote saying "moon" is the likely reference.

<sup>137</sup>Lelièvre, "YHWH et la Meer," 254; Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:324.

<sup>138</sup>So J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen; 2:262, Jacquet, Les Psaumes; 2:463, Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 95.

<sup>139</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 321, 325.

v. 17a. כל-גבולות ארץ - "all the boundaries of the earth"

Some have thought of the temporal zones,<sup>140</sup> apparently to make it parallel to 17b. However, neither גבול nor גבולה is ever used in this sense. A further question is how conscious the psalmist would be of the different temporal zones throughout the earth. Neither is it a strict parallel to the seasons. It makes better sense to follow Briggs's suggestion to think of the division between the seasons of the year (Gen. 1:14).<sup>141</sup> But the most probable interpretation is to take the word in the usual sense as referring to borders between peoples. The Old Testament is very clear that these borders are defined by God (Deut. 32:8). Therefore it was punishable when the Assyrians boasted that they had removed the borders of the peoples (Isa. 10:13). Perhaps we should also think of the border between land and sea (Jer. 5:22).

v. 18a. זכר זאת - "Remember this"

The object for זכר is not necessarily something belonging to the past (Isa. 47:7). The meaning seems to be "think of, consider," rather than "recall the past" (compare Eccl. 12:1).<sup>142</sup> Here Yahweh is called on to pay attention to, to consider, what the enemies are doing. The demonstrative pronoun זאת can be used for reference backward or forward.<sup>143</sup> Here it refers to the following.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup>So Gunkel, Psalmen, 321, 325; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 95; Nötscher, Psalmen, 147; Dahood, Psalms, 2:199, 207; and Young, "Psalm 74," 106.

<sup>141</sup>Briggs, Psalms, 2:156.

<sup>142</sup>See further H. Eising, "זכר," in TWAT, 2:571-593.

<sup>143</sup>See Waltke - O'Connor, § 17.3d and Joüon - Muraoka, § 143b.

v. 18b. ועם נבל - "and a worthless people"

The connotations of נבל is not so much "intellectually inferior" as it is "morally inferior." The nābāl denies God (Ps. 14:1; 53:2). He does what displeases Yahweh (Isa. 32:6) and blasphemes (Job 2:10). One who disgraces a daughter of Israel is a nābāl (2 Sam. 13:13) and does nebālāh (Gen. 34:7; Judg. 20:6; 2 Sam. 13:12). In the same way a girl who has been adulterous has done nebālāh (Deut. 22:21). When Israel turns away from Yahweh and worships idols they נבל their Rock of Salvation (Deut. 32:15) and are themselves עם נבל (Deut. 32:6). Sometimes nābāl seems also to have the connotations of "outcast" (2 Sam. 3:33; Jer. 17:11). Thus to call the enemies עם נבל stresses their wickedness and their lack of respect for Yahweh.<sup>145</sup>

v. 19a. לחית - "to the wild beasts"

Both LXX<sup>146</sup> and Targum translate this way. However, the text is not without problems: The word looks as if it is in construct form. If so, we would have to read לחית נפש, whatever that may mean in this context. It is possible, though, that we have an archaic feminine ending.<sup>147</sup> Secondly, the two occurrences of the word חית in this verse have totally different meanings. However, that may be a deliberate play

---

<sup>144</sup>So most commentators. Contra Gunkel, Psalms, 325.

<sup>145</sup>See further J. Marböck, "נבל nābāl," in TWAT, 5:171-185, and T. Donald, "The Semantic Field of "Folly" in Proverbs, Psalms and Ecclesiastes," Vetus Testamentum 13 (1963): 285-292.

<sup>146</sup>BHS says LXX reads plural, but it may as well be plural translation for collective in Hebrew.

<sup>147</sup>GKC, § 80f. Cf. Dahood, Psalms, 2:207, and Young, "Psalm 74," 112.

on two different meanings of a word.<sup>148</sup>

v. 19a. תורדך - "Your turtle dove"

One Hebrew manuscript plus LXX and Peshitta read תורדך, ἐξομολογουμένην σοι, "the (soul) who praises you." A confusion between resh and daleth is easy and frequent. If we read "wild beasts" with MT and LXX, the figure of the turtle dove fits the context best.

v. 20b. כי מלאו מחשכי-ארץ נאות חמס - "for the hiding-places of the land are filled with dens of violence"

The verse as it stands is difficult. There may be some textual corruption. But it is always easier to point to this possibility, than to restore the original text. BHS suggests אנהרה for MT נאות, but without textual evidence. If we take the text as it stands, we should probably think of the desolation and lawlessness that would follow the war. With the land plundered and the governing structure broken down, the land is open for robbers and looters. They have filled all dark places suitable for hiding, from where they do their wicked work.

---

<sup>148</sup>Young, "Psalm 74," 113; Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 244. A backtranslation from Peshitta would provide the text להוות (KB, 232, הוה II, "Verderben" (232)). KB prefers this reading. BHS proposes למות; BDB, 313, mentions further לשחת and לחרב. The three last mentioned are without textual support and appear to be pure guesses.

v. 21a. אֶל-יֹשֵׁב דָךְ נִכְלָם - "Let not the oppressed turn back ashamed"

It is possible that we should read יֹשֵׁב, "sit" (compare Lam. 2:10; Ps. 137:1).<sup>149</sup>

### Structure

#### Stanzas

The Psalm has three stanzas, preceded by a prologue. The individual stanzas seem not to be subdivided into strophes. The prologue plus the first stanza is as long as stanza II and III together. In other words, the poem has two halves. The middle is marked by a first person singular form, "my king." The structure of the poem can be laid out as follows:

Prologue (vv. 1-3a)  
 Lament (v. 1)  
 Hymn (v. 2)  
 Call for divine intervention (v. 3a)  
 Lament (vv. 3b-11)  
 Hymn (vv. 12-17)  
 Call for divine intervention (vv. 18-23)<sup>150</sup>

The prologue begins with two complaints in question form, the "why" in the first doing double duty for the second. Then in a tricolon God is asked to remember his past actions toward, and relation with, the people. Finally, God is invited to come and see the destruction done by the enemy. The word נָצַח is found near the beginning,

---

<sup>149</sup>So Young, "Psalm 74," 118; Tate, Psalms 51-100, 241, 244.

<sup>150</sup>Following M. Weiss, The Bible from Within, 286-288. Young, "Psalm 74," 143, takes v. 3b with stanza I, but is otherwise in agreement with Weiss. Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 307, also sees the three stanzas each corresponding to a part of the prologue (vv. 1-3), but he takes the invitation to consider the ruining work of the enemy (v. 3) together with vv. 4-11, the description of the case, whereas the prayer (vv. 18-23) expands on the complaint against God's wrath in v. 1.

and near the end, of the prologue, and thus frames it.

The rest of the poem is framed by the description of the enemies roaring in the sanctuary (note the assonance שׂאגו (v.4a), שׂאון (v.23b). Both the prologue and the main body of the poem have three sections with a temporal progression from present to past to future.

Stanza I highlights the enemies, the people and God in succession. Vv. 4-8 describe the enemies as creating havoc in God's dwelling place and burning it to the ground. The destructive character is underlined by very irregular parallelism. V. 9 gives us the effect on the people, whereas vv. 10-11 focus on the taunt that God receives. V. 8, כל מועדי אל, reflects v. 4a, מועדך, whereas v. 9, אאותתינו, by contrast, looks back to v. 4b, אאותתם. Vv. 5-6 and 10-11 stand out by having imperfects; the rest of the stanza has perfect. V. 10-11 harkens back to the למה of verse 1, and thus with the prologue creates a frame<sup>151</sup> for the first half of the poem.

Stanza II (vv. 12-17) starts with a disjunctive waw followed by two nominal clauses. The rest of the stanza consists of verbal clauses addressed to God. אַתָּה is used seven times as subject for verb in perfect. Of the 6 bicola, 5 begin with the letter 'aleph. The structural orderliness underlines that under God's rule there is order. מִקְדָּם, "from ancient time," picks up קִדְמָה, "in ancient time" in v. 2.

Stanza III (vv. 18-23) is dominated by imperatives and negated jussives addressed to Yahweh; v 21. has one third person masculin singular negated, and one

---

<sup>151</sup>I hesitate to use the word "inclusio" for reasons given by Martin Kessler, "Inclusio in the Hebrew Bible", Semitics 6 (1978): 44-49.



third person plural positive, jussive where the subject is the afflicted (with synonyms), but even here the speech is clearly addressed to Yahweh. In total, there are ten expressions of the psalmist's wishes. זכר reflects v. 2 and occurs both in v. 18a and v. 22b. Likewise is the root חרף together with synonyms for "enemy" and the word נבל found both in v. 18 and 22. אל תשכח in both v. 19 and v. 23. The whole third stanza ties to vv. 10-11: V. 10 reads: "How long . . . will the enemy revile, will the foe treat your name irreverently forever?" V. 18 has: "The foe reviles . . . a worthless people treats your name irreverently." "Forever" shows up in v. 19b. V. 21b. contrasts the negative treatment of Yahweh's name: "May the afflicted and the poor praise your name."<sup>152</sup>

The prologue has 7 cola, half the average stanza length in this poem. Stanza I has 16 cola, whereas stanza II and III have 12 cola each. Thus the prologue plus stanza I have 23 cola, one less than the remaining stanzas together (24). Except for one tricolon in v. 2, the psalm consists of bicola.

#### Progression in Content and Mood

The psalm is generally regarded as a lament of the community.<sup>153</sup> Broyles assigns it to the subgenre of the complaint of the individual.<sup>154</sup> The psalm reflects

---

<sup>152</sup>For the section on structure I am heavily indebted to W. A. Young, Psalm 74 (He builds on M. Weiss, The Bible from Within, 281-293).

<sup>153</sup>An exception is F. Willeson, who regards it as a "ritual lament with a fixed position in the cult of the New Year Festival," "The Cultic Situation of Psalm LXXIV," Vetus Testamentum 2 (1952): 289.

<sup>154</sup>Broyles, The Conflict of Faith, 150-154.

the destruction of the temple in 586 BC. Still, every psalm is unique, and we need to trace the progression of thought in this particular psalm. The whole psalm is addressed to God. Jerusalem/the people is spoken of in third person (except v. 9 which has a first person plural). In v. 12, which is the middle of the poem, a first person singular suffix appears.

The psalm begins with a complaint over God's wrath. "Why have you rejected (us) forever?" This rhetorical question demands not an answer but a change (see translation note). To the psalmist the rejection appears total, eternal. A shepherd is supposed to guard and feed his flock, "Why does your anger fume against the sheep you are tending?" This further underlines the hopeless situation of the people. When a wolf attacks the flock, the shepherd is there to kill him or drive him away. When the shepherd has turned against the sheep, there is no one to defend them. Such is the situation now, but it used to be different. In v. 2 God is asked to remember his congregation which he acquired in ancient time, which he redeemed as the tribe of his possession, the second colon making clear that the reference is the exodus.<sup>155</sup> The third colon takes us to the subsequent center of this "tribe of your inheritance" and the cardinal point for Yahweh's relation to his people: "Mount Zion, where you dwelt." The present thus contrasts to the past. God who seemingly has left the city,<sup>156</sup> is

---

<sup>155</sup>For גאל with exodus: Exod. 6:6; 15:13. For the expression שובט נחלה see Isa. 63:17; Jer. 10:16; 51:19. The colon reminds us of Ex. 19:4-6 where Yahweh reminds Israel how he carried them "on wings of eagles and brought you to me" with the intention that Israel should be his סגלה מכל-העמים.

<sup>156</sup>Compare Ezekiel's vision of the glory of Yahweh leaving the temple (Ezek. 10:18-19) and the city of Jerusalem (11:22-23).

called on to lift his footsteps to what is left of his former dwelling place: utter ruins. As in v. 1, both the totality and the temporal aspect is present in נצח. The repetition of this word in the first and second to the last colon of the prologue underlines these aspects of the miserable situation. So far, the psalmist has only mentioned two actors, God and his people. The last colon of the prologue introduces a third, the enemy. In this way v. 3b functions as a transition to the first stanza, where the enemy plays a major role.

The enemy is singular in v. 3b and v. 5, presumably referring to the attacking king. The plural in v. 4, 6, and 7-8 would then refer to his soldiers. V. 3b places the enemy in the sanctuary. Then, in v. 4, the psalmist points the finger toward God: I am talking of your enemies. They roared (like lions, Judg. 14:5; Hos. 11:10; Amos 3:8) in your meeting place. There, in your meeting place, they set up their military standards carrying the emblem of their god (Marduk?). These would then not only show the victory of the enemy's armies, but also symbolize that their god had been victorious. If our translation of vv. 5-6 is correct<sup>157</sup> the idea is either: As the psalmist saw the soldiers coming with axes and clubs to hack out the valuable metals and precious stones that were engraved in the temple structure, he was reminded of wood cutters in the thick forest and thus recalled how the attacking king had had workers in the forests of Lebanon chopping down the lofty cedars of God. Or, if to cut down a forest with axes was already a well known simile or expression for a total defeat of an enemy: The attacking king had already defeated many armies, attacked

---

<sup>157</sup>See translation notes to these verses, pp. 76-77.

and sacked many cities. Now he had turned against the dwelling place of God, and even in God's temple he was able to loot at will. Not content with plundering, the enemies put the sanctuary on fire, again the psalmist takes care to say your sanctuary. In 7b he calls it "the dwelling-place of your name." An attack on the dwelling-place of his name must surely be an attack on God himself. The enemies have "polluted it to the ground" so that there is no longer a holy dwelling-place there. God has no more a dwelling-place in Zion (vv. 2c-3a). Still the enemies were not satisfied. "They said in their hearts, Let us oppress them (the Israelites) all." With this in mind they went through the whole country burning every structure that was used for worshipping Yahweh.<sup>158</sup> In vv. 4-8 the people are absent (but for the suffix of ׀׀׀ (v. 8). The enemy has destroyed God's place. In v. 9 the focus is on the people. V. 4 mentions the signs, field standards, of the enemy. In contrast: "Signs for us we do not see." What the people wanted to see was not war emblems of Yahweh, if such ever existed. They needed signs assuring of God's presence and intervention just as the emblems assured the enemies of their god's victorious presence. For Israel the assurance could be conveyed for example through a prophetic vision. But "there is no longer a prophet," a phrase which again is explained through the next: "There is not with us anyone who knows how long." The misery had dragged on and on, and no one knew its end, if there was any, yet, there had to be! For, "How long, O God, will the enemy taunt, will the foe treat your name irreverently forever?" This never ending situation is insulting to your name, O God! How long will you tolerate it. How can it

---

<sup>158</sup>See translation note to v. 8c, pp. 78-79.

be (again with reproach and complaint as in v. 1) that you withdraw your hand, even your mighty right hand with which you formerly used to do all the mighty works. Get it out of your lap! End it!

The god of the attacker (Marduk?) had deprived Yahweh of his temple. What would that imply in an ancient Near Eastern context? The Babylonian myth of origin, Enuma Elish, tells how the chaos powers threatened to destroy the gods. No one was up to fight Tiamat and her allies. Then Marduk stood up and slew her. From her body he formed the inhabitable universe. All the gods acclaimed him as supreme king and built his palace (temple) in Babylon.<sup>159</sup> A similar myth is found among the Ugaritic texts. Baal defeats Yam and is then acclaimed king. But he has no palace as the other gods. After a bit more back and forth, the palace is finally constructed and Baal can exercise his kingship of the universe.<sup>160</sup> Now Yahweh is seemingly defeated and has no palace. In a polytheistic environment this seemed to say: Yahweh is not king. Marduk (or whoever the god of the attacking king is) is the supreme. The second stanza attacks this problem.

"But, O God, my king from ancient time, achiever of victories on the earth."

God is king and he is my king. "From ancient time" reflects "in ancient time" (v. 2).

This reference, the personal suffix with "king," the fact that several texts older or

---

<sup>159</sup>J. B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd edition with Supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 60-72, 501-503.

<sup>160</sup>KTU 1.2-1.4 (The role of KTU 1.1 is not clear). For an English translation, see e.g. Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends, 37-67. For the monsters associated with Yam, see our translation note to vv. 13-14, pp. 82-83.

contemporary with the psalm apply chaos-myth language to the crossing of the sea (Ps. 77:17-21; Isa. 51:9-10), plus that creation and the beginning of the people of Israel are fused for example in Ps. 100:3 and Isa. 43:1, make plausible that a secondary allusion to the Yahweh's historical defeat of the Sea in the exodus event is intended even though no explicit reference is made. In the midst of seemingly contrary evidence, the psalmist confesses that God and not the god of the invaders, is king. He is the achiever of victories, not Marduk or Baal. This is not a confession in happy triumph. Rather the perplexed and afflicted people who asked "Why do you withdraw your hand" are forced to remind God of who God is. The first person singular underlines the confessional character of the statement.<sup>161</sup> Notice that it comes exactly at the middle of the poem. The seven-fold אתה, "you," as (emphatic) subject for verbs in the perfect heightens the contrast to the god of the attacker. Not he, but you and you alone are the supreme. Vv. 13-14 relates God's victory over Yam and his allies. The imperfect in v. 14 may either be a stylistic variant or describing God as portioning out the heads of Leviatan to the sea-farers. The verses have one אתה per bicolon. It is to be noted that vv. 15-17 has one אתה in each colon (except for v. 16a which begins with יְיָ. This seems to favor Eberlein's thesis that they are to be seen as independent statements, rather than a coherent creation myth as Gunkel

---

<sup>161</sup>It is not necessary to think of vv. 12-17 as sung by a soloist as opposed to the rest by a the people or a choir (so e.g. E. Bryn, K. Myhre et al, Psalmenes Bok (Oslo: Luther and Lunde, 1985-1987), 2:23).

understood these verses.<sup>162</sup> The point of vv. 13-14 is not to describe how God created the earth, or how and when he defeated the chaos monsters. The undisputable victory is described to depict God as the unrivalled achiever of victory, the creator and king of the universe. It is in his capacity as king of creation that God does the things which are mentioned in vv. 15-17. God is the one who creates the springs and the streams. He is the one who dries up perennial rivers. He made and controls the different aspects of nature, such as, day and night (v. 16a), moon and sun (seen as gods by the peoples surrounding Israel), all the boundaries of the earth, and the seasons of the year. God is the unrivalled supreme king of the universe. He has shattered all cosmic forces. He is the author and governor of all creation. He is my king. This glorious confession is set in bold contrast to the miserable situation described in the first stanza.

Stanza III is dominated by imperatives and negated jussives rousing God to activity on behalf of his people and on behalf of himself. It begins by picking up v. 10. The unrivalled creator and king of the universe is brought back to the present reality. "Consider this [that is, the following]: the foe taunts (ףרף cf. 10a) Yahweh." Note the word-play on the alliteration פרף and פרף. God controls the winter but can seemingly not stand up to an earthly enemy. This verse is the first and only place in the psalm that the name Yahweh is used, and it is used as an object for the taunting of the enemies! V. 18b follows up by saying his name is treated irreverently, reflecting

---

<sup>162</sup>Eberlein, Gott der Schöpfer, 199; Gunkel, Psalmen, 325. Eberlein further uses his exegesis of v. 15 (see translation note, pp. 84-86) to support his view. It should be noted, however, that Gunkel shares his interpretation of this particular verse.

v. 10b. The "foe" in v. 10 has become "a worthless people."<sup>163</sup> The nābāl carries the day. This is what God is called on to consider. V. 19 calls Israel God's turtledove. This little creature is helpless against the wild beasts: "Don't give her life to them, O God." The word חַיִּית which in v. 19a is used of the enemies, is in 19b applied to the people of God: "The life of your afflicted ones do not forget forever." This is not a bold prayer for quick relief. The psalmist prays for the survival of his people and that the misery may end some time. לַנָּצַח picks up v. 10b. In v. 20a the psalmist asks God to look at the covenant, consider the relationship he established with this people, the promises he gave. The reason for stating this prayer follows in 20b: In a ravaged land where justice has broken down, lawless people have filled up every dark place suitable for hiding a robber's den. The oppressed have turned to Yahweh in prayer, let them not have to turn back ashamed because there was no help. Change the situation so that the afflicted and poor can praise your name (which is the alternative to have your name treated irreverently by your impious and taunting enemies). V. 22 spells out the appeal that has been implicit in the whole psalm: "Arise, O God, conduct your case!" The enemy has brought forth evidence indicating that you are a defeated weakling, that either does not care about your people or are unable to do anything. You have to clear your name, disprove the vicious charges! Remember (זָכַר, compare v. 18a) the taunt of you (חֲרַפְתֶּךָ, cf חָרַף v. 18a) from the worthless one all the time! Then the voice of the psalmist grows weaker: "Do not forget the noise of your enemies," and finally drowns surrounded by noise, "the

---

<sup>163</sup>See translation note to v. 18b, p. 88, for the precise connotations.



uproar of those who rise against you which goes up constantly.”

The psalm ends as the main body started, with the enemies roaring. The tension is not resolved. The psalmist professes faith in God as the supreme unrivalled king of the universe and as the one who has entered into relationship with Israel. The present reality bluntly contradicts this belief. The enemies have carried and still carry the day. The very existence of God’s helpless people is in the balance. There is no theophany, no answer, no intervention. Only the constant uproar of the enemies can be heard.

### The Problem

Enemies have sacked Jerusalem, looted and burnt the temple (vv. 4-8). The psalmist interprets this as evidence that God has rejected his people, that he is angry with them (v.1). He sees him as no longer dwelling in Jerusalem (vv. 2c-3a). Another interpretation lies close at hand, however, and must have frustrated many of his people: God is defeated. The god of the enemy, whose emblem shines from the field standards that were set up in God’s city (v. 4b), is the supreme god, king of the universe. The psalmist is further distressed by the fact that he does not know how long God’s anger and the enemies’ triumph will last (vv. 9-10). Will it last forever (v. 19)? Finally, in this chaotic situation, where general lawlessness (v. 20b) adds to the misery caused by the enemy, the very existence of God’s people appears in danger (v. 19a).

### The Prayer

The psalmist prays for the survival of the people (v. 19). He prays that God

must end the present situation, and thus his wrath that permitted it (v. 11b). He asks God to think of the covenant he has established with the people (v. 20a). He begs God not to let his oppressed people down (v. 21a). He wants to return to a situation where the afflicted people can praise Yahweh's name (v. 21b), instead of seeing it mocked and taunted by victorious enemies. Finally, God is asked to arise and show that he is the one the people have professed him to be: the supreme and only God, the unrivalled king of the universe (v. 12 and 22-23). There is no prayer for restoration of the temple or the city. Apparently the situation was too dark to think so far ahead. If only God would end his anger!

### The Appeal

Israel is God's tribe of inheritance. Zion is the place where he dwelt. The destruction of the temple is an attack on God himself. The enemies are his enemies (v. 4a). The enemies' idol emblems are highly visible, God is quiet, which to the enemies implies that he is powerless. They have deprived him of his dwelling place; has their god defeated Yahweh? They treat his name irreverently (v. 10c and 18b). This stands in sharp contrast to the fact that he and he alone is the powerful and mighty. He is really the unrivalled king of the universe. The psalmist brings this argument very vividly to the fore by dragging God to court and charging him to defend his reputation, to prove that he is the one he is. Further, God has entered into a relation with his people. They are the sheep he tends (v. 1b). He acquired them in ancient time (v. 2a). He redeemed them and made them his special people (v. 2b). Zion was the place he chose for the dwelling place of his name (v. 2c, 7b). Israel is

his defenseless "turtledove," should God not defend it? (v. 19a). They are "your afflicted ones," do not forget them (v. 19b)! God has established a covenant with his people, pay attention to it, O God (v. 20a)! These people want to live in a relationship with you where they can praise your name, let them do so, O God (v. 21b). Is that not better than having your name treated irreverently by the worthless, impious enemy (v. 18)? The several designations denoting low, poor, helpless, afflicted (v. 19a+b, v. 21a+b) which are applied to God's people, are designed to move God to pity.



- b. תסתיר פניך ממני
- 16a. עני אני וגוע מנער
  - b. נשאתי אמיד אפונה
- 17a. עלי עברו חרוניך
  - b. בעותיך צמתותני
- 18a. סבוני כמים כל-היום
  - b. הקיפו עלי יחד
- 19a. הרחקת ממני אהב ורע
  - b. מידעי מחשך

### Translation

1. A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. For the musical director. To Mahalath-leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.
  
- 2a. O Yahweh, God of my salvation:
  - b. By day I cry,
  - c. in the night before you.
- 3a. Let my prayer come before you,
  - b. Incline your ear to my cry of supplication!
- 4a. For my soul is sated with troubles,
  - b. and my life has come near to Sheol.
- 5a. I am reckoned with those who go down to the pit.
  - b. I have become like a man without strength.
- 6a. Among the dead I am "free,"
  - b. like the slain,
  - c. those who lie in the grave,
  - d. whom you no longer remember, -
  - e. they are cut off from your hand.
- 7a. You have placed me in the nethermost pit,
  - b. in the darkness of the depths.
- 8a. Against me your wrath has pressed,
  - b. and with all your breakers you have subdued me. Selah.
- 9a. You have caused my close friends to stay away from me,
  - b. have made me an abomination for them,
  - c. imprisoned, so I cannot escape.
  
- 10a. My eye has grown weak from affliction.
  - b. I have called to you, O Yahweh, every day,
  - c. I have spread out to you my hands.
- 11a. Do you do wonders to the dead?

- b. Do the ghosts rise and praise you? Selah.
- 12a. Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
  - b. your faithfulness in Abaddon?
- 13a. Are your wonders made known in the darkness,
  - b. and your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?
  
- 14a. But I, to you, O Yahweh, I cry for help,
  - b. in the morning my prayer meets you.
- 15a. Why, O Yahweh, have you rejected me,
  - b. (why) do you hide your face from me?
- 16a. Afflicted I am and about to expire from my youth.
  - b. I bear your terrors, I despair.
- 17a. Over me sweep your bursts of wrath;
  - b. your alarms annihilate me.
- 18a. They surround me like water all the time;
  - b. they close up against me together.
- 19a. You have caused to stay far from me beloved and friend,
  - b. my close friends - darkness!

#### Translation Notes

##### v. 1. שִׁיר - "A Song"

This is the unmarked word for song (Amos 5:23; 6:5). The word occurs a little more than thirty times in the superscription of psalms. Mowinckel thinks that here it had a more specialized, technical meaning, since "there would be no point in stating in a heading that the text for cultic singing was a 'song' in a general sense." He cannot, however, provide any further information as to what that specialized meaning might be.<sup>164</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup>Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:207-208, cf. Psalmenstudien, 2:2-3.

v. 1. לבני קרח - "of the sons of Korah"

See translation note to Ps. 44:1.<sup>165</sup> Delekat points out that this psalm is the only one in which "to the musical director" is preceded by something else. He therefore proposes that the preceding words may originally have been a subscription to Psalm 87.<sup>166</sup> There is no textual support for this view, but some sort of fusing of two originally independent titles is not entirely implausible.

v. 1. על-מחלת לענות - "to Mahalath-leannoth"

The meaning is uncertain. Tate provides a good survey of different opinions.<sup>167</sup>

v. 1. משכיל להימן האזרחי - "A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite"

According to the Chronicler, Heman ben Joel (1 Chron. 15:17) was one of the chief temple singers appointed by king David (1 Chron. 15:19; 25:6) and father of a family of Levitic temple singers (1 Chron. 25:1; 2 Chron. 29:14). He is called "the seer of the king" in 1 Chron. 25:5. 1 Kings 5:11 mentions Heman together with Ethan the Ezrahite as men known for wisdom but surpassed by Solomon. 1 Chron. 2:6 has Ethan and Heman as sons of Zerah, grandsons of Judah. Ethan the Ezrahite is given as the author of Psalm 89 (89:1). To make the picture even more complicated, there exists a word אזרח, "native" as opposed to גר, "foreigner" (Lev. 16:29; 17:15).

---

<sup>165</sup>P. 46.

<sup>166</sup>L. Delekat, "Probleme der Psalmenüberschriften," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 76 (1964):281.

<sup>167</sup>Tate, Psalms 51-100, 394-395.

Dahood has thus suggested that "Ezrahite" describes Heman (and Ethan) as a native of a pre-Israelite Canaanite family.<sup>168</sup> But elsewhere the "natives" are always the Israelites and the "foreigners" those who do not belong to Israel. The derivation is therefore to be doubted. The meaning of "Maskil" is not clear.

v. 2b+c. יום-צעקתי בלילה נגודך - "By day I cry, in the night before you"

With Dahood we take both "I cry" and "before you" as doing double duty for both cola. His translation, "day and night I cry to you,"<sup>169</sup> however, deprives the verse of some of the intensity achieved by adding "in the night."<sup>170</sup>

v. 3b. לרנתי - "to my cry of supplication"

רנה seems to denote a ringing cry, and have different connotations depending on the context. It connotes joy and praise in Ps. 105:43; 107:22. It is parallel to תפלה in Ps. 17:1; 61:2. Here the meaning must be something like, "cry of supplication."

v. 5a. עם-יורדי בור - "with those who go down to the Pit"

The usual meaning of בור is "well, cistern" (Deut. 6:11; Exod. 21:34), but it may also mean a pit used as a trap (Ps. 7:16). A cistern (or hole in the ground) could

---

<sup>168</sup>Dahood, Psalms, 2:302.

<sup>169</sup>Dahood, Psalms, 2:301-302. The text is often emended to: אלהי שועתי יומם וצעקתי בלילה נגודך, "My God, I cry for help during the day, my crying is in the night before you," Gunkel, Psalmen, 381-382; Nötscher, Psalmen, 177, G. Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 889. Similar: Calès, Les Psaumes, 2:118, 120-122). For a survey of different ways this verse has been translated, see Tate, Psalms 51-100, 395-396.

<sup>170</sup>To this compare J. L. Kugel, The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History, 40-41.



be used for prison (Exod. 12:29; Jer. 37:16). Perhaps this use is the background for the usage of בור for Sheol, the underworld (Isa. 14:15; Ezek. 32:23).<sup>171</sup> To “go down to the pit” accordingly means “to die.” ירדו בור probably denotes those who are in the process of dying, that is, not those who are already dead (Ps. 28:1; 30:4; Isa. 38:18).<sup>172</sup>

v. 5b. כגבר אין-איל - “like a man without strength”

איל is a hapax. BDB<sup>173</sup> translates “help.” It is then taken to be a loan word from Aramaic, though the word is apparently not attested in Biblical, Jewish, or Old/Imperial Aramaic, but only in Syriac.<sup>174</sup> By comparing with the words איל I, “ram” and איל II, “mighty tree”, we should perhaps rather translate “strength” with KB.<sup>175</sup> More important, this translation is supported by the Jewish tradition witnessed to by Targum.<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup>So J. G. Heintz, “בור באר,” in TWAT, 1:500-503. Different: A. Bentzen, “Daniel 6: Ein Versuch zur Vorgeschichte der Märtyrlegende,” in Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet, eds. W. Baumgartner et.al. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 60.

<sup>172</sup>See KB, 112.

<sup>173</sup>BDB, 33.

<sup>174</sup>KB, 39 provides an Arabic cognate meaning “refuge”.

<sup>175</sup>KB, 39. So most recent commentaries, e.g. Tate, Psalms 51-100, 394; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 190; Nötscher, Psalmen, 177; Calès, Les Psaumes, 2:118.

<sup>176</sup>Targum to this verse translates חילא, “strength”; targum to Ps. 22:20 (אילות) renders תוקפי, “strength, stronghold.” Also Delitzsch argues for this translation (Psalms, 3:25, for Ps 22:20: Psalms, 1:321).

v. 6a. ירפשי - "I am 'free'"

The usual sense of the word is "free (from slavery), freedman" (Exod. 21:2, 5; Job 3:19). This meaning does not fit the context. In a Ugaritic text the death-god Mot says to Baal:

wrd bt hptt. 'ars            and go down into the house of "freedom" in the earth  
tspr by rdm. 'ars            be counted among those who go down into the earth.<sup>177</sup>

It is interesting that the second colon resembles v. 5a in our Psalm. Since the translation of bt hptt in the Ugaritic text is at best uncertain,<sup>178</sup> however, the gain is limited. Probably the only thing we can say from the Ugaritic evidence is that a cognate word of ירפשי is attested used with reference to the nether world. If the word has its ordinary sense, the idea must be something like: Like a slave is free from his master when he is dead (Job 3:19), I am now free from being a servant of God. For a slave this is fortunate, since his slavery was hard; for me it is disastrous, since to serve God was my life. We thus have here an ironical use of the word "free."<sup>179</sup> It has often been suggested to emend the text, but it still holds true what Gunkel concluded about the problem many years ago: "Konjekturen [that is, the suggested ones]

---

<sup>177</sup>KTU 1.5 V 14-16a. The English translation given here is from Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends, 72.

<sup>178</sup>G. Widengren, "Konungens vistelse i dödsriket," Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok 10 (1945): 71, translates bt hptt 'rs with: "jordens djupa boning," "the deep abode of the earth." Dahood, Psalms, 2:88, has: "the nether house of cots." P. Grelot casts forth: "lieu de pourriture," "place of decay," from an Arabic cognate as a hypotheses, Grelot, "Hofšī (Ps LXXXVIII 6)," Vetus Testamentum 14 (1964): 260-261. Grelot has a good survey of different translations and suggestions for emendation of ירפשי in our verse (the whole article is pages 256-263).

<sup>179</sup>So Tate, Psalms 51-100, 396.

überzeugen nicht recht."<sup>180</sup>

v. 6c. שכבי קבר - "those who lie in the grave"

With BHS and most commentators we take this as an independent colon and not as part of 6b.<sup>181</sup> Since "the slain" is stronger than simply "the dead," and since a decent burial is not what generally characterizes those who die on the battlefield, Gunkel suggests to emend this colon to "those deprived of a grave." Tate understands קבר here as a "common grave" of those "slain and buried without proper attention (compare Isa. 14:19 and Ezck. 32:20-32)."<sup>182</sup> As in v. 12, we should probably take קבר as referring to the underworld. Tate's reference to Ezekiel 32 talks about slain "who went down uncircumcized to the nether world," (v. 24).

v. 6e. והמה מידך נגזרו - "they are cut off from your hand"

והמה is used with change of subject to heighten the contrast between the subjects: You do not remember, they are cut off (Jer. 31:1, 33; Ps. 106:43). The niph'al נגזר is used with personal subject five times. Of these two are without object (Ezck. 37:11; Lam. 3:54), both in the sense "as good as dead, beyond hope." King Uzziah was "cut off" from the house of Yahweh when he got leprosy (2 Chron.

---

<sup>180</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 382. This holds true also for the suggestion made by J. L. Haddix, "Lamentation as Personal Experience in Selected Psalms" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University Graduate School, 1980), 115, who suggested to read šîn instead of šîn.

<sup>181</sup>Contra Widengreen, "Konungens vistelse," 70.

<sup>182</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 383. So also Jacquet, Lcs Psaumes, 2:669, and Tate, Psalms 51-100, 396.

26:21), and Yahweh's Servant was "cut off" from the land of living (Isa. 53:8). Thus in all these cases the subject is excluded from life before God and with others. God's hand very often suggests God's power and saving activity (Ps. 44:3; 74:11; 139:10). Since both Isa. 53:8 and 2 Chron. 26:21 uses the preposition  $\text{מן}$  in a privative sense, we should take it in the same sense here.

v. 7b.  $\text{[במחשכי־ם מצלות]}$  - "in the darkness of the depths"

MT has  $\text{במחשכים במצלות}$ , "in the darkness, in the depths." However, H. D. Hummel has pointed out that the second bet probably arose from a failure to realize that the preceding mem was not a plural ending, but enclitic.<sup>183</sup> Except for Zech. 1:8  $\text{מצולה}$  always refers to the depth of the sea (Zech. 10:11 of the Nile). In Psalm 69 the psalmist prays to God to save him from the waters "for the waters have reached to my neck, I sink in the miry depth ( $\text{מצולה}$ ) and there is no foothold" (v. 2b-3a+b). In v. 16  $\text{שבלת מים}$ , "floodwater",  $\text{מתולה}$ , and  $\text{באר}$  (=  $\text{בור}$ ), "pit" are all parallel. We should probably think of the chaos waters that often are depicted as God's enemies (Ps. 74:13-14). To be in the grip of the depths of the sea and to be in the grip of death, would then both imply being excluded from God's saving activity and thrown to the mercy of the life-threatening forces.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup>H. D. Hummel, "Enclitic mem in Early Northwest Semitic," 98. This reading is also adopted by Tate, Psalms 51-100, 394, 396-397.

<sup>184</sup>See further O. Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms, translated by T. J. Hallet (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 73-75. Gunkel, however, thinks the background for putting "the depths of the sea" parallel to "the nethermost pit" is that "die Wohnung der Toten liegt unter den großen Wassern" (Psalmen, 383).

In this way we must understand the statements implying that the psalmist already is in Sheol. Life and death is seen in relation to Yahweh. When Yahweh has rejected a person, and the life threatening forces have come with sickness, in the form of enemies, or in other ways threaten his life, then the sphere of death has entered his life. It is characteristic for the dead to be outside the actions of God. But this is exactly what the psalmist experiences. Thus he is really in Sheol.<sup>185</sup>

v. 8a. עלי סמך חמתך - "against me your wrath has pressed"

סמך usually means "lay hand on" (for example, the head of a sacrificial victim) (Exod. 29:10; Lev. 1:4; Num. 8:12), or "support, sustain" (Gen. 27:37; Isa. 59:16). However, in Ezek. 24:2 it is said that the king of Babylon סמך אל, has laid siege to, Jerusalem. In our verse a hostile action is clearly intended.

v. 8b. וכל-משבריק ענית - "and with all your breakers you have subdued me"

The text is difficult, since the verb is second person and has no object suffix. We have taken "with all your breakers" as adverbial accusative,<sup>186</sup> though we have to admit an adverbial accusative of means is not well attested.<sup>187</sup> An alternative would be to read third person plural (emendation) and make "all your breakers" the

---

<sup>185</sup>H. J. Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, translated by K. Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 162-168. See further C. Barth, Die Erettung vom Tode in den individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), 91-122.

<sup>186</sup>So Dahood, Psalms, 2:304; Tate, Psalms 51-100, 397. Haddix in his translation note takes "you" as subject for the ענית, however, in his translation he translates with "all your breakers" as subject, "Lamentation as Personal Experience," 115 and 113.

<sup>187</sup>Jouön - Muraoka, § 1271.

subject of the colon. Gunkel and others read אָנִית, "du hast treffen lassen." We further understand עָלִי in 8a to do double duty also for the B-colon.<sup>188</sup> מַשְׁבְּרִים is taken in the usual sense "breakers of the sea," as in several other descriptions of deep distress (Ps. 42:8; 2 Sam. 22:5; Jon. 2:4).<sup>189</sup>

v. 9a. מִיָּדְעִי - "my close friends"

This is pual participle of יָדַע, "know." J. L. Haddix translates "my acquaintances," but as can be seen from Ps. 55:14 and 2 Kings 10:11, the word implies more than mere acquaintance. For the word used with the motive of deprivation of friends in lament, see Ps. 31:12 and Job 19:14.

v. 9b. תְּנוּעָבוֹת - "an abomination"

With Gunkel we take this as plural of amplification or intensity.<sup>190</sup>

v. 9c. כָּלְאֵי - "imprisoned, so I cannot escape"

We understand the word as a qal passive participle. For the meaning "lock up

---

<sup>188</sup>Dahood, Psalms, 2:305; Tate, Psalms 51-100, 397; Haddix, "Lamentation as Personal Experience," 115.

<sup>189</sup>Contra Dahood, Psalms, 2:304. He conjectures a sense "your outbursts" which he tries to half-way undergird by the Ugaritic expression tbr aphm, "their nostrils" (Dahood's translation). The text (KTU 1.2 I 13) is, however, badly broken, and th.b.r. may well have the usual meaning of שָׁבַר, "break". So Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends, 40.

<sup>190</sup>GKC, § 124e, Joüon - Muraoka, § 136f. Gunkel, Psalmen, 383. Many commentaries translate singular but do not tell whether they emended (so BHS apparatus) or took the plural as intensive.

in a room," imprison, see 1 Sam. 6:10; Jer. 32:2-3.<sup>191</sup> The participle is dependent on the suffix of שְׁתַּנִּי in 9b.<sup>192</sup> BHS apparatus proposes to read either כָּלֹא אֲנִי or נִכְלַאתִי, both giving the meaning "I am imprisoned."<sup>193</sup> LXX and Peshitta translate in the same way, but whether they actually had another Vorlage than MT is difficult to decide. For the idea of God imprisoning a person, see Job 12:14 and Lam. 3:7.

v. 10a. עֵינִי דֹאבָה מִנִּי עֲנִי - "my eye grows weak from affliction"

Outside this verse the verb דָּאב is used in Jer. 31:12, 25 and is traditionally translated "languish". To the whole phrase, compare Ps. 6:8 (note that "eye" is singular both there and here). Probably we should understand the reason for the weakening of the eye in our verse in the same way as there: It is caused by the weeping that results from the distress.

v. 10c. שִׁטַּחְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ כַּפַּי - "I have spread out my hands to you"

To spread out the hands is a gesture of praying (Exod. 9:33; 1 Kings 8:38). Our verse is the only place the verb שִׁטַּח is used in this phrase. Gruber maintains a difference between שִׁטַּח כַּפַּיִם, "stretch forth the palms, beg for help," and the more usual פָּרַשׂ כַּפַּיִם, "spread the palms, supplicate."<sup>194</sup> He does not, however, explain

---

<sup>191</sup>Compare כלוא(ה) בית = prison.

<sup>192</sup>So Dahood, Psalms, 2:305, and Haddix, "Lamentation as Personal Experience," 115. Gunkel, Psalmen, 383, and Kraus, Psalms 60-150, share this understanding of MT.

<sup>193</sup>So Gunkel and Kraus, see previous note.

<sup>194</sup>Gruber, Aspects of Nonverbal Communication, 1:25 and 44.

how he arrives to his translation of שטח. In the qal the verb clearly means "spread out" (Num. 11:32; 2 Sam. 17:19; Jer. 8:2; Job 12:23). The piel is found only here. Thus it seems best to take the phrase as a variant of the more common פרש כפים without any significant difference in meaning.

v. 11a. פלא - "wonders"

The word is taken as collective, compare Ps. 77:12, 15; 89:6. The same is the case for פלאך in v. 13a.

v. 11b. יודוך - "do the ghosts stand up to praise you?"

For רפאים, "ghosts, dead, dwellers of Sheol", compare Isa. 26:14, 19; Job 26:5. יודוך is asyndetically attached to the previous verb.<sup>195</sup>

v. 12a+b. חסדך אמונתך - "your steadfast love, your faithfulness"

These words are a common pair often used in praise to denote God's characteristics (Ps. 36:6; 89:2, 25, 34; 98:3). Here they are located in parallel cola.<sup>196</sup> We notice in our verse that these characteristics are not called into question.

v. 12b. באבדון - "in Abaddon"

The word is from the root אבד, "perish." It is used as a name for the underworld (Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Prov. 15:11).

---

<sup>195</sup>Cf. GKC § 120g.

<sup>196</sup>See our treatment of these words in chapter 3, pp. 198-199.



v. 13b. בארץ נשיה - "the Land of Forgetfulness"

נשיה is a hapax, but the verb נשה, "forget" is used seven times, and the meaning is clear. Even the memory of God's gracious works is erased as people enter Sheol.

v. 14a. ואני - "but I"

This contrasts the psalmist with the dead, who did not pray to God. The waw is disjunctive.<sup>197</sup>

v. 14b. תפלתי תקדמך - "my prayer meets you"

The verb means "meet, reach, come before, confront" (Ps. 21:4; 89:15). We translate "meet" to distinguish from the expression translated "come before" in v. 3a.

v. 15a. למה יהוה תזנח נפשי - "Why, O Yahweh, have you rejected me"

Questions beginning with למה often express complaint or reproach, see our translation note to Ps. 74:1a. Balentine notes that the "why" questions in the psalms often go unanswered. It is the uncertainty, the inability to understand God's actions in the present situation, that gives rise to the questions (compare Ps. 10:1; 44:24).<sup>198</sup>

For the verb זנח, "reject," see translation note to Ps. 44:24.<sup>199</sup> נפשי is periphrastic for "I" (cf. Ps. 103:1-2).

---

<sup>197</sup>Cf. Waltke - O'Connor, § 39.2.3b.

<sup>198</sup>Balentine, The Hidden God, 116-125.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., 143-151.

v. 15b. תסתיר פניך ממני - "(why) do you hide your face from me"

"Why" in 15a does double duty also for the B-colon.<sup>200</sup>

v. 16a. עני אני וגוע מנער - "Afflicted I am and about to expire from my youth"

גוע means "expire, die" (Gen. 25:8; Job 3:11). Here it must mean something like "ready to die, about to expire."<sup>201</sup> The versions seem to have read יגע, "exhausted." Castellino emends accordingly.<sup>202</sup> The word "my" before "youth" is needed in English but not in Hebrew. Dahood and Haddix take the mem of מנער as enclitic and read the root נער, "growl" (Jer. 51:38). A hapax in the Bible, the root is attested in post-biblical Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic. However, Dahood prefers to support it mainly by some quite shaky Ugaritic evidence.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup>For the hiding of God's face, see translation note to Ps. 44:25, pp. 55-56.

<sup>201</sup>Briggs, The Book of Psalms, 2: 243-244; Delitzsch, Psalms, 3:22; Tate, Psalms 51-100, 394, 398. Gunkel, Psalmen, 383, takes MT to mean: "I die from my youth, i.e. while I am still young."

<sup>202</sup>Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 214-215.

<sup>203</sup>Haddix, "Lamentation as Personal Experience," 114, 116; Dahood, Psalms, 2:306. Dahood quotes KTU 1.2 IV 6-7: wtn gh ygr tht ksitbl ym, which he translates: "And his voice was given forth, he groaned [ygr, from the root ngr] under the throne of prince Yam." Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends, 43, translates: ". . . he sank (ygr) under the throne of prince Yam." A. Caquot, M. Sznycer, and A. Herdner, Textes Ougaritiques. Tome I: Mythes et Légendes (Paris: Cerf, 1974), 135-136: "Sa voix (ne) se fait entendre (qu') en grognant [ygr, root gr, from Arabic wagr] sous le thron du Prince Yam." The other Ugaritic text quoted by Dahood is KTU 1.93: 1-2: arh.td.rgm.bgr, translated: "The wild cow throws her voice by mooing." C. Virolleau, Le Palais Royal D'Ugarit V, Mission de Ras Shamra XI (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale and Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1965), 173, translates: "La génisse jette (cet) appel (du haut) de la montagne" (gr). A. Caquot, J. M de Tarragon, and J. L. Cunchillos, Textes Ougaritiques. Tome II: Textes religieux, rituels, correspondance (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 37-38, translates: "La Génisse émet (cette) parole: "un cri . . ." (bgr parallel to Arabic fağara and Hebrew פער).

v. 16b. נשאתי אמיך אפונה - "I bear your terrors, I despair"

"Your terrors" is understood as subjective genitive: the terrors that are caused by you. אפונה is a hapax, apparently from the root פון. The meaning is uncertain. LXX translates: καὶ ἐξηπορήθησθαι from ἐξαπορέω, "be in great difficulty, doubt, embarrassment." With Tate we simply suppose LXX understood it.<sup>204</sup>

v. 17a. חרוניך - "your bursts of wrath"

Tate considers it an intensive plural, but in view of the plurals both in 16b and 17b we should understand it as a real plural. Compare חסדות, "expressions of steadfast love," and צדקות, "deeds of righteousness." They sweep over the psalmist as waves (compare Ps. 42:8; 124:4-5).

v. 17b. צמתותני - "(they) annihilate me"

For the form of the verb, see BDB.<sup>205</sup>

v. 19b. מידעי מחשך - "my close friends - darkness!"

The meaning seems to be: My close friends? My only close companion is darkness!<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup>Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 398. The word is often emended to אפונה, "grow numb". So e.g. Castellino, *Libro dei Salmi*, 214, 889. Nötscher, *Psalmen*, 178, takes it as loan word from Akkadian, translating: "in höchstem Maße." Haddix, "Lamentation as Personal Experience," 116, connects it with פנא which he says mean "to turn, to pass away," but the verb never means "pass away" in the sense required here. For the cohortative form see GKC, § 108g.

<sup>205</sup>BDB, 856.

<sup>206</sup>Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3:29. Dahood, *Psalms*, 2:307, thinks of darkness as Sheol, but we should probably take it as a sum of the whole distressful situation.

## Structure

Stanzas

The psalm has three stanzas: vv. 2-9, 10-13, and 14-19. None of them are subdivided into strophes. Every stanza begins with an introduction depicting the psalmist as persistently praying to Yahweh. Stanza I contains 21 cola, whereas stanza II has 9, and stanza III has 12. Thus the two last stanzas are together of equal length with stanza I. Stanza I is therefore a full stanza, stanzas II and III are half-stanzas.

In the introduction to the first stanza (vv. 2-3) the first colon is invocation of Yahweh. Then follow two closely knitted cola stressing the continuity of his prayer. Finally a jussive followed by an imperative asks God to receive the prayer. From v. 4 follows an exposition of the situation. Vv. 4 and 8 have partly chiasmic structure. Except for a tricolon in v. 6, the description of the distress consists of bicola.<sup>207</sup>

Stanza II (vv. 10-13). V. 10 picks up v. 2, the psalmist's continuous prayer to Yahweh. Vv. 11-13 are three bicola, all rhetorical questions starting with the interrogative  $\bar{\eta}$ . In v. 11 the parallel question begins with  $\bar{\eta}N$ . In vv. 12-13 the interrogative  $\bar{\eta}$  and the verb of the first colon does double duty also for the second. Apart from the verb, both of these bicola have a chiasmic structure. The questions give motives to persuade the psalmist that it may be worthwhile to go on praying and to Yahweh that he should hear.

---

<sup>207</sup>So Gunkel, Psalmen, 381-382, J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 2:365, and others (some take v. 10a with the preceding). Castellino, Libro de Salmi, 210, divides after v. 10, seeing the continuous prayer to seemingly no avail as connected with the miserable situation and the weeping just described, and regards vv. 11-19 as one stanza. So also Tate, Psalms 51-100, 398.

The third stanza (vv. 14-19) consists of six bicola. It begins with disjunctive waw. V. 14 picks up vv. 2-3. Both the vocative "O Yahweh" and the word "prayer" are found both places, but instead of "day" and "night" there, the psalmist here says "morning." As stanza II after the introduction continued with questions, so v. 15 has two rhetorical questions spearheaded by למה. V. 16 pretty well sums up the situation described in vv. 4-7. Vv. 17-18 picks up v. 8, and v. 19a repeats "you have caused to stay away from me" from v. 9a. V. 16 contains the pun עני אני. V. 17 is chiasmatically structured.

#### Progression in Content and Mood

The psalm is mostly regarded as an individual lament psalm,<sup>208</sup> or more precisely, a psalm of sickness.<sup>209</sup> Broyles assigns it to the subgenre of the complaint of the individual.<sup>210</sup> Significantly, the psalm lacks several features generally associated with the genre of lament. Gunkel calls attention to the fact that there is no real petition (except for the call to attention in v. 3). Castellino further mentions that

---

<sup>208</sup>Briggs, The Book of Psalms, 2:242, sees it as a national lament. Widengren, "Konungens vistelse," 79-80, finds the background in a text read by the king at a night of ritual suffering. Goulder, The Psalms of the Sons of Korah, 195-210 similarly sees it in the context of ritual suffering, originally at an autumn festival at the sanctuary of Dan.

<sup>209</sup>See e.g. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:1-2, and Seybold, Das Gebet des Kranken, 113-117. Seybold places it in the group: "Psalmen mit sicherem Bezug zu Krankheit oder Heilung des Beters." It has sometimes been suggested that the sickness in this psalm is leprosy (e.g. Delitzsch, Psalms, 3:26), but the psalmist does not give us enough concrete "symptoms" for giving any diagnosis.

<sup>210</sup>Broyles, The Conflict of Faith, 206-209.

expressions of trust are absent from this psalm.<sup>211</sup> There is also no final doxology.

The psalm begins with an invocation of Yahweh. The apposition "God of my salvation" seems, in view of the rest of the psalm, to be a reality of confession rather than of past experience. Yahweh is the one to whom the psalmist looks for help. There is none other. The psalmist has cried to Yahweh by day, even in the night he has cried before him. So far there has been no response. Therefore the psalmist goes on to pray: "Let my prayer come before you, incline your ear to my cry of supplication." This is both an indirect complaint over God's indifference, and a plea to end it and begin paying attention.

The reason for this prayer, the description of the distress, is introduced by כִּי (compare Ps. 6:3; 22:12). The psalmist's soul (used as close synonym for "life" as in v. 15) is sated, filled with troubles. V. 4b intensifies this: My life has come close to Sheol, that is, I am about to die. The next colon takes this a step further: I am reckoned with those who go down to the pit, those who not only has come close to Sheol, but who actually are entering there. He has become like a man without strength.<sup>212</sup> In v. 6 he is not only reckoned with the dying, he is among the dead. A slave is free from his master after six years of work (Exod. 21:2). The psalmist is "free" from his relation to Yahweh, "free" from his saving activity. He is not even like one who dies in honor and receives a decent burial, no: "like the slain, those who lie in the grave," who have gone down to Sheol from the battlefield (similar to the

---

<sup>211</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 382; Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 209.

<sup>212</sup>גבר often connotes strength, BDB, 150.

description in Ezek. 32:19-27). Of these dead, and thus of him, it is further characteristic that Yahweh does not remember them any more. They are cut off from his care, from his saving activity. This is his situation: Totally excluded from, and erased from, the mind of the God of his salvation. Even worse, God is actively against him: "You have placed me in the nethermost pit," as far down in the realm of death and the underworld as one can possibly come, and placed there by Yahweh "God of my salvation." The parallel colon talks of the "darkness of the depths." "The depths" refers to the chaos-forces of the Sea.<sup>213</sup> The powers of death and the chaos forces of the Sea are seen together as life threatening forces that try to challenge God's order. The psalmist is as deep into the grip of these powers as is possible. Still, Yahweh has not only placed him as far away from him as possible, he himself wages war against him. His wrath presses against him, as an enemy lays siege against a city (Ezek. 24:2). Then God has become like a chaos force. He is sending his breakers to continually roll over him and press him down.<sup>214</sup>

We saw the psalmist sinking deeper and deeper into the realm of death for each new statement. Death is first and foremost seen as separation from Yahweh, his care and his saving activity (especially v. 6a,d,e). In this way a person still alive can actually be in Sheol, be outside God's sphere of gracious activity and at the mercy of the life threatening chaos forces. As the psalmist sinks deeper into death, the distance

---

<sup>213</sup>See translation note, pp. 111-112. Compare Ps. 69:2-3.

<sup>214</sup>Cf. Ps. 42:8, see P. R. Raabe, Psalm-structures: A Study of Psalms with Refrains, 48.

from Yahweh increases for each statement. Then in v. 7 God is brought in, but not as "God of my salvation." He is the one who has thrown the psalmist so deep into death and depth and as far away from himself as possible. Implicitly this affirms God's control even in Sheol. And what is implicit here, becomes explicit in v. 8, for now the life-threatening force he has to face and which presses him down again and again like breakers of the sea, is none other than Yahweh himself.

In v. 9 a new aspect is introduced. The separation and alienation from God has social consequences: "You have caused my close friends to stay away from me." The next colon intensifies this: "You have made me an abomination for them." Notice that it is Yahweh who has caused the break in social relations. The psalmist sees himself as imprisoned, possibly a reference back to v. 7, but more of a description of the isolation of a sick, dying, friendless person against whom God acts as an enemy. There is no escape. He cannot do anything to change his situation.

What he can do and must do is to go on weeping and praying. The second stanza begins by telling that weeping has weakened his eye (cf. Ps. 6:8). He has been calling to Yahweh every day, his hands are spread out in the posture of supplication toward Yahweh. Yahweh is his God of salvation. After the introduction the second stanza has six rhetorical questions, all requiring a negative answer. The motives in them can be seen as elaboration of "God of my salvation" in v. 2. The first bicolon consists of two parallel questions, both referring to the dead. God does not do wonders to them. They do not praise him. God's activity is for the benefit of the living. Only they can enter into a relationship with Him and praise Him for his



works. The next two bicola are each chiasmic structured but for the verb which does double duty for both. In the middle are two words describing God's character (v. 12) or His works (v. 13). They are enclosed by a name for the underworld in each colon. "Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders made known in the darkness, and your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness." The parallelism with "wonders" shows that "righteousness" here denotes God's works of righteousness (see Ps. 103:6). Not declared, not even known, and if by chance it would be, then certainly forgotten. Thus these rhetorical questions on one the hand function to remind God that if he wants his steadfast love, his faithfulness, his wonders and works of righteousness to be declared, known, believed and praised, then he should save the psalmist before he is irreversibly in the grip of Abaddon. On the other hand it underlines the urgency for the psalmist himself: He soon will be forever excluded from Yahweh's saving love and wondrous works. He soon will be even without the memory of Yahweh.

However, the questions also make it clear for the psalmist that he is not yet lost among the dead. He is different from them: "But I, to you, O Yahweh, I cry for help." Descartes once said: "Cogito, ergo sum." The psalmist could have said: "Supplicio, ergo sum." This gives him courage to approach God once more. He had asked in v. 3 that his prayer might come before Yahweh. Now he states that his prayer meets Yahweh in the morning. The morning seems to have been the time of the day especially associated with God's saving acts (Ps. 46:6; 90:14; Lam. 3:22-

23).<sup>215</sup> Yet, when his prayer meets Yahweh, the only thing that will come out is complaint: "Why, O Yahweh, have you rejected me, why do you hide your face from me?" The questions do not look for an academic answer. They express bewilderment and protest (see translation note). God was not supposed to be like this. He is the God of my salvation. He is characterized by steadfast love and faithfulness. He works wonders and acts of righteousness. Why is God not toward me the way he is? And as the psalmist moves on to describe his situation, he ends up rephrasing what he has said in his first complaint: "Afflicted I am and about to expire from my youth," the possibility of a premature death has been hanging over him. But this time, since he just noted the difference between him and the dead, he moves straight on to the wrath of God: "I bear your terrors, I despair!" V. 17a closely reflects v. 8a: "Over me sweep your bursts of wrath." Even more intense is the second colon which chiasmatically balances it: "Your alarms annihilate me." Then the water image from v. 8b is brought in: "They [the terrors, the bursts of wrath, the alarms] surround me like water all the time." Finally the totality and inescapableness are brought to climax in v. 18b: "They [again the terrors, burst of wrath and alarms of God] close up on me together" that is, they join forces to attack him from every possible angle. He is drowning in God's wrath, engulfed in his alarms. As in the first description of the situation, the social aspect is mentioned, and in almost the same words. Yahweh has caused those who formerly loved him and were his friends to stay away from him.

---

<sup>215</sup>See J. Ziegler, "Die Hilfe Gottes 'am Morgen'," Bonner Biblische Beiträge I (1950): 281-288.

What is left for him? Does he have any close friends still? The only companion that remains is darkness! With this darkness the psalm ends.

What is the function in the psalm of the second and third stanzas? Is the psalmist any different after v. 19 than he was after v. 9? He is more aware that the problem is not so much the miserable situation itself as it is God. He is not lost in Sheol, as he lamented in the first stanza; he is lost under Yahweh's wrath. He is more conscious that it is not too late for Yahweh to save him from death, that he can do it, that he should do it, but he does not do it. Darkness.

#### The Problem

The psalmist is apparently sick, though there is little or no description of symptoms. He is dying, has been in a critical state from his youth (v. 16a). All his close friends have left him (vv. 9 and 19). He has been praying day and night to Yahweh, but he has not paid attention (vv. 2-3, 10bc, 14). The psalmist sees himself in the grip of the powers of underworld and chaos (vv. 4-6). He is radically separated from God, his care and his saving activity (v. 6). What makes it even worse is that he is convinced it is God who has separated him from himself (v. 7), and who further attacks him continuously as an enemy (vv. 8, 16b-18). The psalmist does not understand God (v. 15). God is the God of steadfast love and faithfulness (v. 12), but not to him. God is the only one who is able to save him (v. 2), but he is precisely the one who fights against him to annihilate him (v. 17b). What the psalmist fears more than anything else is death as utter separation from Yahweh (vv. 11-13).

### The Prayer

The only explicit petition in this psalm is the prayer for attention in v. 3. There is no prayer for healing, not even for rescue from death. And in one way attention is what this psalm is all about. What the psalmist wants and needs, is that God let him into his presence, his sphere of care and gracious activity (cf. v. 6). The psalmist wants God to end his strange wrath, to stop attacking him. He wants him to show him his steadfast love and faithfulness (v. 12). He wants him to do wonders and works of righteousness (v. 13). He wants him to act as the God of his salvation (v. 2). But he does not put these wishes into words. He comes no further than to lament his misery and protest God's wrath (vv. 8, 16b-18).

### The Appeal

The psalmist begins his psalm by calling Yahweh "God of my salvation" (v. 2). The psalmist has been persistently praying for a long time (v. 2bc). It is time the God of my salvation hears my supplication (v. 3). Therefore the description of the situation should move God to action. The second stanza spells out the implications of "God of my salvation" mentioning Yahweh's steadfast love, his faithfulness, his wonders and works of righteousness (vv. 11-13). God gets no recognition for this from Sheol. The psalmist is about to enter there. But he is not there yet (v. 14a), he is praying persistently to Yahweh (v. 14). Thus, if Yahweh still wants to be known as the one he is, he should come quickly to rescue the psalmist. This all remains implicit, however, as the psalmist never gets courageous enough to verbalize a petition.

- 1. תפלה למשה אהרן-האלהים
- 1a. אדני מעון אתה היות לנו
- b. בדר ודר
- 2a. בטרם הרים ילדו
- b. ותחולל ארץ תבול ותחוללנו
- c. ומעולם עד-עולם אתה אל
- 3a. תשב אנוש עד-אנכי
- b. ותאמר שובו בני-אדם
- 4a. כי אלהי בני אדם יענין
- b. כי ימים אתה אל
- c. ותאשרו בלילה
- 5a. רומם שמו
- b. יהיו בקרב יחפיו יהיו
- 6a. בלחן יצא יקבץ
- b. שבי ללוי אלהי
- 7a. תפארה ילך-כ
- b. וברחוקו
- 8a. תדגל ויעמוד עמו
- b. תפארתו אלהי
- 9a. כי ילך-על ענני-לך
- b. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- 10a. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- b. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- c. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- d. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- 11a. תפארתו יענין
- b. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- 12a. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- b. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- 13a. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- b. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- 14a. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך
- b. ואלה-אנכי ואלה-לך

Text

Psalm 90

- 15a. שמחנו כימות עניתנו  
 b. שנות ראינו רעה
- 16a. יראה אל-עבדיך פעלך  
 b. והדרך על-בניהם
- 17a. יהי נעם אדני אלהינו עלינו  
 b. ומעשה ידינו כוננה עלינו  
 c. ומעשה ידינו כוננהו

### Translation

1. A prayer of Moses, the man of God.
- 1a. O Lord, an abode you have been for us,  
 b. from generation to generation.
- 2a. Before mountains were born,  
 b. and before you brought forth the earth and the world,  
 c. and from eternity to eternity you are God.
- 3a. You let man return to dust,  
 b. and say: Return, children of man.
- 4a. For a thousand years in your eyes  
 b. are like the day yesterday, for it passes by,  
 d. and like a watch of the night.
- 5a. You pour on them sleep,  
 b. they become in the morning like grass which passes away;
- 6a. in the morning it blossoms, but it passes away,  
 b. toward the evening it withers and is dry.
- 7a. For we vanish because of your anger,  
 b. and because of your wrath we are terrified.
- 8a. You have fixed our offenses in front of you,  
 b. our secrets before the light of your face.
- 9a. For all our days decline under your fury,  
 b. we complete our years like a groan.
- 10a. The days of our years, in them be seventy years,  
 b. or if with supreme strength, eighty years;  
 c. yet their pride is trouble and distress,  
 d. for it passes hastily by, and we fly.
- 11a. Who knows the strength of your anger,  
 b. and according to the fear due to you your fury.

- 12a. To count our days, such teach us!  
 b. Then we will obtain a heart of wisdom.
- 13a. Turn around, O Yahweh, how long!  
 b. and repent concerning your servants!
- 14a. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,  
 b. so that we may shout for joy and be glad all our days.
- 15a. Make us glad as many days as you humiliated us,  
 b. as many years as we saw misery.
- 16a. Let be revealed to your servants your work,  
 b. and your grandeur for their children.
- 17a. And let the kindness of the Lord our God be upon us;  
 b. and the work of our hands establish for us,  
 c. and the work of our hands, establish it!

#### Translation Notes

- v. 1. תפלה למשה איש-האלהים - "A prayer of Moses, the man of God"

This is the only psalm in the Psalter ascribed to Moses. Delitzsch has pointed out affinities to Deuteronomy, especially the song (chapter 32) and the blessing (chapter 33) of Moses.<sup>216</sup> The title "the man of God" is given Moses in for example Deut. 33:1 and Joshua 14:6. It is applied to David (2 Chron. 8:14; Neh. 12:24, 36), but is mostly used as a title for prophets, apparently exclusively or primarily in pre-exilic times (1 Sam. 9:10; 1 Kings 13:4-11).

- v. 1a. מֵעוֹן - "abode"

H. P. Müller argues for the meaning "help." He gives Ps. 31:3; 71:3; 91:9 as

---

<sup>216</sup>Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3:49. In his exegesis of the psalm (pages 49-60) he pays close attention to these affinities. Regarding Deuteronomy as of direct Mosaic origin, he sees in this a strong argument that Moses really is the author of this psalm.

examples.<sup>217</sup> Ps. 31:3 has "Rock of refuge [מעוץ, variant: מעון, "abode"]," parallel to "a stronghold to save me." Ps. 71:3: "Be for me a rock of abode [variant: refuge] where I can always come, you have commanded to save me, for my rock and my fortress are you." In Ps. 91:9 מעון is parallel to מחסי, "my refuge." Thus the traditional rendering is supported by all these examples. Further, they all show that מעון when applied to God carries connotations of a place of refuge. Thus emendations to מעוץ<sup>218</sup> are unnecessary, LXX may very well have read מעון both here and in Ps. 91:9.<sup>219</sup>

v. 1b. בדר ודר - "from generation to generation"

Many manuscripts substitute the more familiar phrase לדר ודר, which we also translate "from generation to generation" but as future (Ps. 10:6; 79:13), whereas this verse looks back.

v. 2b. ותחולל ארץ ותבל - "and before you brought forth the earth and the world"

LXX reads polal, making the colon passive like 2a. Several scholars follow this.<sup>220</sup> J. Ridderbos calls the sense conveyed by MT ("God was, before he created")

---

<sup>217</sup>H. P. Müller, "Der 90. Psalm: Ein Paradigma exegetischer Aufgaben," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 81 (1984): 269, text and notes. Also Tate, Psalms 51-100, 431-432.

<sup>218</sup>E.g. Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 342.

<sup>219</sup>Contra BHS apparatus.

<sup>220</sup>E.g. Weiser, Psalms, 594; Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 342-343; B. Vawter, "Postexilic Prayer and Hope," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 37 (1975): 460.



a tautology.<sup>221</sup> However, God is to be assumed as the actor behind the passive in 2a also,<sup>222</sup> and it is not obvious that the psalmist would have felt a statement using an active verb as less adequate in the context than one using the passive. וַתַּחֲוֹל is polel second person singular imperfect consecutive of the verb חָוַל, "bring forth, be in travail." For the metaphor see Job 38:28 (compare Prov 8:24).<sup>223</sup> בָּטָרַם in v. 2a does double duty also for v. 2b.

v. 3a. תָּשָׁב אִנוֹשׁ עַד-דָּכָא - "You return man to dust"

תָּשָׁב is the short form used with the sense of the long form (Ps. 11:6; 25:9).<sup>224</sup>

דָּכָא used as noun is a hapax, derived from the verb דָּכָא, "crush, break to pieces."

An adjective דָּכָא is found with רוּחַ, "spirit," with the meaning "contrite, humble."

Though both LXX and Vulgate have "to humility," this does not fit the context.

---

<sup>221</sup>J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 2:396.

<sup>222</sup>Contra Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 215. He argues from Job 38:4-11. that we here have a cosmogonic myth that contradicts the faith in creation. In the Job account Yahweh's honor and wisdom "consisted of this, that he was there already as the only God and was witness to the mystic primeval event." Kraus says: "understood thus, v. 2 is a statement about the supreme sovereignty and eternity of the God of Israel." However, in Job 38:4 God asks Job: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth (בְּיִסְדֵי-אָרֶץ)?" That passage therefore does not attest to a cosmogonic myth were God had no part. In fact no such myth can be found in the Old Testament.

<sup>223</sup>In theory the form could be 3rd. person feminine, so Gunkel, Psalmen, 400, but this seems forced.

<sup>224</sup>Müller, "Der 90. Psalm," 271 argues that the short form here is old praeterital imperfect. If so, the meaning is: You have decided in ancient time that men shall return to dust, i.e. die. The waw consecutive (relative) of the B-colon might be taken to support, though the consecutive after an imperfect can be used for present time, see Waltke - O'Connor, § 33.3.3c.

v. 4. כִּי אֶלֶף שָׁנִים - "for a thousand years"

For the use of כִּי to introduce circumstantial information, see Gen. 35:18.<sup>225</sup>

This verse is sometimes transposed before verse 3,<sup>226</sup> and would admittedly fit well there. As none of the versions has the verses in reversed order, it is, however, more likely that the author purposely put this verse as a parenthesis in the flow of thought to strengthen the contrast between God's eternity and human frailty.

v. 4b. יַעֲבֹר - "it passed by"

Gunkel and Castellino take the yod as dittography caused by preceding כִּי, and read a perfect.<sup>227</sup>

v. 4c. וְאִשְׁמֹרֶה בַּלַּיְלָה - "and a watch of the night"

The כִּי, "like," of v. 4b does double duty also for the third colon. The night was divided into three night-watches (Judg. 7:19; 1 Sam. 11:11; Lam. 2:19).

v. 5a. זָרַמְתָּם שָׁנָה - "You pour on them sleep"

זָרַם in the qal is unattested elsewhere. KB conjectures a separate root (with a doubtful derivation from Arabic), "stop, put an end to life."<sup>228</sup> BDB gives "sweep

---

<sup>225</sup>See Aejmelaeus, "Function and Interpretation of כִּי," 203.

<sup>226</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 396; Nötscher, Psalmen, 183; Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 344.

<sup>227</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 396, 400 reads plural, taking "a thousand years" as subject. Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 344 (and BHS apparatus) reads singular.

<sup>228</sup>KB, 270.

away" for qal and "pour forth" for the one instance (Ps. 77:18) of poel.<sup>229</sup> The versions have had problems too. LXX translates: τὰ ἐξουθενώματα αὐτῶν ἔτη (ἔσονται), "What they contempt (will become) years." Jerome: percutiente te eos somnium (erunt), "When you strike them, (they become) a sleep." Peshitta has: "their generations are a sleep" (From which is conjectured: "you seed them year after year"<sup>230</sup>).<sup>231</sup> The translation given above must be credited to Castellino.<sup>232</sup> It has the advantage of making no emendations (except for moving the half-verse division, see below), and the meaning given the verb ׀ַרַּ is consistent with the meaning of the noun ׀ַרַּ, "rain-storm, cloudburst." "Sleep" indicates "utter human helpless and liability to death as willed by God,"<sup>233</sup> compare Ps. 76:6; Jer. 51:39; Nah. 3:18.

v. 5b. יהיו בבקר כחציר יחלף - "they become in the morning like grass which passes away"

Both MT, LXX and Jerome connect the verb with 5a. This would also make

---

<sup>229</sup>BDB, 281.

<sup>230</sup>Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 212-213. So also suggested in BHS apparatus.

<sup>231</sup>For surveys of different suggestions, see KB, 1480, and C. Whitley, "The text of Psalm 90:5," Biblica 63 (1982): 555-557.

<sup>232</sup>Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 344. R. J. Tournay picks up this in "Notes sur les Psaumes," Revue Biblique 79 (1972): 50-53, making the translation known to those who understand French but not Italian. M. Tsevat supports the same by an Akkadian expression, "Psalm XC 5-6," Vetus Testamentum 35 (1985): 115-116. This translation is further followed by Th. Booij, "Psalm 90:5-6: Junction of Two Traditional Motifs," Biblica 68 (1987): 394-396, and Tate, Psalms 51-100, 431, 433-434.

<sup>233</sup>Booij, "Psalm 90:5-6: Junction," 395.

the verse more evenly divided. However, יחלף is singular and seems to have חציר as subject. The morning would be the time when the fatal result of what God had done became apparent,<sup>234</sup> though it is possible שבקר has crept in from v. 6.<sup>235</sup> The Versions read "in the morning" in both verses. The verb חלף is sometimes taken in the meaning "become renewed, grow again."<sup>236</sup> However, though this understanding has been around for centuries, it is apparently merely a guess from the context. יחלף, "which passes away" is an asyndetic relative verbal clause.<sup>237</sup> The relation between 5a and 5b seems to be temporal: "When God . . . , then they . . ."

v. 7a. כִּי-כִלִּינוּ בְאַפֶּךָ - "for we vanish because of your anger"

For the use of כִּי, see footnote to v. 4a. For the sense of כִּלִּינוּ, compare Ps. 39:11; 71:13. For כִּי, "because of," see Ps. 6:7; Gen. 18:28; Lam. 2:19. So also 7b and 9a.

v. 8b. עֲלֵמֵנוּ - "our secrets"

The word is a qal passive participle masculine singular (taken as collective) of עָלַם: "hidden things," that is, secret sins (compare Ps. 19:13 נִסְתָּרוֹת). The verb is

---

<sup>234</sup>Cf. Ziegler, "Die Hilfe Gottes 'am Morgen'," 286-287, for God's destruction of Israel's enemies as being revealed by the morning.

<sup>235</sup>Nötscher, Psalmen, 184; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 212-213; Booij, "Psalm 90:5-6: Junction," 395-396.

<sup>236</sup>BDB, 322; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 212; Jacquet, Les Psaumes, 2:719; J. Ridderbos, De Psalmen, 2:393.

<sup>237</sup>Jouion - Muraoka, § 158a.

elsewhere always in niph'al. Many manuscripts have the plural, עלמינו.<sup>238</sup> In all other occurrences, עלמים means "youth." Targum accordingly translates עוית טליותנא, "the iniquities of our youth."<sup>239</sup> Plural but with the same translation as we have given the singular form is maintained by Castellino and Tate.<sup>240</sup> Delitzsch argues against this, saying the plural of עלום would be עלמות in analogy with נסתרות (Ps. 19:13) and to distinguish it from "youth."<sup>241</sup>

v. 9b. כלינו - "we complete"

LXX seems to read qal (uses same form as in v. 7a.) and connects with the preceding word (divides the verse in three colons). BHS wants us to read כלו, "[Our years] vanish," apparently supported by Peshitta.<sup>242</sup> To make "our years" the subject would make the clause more parallel to 9a. where "our days" is the subject. But a change of subject is not uncommon in parallelism (Ps. 77:10; 16:6-7).

v. 9b. כמו-הגה - "like a groan"

The word הָגָה is used in Ezek 2:10, where it is found together with קָנִיחַ, "dirge," and Job 37:2, where it seems to refer to the rolling of thunder. The word derived from the verb הָגָה, "growl, murmur, groan." Curiously, both LXX and

---

<sup>238</sup>So Aquila, Symmachus and Jerome; LXX reads sg. and translates αἰὼν.

<sup>239</sup>Dahood, Psalms, 2:321, 325, follows the reading in Targum. Briggs, The Book of Psalms, 2:271, 274, translates "our youth."

<sup>240</sup>Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 344-345; Tate, Psalms 51-100, 434.

<sup>241</sup>Delitzsch, Psalms, 3:55.

<sup>242</sup>So Gunkel, Psalmen, 397, 401; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 213.

Peshitta have found a reference to a spider's web.<sup>243</sup>

v. 10a. ימי-שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה - "the days of our years, in them be seventy years"

We understand this colon in the following way: "The days of our years" is synonymous to the span of our life, our age (see Gen 25:7). In the span of our life (בהם) there may be seventy years, or even eighty years. The number of years given is often taken as giving a normal life span. With Castellino, we see v. 10 together with the previous verse, the connection being: Life is completed like a groan even if it may extend to seventy (and with exceedingly good health to eighty) years.<sup>244</sup>

BHS suggests to delete the two first words metri causa, which seems careless especially with a text as problematic and "non-metric" as this psalm. בהם, "in them," is often emended or deleted,<sup>245</sup> though MT is clearly supported by LXX and the other Versions. Targum solves the difficulties gallantly בעלמא הדין, "in this world/age," but we can be sure this is an expansion. גבהם is frequently suggested<sup>246</sup> but has no textual support.

---

<sup>243</sup>See A. A. Macintosh, "The Spider in the Septuagint Version of Psalm XC. 9," Journal of Theological Studies n. s. 23 (1972): 113-117, for the view that the spider crept into the LXX text from Ps. 28:12 and neither from the translators understanding of the Hebrew nor from an underlying text different from MT.

<sup>244</sup>Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 345. We refer to his commentary section, not to the translation (which is on the following page). Compare Tate, Psalms 51-100, 431.

<sup>245</sup>Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 213-214, and Nötscher, Psalmen, 184, delete.

<sup>246</sup>Müller, "Der 90. Psalm," 274, n. 49; Gunkel, Psalmen, 401.

v. 10c. רהבם - "their pride"

This word is a hapax. The verb רהב is used two times in the qal (Isa. 3:5; Prov. 6:3), and two in the hiphil (Ps. 138:3; Cant. 6:5). In Isa. 3:5 it describes the young as rising up against the old. Prov. 6:1-5 gives advice to one who has put up security for someone. He should humble himself, go back to the person and plead with him (רהב) to be released from the pledge. The psalmist in Psalm 138 says to God: תרהיבני בנפשי עז, "you have strengthened my soul." Finally, in Cant. 6:5 the eyes of the loving girl הרהיבו, "overwhelm" her lover. Targumic Aramaic has a word רהבא, "pride, arrogance."<sup>247</sup> Thus BDB translates the noun "pride," that is, the object for "object for pride."<sup>248</sup> The Versions all translate as if they read רבם, "the majority of them."<sup>249</sup> Another possibility would be to read רחבם, "their span," suggesting that ה and ח had been confused some time before the versions appeared. We read MT and translate "pride" on the strength of the Aramaic word.

v. 10d. גז - "it passes by"

This is perfect third person singular of גז, "Pass over, pass away." The only other occurrence in the Bible is Num. 11:31, where a transitive translation is required. Targum translates plural, which would fit the context well, but LXX clearly had singular in its Vorlage. The subject is perhaps רהבם, "their pride."

---

<sup>247</sup>Jastrow, 1453.

<sup>248</sup>BDB, 923. See KB, 1113 for other translations and emendations suggested.

<sup>249</sup>BDB, 923, thinks the versions read רחבם, but that is hardly the case.

v. 11b. וכיראתך עברתך - "and according to the fear due to you your fury"

For כּ, "according to," see Gen. 1:26; 1 Sam. 13:14. The מי-יודע, "who knows," in 11a must be regarded as subject and verb also for the B-colon. The same holds true for the rendering in LXX: καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου σου τὸν θυμὸν σου," and from the fear etc." The meaning seems to be the same as that of MT but LXX apparently read ומי instead of MT וכיראתך. This has led some commentators to read ומי + verb, "and who fears your furor."<sup>250</sup> This would make the parallelism tighter, but the meaning would not be largely affected. The more radical surgery ומי ראה תך, "and who see the harshness of,"<sup>251</sup> has less to commend itself.

יראה is the right attitude toward Yahweh (Ps. 2:11; 5:8). As such it is the source of life (Prov. 14:27; 19:23). The promised king of David (Isa. 11:2-3) and the restored people (Jer. 32:40) is characterized by יראת יהוה. יראת יהוה has ethical consequences (Prov. 8:13 and 16:6), and so has the lack of it (Gen. 20:11). Of importance for our verse is the connection between יראת יהוה and חכמה, "wisdom"/דעת, "knowledge," which we find very frequently in Wisdom literature (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28).<sup>252</sup>

<sup>250</sup>Nötscher, Psalmen, 184; Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 346.

<sup>251</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 401; Maillot and Lelièvre, Les Psaumes, 2:243; Vawter, "Postexilic Prayer," 461; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 213-214.

<sup>252</sup>See further H. F. Fuhs, "מורא, יראָה, יראָ," TWAT, 3:869-893, especially pages 885-892.



v. 12b. וּנְבֹא לִבֵּב חִכְמָה - "then we will obtain a heart of wisdom"

The waw introduces the result of what is said in 12a.<sup>253</sup> Hiphil of נֹבֵא means "to bring in, gather" (of the crops, 2 Sam. 9:10; Hagg. 1:6). Proverbs 2 teaches us that wisdom is from Yahweh (v. 6, compare Ps. 51:8). It is contingent on the "fear" of Yahweh (v. 5, see above). It is given through instruction (vv. 1-4, compare Ps. 34:12). It enters the heart (v. 10, Prov. 23:15). The heart as the seat for the God-given wisdom is mentioned several times in connections with the artisans that built the tabernacle (Exod. 28:3; 31:6; 35:26, 35; 36:2)). Wisdom guides you and protects you from evil ways (vv. 11-12) and saves you from sharing the disastrous end of the wicked (vv. 13-22).

v. 13a+b. שׁוּבָה יְהוָה עַד-מַתִּי וְהִנַּחֵם עַל-עַבְדֶּיךָ - "Turn around, O Yahweh, how long? and repent concerning your servants"

For the form of the imperative שׁוּבָה see Ps. 6:5. The meaning is: "turn from your anger," see Exod. 32:12; 2 Kings 23:26; Jonah 3:9. For עַד מַתִּי see Ps. 74:10. הִנַּחֵם, niphil imperative of נָחַם, is often translated "have compassion on."<sup>254</sup>

However, the instances understood in this way<sup>255</sup> can all be understood in the sense

---

<sup>253</sup>GKC, § 109f.

<sup>254</sup>E.g. Delitzsch, Psalms, 3:48; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 213; Nötscher, Psalmen, 184.

<sup>255</sup>BDB, 637, gives, apart from our verse, Judg. 2:18; 21:6,15; Jer. 15:6, in hithpael Deut. 32:36; Ps. 135:14. In Judges 21 we read about how the Israelites changed their mind concerning the tribe of Benjamin, from trying to exterminate them, to trying to save them as an independent tribe. For the other instances, see F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, Amos. The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 659, 666-671.

"change one's mind, change one's course of action" (the same is true for the hithpael which are traditionally translated in this way). We thus translate "repent," not in the sense "be sorry for something done which cannot be changed," but to change one's course of action.<sup>256</sup> With נחם in the niphal על mostly introduces the matter that the subject repents of (Exod. 32:14; Jer. 8:6; Joel 2:13. An exception is Isa. 57:6). However, Deut. 32:36 and Ps. 135:14 have: ועל-עבדיו יתנחם, "and concerning his servants he has repented" (the verb form here being hithpael).

v. 14a. בבקר - "in the morning"

The morning is often mentioned in connection with Yahweh's grace and saving acts (Ps. 46:6; 143:8).<sup>257</sup>

v. 15a. שמחנו כימות עניתנו - "Make us glad as many days as you subdued us"

כימות instead of the regular ימים is perhaps to be understood as nomen unitatis, stressing the many single days of suffering,<sup>258</sup> but may be dictated by the desire of assonance with שנות (this form is also rare).<sup>259</sup> At any rate, the only other occurrence of the form is in Deut. 32:7. For עניתני compare Deut. 8:2-3,16. The כ of כימות works also for שנות, "years" in 15b.

---

<sup>256</sup>For the meaning of "repent" see Andersen and Freedman, Amos, 638-679; H. Simian-Yofre, "נחם," TWAT, 5:366-384. הנהחם is translated "repent, change mind" by Maillot and Lelièvre, Les Psaumes, 2:243, and Tate, Psalms 51-100, 432, 436.

<sup>257</sup>See Ziegler, "Die Hilfe Gottes `am Morgen'," 281-288.

<sup>258</sup>Müller, "Der 90. Psalm," 278.

<sup>259</sup>So Dahood, Psalms, 2:326.

v. 16a. יראה אל-עבדיך פעלך - "let be revealed to your servants your work"

LXX has καὶ ἰδὲ, "and see," which corresponds to וראה. פעלך is a collective. Many manuscripts read plural, but the singular form of this word is often used with collective meaning (Job 34:11; Ps. 143:5). With God as the subject, the word is used regularly to refer to his good, gracious, and marvelous deeds (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 64:10),<sup>260</sup> often his great works in the past (Ps. 44:2; Hab. 3:2).

v. 16b. והדרך על-בניהם - "and your grandeur for their children"

For הדר together with פעל see Ps. 111:3. The idea is not that the parents shall see God's works, whereas the children are permitted to watch his grandeur. He is to reveal both to his servants, and what is more, let it go on even for coming generations. In the B-colon both what is seen and the extension of those who are made to see, exceeds what is said in the A-colon.<sup>261</sup> LXX reads והדרך as hiphil imperative of דרך, "and lead."

v. 17c. This colon is lacking in a few Hebrew manuscripts and LXX. The repetition is, however, a very effective rhetorical device which serves to intensify the petition.

Kraus says it "obviously has the force of an especially enduring petition."<sup>262</sup>

---

<sup>260</sup>Kugel, The Idea of Biblical Poetry, 41, translates "your active-force."

<sup>261</sup>See Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2:102, and Kugel, The Idea of Biblical Poetry, 40-41.

<sup>262</sup>Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 214.

## Structure

Strophes

We divide the poem into six strophes: vv. 1-2, 3-4, 5-10, 11-12, 13-15, and 16-17.

Vv. 1-2: After the opening vocative, "O Lord," the whole strophe is chiasmically structured:

מעון - an abode  
 אתה היית לנו - you have been for us  
 בדר ודר - from generation to generation  
 בטרם הרים - before the mountains  
 ילדו - were born  
 ותחולל - and before you brought forth  
 ארץ ותבל - the earth and the world  
 ומעולם עד-עולם - and from eternity to eternity  
 אתה - you are  
 אל - God.<sup>263</sup>

Vv. 3-4: This strophe, like the previous, consists of a bicolon followed by a tricolon. The bicolon contrasts with the previous strophe. It starts with an imperfect תשוב אנוש, "you turn man . . ." contrasting the blessed reality expressed by the perfect מעון היית לנו, "an abode you have been for us," of v. 1. This תשוב שובו also contrasts with the eternity of God. The tricolon (v. 4) restates the theme of the first strophe, the eternity of God, thus intensifying the contrast.

vv. 5-10: The strophe consists of 7 bicola and is structured as a thematic chiasm:

vv. 5-6 (2 bicola): The distressing reality of human life

---

<sup>263</sup>P. Auffret, "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 90," *Biblica* 61 (1980): 263.

- v. 7 (1 bicolon): We vanish because of your anger  
 v. 8 (1 bicolon): You have fixed our sin before you  
 v. 9 (1 bicolon): Our days decline under your fury  
 v. 10 (2 bicola): The distressing reality of human life.<sup>264</sup>

V. 9 further picks up "day" and "year" from v. 4, thus again evoking the contrast man and God. V. 10 contrasts man's optimal lifespan with the thousand years (v. 4) which for God is like a night-watch.

Vv. 11-12: V. 11 has two words for divine wrath, one is picked up from v. 7, the other from v. 9. Vv. 11-12 are connected by the root  $\text{לָמַח}$  and by the fact that both verses have rhyme, further by the well known connection between "the fear of Yahweh" and "wisdom." V. 11 pinpoints what is lacking, v. 12 supplies the petition for the solution. V. 12 picks up "our days" from vv. 9-10.

Vv. 13-15: This strophe has three bicola, each starting with an imperative addressed to God. V. 13 has an imperative in the second colon also. In v. 14 the bicolon gives the intended result of the petition in the a-colon; the two cola in v. 15 together form one petition.  $\text{שׁוּבָה}$  in v. 13a reflects v. 3. God returned man, now the psalmist prays that God must turn around. "In the morning" in v. 14 picks up v. 5 and 6. Note the repetition of the root  $\text{שָׁמַח}$ . V. 14 "all our days" reflects v. 9. V. 15 has the word-pair "day," "year," as have vv. 4 and 9.

Vv. 16-17: The previous strophe ended:  $\text{רְאִינוּ רַעְיָהּ}$ ; the present strophe begins:  $\text{פִּעֲלֶךָ . . . יִרְאָה}$ , "let be revealed . . . your work." V. 16 has "your servants" like v. 13, the first verse of the previous strophe. V. 17 "Lord" connects with v. 1, and so

---

<sup>264</sup>Ibid., 265-268.

does  $\square\aleph$  which is  $\aleph\aleph$  spelled backwards. Note the repetition of the last line. Thus this last strophe consists of a bicolon plus a tricolon, as do the two first strophes.

### Stanzas

The first strophe (vv. 1-2), 5 cola, is an introduction to the poem. The next three strophes form the first stanza (vv. 3-10), and the last two strophes the second stanza (vv. 13-17). Stanza I has 23 cola, and stanza II is half as long, 11 cola.

The introduction stresses God's eternity and sovereignty and that he has been good to Israel in the past.

Stanza I depicts human life under God's wrath. This life is short and miserable. The essence of the distress is that God has fixed human sin before his eyes. The stanza ends with a petition for the right attitude faced with God's wrath: "fear" and "wisdom."

The second stanza builds on this petition, and prays that God may once again be gracious to Israel. The psalmist prays for a reversal of the situation in the first stanza (see under "strophes" for particular devices of contrast) and for a return of the reality described in the introduction, thus the reversed  $\aleph\aleph$  and the repetition of  $\aleph\aleph$ . Stanza II is sometimes regarded as a later addition to the psalm,<sup>265</sup> but as we have seen, the whole poem has a unified structure.<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup>Gunkel, Psalmen, 397; Müller, "Der 90. Psalm," 267-268.

<sup>266</sup>See further S. Schreiner, "Erwägungen zur Struktur des 90. Psalms," Biblica 59 (1978): 80-90; Auffret, "la structure littéraire du Psaume 90," 262-276.

## Progression in Content and Mood

The psalm is often regarded as a communal lament.<sup>267</sup> Castellino calls it an lament, influenced by wisdom, which, though being expressed by an individual, laments the painful condition of the whole people.<sup>268</sup> Harrelson, on the other hand, views this psalm as a psalm of meditation.<sup>269</sup> The psalm contains most of the elements generally associated with the genre of lament (invocation, praise, complaint, petition). Broyles assigns it to the subgenre of "complaint of the community."<sup>270</sup> If it holds true for the psalms in general that each one advances the thought in its own unique way, this can be said even more of Psalm 90.

The psalm contains two movements, one of complaint and one of petition. After the invocation, "O Lord," the psalmist begins by extolling God's greatness and everlastingness. The introduction (vv. 1-2) has a chiastic structure. First God is described in relation to the people as he has been experienced in the past: "An abode, a safe haven, a place of refuge, have you (used with finite verb the pronoun is not necessary and thus carries stress, "you and you alone") been for us from generation to generation." Then his eternity is contrasted with all creation: "Before the mountains

---

<sup>267</sup>E.g. C. Westermann, "Der 90. Psalm," in Forschung am Alten Testament: Gesammelte Studien (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964), 344; G. Von Rad, "Psalm 90," in God at Work in Israel, translated by J. H. Marks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 213.

<sup>268</sup>Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 342-343.

<sup>269</sup>W. Harrelson, "A Meditation of the Wrath of God: Psalm 90," in Scripture in History & Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam, eds., A. L. Merrill and T. W. Overholt (Pittsburgh, PA: The Pickwick Press, 1977), 181-182.

<sup>270</sup>C. C. Broyles, The Conflict of Faith, 173-177.

were born, then you brought forth the earth and the world." The verbs "were born, you brought forth" stand at the pivot of the chiasm, making the contrast even more effective. Finally, the thought of God's eternity is brought up again, this time not in connection with the past experience of the people, but as a reality valid from before creation and for all future, **מֵעוֹלָם עַד עוֹלָם**. Notice that the people has disappeared from the picture. Now it is said: "you are God (**אל**)," there is no **לָנוּ**, "for us," as there is in v. 1. This leads over into the description of the present situation in stanza I.

This eternal God has decided to cut short the lives of men: "You let man return to dust." Notice the clear allusion to Yahweh God's curse upon man after the fall: **אִפֶּר אֶתְּךָ וְאַל-עֹפֶר תִּשׁוּב**, "dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19), only that the psalmist has chosen a more harsh word for dust, **אֶדְמָה** which probably connotes something crushed into pieces, pulverized. As God once said to Adam, so he continues to say to his descendants: "Return O children of Adam" (**בְּנֵי-אָדָם**)! Lest we miss the point, the author again (cf. v. 2) reminds us that the very God who does this to people, is himself totally unrestricted by time: "A thousand years in your eyes are like the day of yesterday." A third colon intensifies it: "and like a watch in the night," not a long period compared with a thousand years. After this reminder we are back in the flow of thought from v. 3: "You pour over them sleep." This motif which was usually reserved for the enemies of Israel (see translation note) is now applied to "the children of man" (v. 3) including Israel. It denotes death and destruction. When God thus overpowers humankind, they become in the morning, the time God's nightly



judgment is made manifest,<sup>271</sup> like grass which passes quickly. The grass sprouts in the morning, but may have withered at dusk. The reason why human life is so frail and futile is God's anger. The chiasmic structure of v. 7 makes this fact stand out even more. We vanish. We are terrified.<sup>272</sup> We should further note that the psalmist from v. 7 ceases to talk of "man" or "children of man" and turns back to the first person plural with which he opened the psalm. His interest is not with describing some general human experiences, but with God's people at present in distress because of God's anger. God's wrath is directed against human sin (v. 8 is the pivot of the third strophe, framed by the "wrath" of vv. 7 and 9 and the description of the distress in vv. 5-6 and 10): "You have placed our offenses before you; our secret faults to the light of your face." The point is not primarily a confession of sin. What the psalmist describes is God's reaction to the people's sins, even their secret faults. God scrutinizes their every shortcoming to punish them for it. God's focused on their sins is the reason for his wrath and thus the root of the distress. This is the background for v. 9: "For all our days decline because of your fury," and where it all ends up: "We complete our years like a groan." But what about those who attain advanced age in good health? The psalmist will not back off: Granted you may reach seventy years, and if you have extremely good health and strong body perhaps even eighty, still "the pride of them," the very best they can come up with, is "trouble and distress," for it

---

<sup>271</sup>See translation note to v. 5b, pp. 134-135.

<sup>272</sup>See Ps. 6:3-4; 30:8 for נבהל as human response to divine wrath.

(the pride of the days of our years) passes quickly, and we fly."<sup>273</sup> Life under God's wrath is short and miserable. V. 10 lets us see that this is not so much "a common experience of all" as it is life as seen by faith. That is, death is common enough, but the interpretation of life and death given by the psalmist is not one shared by every human. The psalmist describes a life under God's wrath. V. 11 picks up the motif of God's wrath, holding together vv. 7 and 9 by picking one word for divine wrath from each. Now the problem is that the people do not know the strength of God's wrath. This may seem strange after the long description precisely of human condition under God's wrath. The key is כִּירָאתָךְ, "according to the fear due to you," which works for both cola. As seen in the translation note, the "fear" of Yahweh entails reverence, worship, and a living relationship to Yahweh. This seems to be lacking in the people. Therefore the psalmist turn to God in prayer: "To count our days, such teach us, that we may obtain a heart of wisdom." The combination of "fear" in v. 11 and "wisdom" in v. 12 and further the focus on יָדַע, "know" evokes the proverb: "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge" (וְדַעַת), with חִכְמָה, "wisdom," in chiasmic parallel (Prov. 1:7), or as Job has it: "The fear of the Lord that is wisdom" (Job 28:28). The right way of understanding the precariousness of human life and the wrath of God is to be sought precisely with God. Notice how in this stanza time units such as days (v. 9a, 10a, and 12a), years (v. 9b and 10), and even "in the morning," all pertain to humans (in v. 4 it is the irrelevance of time units to God that is stated),

---

<sup>273</sup>For the relation between v. 9 and v. 10, cf. Castellino's imaginative description, Libro dei Salmi, 345-346.

whereas God is from eternity to eternity (v. 2c).<sup>274</sup> To count our days entails facing the reality of an impending death and have one's mind directed toward him who has been our abode from generation to generation.

As one who fears Yahweh, counts his days and has wisdom in his heart, the psalmist confronts God, asking him to change the distressing situation. Each bicolon in this strophe starts with an imperative (v. 13 has two): "Turn around (away from your wrath, back to the earlier way when we learned to know you as an abode from generation to generation), O Yahweh! How long (will your wrath last)? Repent (change your mind and your course of action) concerning your servants." ׀ַבְּדַבְּרֶיךָ, "your servants" underlines the relation which exists between Yahweh and his people. The appeal to this relation is frequent in the prayer of lament psalms, for example Ps. 27:9; 31:17; 69:18.<sup>275</sup> The next petition is: "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love." The psalmist does not speak of God's steadfast love as something new, but as something known, obviously as part of the reality confessed in v. 1. The petition is that God may let the people enjoy it. In v. 5 the morning was the time when God's destructive activity against humans was made manifest. Here the psalmist prays that God may let them experience his steadfast love instead, precisely in the morning. The result that would follow when God does so is stated in the second colon:

---

<sup>274</sup>See to this Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 342.

<sup>275</sup>Compare H. Ringreen, TWAT, 2:1000: "Er will sich durch diese Selbstbezeichnung als einen auf die Güte JHWHs angewiesenen Menschen darstellen, vielleicht auch sein 'æbæd-Sein als Grund für Gottes Eingreifen anführen (vgl. das ki in Ps. 143,12."

“so that we may shout for joy and be glad all our days,” the very opposite of the situation painted for “all our days” in v. 9. Thus we have the contrast: To be under God’s wrath - life declines with groans; and to experience God’s steadfast love - all our days are filled with joy. The motive of joy is carried into the next verse: “Make us glad as many days as you subdued us, as many years as we saw misery.” Notice how it comes through that the psalmist prays as one whom God has taught to count his days: “in all our days” (v. 14b), “as many days as”(15a), “as many years as” (15b). In past days and years the people have seen misery (v. 15b); now the psalmist prays they may see God’s works (v. 16a). As we saw in our translation note, God’s פִּעַל is generally his gracious and salvific works, not the results of his wrath. We see the same is true in our psalm. God’s “work” has been hidden while God’s anger lasts. The relational term “your servants” (v. 13b) is repeated in v. 16a. V. 16 is a good illustration of what Kugel calls “A and what is more B.” The psalmist wants to see Yahweh’s works, and what is more: God’s “grandeur”; he wants it to be shown to Yahweh’s servant, and what is more: continue to do so even for their children.<sup>276</sup> V. 17 looks back to v. 1, יָדָנָה and also the fact that נָעַן is מָעוֹן spelled backwards. Thus what the psalmist prays for is for God to be “an abode for us” even now, as he has been from generation to generation. Finally God is called on to establish (כִּוֵּן) the work of their hands for them, that is, let them prosper under his care. The repetition underlines the thought that even the works of our hands are at the mercy of God. He is the one who establishes them.

---

<sup>276</sup>Kugel, The Idea of Biblical Poetry, chapter one (pp. 1-58).

### The Problem

In Psalm 90 no physical distress is described, but the people seem to be in a situation that at least those who feared Yahweh interpreted as a prolonged period of being under God's wrath.<sup>277</sup> The distress is to live under the wrath of God. God is said to have fixed their sins in front of himself. Because of God's wrath they vanish (v. 7a); under God's wrath this short life becomes "trouble and distress" (v. 10). Even though the reality of death and the brevity of life are common human experiences, the psalm seems not to intend to describe life merely as it is generally experienced, but a situation where God's people experience God's wrath. The same who see their years declining are the ones who could confess: "O Lord, an abode you have been for us from generation to generation."

### The Prayer

First the psalmist asks God to teach his people to count their days and thus attain wisdom in their heart (v. 12), face the brevity of life and understand that God, the abode from generation to generation, is the only one and the only thing that really matters, so put their trust and hope in him. Then he prays that God must turn from his wrath (v. 13a), change his mind and course of action concerning them (v. 13b), grant them to enjoy his steadfast love (v. 14a) and thus attain happiness for the rest of their days and years (vv. 14b-15). The psalmist wants to see God's "proper" works (v.

---

<sup>277</sup>This is sometimes taken to imply a post-exilic date, but would fit any situation of prolonged wrath, including the forty years in the wilderness, with which the psalm is connected through the superscription, and the exile.

16a) and wants God's grandeur to manifest itself even to coming generations (v. 16b). He prays that God's kindness may be over them (v. 17a) and that God may establish the work of their hands (v. 17bc). In short, he wants God once again to let them experience him as an abode from generation to generation.

### The Appeal

Vv. 13 and 16 appeals to the relation "your servants." This is used partly to underline the total dependence on God and partly to underline the relation (Is it significant that this psalm uses יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ?) as a motivation for why God should act. Note the prayer: "Let your works be revealed," as if his present works are not his works. This is probably to understand as an appeal to God's "proper" works. The same may be said of God's "grandeur" and "kindness." This is further strengthened by the connection between v. 17 and v. 1 where the Lord is said to have been an abode for generation and generation. As the opening would lead us to expect, the appeal is to God's character as experienced in the past and still confessed, and to the relationship between God and the people.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

#### Introduction

We will draw together what we found in the investigation of the five psalms in chapter two. What are the underlying theological assumptions? This will lead us to an answer of the main question of our paper: What did the Israelite faithful do when they experienced God as their enemy? We will in this chapter also use evidence from other psalms belonging to the group C. C. Broyles assigned to the subgenres of the complaints of the individual (Psalms 13, 22, 35, 39, 42-43, and 102) and the complaints of the community (Psalms 9-10, 60, 77, 79, 80, 85, and 89).<sup>1</sup>

#### Structure and Progression in Content and Mood

Each of the five psalms which we studied in chapter 2 has a unique structure and thus its own way of advancing the appeal. The different elements function within the total progression in content and mood in a particular psalm. The "same" element

---

<sup>1</sup>We have excluded Ps. 108, see chapter 1, p. 11, note 26. For a treatment of the individual psalms see Castellino, Libro dei Salmi. To the psalms found in the first third of the Psalter compare further Craigie, Psalms 1-50, for those in the second, Tate, Psalms 51-100. For Psalm 13 see M. Weiss, The Bible from Within, 298-314. For Psalm 42-43 see Raabe, Psalm-Structures, 32-67. For Psalms 22; 39; 77; and 102 see Haddix, Lamentation as Personal Experience.

may thus have a different function in two psalms.<sup>2</sup>

Psalm 6 begins with petitions for God to stop reproaching the psalmist in his wrath. The enemies are not introduced before the last word of v. 8, and then only to be ordered to leave in the next colon. This effectively focuses on God's wrath as the cause of the distress, whereas the enemies are marginalized. Very different is Psalm 88, which like Psalm 6 can be classified as a "sickness psalm" or an "individual near-death psalm." Here God is called "God of my salvation" (v. 2). The psalmist, after asking God to finally listen to his prayer, describes his distress. He sinks deeper and deeper into the realm of death. He sees himself as cut off from the sphere of God's saving activity (v. 6). Then God becomes his enemy (vv. 8-9). Whereas the description of the problem in Ps. 6:3-4a is from the very beginning linked to God's wrath, in Psalm 88 God's wrath only by and by becomes the problem. The motif that there is no praise or recognition of Yahweh in Sheol functions differently in the two psalms. In both it serves to warn God that he should act fast if he wants the worship and praise of the psalmist. However, whereas in Psalm 6 the motif colors vv. 7-8 so that the weeping parallels the psalmist with those in Sheol, in Psalm 88 it causes the psalmist to see that he is not yet in Sheol, he has not entered "the land of forgetfulness." He is still praying. This motivates the new start in v. 14. For all the similarity between the third and the first stanza, in stanza III the psalmist's problem is God, not the powers of Sheol. The reference to God's steadfast love also is different in the two psalms. In Psalm 6 Yahweh is asked to save "for the sake of your steadfast

---

<sup>2</sup>See also Raabe, Psalm Structures, 186-189.



love," whereas in Psalm 88 the psalmist merely reminds God that his steadfast love is not recognized in Sheol. This accords well with the much more hopeless mode in Psalm 88. In Psalm 6 the psalmist in the end becomes certain Yahweh has heard his prayer; Psalm 88 ends in darkness.

The two public laments Psalms 44 and 74 also have different structures. Psalm 44 begins by recalling how God were well-disposed toward the people in the past, gave them victory over their enemies and made them thrive in the land. The psalmist then confidently asserts that this God is his king. He temporarily forgets the present realities and states: "With God we push down our enemies" (v. 6). The situation where God saves and the people praise him is pictured as the normal situation (v. 8-9). Then, finally the present distress catches up with the psalmist. Vv. 10-17 contrasts what God does now to what he did in the past. As the unchanged fidelity of the people enters the picture (vv. 18-23), the case is made that God has acted unfaithfully to his people. Against this background the questions of "why" are uttered (vv. 24-25). God's steadfast love with its element of faithfulness<sup>3</sup> is appealed to in the very last colon of the psalm. Psalm 74 begins with complaint. The psalmist describes how the enemies have destroyed the temple. The people are helpless and the question is how long God will tolerate that the enemies taunt him. The reference to God as "my king" in v. 12 does not connote confidence and trust as in Psalm 44. Here the tone is more one of complaint. If God is "my king from ancient time, achiever of victories in the

---

<sup>3</sup>See our discussion of  $\text{דָּוָד}$  below, pp. 198-199.

midst of the earth," how is it that the enemy can taunt him unpunished.<sup>4</sup> Thus the main case that is made in this psalm is that God has to defend his reputation as king of the universe. But because he has entered into a relation with Israel, his role as their defender and his reputation as the only true God is linked together. This is made clear by the many relational expressions in this psalm (vv. 1-2, 19-21), and therefore petitions that God should pay attention to how the enemies mock him and petitions concerning his people are found together in vv. 18-23.

In Psalm 90 the opening motif of confidence and praise is key to the psalm. The psalm describes common human experiences as the brevity of life and the impending death. Without the opening, stanza I could be taken as a general description of the misery of life and a petition that God may teach us how to cope with it.<sup>5</sup> But v. 1 makes clear there was a past reality that is not experienced as such at present. Therefore, after the petition that God may change us (vv. 11-12), the psalmist prays that God may change. The "how long" (v. 13) serves to motivate God to action (in Psalm 6 the phrase entails the hope that God's wrath is not forever and the fear that the psalmist will die before God turns away from his wrath; in Ps. 74:9 it expresses the silence of God, there is no one who knows when the distress will end

---

<sup>4</sup>See further Weiss, The Bible from Within, 278-280.

<sup>5</sup>This is the reason why e.g. Gunkel, Psalmen, 397, and Müller, "Der 90. Psalm," 267-268, see vv. 13-17 as a later addition. If the first stanza is read as a description of life as life with necessity is, there is nothing more to pray for than wisdom to cope with it. If so, vv. 13-17 must be seen as expressing disagreement with the view of life found in the first part of the psalm. If, however, we read stanza I in the light of v. 1, it becomes clear that there is more to say than "Grant us to cope with your wrath."

because God does not speak. In 74:10 the question is how long God will tolerate that the enemies insult him). Here is a prayer for God's steadfast love, reference to the people as his "servants," and prayer that God will make them glad and reveal his work to them. What is prayed for in the last stanza, is what was experienced in v. 1.

### The Problem

#### Disasters Interpreted as Caused by God's Wrath

The psalms in this group reflect different troubles and distresses. In Psalms 6 and 88 the psalmist appeared to be sick. At any rate he saw his death as impending. Sickness or near-death situations are the case also in Psalms 13, 22, 42-43, and 102.<sup>6</sup> Enemies are part of the distress in Psalm 6. The same is true for Psalms 9-10,<sup>7</sup> 13,

---

<sup>6</sup>Ps. 13:3-4; 22:15-16,18; 102:4-12,24-25. Of these psalms Seybold, Das Gebet des Kranken, regards only Psalm 88 as a sure psalm of sickness (113-117). Psalm 102 is placed in the group "Psalmen mit sehr wahrscheinlichem Bezug zu Krankheit oder Heilung des Beters." Among his "Psalmen mit unsicherem Bezug zu Krankheit oder Heilung des Beters" are found Psalms 6 and 13. Seybold thinks Psalm 22 is not a psalm of sickness. For a discussion of the special problems of structure and unity of Psalm 102 see Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 216-218.

<sup>7</sup>Broyles assigns Psalm 9-10 to the subgenre "the complaints of the community" (135-139). If so, the enemies should here probably be taken to imply a military defeat. However, e.g. E. S. Gerstenberger, Psalms part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry, *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* Vol. 15 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 72-76, sees the psalm as individual. With Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 775, we understand the psalm to have three parts. 9:1-11 praises God for a salvation in a past crisis. In 9:12-21 the psalmist approaches a present crisis. He is confident Yahweh will help him now, as he did in the past. But to this "psalm of plea," as it would have to be classified in Broyles' system, the psalmist appends a complaint that God time and again permits the wicked to have their way (10:1-18). Only this last part qualifies as a "complaint psalm." Even though the enemies in Psalm 9 may be hostile nations, those in Psalm 10 appear to be whatever enemy there may be that rises up to oppress the poor and the godly. We therefore group the psalm with those featuring enemies rather than with those reflecting a military defeat.

22, 35,<sup>8</sup> 42-43, and Ps. 102.<sup>9</sup> In Psalm 44 the background is a military defeat, as it is in Psalms 60, 80, and 89.<sup>10</sup> Psalm 44 further mentions the mocking by the neighboring peoples as a result of the defeat. In Psalm 74 the defeat is even more bitter and final, since Jerusalem is sacked, the temple looted and burnt. Such is also the case in Psalm 79. In Psalm 90 death and a short life under God's wrath for sin is the distress, as is also the case in Psalm 39.

We saw in chapter 2<sup>11</sup> that near-death situations, troubling enemies, military defeat, the destruction of the temple and even a generally miserable life are all attributed to God's wrath. Personal and national disasters are not something that just happen. Nor are they caused by evil spirits or by the activity of sorcerers. They are caused by God's displeasure for the individual or for the people. What made the psalmist view misery in this way?

Yahweh is the living God (Ps. 42:3, 9). He is the creator and only source of life (Ps. 89:48 and 90:2). Our life is in his hand (Ps. 39:6). This God had made Israel his own people (Ps. 74:2), rescued them from slavery in Egypt (Ps. 77:16 and 80:9), and planted them in the land (Ps. 44:3 and 80:9-11). Yahweh had entered into a covenant relationship with this people (Ps. 74:20). How this was thought to

---

<sup>8</sup>In Psalm 35 the problem perhaps is false accusations, though see Castellino, Libro dei Salmi, 106-108, and Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 285-286.

<sup>9</sup>Ps. 10:3-11, 13, 15; 13:3, 5; 22:13-14, 17, 19; 35:1, 4, 7, 11-12, 15-16, 19-21; 42:10; and 102:9.

<sup>10</sup>Ps. 60:4, 12; and 89:39-46.

<sup>11</sup>See pp. 40, 68, 100, 126, and 152.

influence life is seen in Deut. 30:15-19. Here Moses lays before the people "life and good" on one hand, and "death and bad" on the other. If they will "love Yahweh your God, walk in his ways, and keep his commandments," then they will "live and multiply, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land into which you enter to possess it." Life, blessing, and land belong together. On the other hand, if they do not obey God, but worship other gods, they will perish and not prolong their days on the land given them by Yahweh. Their life and well-being in its totality depend on the relation to Yahweh.<sup>12</sup> This is spelled out in more detail in Deuteronomy 28, where the first part exemplifies blessings that will characterize their life with Yahweh while the rest of the chapter gives numerous examples of what will happen if they leave their God. The traditions from pre-monarchial Israel as recorded in the book of Judges are rich in examples of how Israel's life depended solely on its relation to Yahweh. The recurring pattern here is the following: The people sinned; God permitted neighboring peoples to oppress them; they cried to Yahweh; he saved them by his chosen judge; the judge ruled Israel for forty years; there was rest as long as he lived.

Life thus has no autonomy. Yahweh is the fountain of life (Ps. 36:10, Jer. 2:13, and 17:13). Life and good belong together and are at home in the realm of Yahweh's favor and blessing. Death and all kinds of misery [יָגוֹן] are characteristics of an existence outside the sphere of God's goodness and saving activity and under his curse.

---

<sup>12</sup>See also G. Von Rad's treatment of this passage, "Statements of Faith in the Old Testament about Life and about Death," in God at Work in Israel, translated by J. H. Marks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 199-200.

In this frame of reference, near-death situations, whether they were caused by sickness (Psalm 88), hunger, wicked oppressors (Psalm 13), or whatever, would be interpreted as evidence that God was angry. When God is the absolute sovereign, the creator and unrivalled ruler of the universe (Ps. 74:12-17 and 90:1-2) there could be no place for military defeat where the people's relationship with Yahweh remained intact. It had to be interpreted as Yahweh no longer guarding the land he had given them (Ps. 60:4; 80:13-14; and 89:41-42). Yahweh, who as a mighty warrior brought them out of Egypt and cleared the ground for them in the land he gave them (Ps. 44:3-4 and 80:9-10) has now turned their sword back and strengthens the enemy (Ps. 44:10-12 and 89:43-44).<sup>13</sup>

#### The Wrath of God as Heart of the Problem

If life is to live with God, then his wrath is not only what brings death and misery, it is the core of the distress. What is so terrifying about death in Psalm 6 is that there no one praises Yahweh (v. 6, compare Ps. 88:11-13). Central in the picture of death in Psalm 88 is to be cut off from God's hand, to be placed outside the sphere of his saving activity (vv. 6-7). Death is terrible because it separates from Yahweh. Sickness and near-death situations are a foretaste of that. We saw in connection with these two psalms how the reality of death reaches into the realm of physical life. The

---

<sup>13</sup>See further H. J. Kraus, "Der lebendige Gott," *Evangelische Theologie* 27 (1967): 190-195, which deals with God as the fountain of life (The whole article is pp. 169-200), and Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode*, 36-51. On pp. 50-51 Barth deals with the connection between life and the land: "Überall gehören 'am Leben bleiben' und 'das Land besitzen' zusammen" (50).

sick experience themselves as already being in Sheol; they are unable to praise Yahweh (6:7-8). This thought of being separated from the praise of Yahweh is prominent in Psalm 42. Here the psalmist, caught up under God's "breakers and rollers" (v. 8), recalls a better past when he would go up with the festival crowds to the temple to praise Yahweh (vv. 5 and 9). He pants for God as a stag pants for water (v. 2).<sup>14</sup>

Psalm 88 gives us a vivid picture of a desperate man persistently praying to a deaf deity (vv. 2, 10, 14 and the end of it all, v. 19b: "darkness"). This unapproachability of God not only precludes any solution to the problem, it is (of course) very distressful itself. The psalmist wants to live in a praise-relation with God, yet God does not even bother to hear him. The psalmist in Psalm 22 has a similar problem. He used to have a close relation to God (vv. 10-11) but God is not there in his need (vv. 8-9, and 12). The fathers were saved when they cried to God (v. 5-6). He cries, but his Salvation is far away (vv. 2-3). In Psalm 74 God's people are in danger of losing their faith because it appears the god of the conquerors has prevailed against their God. They are also in danger of losing their very lives. In this situation God remains silent. This is the problem in Psalm 74.

The silence of God made it impossible to know when this macabre situation would end (Ps. 74:9-10). The "how long" is a very common element in the psalms within our corpus (for example 13:2-3; 35:17; 79:5, and 80:5). The theological assumptions and appeal value of these questions will be dealt with below. We will

---

<sup>14</sup>See Raabe, Psalm-Structures, 48-50.

here only mention what they tell us about the problem. The "how long" sometimes expresses fear. The question entails the possibility that it may be too long. Will death come before Yahweh's wrath ends (Ps. 6:4-6)? They may express bewilderment: How can it be that God for so long time tolerates that the enemies taunts his name and oppress his people? (Ps. 74:11). In all cases it adds a note of urgency, and can thus be seen as the negative formulation of the prayer in Ps. 22:20 לעזרתִי רוּשָׁה, "hasten to help me."

It makes a difference whether one says, "O Lord, here is a mighty army approaching, but I know you will save us," or one says, "Here is a mighty enemy, and you, O Lord, who always saved us before, have sold us to this mighty enemy." The latter is the situation in Psalm 44 (see vv. 11-13). The same goes for Psalm 89. After a lengthy section extolling Yahweh's might, love and faithfulness and his unbreakable promises to David and his dynasty, the psalmist abruptly breaks off: "Still, you have rejected and refused, become angry with your anointed. You have scorned the covenant with your servant and profaned to the ground the oath to him. You have broken down his walls, made his fortresses into ruins . . . You have lifted up the right hand of the enemy, made all his foes happy" (vv. 39-43). Thus the chief problem in these psalms is not the enemies but God who has acted as an enemy. God has disappointed them and bewildered them. He has ceased to be predictable. Now anything can happen. They experience "death and misery."

Psalm 90 describes the distress entirely as a short life under God's wrath. Even a lifespan of seventy or eighty years passes as a groan and has nothing higher to offer



than trouble and distress when God is angry (Ps. 90:7-10, see also Ps. 39:5-7).

We see in these psalms that the wrath of God is not only a problem insofar as it deprives people of health, social security, or national independence. God's wrath is a problem because it deprives people of God and with him of life in its real sense. The heart of the distress in the complaint psalms is therefore the wrath of God.

### The Character of Divine Wrath

#### General

We have seen above that the wrath of God is not only an emotion. The psalmists view it as having caused the intolerable situation they experience. God's anger is effective.<sup>15</sup> Still we cannot reduce God's wrath to something like "retributive justice"<sup>16</sup> to defend a philosophical immutability and impassability of God. In many places the Old Testament depicts God as provoked to anger. He was not originally angry, but he became angry because someone made him angry. The God of the Old Testament and of the complaint psalms is a God who has passions.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Compare Baloian, Anger, 98-99.

<sup>16</sup>The expression is mentioned as untenable by W. Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 1:259.

<sup>17</sup>See Eichrodt, Theology of the old Testament, 258-282; Baloian, Anger, 156-163, and F. Weber, Vom Zorne Gottes: Ein biblisch-theologischer Versuch (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1862), 40-64. In his chapter "Die Gegensätze und ihre Ueberwindung," Weber refutes on one hand the Augustinian view that God is impassible and that anger thus was no affect in God, and on the other hand the view that a loving and caring God cannot be thought to be angry with anyone for anything. G. A. F. Knight is wrong when he writes: "Unlike human anger, which fluctuates with the passing mood and whim, the Wrath of God is permanent, unswerving, and undeviating. . . . The great thinkers of the OT accept this fact without any hesitation

It is interesting to note the way the psalmists relate God to time and space. God rejects, and the psalmist asks how long he will go on doing that. God forgets, what he was aware of before is no longer on his mind. God is far away, though he used to be close by. He does not go out with Israel's armies as he did before. He is sleeping, but can wake up. The strong statements of God's independence of time in Psalm 90 warn us against a too tight interpretation of these motifs. The psalmists are not offering philosophical statements about God, they are describing how God is to them.<sup>18</sup>

We have talked about divine wrath and divine anger in this study not merely to render certain Hebrew vocables (חמה and חרון are translated "wrath," אף is translated "anger"). We have used it to cover God's displeasure with the people or an individual, no matter which, if any, of the words in the field of anger/wrath is used. Only 10 of the 18 psalms (when Psalms 9-10 and 42-43 are regarded as one psalm each) included in our study contain any word for divine "wrath." However, in all the

---

whatsoever. 'We are consumed in thine anger, and in thy wrath are we troubled' (Ps. 90:7)." (A Christian Theology of the Old Testament (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1959), 133. We saw in Psalm 90 that the psalmist did not regard God's wrath as an unchangeable reality. He prays for a change. As we shall see below, it is an assumption of the psalmists that God's wrath is temporary.

<sup>18</sup>T. E. Fretheim interprets Ps. 90:4 as saying "one thousand of God's years are like one human day." He thus stresses that God's relation to time is different from humans'; nevertheless, "at least since creation, the divine life is temporally ordered" (The Suffering of God (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 43. However, as we saw in chapter 2, Ps. 90:4 is not speaking of God's years but of how ordinary human years are to God. We saw further the contrast created in that psalm by ascribing broken times, years, days, morning, to men, while God is from generation to generation, from eternity to eternity.

complaint psalms the people or an individual is faced with evidence that God is against them. We shall see below that God is described in these psalms sometimes as actively hostile, other times as absent or hidden. We will now first include a short overview of the words in the semantic field of wrath which are found in these psalms.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter we will look at the description of God as absent or hidden and then as actively hostile.

### Words for divine "wrath"

The most common word for "wrath" is אַף, "nose, face, anger."<sup>20</sup> The rationale for getting "anger" out of "nose" may be the snorting which often accompanies this emotion. The word is used with God as subject seven times in the complaint psalms. The word is parallel to רחמה in Ps. 6:2; 90:7, and to עברה in Ps. 90:11, with אַף placed first in all cases. Once (Ps. 74:1) אַף is the second in a parallel construction, with the verb רָחַץ, "reject." The expression אַף רוֹדֵן which M. I. Gruber explains as the reddening of nose/face of angry persons,<sup>21</sup> is found in Ps. 85:4, where it is

---

<sup>19</sup>The word field given here is identical with that found in Baloian, Anger, 6-7, with two exceptions:

- a) Words that do not occur in the complaint psalms are not included.
- b) The word קנאה is included since it is found in a second colon parallel with אַף (Ps. 79:5).

<sup>20</sup>For more thorough treatments of the words for "wrath", see F. Weber, Vom Zorne Gottes (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1862), 14-28; E. Johnsen, "אַף," in TWAT, 1:376-389; K. D. Schunck, "רחמה," TWAT, 2:1032-1036, and "עברה," TWAT, 5:1033-1039; D. N. Freedmann and J. Lundblom, "רחה," TWAT, 3:182-188; N. Lohfink, "כעס," TWAT, 4:298-302; B. Wiklander, "אעב," TWAT, 2:621-626. A short summary is found in B. E. Baloian, Anger in the Old Testament (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 5-7.

<sup>21</sup>Gruber, Nonverbal Communication, 2:491.

parallel to עברה with the latter as the A-word. In Ps. 74:1b we find the phrase ישן אפך, "your anger fumes."<sup>22</sup> The cognate verb אנף, "be angry" is used three times, all in parallel constructions. It stands as A-word to קנאה in Ps. 79:5, and to אף in Ps. 85:6. In Ps. 60:3 it is found in the second colon, where the first contains זנח, "reject," and פרץ, "break through a wall."

חמה, "wrath" is usually connected with the verb יחם, "be hot." The word sometimes has the meaning "poison."<sup>23</sup> Gruber contests the derivation from the verb and sees "poison, venom, foam, wrath" as the range of meaning.<sup>24</sup> Apart from the two times it is parallel to אף the word is used three times in verbal phrases, with שפך in Ps. 79:6, "pour our wrath" or with Gruber the metaphor "pour out poison,"<sup>25</sup> in Ps. 88:8 with סמך, "lean, support,"<sup>26</sup> and finally in Ps. 89:47 the metaphor of wrath as fire, the wrath is said to בער, "burn." This last phrase stands parallel to נסתר, "hide," with "hide" in the first colon.

עברה, "fury" is sometimes connected with the root עבר, "cross, pass by." The idea is that the heat inside boils over. Others connect the noun together with hithpa'el עבר to a root meaning "be arrogant" (Both the verb and the noun sometimes have this meaning). The verb is used once (Ps. 89:39) as B-word with זנח, "reject," and מעט,

---

<sup>22</sup>See Gruber, Nonverbal Communication, 2:510-513.

<sup>23</sup>See Ps. 58:5 and 140:4.

<sup>24</sup>Gruber, Nonverbal Communication, 2:513.

<sup>25</sup>Gruber, Nonverbal Communication, 2:535.

<sup>26</sup>We understand the phrase to describe God's wrath as pressing against the sufferer, see translation note in chapter 2, p. 112.

"refuse," in the first colon.<sup>27</sup> The noun is used three times in the complaint psalms, once (Ps. 90:11) with אָא, once (Ps. 85:4) with אָא חרון (for these see above), and once (Ps. 90:9) alone.

חרון, "wrath," is derived from the verb חרה, "burn." Thus once more we have the metaphor of wrath as fire. The verb is very often used with אָא, the wrath burns (2 Sam. 24:1; Isa. 5:25), but is rare in the Psalms and not found in the complaint psalms. אָא חרון is found in Ps. 85:4. In Ps. 88:17 חרון is used in plural with עבר, "Over me sweep your bursts of wrath." It is parallel to בעותיך, "your alarms." כעס, "provocation" is found in Ps. 85:5.<sup>28</sup> As mentioned above, in Ps. 79:5 קנאה, "jealousy" (used with בער, burn) is parallel to אָא. In Ps. 102:11 the nouns זעם, "wrath" or "curse," and קצף, "anger," are used together in this order.

The words for wrath that are most common in the complaint psalms seem to have considerable overlap, and can for our purposes be treated as synonyms. We have applied the more common English word "anger" for the more common אָא, and less common English words ("wrath," "fury") for less common Hebrew synonyms. (חמה, חרון, and עברה).

---

<sup>27</sup>Yaron, "the Meaning of Zanach," 237-239, has argued זנח means "be angry" rather than "reject." He supports this view partly by parallelism. The three instances in the complaint psalms where the verb is parallel to words for anger/wrath do not, as far as I can see, strengthen his theory. Firstly, the fact that it stands first would describe it as the less marked than both אָא, אָא, and הרתעבר. With the frequent use and apparently general meaning of אָא/אָא this appears to me unlikely. Secondly, in Ps. 60:3 it is immediately followed by פרץ, "break through a wall," and in Ps. 89:39 by מאס, "refuse."

<sup>28</sup>The word is also used in Ps. 6:8 but in its passive meaning, "distress."

### God as Absent and Indifferent

In the complaint psalms the psalmists protest that God has rejected them, has hidden himself, has forgotten them, is far away, is inaccessible, and even sleeps. These complaints tend to cluster in the beginning of a "description of the distress" section or, as negated jussives, are found in complaint-like petitions. These motifs have basically the same function; they protest that God has abandoned them and does not pay attention to their prayer. Still each motif gives its own nuance to this complaint.

The most common verb for rejection<sup>29</sup> in the complaint psalms is רָצַח, which is used seven times in these psalms. רָצַח, "abandon" and סָרַח, "refuse" are used one time each (Ps. 22:2 and 89:39, סָרַח together with רָצַח). Six times the motif of rejection is found in the first colon of a complaint section (Ps. 22:2; 44:10; 60:3; 74:1; 88:15, and 89:39). In Ps. 77:8 "Will the Lord reject for ever, and never more be favorably disposed" is the first of several rhetorical questions complaining that God has seemingly stopped being good, and asking him if this is final. In Ps. 44:24 the negated jussive אַל תִּרְצַח לְנֶצַח, "do not reject forever," is found in the second colon of complaining prayer. The rejection motif is cast in a "why" complaint in Ps. 22:2; 74:1, and 88:15. In Psalms 44 and 89 the rejection-motif is directly preceded by a hymnic section describing God's salvific acts in the past (44) or God's unbreakable

---

<sup>29</sup>We have here grouped together words that are generally translated "reject," "abandon," "forsake," "refuse," etc. Thus a preliminary "definition" would be: words that can be translated "reject, abandon." The discussion will make clear how the psalmists used these words.

promises (89). Immediately before the prayer in Ps. 44:24-27 the people had professed their innocence and unmistakably put the blame for the misery on God. In Ps. 22:2 the complaints following the complaint of rejection bear out the contrast between how God should have acted and how he does treat the psalmist. Thus the context of the rejection-clauses is a radical break between God's past, his promises, and relation with the people and the individual on one hand, and the present, where promises are not kept and the relationship not recognized. Sin or human unfaithfulness is not admitted in any of the complaint psalms in which the rejection-motif is found. When man is subject for the rejection and God or his commandments are objects, it denotes apostasy (Lev. 26:15-16; Judg. 2:12; and 2 Kings 17:15). Now Israel or the individual has been faithful to God, but God has broken faith with them.<sup>30</sup>

The motif of the hiding of God is expressed four times by הִסְתִּיר פָּנִים, "hide the face" (including once [Ps. 10:11] in the mouth of the wicked), once נִסְתָּר, "hide oneself" (89:47), and once (10:1) הֶעֱלִים, "hide." When God hides his face, he does not listen to prayer and pay attention to their misery. They are in the hands of whoever wants to oppress them and take advantage of them. S. E. Balentine mentions that the question "why do you hide your face" in the lament psalms receive no answer.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, all instances where God is said to be hidden occur in contexts

---

<sup>30</sup>See our translation note to Ps. 44:24, p. 55. See further Balentin, The Hidden God, 143-151, and H. Ringgren, "אָנָּה," TWAT, 2:619-621.

<sup>31</sup>Balentine, The Hidden God, 49-65. See our translation note to Ps. 44:25.

that stress temporal continuation. In 13:2 the phrase is found in a colon introduced by עַד-אֲנִי, "how long." In both 44:25 and 88:15 the "hiding" colon is introduced by לָמָּה, "why," but the last word in 44:24b is לְנֶצַח, "forever"; in 88:16 the psalmist complains he has been dying מִנְעוּר, "from (his) youth." Finally, the wicked in Psalm 10 says: "He [God] has hidden his face not to see forever." We see the hiddenness of God depicted in the whole of Psalm 88 where the psalmist prayed and prayed but could never get through to God and ended seeing only darkness. Similarly the sufferer in Psalm 22 could not understand why God would not answer his prayer (vv. 3-6).

The verb שָׁכַח, "forget," which occurs nine times in the Psalms with God as subject, all within the complaint psalms,<sup>32</sup> seems to be closely connected to God's hiding of his face. Three times in our psalms (Ps. 10:11 [in the mouth of the wicked]; 13:2; 44:25) it is parallel to הִסְתִּיר פָּנִים. A fourth, Ps. 10:12 reflects the bragging of the wicked in the previous verse and prays: אַל-תִּשְׁכַּח עֲנִי, "do not forget the afflicted."<sup>33</sup> The verb is found in questions (Ps. 13:2; 42:10; 44:25; 77:10) which receive no response, or negated jussives (Ps. 10:12; 74:19, 23). In Ps. 106:21<sup>34</sup> it is said about the fathers that they "forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt," and so they built the golden calf (vv. 19-20). In the complaint

---

<sup>32</sup>In Psalm 9-10 the verb is used three times. In 9:13 it is said that God did not forget the cry of the afflicted. In 10:11 the wicked brags that God does not pay attention to his oppression of the poor and miserable good and godly. Finally, in v. 12 the psalmist petitions God not to forget the afflicted.

<sup>33</sup>Balentine, The Hidden God, 136: "Clearly God's hiding and his forgetting are two aspects of the same lament."

<sup>34</sup>See also Ps. 78:11 and 106:13.



psalms God is the one who does the forgetting; human sin does not enter the picture. In fact, Ps. 44:18 says the people have not forgotten God. זָכַר, "remember, be mindful of," is used five times in these psalms, all in the imperative. Notice Ps. 74:18-23 where זָכַר is used in vv. 18 and 22, אַל-תִּשְׁכַּח, "do not forget," in vv. 19 and 23. In v. 20 God is asked to "look at" the covenant, that is, pay attention to what he has promised to Israel, into what relation he has entered with the people.

God had promised to be with his people, yet now he must be reminded, even petitioned, to be faithful to his promise lest the downtrodden, for whom he has pledged responsibility, be put to shame (cf. v. 21).<sup>35</sup>

In Ps. 22:2 the psalmist complains that the words of his cry are "far away (רָחוֹק) from my Salvation." This is followed by a description of how God has left him alone in his distress. In v. 12 he cries out: "Do not be far from me (אַל-תִּרְחַק), for the trouble is close by." After more description of the suffering and the threatening enemies he again prays: "Do not be far away" (v. 20). The psalmist in Psalm 10 asks why God stands far away (תִּעַמַּד בְּרָחוֹק) and hides in times of trouble (v. 1). Then he goes on to describe how the wicked has his way. A similar idea is expressed in Psalm 74 where v. 2c-3a implies God has left Zion. The result is that the enemies have plundered and burnt his sanctuary and set up their standards there. In God's absence they have had free course. On the other hand, God's people see no sign, no revelation from God (v. 9). In Ps. 35:17 the psalmist complains that God merely stands and watches his distress without intervening. Ps. 44:10b and 60:12b say

---

<sup>35</sup>Balentine, The Hidden God, 138. Our discussion of God's forgetting is indebted to pages 136-143 in the same book.

God "did not go out with our armies." Ps. 74:11 asks: "Why do you hold back your hand, even your right hand."<sup>36</sup>

Finally we must mention the motif of God as sleeping, which we come across in Ps. 44:24.<sup>37</sup> It is found together with the motifs of rejection, hiding the face, and forgetting. This implies that these motifs are to be seen as different ways of expressing God's absence, inactivity, inattentiveness and indifference. In Ps. 121:4 it is said that God does not sleep.

We thus see that God as he is known from his deeds in the past and from his promises and the relationship to the people and the individual to which he has committed himself, has become impossible to reach for the psalmist. Past promises appear annulled, past patterns of action are reversed. All communication between the psalmist and God is broken. The psalmist applies to Yahweh motifs associated with human unfaithfulness.

### God as Actively Hostile

God is not merely absent or indifferent. The psalmists also depict him as actively hostile. In some psalms God is seen as having brought the psalmist near to death. In Psalm 6 God's persistent angry reproaching (v. 2) makes the psalmist "feeble" and "terrified" (v. 3) and causes him to fear death as separation from God (v.

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 155-157.

<sup>37</sup>The same motif is apparently present in Ps. 35:23 where God is asked to rouse himself and awake. The imperative קוּמָה, "arise" (44:27; 74:22), is also perhaps to be seen as connected to this motif.

6). In Psalm 88 the psalmist says that God has placed him in "the nethermost pit," as far into Sheol as one can possibly go, and in "the darkness of the depth," an expression which evokes the picture of the chaos-forces. He sees the wrath of God as pressing (ךמט) against him (v. 8a). In v. 8b God is even given the role of the chaotic Sea: "and with all your breakers you subdue me." This last motif is also found in Ps. 42:8. Similarly 88:17-18 says: "Over me sweep your bursts of wrath, your alarms annihilate me, they surround me like water all the time." Psalms 22 and 102 depict God's attitude toward the psalmist primarily as passive, but both also include complaint that God is actively causing the near-death situation (22:16c; 102:11, 24). The isolation from former friends connected with near-death experiences is said to be caused by Yahweh in Ps. 88:9 and 19.

Military defeat is interpreted as actively brought about by Yahweh in Psalms 44, 60, 80, and 89. God is said to have broken down the physical structures for defence (Ps. 60:4a; 80:13a; and 89:41). He has on the one hand strengthened the enemy (Ps. 89:43) and on the other hand weakened Israel (60:5b). Thus he made them lose the battle (Ps. 44:11a; 89:44). Worse, he has actually delivered them up "as sheep for eating" (Ps. 44:12a). He has scattered them among the nations (Ps. 44:12b) and sold them as slaves, - on sale (Ps. 44:13). On the battlefield he has crushed them "in a place of jackals"<sup>38</sup> and covered over them with deep darkness (Ps. 44:20). Yahweh has made them into a mockery for the peoples that live around them (Ps. 44:14-15; 80:7). Generally he has let them experience sorrow and distress (Ps. 60:5a;

---

<sup>38</sup>See translation note, p. 52.

80:6). Thus the defeat from first to last with all its consequences is attributed to Yahweh. He is the one who has brought it upon them. In addition, Ps. 89:45-47 complains that God has thrown the king down from his throne, shortened the days of his youth and brought shame upon him.

Psalms 39 and 90 describe the short and miserable life for sinners under God's wrath. Ps. 90:3 alludes to Gen. 3:19: "You return man to dust, and say: return children of man." "Like a hand-breadth you have set my days" (v. 6b) is Psalm 39's counterpart to this. Ps. 39:10: "You have done this" also looks back to the description of life as short and distressful. In 90:5 God is said to pour sleep on<sup>39</sup> them and cause them to become like withering grass. V. 7: "We vanish because of your wrath" (also Ps. 39:11). God's wrath causes the people to be terrified (see Ps. 6:3-4, 11). God has fixed the people's sins in front of himself (v. 8). Similarly Ps. 39:12: "With reproaches over iniquity you correct man" (see Ps. 6:2 above). This is done in a such way that his wealth is consumed as by fire (39:12b). In 90:9 the psalmist complains that all their days decline under God's wrath. V. 15 talks about the "days you subdued us."

The description of sickness and near-death situations, military defeat, and a generally miserable life, as a result of God's actively hostile action assumes that sickness and death are in God's hand, not in the hand of sorcerers or evil spirits, nor caused by the law of nature or by virus. When mighty military powers are able to invade Israel, it is not according to their military strength or tactical skill, but because

---

<sup>39</sup>For this expression see translation note, pp. 133-134.

God has become Israel's enemy and gives the enemy the victory. Distress is not just a part of life. It is an experience of God's wrath.

### The Active Hostility and Absence of God Viewed Together

The same situation that is described as a result of God's absence is also described as an experience of God's hostile activity. God has hidden, forgotten and sleeps (Ps. 44:24-25), yet he also hands them over "like sheep for eating" (v. 12), sells them as slaves (v. 13) and makes them a reproach for their neighbors (v. 14). He has crushed them at a place of jackals (v. 20). We see the same in Psalm 89. Yahweh has rejected his anointed (v. 39) and hides (v. 47), but he is also depicted as tearing down his strongholds and strengthening his enemies (vv. 41 and 43). God has left, but is present in wrath. This tension is resolved if we see that what is absent is God as a loving and caring savior. He is inaccessible to their prayers. He does not defend them against enemies. He does not pay attention to their affliction. Thus the experiences of God as absent and as hostile belong together. We see the same in Deuteronomy 28 and the text we looked at above from Deuteronomy 30. God's wrath deprives the people or the individual of a life with God, the source of life, in the land he had given them and under his continuous blessing. It excludes from the realm of God's gracious, and saving activity. But at the same time the wrath also causes the people or the individual to be placed under God's curse. He is actively against them. With a sole, supreme, and sovereign God it has to be this way. Nothing happens that he has not permitted. Nothing comes that he has not sent. There is no neutral position. God is either for or against a person, much like a person is either for or

against God. To be without God is to be against him at the same time. It is important to note that it is a problem for the psalmists that God has hidden himself for them at the same time as his wrath terrifies them. It shows that they do not want a life were God does not interfere.

### Why is God Angry?

B. E. Baloian has shown that the wrath of God generally has two motifs of motivation: justice and rationality. Fifty-one percent of the pericopes in the Old Testament that speak specifically of divine anger include the motivation of anger as entailing the wickedness of human beings in their behavior towards one another. Seventy-five percent of them have his anger motivated by human rebellion against his person (33 percent included both motivations). He thus finds that Yahweh's wrath also is predictable.<sup>40</sup> It is natural to start with the question whether this observation holds true in the complaint psalms. Is God's wrath depicted as a rational and predictable reaction to human sin and wickedness?

The verbs יָסַר and יָכַח used in Psalm 6 imply that the psalmist knows he is a sinner deserving Yahweh's chastisement.<sup>41</sup> However, his problem is not his sin as such, but that God deals with him in his wrath, rather than being gracious according to his steadfast love. In Psalm 90 the root of the problem is that God has fixed the people's sins in front of himself and scrutinizes their secret shortcomings. The

---

<sup>40</sup>Baloian, Anger, 71-73. His discussion of motivations continues to page 98.

<sup>41</sup>See translation note, pp. 21-22.

psalmist's reaction to this is not, however, a quick confession that obtains a gracious God once again. He acknowledges his and the people's sins (that is clear from v. 8), he has his mind turned toward God and knows that only with him is true wisdom (v. 12). However, the problem still exists. God continues to focus his eyes on secret sins. He is still angry. This is the problem. Apart from these, there are two more complaint psalms where sin plays a role. In Ps. 39:9 the psalmist asks God to free him from all his sins. He also, like the psalmist in Psalm 6, talks about God as reproaching and correcting man (v. 12). But again, the problem is not lack of confession or any other reason that should provoke God to anger. The psalmist has confessed his sins and wants to be right with God, but God goes on reproaching and correcting. Thus in v. 13 the psalmist begs God to hear his prayer: "hear my prayer, O Yahweh, and listen to my supplication, be not deaf to my tears!" The last psalm is Psalm 79. This psalm looks back to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. It asks: "How long, O Yahweh, will you be angry forever, will your jealousy burn like fire" (v. 5). There was reason for God's jealousy, - the psalmist mentions עֲוֹנוֹת אֲבוֹתָינוּ, "the former sins" (v. 8). But why does this situation go on and on? The psalmist asks God to turn his wrath to the enemies who have offended him much more gravely than Israel does now (v. 6). He prays for forgiveness of their sins (v. 9). Again, even though the reason for God's wrath is acknowledged, the problem now is not the sin but that God still does not turn his wrath away from them.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup>In Psalm 85 sin is mentioned as already forgiven by God (v. 3). A possible allusion to sin may be found in Ps. 35:15, but it has no role in relation to God's wrath. It is rather a part of the description of the wickedness of the enemies.

In most of the complaint psalms sin is not mentioned. In Psalm 44 the people profess not to have given Yahweh any reason for his wrath: "All this came over us even though we had not forgotten you nor been unfaithful to your covenant" (v. 18). "Though we were loyal to you, you still crushed us" (vv. 19-23). We should not take this to be a profession of total sinlessness.<sup>43</sup> But, according to the covenant Yahweh had made with his people, they could see no reason why God should reject them and deal with them in wrath.

The wrath of God as it is depicted in these psalms, ranges from explainable but burdensome (Psalms 90 and 39) to totally impossible to understand (Psalms 22, 44, and 88). It is not possible to say that God's wrath is always predictable. It is not possible to say it always is a reaction to human sin, at least as his behavior is experienced by the psalmists. There exist situations when God's dealing with humans can be given no justification. These psalms give no explanation. They simply affirm there are times when God is experienced as an enemy.<sup>44</sup>

Baloian maintains the issue in these psalms is not that Yahweh is perceived as involved in unjust actions, but rather the delay of his acting:

"These Psalms speak of those who await His merciful as well as just intervention.

---

<sup>43</sup>See chapter 2, note 93, p. 65.

<sup>44</sup>S. Terrien, The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 323, maintains Psalm 22 is the only psalm where the hiddenness of God is unrelated to sin. As will be seen from the discussion above, this is simply not the case. Balentine is right: There is a significant lack of references to sin in the complaint psalms in connection with God's absence and hiddenness. He says: "it may be suggested that for the psalmist the hiding of God's face was perceived as an inexplicable experience, at least in some instances." Balentine, The Hidden God, 56.



There is not contradictory evidence to characterizing Yahweh's person as just but there is a delay in its manifestation."<sup>45</sup>

However, on the one hand we have seen above<sup>46</sup> that the "how long" question is not just a matter of awaiting Yahweh's merciful intervention. On the other hand, the how long is only part of the problem. The psalmists in several of these psalms clearly were faced with evidence indicating Yahweh was not just. In Psalm 44 God is seen as handing them over to the enemy even though the people has not been unfaithful to him. In Psalm 89 there is a stark contrast between what God has promised by an unbreakable oath and what he actually does. In Psalms 22 and 88 the psalmist keeps praying but gets no response; in the former the psalmist eventually becomes certain God has heard him, but in Psalm 88, by the end of the psalm there is nothing else than darkness. This is exactly the core of the distress in some of these psalms: God appears to be either powerless or unjust, thus the many למה, "why."<sup>47</sup> We shall see

---

<sup>45</sup>Baloian, Anger, 117-118.

<sup>46</sup>Pp. 162-163.

<sup>47</sup>Fretheim, Suffering of God, 66, mentions Ps. 44:23; 74:1, 10; and 89:46 as instances that speak of "an anguish over the divine absence because of sin." None of these psalms mention sin. If, as is likely, Psalm 74 looks back to the destruction of the temple in 586/7 BC, we can infer that the wrath spoken of in this psalm at least started as directed against sin. Still, it has reached a point when this no longer accounts for its persistence. Thus: "Why do you reject for ever?" However, in Psalm 44 the people deny any responsibility for this outburst of divine wrath. What has happened is unintelligible to them. Likewise in Psalm 89 there is no confession of any sin giving God a legitimate reason for being angry. In these psalms there is a striking incongruence between God as known by past revelation and God as he is experienced in the present situation.

The Old Testament speaks of the inscrutability of God and incomparability of God, the hidden God, God apart from his revelation. Speculations centering on God apart from revelation are strongly discouraged. God should be approached as he is according to his revelation. It appears to me that Fretheim does not do justice to this

below what the psalmists do about it.

### The Prayer

#### Presuppositions for the Prayer

That the psalmists find it worthwhile to approach Yahweh in prayer assumes that he is a personal God. The psalmists address God as "you" (Ps. 6:2-4 and 22:2-6). It makes no sense to pray to a principle or a cosmic force. It is worth noting that in these psalms, several of which describe deep distress, we find no magical formulas or incantations. There is no way to force or manipulate God into action. In Psalm 88 the distress is both serious and protracted, but the sufferer can do nothing about it. The same is true for Psalm 74 or Psalm 6. The psalmists are talking to God, asking for a change and even providing arguments why God should grant them their requests.<sup>48</sup> Thus God is not only assumed to be personal, but in such a way analogous to humans that a verbal communication in human language is possible.<sup>49</sup> This analogy is further underlined by the anthropomorphic language in which the prayers are cast: Stop being angry! (Ps. 6:2); why do you stand at a distance? (Ps.

---

aspect. His book read as a whole seems to leave no room for a "Deus absconditus." In the psalms which form the basis for the present dissertation, however, the psalmists struggle precisely with a God that does not fit the description, they experience a God who deals with them contrary to what he has revealed about himself, what he has promised and what he has previously done. See further Child's critique of Fretheim, B. S. Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 356-358.

<sup>48</sup>"God may not be coerced, but God can be persuaded." P. D. Miller, "Prayer as Persuasion: The Rhetoric and Intention of Prayer," Word & World 13 (1993): 361.

<sup>49</sup>Compare Gen. 1:26-27: God created man in his image.

10:1); how long will you forget me and hide your face? (Ps. 13:2); why do you sleep? (Ps. 44:24); get your hand, your right hand out from your lap! (Ps. 74:11).<sup>50</sup>

To pray for a change further assumes that God can change and that he may do in response to human prayer. The psalmists ask God to "turn around" (נָשׁוּב, Ps. 6:5; 80:15; and 90:13). We have seen that this means to turn away from his wrath and once again be gracious to his people or the individual.<sup>51</sup> In Ps. 90:13 God is further asked to "repent" (נָחַם). The verb נָחַם with God as subject does not denote "being sorry for what you have done and cannot change," as the word "repent" is often understood in modern usage, but to "change his mind about something he has planned to do, change his course of action."<sup>52</sup> This also fits the context for the only occurrence of the word within the complaint psalms. In Psalm 90 Yahweh is not asked to be sorry for something he has done, but to change his course of action concerning his servants, the people of Israel. He has been angry. The psalmist wants him to show his steadfast love. Andersen and Freedman mention three conditions on which God's repentance occurs:

1. It can be a reaction to certain events or developments in the human scene.
2. It can occur in response to human intervention or intercession.
3. It can be a response to genuine repentance in word and deed on the part of the

---

<sup>50</sup>God's relatedness to the world and to humans are discussed by S. E. Balentine, Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Humane Dialogue, 33-47. See also Fretheim, Suffering of God, 34-44.

<sup>51</sup>See Exod. 32:12; 2 Kings 23:16; Jonah 3:9; and translation notes to Ps. 6:5, pp. 23-24, and 90:13, pp. 140-141.

<sup>52</sup>Andersen and Freedman, Amos, 638-679.

people.<sup>53</sup>

In Psalm 90 the prayer for divine repentance is preceded by a petition for God to give the people wisdom in their hearts (v. 12). Also in Psalm 6, where  $\text{נשׁו}$  is used alone the penitent heart is implicit. In Psalm 85 there is a confession that God has forgiven their sins (v. 3) which precedes the prayer for repentance in v. 5. Important for us here is that God can change his mind, and he can do so because of human intercession or as a response to human actions.

The language of repentance . . . has to do with divine affectability by the creation. The God who repents is also a God who is provoked to anger, who rejoices over the creation, who responds to prayer. This is a God who has chosen to enter into a relationship with the world such that it is a genuine relationship.<sup>54</sup>

It is sometimes stated that prayer is primarily to change us, to open us for God's activity.<sup>55</sup> This is not what we see in these psalms. The psalmists pray to change God. They want him to relent from his wrath, change his course of action concerning them and let them experience his steadfast love. They think he may change in response to their prayers.

God is further seen as having power to work out the change. When the psalmist in Psalm 6 cries out, "Be gracious to me . . . heal me" (v. 3), he assumes it is

---

<sup>53</sup>Andersen and Freedman, Amos, 644-645.

<sup>54</sup>T. E. Fretheim, "The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-Talk," Horizons in Biblical Theology 10 (1988): 59. The whole article is pages 47-70.

<sup>55</sup>O. Hallesby, Prayer, translated by C. J. Carlsen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 12: "To pray is nothing more involved than to let Jesus into our needs. To pray is to give Jesus permission to employ His powers in the alleviation of our distress. To pray is to let Jesus glorify His name in the midst of our needs."

in God's power to heal him. The same is underlined by the totally passive role assigned to the enemies in that psalm. Similarly, in Psalm 44 only the fact that God is sleeping and has hidden his face accounts for the tragedy that the people are subdued by the enemies. If God arises, he is able to redeem them (v. 27). The question is how long God will let his anger fume (Ps. 80:5). As soon as God chooses to change the situation for his people and let his face shine, they are saved (v. 8). In the meantime they are at the mercy of everyone (v. 14). Even in Psalm 88 the psalmist never expresses doubt that God is able to end his distress. He is just bewildered why God does not do it.

Yahweh is not part of a polytheistic power balance. He alone is God, he alone is in control. In Psalm 74 we saw the contrast between how God appeared to the enemies and to all who were influenced by a Near Eastern polytheistic frame of reference, and how he, according to the psalmist's belief, really is: God is the one who once and for all crushed all the mighty life threatening chaos-forces. He is the unrivalled king of the universe. He does not share his power with a sun god and a moon god. He does not have to fight Mot periodically to revive fertility after the dry season as the Canaanite god Baal did; "summer and winter, you formed them," the psalmist says (v. 17). There is no doubt that God is capable of snatching his turtle dove out of the teeth of the wild beasts and stopping their bragging. It is just that he holds back his hand, even his right hand.

We further see that their beliefs about God are not based upon their experiences in the present situation but on revelation and history. They experience God as absent

(Ps. 22:2-3, 12) and hidden (Ps. 13:2 and 44:25) but still direct their prayer toward him and come before him (Ps. 88:2),<sup>56</sup> as if he is present. They hope that God will hear their prayer. Faced with a hostile God (88:7-9), they assume he is characterized by steadfast love, faithfulness and righteousness (88:11-13), and that his deeds are wonderful (see Appeal below), even though experience tells them the contrary. T. E. Fretheim maintains divine absence is "best understood within the context of varying intensifications of presence." Thus it means "the loss of one intensification of presence or another. . . . absence always entails presence at some level of intensification, albeit diminished."<sup>57</sup> That God in the Old Testament is present in different ways is clear. We have also seen above that God's absence in these psalms often is found together with a presence of divine wrath and hostile action. However, though Fretheim's may be a workable way of holding God's absence and presence together in a philosophical framework, it would be a misunderstanding to use it to describe the theological assumptions of the psalmists. They are not in a situation where God is "absent, but not that absent." Rather, God is present in wrath. They experience God as uninterested in their distress, unapproachable by their prayers, and actively hostile to them. Still, they turn from the God of their experience to the God of their belief and assume that God does care about their distress, will hear their prayers and is rich in steadfast love.

---

<sup>56</sup>Here the statement is surprising enough, in view of the situation, that Dahood suggests assigning a special understanding to  $\text{ךָ}$  for this verse. Dahood, Psalms, 2:301-302.

<sup>57</sup>Fretheim, Suffering of God, 65.

Balentine writes that whereas "A major voice in the Hebrew Bible, perhaps the majority voice, clearly espouses a type of contractual theology that equates suffering with sinfulness, prosperity with righteousness, in an unambiguous, quid pro quo distribution," these psalms represent a countertradition, "a virtual reservoir of protest literature."<sup>58</sup> Though "quid pro quo" may be caricature, there clearly is the thought that God on the one hand blesses those who are loyal to his covenant and keep his commandments, and on the other hand will punish those who turn their backs against him (Exod. 20:5-6 and Deuteronomy 28). It is, however, important to ask, what kind of protest do we find in the complaint psalms? As we have seen, it is not a protest against the theology of Exod. 20:5-6 or 34:6-7. The psalmists rather presuppose this theology.<sup>59</sup> They protest that what they experience flatly contradicts this theology (Ps. 44:18-23), or at least that the situation of wrath drags on when it should have ended (Ps. 6:2-4 and Psalm 74). They want God to act precisely according to the "majority voice" theology.

Do the psalmists then think that God really is angry or do they just want to say he appears to them as being angry? We may summarize their dilemma in five points:

1. What has happened to them is done by God (Ps. 39:10).
2. God has behaved in the way which he according to his self-revelation would do when provoked to anger.
3. According to his self-revelation and covenant he would be provoked to anger

---

<sup>58</sup>Balentine, Prayer in the Hebrew Bible, 147-148.

<sup>59</sup>For punishment of the wicked, see Ps. 6:9-11 and 44:21-22.

by sin and unfaithfulness.

4. This time this reason does not apply.

5. Yahweh is good, just, and rich in steadfast love and faithfulness.

These five points all express what is perceived as reality, and the psalmists never back down on any of them. They do not come up with a revised theology. They take the bewildering situation to God of whom they believe and confess that he is still almighty, good, just, and rich in steadfast love. Is God really angry? Yes, he has handed his people over to the enemies, he has made them a mockery to their neighbors. He has placed his faithful in Sheol. He has permitted the enemies to roar in his dwelling-place. Is God really angry? No, he is rich in steadfast love and faithfulness toward his people. The psalmists do not solve the tension. They take it to God.

### The Contents of the Prayer

Turning now to what the psalmists pray for, as expected we find prayers for release from the distress. There is prayer for healing (Ps. 6:3). There is prayer for rescue from the national enemies (Ps. 44:27). There is prayer for justice, that the wicked oppressor may be broken (Ps. 10:15). There is prayer for help against the enemies of an individual (Ps. 22:20-21). However, we saw in chapter 2, and the other complaint psalms confirm it, that as the understanding of the distress was seen to be theocentric, the content of the prayers is also related to God.

In the individual near-death psalms we notice that the psalmists desire not just health to be restored, personal enemies to be put to shame, and bodily life to continue.



In Psalm 6 the worst thinkable situation for the psalmist is to be in death where "there is no remembrance of you" (v. 6). What he wants is for Yahweh to stop punishing him in his wrath and rather be gracious to him so that he can come back into the relationship with Yahweh where he can praise him and worship him. In Psalm 22 Yahweh is called the one "who is enthroned over Israel's songs of praise" (v. 4). The psalmist remembers how the fathers have cried to Yahweh and not been put to shame (v. 6). He himself has put his trust in Yahweh since he was a child (v. 10-11). Thus, when he asks God to stop being far away, it is not merely a prayer for rescue. It is also a prayer for revival of the seemingly lost relationship. This is clear from his vow of praise when he has become certain that Yahweh has heard his prayer (vv. 23-29). In Psalm 42 the psalmist "pants" and "thirsts" for God and longs to go and see God's face (vv. 2-3). Instead his tears are his bread (v. 4). As people mockingly ask, "Where is your God?" he remembers how he formerly used to join the crowd going up to God's house (vv.4-5). In a distant area he is drowning in Sheol under God's rollers and breakers (vv. 7-8). He again thinks of how he used to sing of God's steadfast love (v. 9). As the situation is, he can only complain: "Why have you forgotten me?" (v. 10).<sup>60</sup> Finally, Psalm 88 has no explicit prayer for healing. Apart from describing the situation and asking "why," the only prayer is for Yahweh to let the psalmist's prayer come before him (v. 3). The psalmist describes himself as in death, since he experiences himself outside the realm of God's saving activity. Life is for him a life

---

<sup>60</sup>See Raabe, Psalm-Structures, 48.

with Yahweh.<sup>61</sup> We thus see in all these psalms, that the prayer is not directed only, not even mainly, toward a life of bodily health and social security, but toward a restoration of the relationship with Yahweh, a relationship where the psalmist can praise God and rejoice with all his faithful.

In the Old Testament the focus is on this life. It is here the blessings in the relationship with Yahweh are experienced. There are a few glimpses of a future with God after death, notably Ps. 73:24, but not enough to alter the general picture. The complaint psalms fit in well with this. The life in worship and praise to Yahweh and his steadfast love here and now is what the psalmists petition God to restore. Death means separation from God. It should be noted, however, that death in these psalms is described by people who experienced themselves to be under God's wrath. The implications for death experienced by those who possess the relation to Yahweh which the psalmists have lost and for which they pray are not directly addressed in these psalms.

In psalms occasioned by military defeat, the defeat is also not seen in isolation. In Psalm 44 the "normative" situation against which the present distress forms a contrast is not only a situation where God gives them victory but a situation where the people boasted in God all the time and praised his name continuously (v. 9). In Psalm 80 the refrain is: "O Yahweh, God of Hosts, restore us, let your face shine so that we

---

<sup>61</sup>C. Barth, *Die Eretzung vom Tode*, 44-51, has shown that life for the Hebrew is always a life "vor Jahwe." Thus the realm of death reaches into what can be described as physical life. A person is in the grip of death, is in Sheol when different kinds of affliction make him experience himself as "cut off from God's hand" (Ps. 88:6) and handed over to the forces of death and chaos (pp. 91-122).

are saved" (vv. 4, 8, and 20). Vv. 18-19 read: "Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, upon the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you. Revive us, and we will call on your name." Whatever the reference of "the man of your right hand" may be, it is clear that the verses intend a restoration not only of military strength and security from enemy attacks, but a relation between Yahweh and his people where his name is worshipped by them and he looks on them with favor. Psalm 89 has a lengthy presentation of the character and power of God and of the promises connected to his covenant with David and his offspring. This picture is then contrasted with the present situation. It is clear that the psalmist wants more than defeat turned to victory. He wants back the relation stipulated by the Davidic covenant. Thus, even in these psalms of military defeat, the primary request is once again to experience the relation to Yahweh as shown by his former deeds and prescribed through his covenant. What the people want is a life with God.

Turning now to the psalms where the distress is less specified, we see they want life under God's wrath to end and life under his steadfast love to begin. After lamenting the terrible distress of life when God is angry, the psalmist in Psalm 90 begins his petitions by asking for wisdom (v. 12), the wisdom which is connected to fear (יראה) of Yahweh (v. 11). After this he asks God to turn away from his wrath, to change his mind and course of action concerning his servants (v. 13). He wants to see God's steadfast love. Note that the psalmist believes that God's steadfast love will give the people gladness of life. Vv. 16-17 go on to ask God to show them his proper

works, even his grandeur, and establish their work for them. The psalmist testified in v. 1 that God had been an abode from generation to generation. This is precisely what he prays for in the present situation. What is it the psalmist in Psalm 77 misses? Vv. 8-10 tell us what he is looking for but cannot find: "Will God no longer be favorably disposed? Is his steadfast love gone forever, his promise ended from generation to generation? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Is his compassion shut up in anger?" He goes on to remember God's wonderful works in times past (vv. 12-21). Thus again, what is prayed for is a life with Yahweh.

In situations where God is experienced as angry, absent and an enemy, the primary prayer of the psalmists is for communion with Yahweh to be restored, a relation where his steadfast love and wonderful works are shown to them, a relation where they can praise his name. These are prayers of faith, not protests of unbelief.

### The Appeal

#### Appeal to Yahweh's Abiding Character

When the psalmists appeal to God's character, the attribute of "steadfast love" is mentioned most often; it occurs in eight of the complaint psalms. Since the word  $\text{רַחֲמִים}$  has been very differently interpreted, we shall include a discussion of its meaning here.

LXX and Vulgate translate  $\text{רַחֲמִים}$  with  $\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  and misericordia. The targum uses derivatives of  $\text{רַחֲמִים}$ . Thus the traditional translation has been "mercy." N. Glueck in a

very influential study<sup>62</sup> defines the word in its secular meaning as "conduct corresponding to a mutual relationship of rights and duties," and maintains that "only those participating in a mutual relationship of rights and duties can receive or show hesed."<sup>63</sup> Thus it is often connected to the covenant, and "constitutes the essence of a covenant."<sup>64</sup> God's hesed, he argues, denotes "Yahweh's covenantal relationship toward his followers."<sup>65</sup> He regards suitable translations to be "loyalty," "mutual aid" or "reciprocal love."<sup>66</sup> H. J. Stoebe<sup>67</sup> notes that hesed often stands together with חסד, and, except for the cases where the words are in the plural, always first. He concludes that "häsäd der übergeordnete Begriff ist und demzufolge in erster Linie als

---

<sup>62</sup>N. Glueck, Das Wort hesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche un göttliche gemeinschaftsgemasse Verhaltensweise. Giessen: Alfred Topelmann, 1927; Hesed in the Bible. translated by A. Gottschalk, Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College, 1967.

<sup>63</sup>Hesed in the Bible (Eng. ed.), 54. Glueck had to stretch some of his cases to find any relational obligation. In Joshua 2:12 he finds the obligation in the relation between host and guest (Hesed in the Bible, 36). This is aptly refuted by K. Sakenfeld, The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible, Harvard Semitic Monographs 17 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 68: a prostitute had no obligation to help visitors that turned out to be spies for a hostile nation.

<sup>64</sup>Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, 55.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 102. Basically in agreement is A. R. Johnson, though he, arguing from the close association with the root חסד, finds an emotional aspect in hesed which is not present in English "loyalty." He therefore suggests the translation "devotion." A. R. Johnson, "Hesed and Häsäd," in Interpretationes ad Vetus Testamentum pertinentes Sigmundo Mowinckel septuagenario missae (Oslo: Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1955), 101-112.

<sup>67</sup>H. J. Stoebe, "Die Bedeutung des Wortes häsäd im Alten Testament", Vetus Testamentum 2 (1952): 244-254.

Ausdruck für eine gütige Gesinnung oder Freundlichkeit verstanden werden kann, während dann rahamim die konkrete Auswirkung dieser Gesinnung meint."<sup>68</sup> In its secular use the word expresses a goodness and friendliness going beyond that which one normally had the right to expect, beyond what was deserved. Through such action community becomes possible.<sup>69</sup> He says the word applied to God tells us "dass Gott sich in bedingungsloser Freundlichkeit und Grossherzigkeit dem Menschen zuwendet. Er begibt sich also seines göttlichen Rechtes, um mit den Menschen Gemeinschaft zu haben."<sup>70</sup> For K. Sakenfeld<sup>71</sup> hesed in secular use means "provision for an essential need" by a "situationally superior" based on relation or on a former act by the other, thus on "recognized responsibility" but nevertheless a freely willed act<sup>72</sup>. In theological usage it often denotes "God's hesed for his covenanted people in the Mosaic tradition," either his "delivering, protective power on behalf of those who are obedient," or "surprising forgiveness offered to the disobedient when they are penitent."<sup>73</sup> In basic agreement with Stoebe, and in some ways building on

---

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 247-248.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 248-249.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 254.

<sup>71</sup>K. Sakenfeld, The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible, Harvard Semitic Monographs 17. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 234.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 237.

Sakenfeld, is F. I. Andersen.<sup>74</sup> His point of departure is four passages in the Pentateuch ascribing חסד to Yahweh, Exod. 20:5-6; 34:6-7; Num 14:18-19 and Deut. 7:9-10. Especially Exod. 34:6-7 is revealing. We will quote it in full:

Yahweh is a merciful [רחום] and gracious [חנון] God, slow to anger [ארך אפים] and rich in steadfast love [רב-חסד] and faithfulness [אמת], who keeps [נצר] steadfast love for thousand generations [לאלפים], who forgives [נשא] iniquity [עון] and transgression [פשע], and sin [חטאה], but will by no means clear the guilty [לא ינקה], who punishes iniquity of fathers on the children and grandchildren, on the third and on the fourth generation.<sup>75</sup>

The people had just sinned gravely by making and worshipping the golden calf. According to the covenant they deserved punishment. The punishment is withheld, and in this context God provides this "self-disclosure." Andersen finds that חסד here far from describing "covenant obligations" can rather be said to describe Yahweh as characterized by a richness of amazing grace. After a lengthy survey of passages where the word חסד occurs, Andersen concludes:

hesed [is to be located] outside the domain of duty and obligation, even though a promise to do hesed can bring it within the domain of commitment. . . . The act of hesed may be spontaneous, or in response to an open appeal. The receiver is usually in a desperate, helpless situation. . . . in the old stories, hesed mainly describes exceptional acts of one human to another, meeting an extreme need outside the normal run of perceived duty, and arising from personal affection or pure goodness. Secondly, the earliest revelations of God's character highlight his hesed as primal, elemental, enduring, and associated with his love, grace,

---

<sup>74</sup>F. I. Andersen, "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God," in God Who is Rich in Mercy, eds. P. T. O'Brien and D. G. Petersen (Australia: Lancer Books, 1986), 41-88.

<sup>75</sup>Also Fretheim has called attention to the importance for Israel's faith of propositional statements about God's character. He calls them "generalizations of the history," without which the history is not "intelligible and coherent." These statements can then be viewed as "theological constants." See Fretheim, Suffering of God, 24-29. Compare Baloiian, Anger, 67-71.

compassion. . . . in the Psalms, hesed is the supreme attribute of God.<sup>76</sup>

Recently G. R. Clark has made a very thorough study of חסד.<sup>77</sup> He studied the word against other elements in the same lexical field, unlike the word studies of most of the previous. His findings generally support those of Stoebe and Andersen, but are more nuanced. He finds that three out of every four occurrences of חסד have God as agent. The word is never used with God as patient.<sup>78</sup> Already this would show that Glueck's "mutual obligation" misses the mark. We will summarize some of Clark's findings:

אמת and אמונה are essential components of חסד.<sup>79</sup> A commitment between the parties is involved when חסד, but not when טוב, is used.<sup>80</sup> When God is agent the most common benefit from חסד is deliverance. Other common benefits are assistance, forgiveness, preservation, and the Davidic dynasty. Very often Yahweh's

---

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 81-82. See also H. J. Zobel, "חסד," TWAT, 3:47-71. Zobel finds in חסד both a "Tatscharakter" (as seen from the phrase עשה חסד (used 36 times)), a "Gemeinschaftscharakter" (as seen from the contexts in which the word is used), and "Beständigkeit" (as seen from the hendiadys חסד ואמת (23 times, according to Even-Shoshan)). He rejects Glueck's subordination of חסד under the concept of the covenant.

<sup>77</sup>G. R. Clark, The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible, JSOT Supplement Series 157, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 65. For Clark's use of "agent" and "patient," see his glossary on pages 13-14. Note that the terms are not always equivalent to grammatical subject and object. E.g., in the sentence: "He was eaten by his pet crocodile," the grammatical subject is "he," whereas the crocodile is the agent.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 259-260.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 260.



חסד leads to worship.<sup>81</sup> חסד is close to חנן; it includes 'grace' and 'mercy,' but is much more. חנן does not imply commitment.<sup>82</sup> חסד is close to רחמים; it includes 'compassion,' but is not merely compassion. רחמים does not imply commitment.<sup>83</sup> The connotations of חסד are much broader than those of love.<sup>84</sup>

It will be noticed that several of the words that Clark found are closest to חסד are found in Exod. 34:6-7 and the other passages Andersen used as the points of departure for his discussion. The statements in these verses are repeated and reflected several times<sup>85</sup> in the Old Testament and thus clearly qualify as "theological constants."<sup>86</sup> Although we find no repetition or even clear allusion to this particular formula in the complaint psalms, the theology, the "theological constants" in this and similar propositional formulas, is shared by the belief of the psalmists. We should remember that the formula in Exod. 34:6-7 as well as other formulas of God's character is presented as God's self-revelation and would thus for the psalmists be more than "generalizations from history."<sup>87</sup> Thus an appeal to God's חסד is an appeal to God's gracious character and amazing commitment to his people according

---

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 267.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 267.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 268.

<sup>85</sup>Num. 14:18; Joel 2:13; Nah. 1:3; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; and Neh. 9:17. The first part of the formula (the grace part) is quoted more often than the last part.

<sup>86</sup>Fretheim, Suffering of God, 28.

<sup>87</sup>Fretheim's expression, Suffering of God, 28.

to his self-revelation. In a shortened form, "Yahweh is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in steadfast love," the formula seems to have functioned as a quasi-creedal statement (Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8).<sup>88</sup>

The most direct appeal to חסד as "the supreme attribute of God" is the phrase למען חסדך, "for the sake of your steadfast love" in Ps. 6:5 and 44: 27.<sup>89</sup> Yahweh's supreme goodness should motivate him to act and change the situation for the psalmist. Psalm 77 takes a more indirect course. Here the psalmist asks if God's חסד is gone forever. But by the way the question is asked, the psalmist makes clear that he regards doing חסד as an action characteristic for Yahweh. The incongruence of the present situation with this norm appeals to God to end the distress and once again act according to his character. In Psalm 88 the statements that Yahweh's חסד (as well as other attributes and characteristic actions of God) is unknown and unrecognized in Sheol (vv. 11-13) on the one hand serves to motivate the psalmist's prayer (it will soon be too late), on the other hand it should be a motivation for God to act; he has to show who he is now, not when the psalmist is dead. In Psalm 89 Yahweh's חסד as promised to David is part of (and may sum up) the normative pattern for the way God should be toward the Davidic king and his people. This pattern stands in the sharpest possible contrast to the shocking reality of recent events.

---

<sup>88</sup>Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2 add an element to this: "and repents of the evil" (נחם) על-רעה. Jonah uses this description of God to explain why he tried to flee to Tarshish. He did not want Yahweh to be gracious to Nineveh and change his course of action away from the pronounced destruction.

<sup>89</sup>A similar phrase, כחסדך, is found for example in Ps. 25:7; 51:3; and 109:26.

Thus the psalmist can appeal to this חסד in v. 50: "Where are your former acts of steadfast love, O Lord, which you by oath promised to David in your faithfulness."<sup>90</sup>

In Psalms 77, 88, and 89 several of God's attributes are placed in clusters. In Ps. 77:8-10 חסדו, "his steadfast love," and רחמיו, "his compassion," describe God's character, while the two infinitives רצות, "be favorably disposed," and חנות, "be gracious," depict his characteristic actions. These are found together with the obscure אמר which is traditionally translated "promise." In Ps. 88:11-13 God's character is described by חסדך, "your steadfast love," and אמונתך, "your faithfulness," whereas his characteristic actions are פלא, "wonders," and צדק, "(works of) righteousness." In Psalm 89 the word חסד is used both to describe a characteristic quality of God (vv. 29 and 34) and the actions that flow from this quality (vv. 3, 15, and 50). It is found together with אמומה in vv. 2, 3, 25, 34, and 50. In v. 15 God's rule of the world is characterized by צדק ומשפט, "righteousness and justice," and חסד ואמת, "steadfast love and trustworthiness." Yahweh's פלא is mentioned in v. 6.

For the distinction between the two cognates of אמן in general, it suffices to quote A. Jepsen:

"Während אמת das Wesen einer Person umschreibt, auf deren Wort und Tat man sich verlassen kann, bezeichnet אמונה das Verhalten einer Person, das ihrem eigenen inneren Sein entspricht. אמת ist Gottes Wort und Tat, auf die der Mensch sich verlassen kann; אמונה ist Gottes Verhalten, in dem er dem Wesen seiner Gottheit entspricht."<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup>Ps. 85:8 and 90:14 contain prayers for God's חסד. In Ps. 85:11 חסד is part of the blessed situation after the prayer is heard. In Ps. 13:6 God's חסד is an object for trust.

<sup>91</sup>A. Jepsen, "אמן, אמונה, אמן, אמת," TWAT, 1:344-345.

However, in his treatment of **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת** Clark argues that it is a hendiadys, and that “[its] semantic area is closer to that of **חֶסֶד** than to that of **אֱמֶת**.”<sup>92</sup> The use of **אֱמוּנָה** in Psalm 89 is one of Clark’s main arguments for calling it an essential component of **חֶסֶד**. Several times in the psalm the two words are used together in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish between them. In v. 50, however, **אֱמוּנָה** is both the guarantee that God will keep his promise and the motivator for the promised **חֶסֶד**.<sup>93</sup>

The “how long” questions<sup>94</sup> indicate God’s wrath was not expected to last forever. The same is brought out by the complaints and protests that the distress is dragging on, apparently **לְנֶצַח**, “forever.”<sup>95</sup> This assumption coheres with the many statements found elsewhere in the Old Testament that God’s wrath does not last long,<sup>96</sup> unlike God’s steadfast love which endures forever (Isa. 54:8 and especially Psalm 136).<sup>97</sup> The point is not that the “how long” questions in the complaint psalms

---

<sup>92</sup>Clark, The Word Heseed, 255.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 149-151.

<sup>94</sup>עַד מָתַי: Ps. 35:17, עַד אָנָה: Ps. 13:2-3, עַד-מָה: Ps. 74:9; 79:5; 89:47, and עַד מָתַי: Ps 6:4; 74:10; 80:5; and 90:13.

<sup>95</sup>Ps. 44:24; 74:1, 10, 19; 77:9, and 89:47, **נֶצַח** without **ל** is used with the same meaning in Ps. 13:2. **הַלְעוּלָמִים** and **הַלְעוּלָם** are used with a similar function in Ps. 85:6 and 77:8.

<sup>96</sup>Ps. 30:6; 103:9; Isa. 10:25; 54:7-8; 57:16; Jer. 3:12; Micah 7:18-20; and Lam. 3:31-33.

<sup>97</sup>See P. R. Raabe, “The Two “Faces” of Yahweh,” in And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday, eds., G. S. Krispin and J. D. Vicker (Chelsea, Michigan: Book Crafters, 1990), 286-288.

are dependent on any of these passages, but that they attest to the same theological assumption: God's steadfast love is lasting, his wrath is not. Perhaps the roots of this assumption lie in the contrast between the thousand generations to whom God's steadfast love is shown and the three or four generations that suffer his wrath according to Yahweh's self-presentation in Exod. 20:5-6 and 34:7.

#### Appeal to Yahweh's Relation to His People and to the Individual

Yahweh's saving acts in ancient times are appealed to in Psalms 22, 44, 74, 77, and 80. In Psalm 22 the psalmist contrasts his own situation with that of the fathers: "In you our fathers trusted; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried and were safe; in you they trusted and were not put to shame" (vv. 5-6). For him it is different. He trusts too, but God does not intervene (vv. 7-12). In Psalm 44 the people look back to how God dispossessed the nations that formerly inhabited Canaan and planted Israel there. God did so because he was well-disposed toward them (v. 4). The psalmist goes on to confess that this God is his king. Then, this past glory is contrasted by the present grim situation (vv. 10-23). Thus the distress is shown to be abnormal. My king was not used to act like this and should not do so now. Psalm 80 compares Israel to a vine. Yahweh brought it out from Egypt. He drove out the nations and planted it (v. 9). He cared for it and it thrived and filled the land (vv. 10-12). But now God has torn down the wall around it (v. 13) and delivered it up to the boars from the forest (v. 14). By this simile Israel's entire history is seen as a unity

and directly related to what God did to establish the people.<sup>98</sup> Also in alms. 77 it is the events related to the exodus that are remembered (vv. 12-21). Here the crossing of the sea is depicted in the language of the Storm-god's victory over the chaos forces of the personified Sea (vv. 17-20). In Psalm 74, because the god of the enemies has so blatantly challenged God's position as the king of the universe, it is precisely the primeval struggle with the chaos monsters (vv. 13-14) and his role as creator and preserver (vv. 15-17) that are remembered as God's victories of ancient time. Also, a secondary allusion to the exodus event is probably intended.<sup>99</sup> Westermann notes about the sections called "looking back to God's earlier saving deeds" in the lament psalms, that the events remembered in these sections are those belonging to the "series of events by which Israel first became a people."<sup>100</sup> The way this retelling of history functions as an appeal to God to do something with the present distress, is stated well by C. Westermann:

From the shock of contemporary (national) experience, what once happened suddenly emerged as that which was now to be held up before God, in the assumption that by forcing God to remember, he might heal the ruptures in the present. Recalling history had the immediate purpose of influencing history.<sup>101</sup>

God had made Israel into a people, his people, and given them the land. He had further established a covenant with them. Thus we find this appeal in Ps. 74:20:

---

<sup>98</sup>C. Westermann, Praise and Lament in the Psalms, Translated by K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 217-218.

<sup>99</sup>See pp. 96-97.

<sup>100</sup>Westermann, Praise and Lament, 219.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 220.

"Look at the covenant!" If God paid attention to the things to which he had pledged himself in the covenant, he would change the situation for his people. In Ps. 44:18 there is the charge that "All this has come upon us, even though we have not forgotten you nor been unfaithful to your covenant." Thus God will have to do something about it if he will not be marked as covenant breaker. In Psalm 89, where the miserable situation of the Davidic king is the focus of the complaint, the appeal is to the promises associated with the covenant which Yahweh established with his servant David. These unbreakable promises which God had confirmed by oath, God had now disregarded. He had done just the opposite of what he had said. The force of this contrast is to say that Yahweh now should restore the king to the position to which he is entitled according to the Davidic covenant if God still wants to be regarded as characterized by "faithfulness."

As God has entered into these relations with the people, almost all the complaint psalms contain relational appeals in one form or another. This is true both for communal and individual psalms. God is "my God" (Ps. 13:4; 22:2 [אלו]; 22:3, 11 [אלו]; 35:23, 24; 42:7, 12; 43:4, 5; 89:27 [אלו]; and 102:25 [אלו]) or "our God" (Ps. 44:21 and 90:17). He is "God of my salvation" (Ps. 88:2). The people are God's people (Ps. 44:13; 60:5; 77:16, 21; 79:13; 80:5, and 85:3, 7). It is called "your congregation" and "the tribe of your inheritance" (Ps. 74:2). The land is Yahweh's (Ps. 85:2). The image of a shepherd and his flock is evoked in Ps. 44:12; 74:1; and 80:2. The psalmist in Psalm 90 confesses that God has been an abode for his people from generation to generation (v. 1). He addresses God as יהוה, "Lord," and refers to

the people as "your servants" (vv. 13 and 16, also Ps. 89:40 [singular] and 51). In Psalm 22 the psalmist appeals to a close personal relation with God: "For you are the one who drew me out from the womb, who made me secure at the breasts of my mother. Upon you I am thrown from the womb; from my mother's womb you are my God" (vv. 10-11). Upon this follows the prayer in v. 12 asking that God may not be far away.

The relation between the people and Yahweh entails worship and praise (compare Exod. 3:12, 15 and Deut. 8:10). The references to this in the complaint psalms imply the assumption that God desires to be praised by his people. The warning that no one praises or acknowledges God in Sheol (Ps. 6:6 and 88:11-13) beside expressing the urgency of the psalmist's problem, also should motivate God to intervene. Several psalms have so-called "vows of praise."<sup>102</sup> Note also those where the promise of praise follows upon the assurance of salvation (Psalms 13 and 22). In Psalm 35 prayer that God may vindicate the psalmist against the enemies (vv. 1-8) is followed by a vow of praise. If God will hear his prayer and let the enemy fall into his own trap, then the psalmist will "rejoice in Yahweh and delight in his salvation" (v. 9). A description of how the enemy threatens and harasses the psalmist follows in vv. 11-16. In v. 17 the psalmist asks God how long he will passively look at this: "Rescue my life from those who hate me, my precious one from lions!" Then once more a promise of praise follows: "I will praise you in a large congregation" (v. 18). Here we see the idea: If God saves, he will receive praise. The same can be seen in

---

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 52-54.



Ps. 43:3-4 and 79:13. In Ps 74:21 we find this petition: "Let the humble and afflicted praise your name!"<sup>103</sup> The prayer is clearly formed in contrast to v. 18 where it is said a worthless people (the enemy) ridicules God's name. Thus, in addition to giving voice to the people's longing for restoration to a normal relationship with Yahweh, the petition also serves as a motivation for Yahweh to save under the assumption that he desires praise.

Appeals to God's compassion for the poor and afflicted could have been placed under "appeal to God's abiding character." They assume that God pities the helpless and afflicted, that he is not cold-hearted. However, a relational aspect is often present in these appeals, so we deal with them here. In Ps. 6:7-8 the psalmist tells about his weeping. The point of this description must be that his tears should move God to pity. He is in some ways like the dead who cannot praise Yahweh (v. 6). Similarly, in Psalm 88, where God is addressed as "God of my salvation," the long description of the psalmist's suffering is intended to move God to compassion. In Ps. 22:7-11 the psalmist's misery is laid out in contrast to the close relation that previously existed between God and him. In Ps. 44:25 the psalmist complains that God forgets his people's misery and affliction. Ps. 74:19 speaks about "your turtledove" which God must defend against the wild beasts, and "your afflicted one," whom he has forgotten. V. 21 mentions the "afflicted and poor" (and by implication also "the low") in relationship with Yahweh: "Let them praise your name." The psalmist of Psalm 10

---

<sup>103</sup>I hesitate to call this a vow of praise (Westermann, Praise and Lament, 54), since it is obviously a petition for salvation. On page 59 Westermann calls it an "implied vow."

knows that Yahweh as the eternal king will have compassion with the afflicted and marginalized (vv. 16-18). Here it seems the allusion is to the responsibility of the king to care for the oppressed, as evidenced both in the Old Testament (2 Kings 8:1-3) and extra-Biblical literature.<sup>104</sup> In the exodus story God heard the outcry of the oppressed descendants of Abraham in Egypt and came to rescue them (Exod. 2:23-25; 3:7-12, and 6:2-8). A direct promise that God would see to it that the rights of the helpless were not suppressed is found in Exod. 22:20-23.<sup>105</sup>

#### Appeal to Yahweh's Reputation

Yahweh is the creator of the earth and the only true God (Ps. 90:1-2; 74:12-17). He has entered into a covenantal relationship with Israel (Ps. 44:18; 74:20) and revealed his abiding character (Exod. 34:6-7). The psalmists assume that God wants this to be acknowledged, both by Israel and by the nations. In our discussion of Psalm 74 in chapter 2 we saw the important role played by the argument of reputation. God is called to court to conduct his case and show that he, not Marduk or any other god of the nations, is the only powerful and mighty, the unrivalled king of the universe. In Psalm 10 the arrogant oppressor boasts that God has forgotten, has hidden, will not see the evil deeds, and will not hold him accountable (vv. 11 and 13). So the psalmist asks: "Why does the wicked man revile God?" (v. 13a). The

---

<sup>104</sup>See the Ugaritic legend of king Keret, KTU 1.16 VI 45-50. For an English translation, see Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends, 102.

<sup>105</sup>See further R. N. Boyce, The Cry to God in the Old Testament, SBL Dissertation Series 103, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

assumption must be that God cares about his reputation. Also Psalms 44 and 89 is construed so as to challenge God's reputation. In Psalm 44 God appears unfair (vv. 18-23). In Psalm 89 the present circumstances are contrasted with God's promises in such a way that Yahweh is stigmatized as a liar if he does not change the situation and restore the Davidic king. God is a person also in this way, in that it matters for him what people say and think about him. He wants his integrity to be recognized. Yahweh is zealous for the first commandment, that he is God and wants to be acknowledged as such by all the nations. The psalmists point out the consequences God's present actions or inactivity have for what kind of God he appears to be. By this they intend to move God to act so that he once again can be seen by his oppressed people and by the mocking nations to be the one he really is. Note further that in Psalm 74 it is the destruction of the physical structure in which God dwelled among his people for their benefit that presents the challenge. God has bound himself to his people in such a way that his reputation is at stake. We remember that the same argument was used by Moses when God wanted to destroy Israel after they had sinned with the golden calf (Exod. 32:10-12).

#### Other Appeals

Innocence is professed in Ps 44:18-23. It is important to notice, however, that whereas the innocence provides a reason why God should not act as he does, the motivation given in the prayer for rescue (v. 27) is God's own steadfast love.

The brevity of life is used to give added urgency to different appeals. In Ps. 89:48-49 it motivates God to act quickly, lest he will be standing as a liar for ever. In

Ps. 6:6 and 88 (more or less the whole psalm, especially vv. 11-13) the function is to add urgency both to the psalmist's situation and to God's chances of having his gracious character and wonderful works recognized and praised.

The psalmists depict the enemies as wicked, impious, doers of injustice so as to present them as people Yahweh ought to punish (Ps. 6:9; 74:18; 79:6). This assumes God's justice; his justice should cause God to punish, but his steadfast love should motivate him to save.

We have seen in chapter 2 in connection with the different psalms that the "why" questions express reproach, protest, and bewilderment. They can connect to either of the theological assumptions mentioned above. In Ps. 10:1, 13<sup>106</sup> the psalmist protests the bewildering situation that God does not care for the afflicted but rather permits the wicked to have their way, unrestricted. Ps. 22:2; 42:10; 43:2; and 74:1 protest God's present way of dealing with them in view of the relation that had existed between them. In Ps. 74:11 and 79:10 the psalmists complain and are bewildered that God permits his reputation to suffer. In Ps. 80:13 God's present actions toward his people compared with what he had done in the past give rise to the "why." In Ps. 44:24-25 we should probably think of the cumulative force of the broken relation, endangered reputation and indifference to the afflicted as backdrop for the bewildered reproach expressed by these questions. These questions thus underline the theological assumptions mentioned above.

---

<sup>106</sup>V. 13 has על-מה, all the others instances have למה.

Conclusion

In these psalms the psalmists experience God's wrath as the heart and cause of their present distress. They interpret the distress in the light of Yahweh as the Lord of life, and his promises of a life rich in blessings to all who would be faithful to him. On the other hand they assume that those who are unfaithful are entitled to a broken relationship with Yahweh and to death and misery. In some of the psalms it is assumed that God originally became provoked to anger by the people's sin. His wrath has, however, dragged on beyond what is reasonable. In other psalms there can be found no explanation why God should be angry. God appears to act contrary to his character, contrary to his way of acting in the past, and in violation of the relationship into which he has entered with the people and the individual, in violation of his promises, with the result that his own reputation suffers.

In this situation the psalmists hold these discrepancies up to God's nose; they tell him exactly how they experience his current actions and inactivity toward them; they complain and protest and ask God to be the one he has told the people he is and the one he has revealed in the past. They assume, in total disregard of present evidence, that God is still rich in steadfast love and compassion, that he is still the one who forgives sin, that his promises and covenant are still valid and unchangeable, and that his actions back in the time when he made Israel into his people, are still characteristic for how he deals with his people. They protest God's work of wrath as not being his proper work and ask for his steadfast love and the works that are performed "for the sake of your steadfast love."

They further assume that they matter to God. As he has chosen them to be his people he is "stuck" with them, for they are his people. Thus their situation affects his reputation. God is zealous for the first commandment (Exod. 20:2-5) and does not want to have his reputation damaged among the nations.

Today we can learn from this both in our pastoral care and in the boldness of prayer. By observing what the psalmists did when they experienced God as an enemy we can meet those who suffer similar experiences today in a more proper way. First, it saves us from fatalism, the explanation that God surely has a meaning with this and it is surely all well and good seen in the right light. Such an explanation is of little help to the sufferer. In that case he just has to accept what has happened to him as from an impersonal fate. There is nowhere for him to go with his problem. Fatalism deprives people of a personal God with whom humans can have a relationship. Secondly, it saves us from rationalizing the problem, either by insisting on a rigorous sin-punishment model implying that the suffering is caused by some particularly grave (hidden) sin committed by the sufferer or by lack of faith, or by making the suffering into a non-problem by referring to general sinfulness of humankind. The first adds greatly to the suffering and has the words of our Lord and Savior against it;<sup>107</sup> the latter overlooks the fact that suffering and distress are very unevenly distributed among general sinners. Thirdly, we are saved from the temptation to resort to a power-balance model to defend God. In this model God is said to have the ultimate victory, but in the mean time Satan has great power too, and many things happen that

---

<sup>107</sup>Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-3.

God does not want. An untimely death, a case of prolonged sickness, a natural disaster, are all caused by Satan, not willed by God. This is of no comfort to those who suffer, for in this way they are put at the mercy of Satan. Our duty, I believe, is to follow the lead of these psalmists. We should admit that there is much suffering and distress in this world that by all our knowledge and possible explanations still remain unfair, unintelligible, and cruel. We should not blame people for experiencing God as unjust. We should not try to answer the many "why?" and "how long?" questions. But we should point them to the God who is rich in steadfast love, encourage them to direct their protests to him, and in the middle of the distress and in blunt contradiction to their experience exhort them to cling to God as he has made himself known in his Word.

On the other hand, these psalms cannot be used as an excuse for people who want to live their lives in their own ways and then blame God as soon as something does not turn out as they hoped. When Bentzen says about Psalm 44: "The psalm is an expression of the religious attitude which the prophets attacked. Its climax, that the people has a claim on God, is also as diametrically opposite to prophetic religion as possible,"<sup>108</sup> he has either misunderstood the psalm or the prophets or both. These psalms are not expressions of impenitence (Ps. 44:18-19, 21-22), but they take Yahweh's covenant seriously. In this we should take after the psalmists. If we have

---

<sup>108</sup>"Salmen giver derefter udtryk for den religiøse opfattelse, som profeterne angriber. Dens højdepunkt, at folket har krav paa Gud, er ogsaa profetisk religion saa diametralt modsat som vel muligt." Bentzen, Fortolkning til de gammeltestamentlige salmer, 246.

sins to repent, they have to be repented of. However, if we have confessed and turned away from our sins, "God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Faith sticks to God's self-revelation in the midst of conflicting evidence, that is these psalmists's contribution to us.

The church of God, suffering from improper teaching and behavior by some of her ministers as well as being faced by a culture that seems to drift further and further away from her ideals, often feels insignificant and unsuccessful in this world. In this situation we would do well to pay attention to the close tie between God and his people assumed in these psalms. The prayer for God to defend his reputation affirms that what disgraces the church disgraces God, and he will do something about it.



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achtemeier, E. R. "Overcoming the World: an Exposition of Psalm 6." Interpretation 28 (1974): 75-88.
- Ackroyd, P. R. "Some Notes on the Psalms." The Journal of Theological Studies n.s. 17 (1966): 392-399.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "ΠΣ - εις τελος." Expository Times 80 (1968-69): 126.
- Aejmelaeus, A. "Function and Interpretation of ׀ in Biblical Hebrew." Journal of Biblical Literature 105/2 (1986): 193-209.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Traditional Prayer in the Psalms. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986.
- Airoldi, N. "Note critiche al Salmo 6." Rivista Biblica 16 (1968): 285-289.
- Alter, R. The Art of Biblical Poetry. New York: Basic Books, 1985.
- Andersen, F. I. "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God." In God Who is Rich in Mercy, eds. P. T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson, 41-88. Australia: Lancer Books, 1986.
- Andersen, F. I. and D. N. Freedman. Amos. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1989.
- Anderson, A. A. The Book of Psalms. 2 vols. New Century Bible. London: Oliphants, 1972.
- Anderson, G. A. A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991.
- Anderson, G. W. "Enemies and Evildoers in the Book of Psalms." Bulletin of John Rylands Library 48 (1965-1966): 18-29.
- Anders-Richards, D. The Drama of the Psalms. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968.

- Ap-Thomas, D. R. "Appreciation of Sigmund Mowinckel's Contribution to Biblical Studies." Journal of Biblical Literature 85 (1966): 315-325.
- Auffret, P. "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 90." Biblica 61 (1980): 262-276.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume LXXIV." Vetus Testamentum 33 (1983): 129-148.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Note complémentaire sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 6." Biblische Notizen 42 (1988): 7-11.
- Balentine, S. E. The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament. Oxford Theological Monograph. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Baloian, B. E. Anger in the Old Testament. American University Studies, Series VII, vol 99. New York: Peter Lang, 1992.
- Barr, J. "Philology and Exegesis," Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium 33 (1974): 39-61.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reading the Bible as literature." Bulletin of John Rylands Library 56 (1973-1974): 10-33.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Semantics of Biblical Language. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Why? in Biblical Hebrew." Journal of Theological Studies 36 (1985): 1-33.
- Barth, C. Die Errettung vom Tode in den individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments. Basel: Zollikon, 1947.
- Beaucamp, E. Le Psautier. 2 vols. Sources bibliques 7. Paris: Gabalda, 1976.
- Becker, J. Israel deutet seine Psalmen: Urform und Neuinterpretation in den Psalmen. Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 18. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Wege der Psalmenexegese. Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 18. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975.

- Begrich, J. H. "Das priestliche Heilsorakel." Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 52 (1934): 81-92 = J. Begrich, Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament. Herausgegeben von Walther Zimmerli. Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964:217-231.
- Bentzen, A. "Daniel 6: Ein Versuch zur Vorgeschichte der Märtyrlegende." In Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet, eds. W. Baumgartner, O. Eissfeldt, K. Elliger, and L. Rost, 58-64. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Der Tod des Beters in den Psalmen". In Festschrift Otto Eissfeldt. J. Fück, ed. Halle an der Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1947: 57-60.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Fortolkning til de gammeltestamentlige salmer. Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads forlag, 1939.
- Berlin, A. The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Grammatical aspects of Biblical parallelism." Hebrew Union College Annual 50 (1979): 17-43.
- Beyerlin, W. "Innerbiblische Aktualisierungsversuche: Schichten im 44. Psalm." Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 73 (1976): 446-460.
- Birkeland, H. Die Feinde des Individuums in der Israelitischen Psalmenliteratur. Oslo: Grøndahl & søns forlag, 1933.
- Blackmann, A. M. "The Psalms in the Light of Egyptian Research." The Psalmists, ed. D. C. Simpson, London: Oxford University Press, 1926: 177-197.
- Blank, S. H. "Men Against God - The Promethean Element in Biblical Prayer." Journal of Biblical Literature 72 (1953): 1-14.
- Booij, Th. "Psalm 90:5-6: Junction of Two Traditional Motifs." Biblica 68 (1987): 393-396.
- Botterweck, G. J. and H. Ringgren, eds. Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament. 6 vols. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1973-1989.
- Boyce, R. N. The Cry to God in the Old Testament. SBL Dissertation Series 103, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988.

- Briggs, C. A. and E. G. Briggs. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms. 2 vol. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1906-1907.
- Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.
- Broyles, C. C. The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 52, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989.
- Brueggemann, W. "The Costly Loss of Lament." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 36 (1986): 57-71.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life." Interpretation 28 (1974): 3-19.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Message of the Psalms. Augsburg Old Testament Studies. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 17 (1980): 3-32.
- Brug, J. F. Psalms. 2 vols. The People's Bible. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989.
- Bryn, E., K. Myhre, J. O. Mæland, and K. Valen. Salmenes bok. 2 vols. Bibleverket. Oslo: Nye Luther Forlag and Lunde Forlag, 1985-1987.
- Buss, M. J. "Psalms of Asaph and Korah." Journal of Biblical Literature 82 (1963): 382-392.
- Buttenwieser, M. The Psalms. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938.
- Calès, J. Le livre des Psaumes. 2 vols. Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et ses fils, 1936.
- Caquot, A., M. Sznycer, and A. Herdner. Textes Ougaritiques. Tome I: Mythes et Légendes. Paris: Cerf, 1974.
- Caquot, A., J. M. de Terragon, and J. L. Cunchillos. Textes Ougaritiques. Tome II: Textes religieux, Rituels, Correspondance. Paris: Cerf, 1989.
- Castellino, G. Libro dei Salmi. Rome: Marietti, 1955.

- Childs, B. S. Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.
- Clark, G. R. The Word Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 157. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.
- Clines, D. J. A. "Psalm Research since 1955: I. The Psalms and the Cult." Tyndale Bulletin 18 (1967): 108-126.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Psalm Research since 1955: II. The Literary Genres." Tyndale Bulletin 20 (1969): 105-126.
- Coppens, J. "Les Psaumes 6 et 41 dépenant-ils du livre de Jeremie?" Hebrew Union College Annual 32 (1961): 217-226.
- Craigie, P. C. Psalms 1-50. Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 19. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983.
- Crenshaw, J. L. "The Human Dilemma and Literature of Dissent." In Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament, ed. D. A. Knight, 235-258. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Dahood, M. "Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography VII." Biblica 50 (1969): 337-356.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Psalms. 3 vols. Anchor Bible 16, 17 and 17a. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965-1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ugaritic-Hebrew Syntax and Style." Ugarit-Forschungen 1 (1969): 15-36.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Vocative Lamedh in Psalm 74:14." Biblica 59 (1978): 262-263.
- Day, J. God's conflict with the dragon and the sea: Echoes of a Canaanite myth in the Old Testament. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Deissler, A. Die Psalmen. 2 vols. Die Welt der Bibel. Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1963.
- Delekat, L. "Zum hebräischen Wörterbuch." Vetus Testamentum 14 (1964): 7-66.
- Delitzsch, F. Psalms. Translated by J. Martine. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1871.

Dietrich, M., O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit. Kevelaer: Butzon & Becker, 1976; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976.

Donner, H. "Argumente zur Datierung des 74. Psalms." In Wort, Lied und Gottesspruch. Festschrift für J. Ziegler, ed. J. Schreiner, 2:41-50. Würzburg: Echter, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Ugaritismen in der Psalmenforschung." Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 79 (1967): 322-350.

Donald, T. "The Semantic Field of "Folly" in Proverbs, Psalms and Ecclesiastes." Vetus Testamentum 13 (1963): 285-292.

Driver, G. R. "Old Problems Re-examined." Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 80 (1968): 174-183.

Eaton, J. H. Psalms. Torch Bible Commentaries. London: SCM Press, 1967.

Eberlein, K. Gott der Schöpfer - Israels Gott: Eine exegetisch-hermeneutische Studie zur theologischen Funktion alttestamentlicher Schöpfungsaussagen. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986.

Eichrodt, W. Theology of the Old Testament. 2 vols. The Old Testament library. London: SCM, 1961-1967.

Emerton, J. A. "Notes on Three Passages in Psalms Book III." Journal of Theological Studies n.s. 14 (1963): 374-381.

\_\_\_\_\_. "'Spring and Torrent' in Psalm LXXIV 15." Volume du congrès Genève 1965. Supplement to Vetus Testamentum 15 (1966): 122-133.

Engnell, I. Critical Essays on the Old Testament. London: SPCK, 1969.

Erlandsson, S. "The Wrath of YHWH." Tyndale Bulletin 23 (1972): 111-116.

Even-Shoshan, A. A New Concordance of the Old Testament. 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993.

Feiniger, B. "A Decade of German Psalm-Criticism." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 20 (1981): 91-103.

Fenton, T. L. "Ugaritica-Biblica." Ugarit-Forschungen 1 (1969): 65-70.

- Ferris, P. W., Jr. The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East. SBL Dissertation Series 127. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992.
- Freedman, D. N. "Another Look at Biblical Hebrew Poetry." In Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, ed. E. R. Follis, 11-22. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Divine Names and Titles in Early Hebrew Poetry." In Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright, eds. F. M. Cross, et al, 55-107. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967.
- Fretheim, T. E. "The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-Talk." Horizons in Biblical Theology 10 (1988): 47-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Gaster, Th. H. "Psalm lxxiv. 14." The Expository Times 68 (1956-1957): 382.
- Gelston, A. "A Note on Psalm LXXIV 8." Vetus Testamentum 34 (1984): 82-86.
- Gerstenberger, E. Psalms, Part I, With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature XIV. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Gibson, J. C. L. Canaanite Myths and Legends, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977.
- Girard, M. Les Psaumes: Analyse structurelle et interprétation 1-50. Montréal: Editions, Bellarmin, 1984.
- Glueck, N. Das Wort hesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche und göttliche gemeinschaftsgemasse Verhaltensweise. Giessen: Alfred Topelmann, 1927. English edition: Hesed in the Bible. Translation: A. Gottschalk. with an introduction by G. A. Larue. Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967.
- Goitein, S. D. "'ma'on" - A Reminder of Sin." Journal of Semitic Studies 10 (1965): 52-53.
- Goldingay, J. "Repetition and Variation in the Psalms." Jewish Quarterly Review 68 (1978): 146-151.
- Goulder, M. D. The Psalms of the Sons of Korah: A Study in the Psalter. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982.

- Groß, H. "Geschichtserfahrung in den Psalmen 44 und 77." Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift 80 (1971): 207-221.
- Groß, H. and H. Reinelt. Das Buch der Psalmen. Geistliche Schriftlesung. Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1978.
- Gruber, M. I. Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East. 2 vols. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980.
- Gunkel, H. Die Psalmen. Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926.
- Gunkel, H. and J. Begrich. Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels. Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933.
- Gunn, G. S. God in the Psalms. Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1956.
- Haag, E. "Psalm 88." In Freude an der Weisung des Herrn: Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Heinrich Gross, eds. E. Haag and F. L. Hossfeld, 149-170. Stuttgart: Katholischer Bibelwerk, 1986.
- Haddix, J. L. "Lamentation as Personal Experience in Selected Psalms." Ph.D. diss., Boston University Graduate School, 1980.
- Hallesby, O. Prayer. translated by C. J. Carlsen. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937.
- Hanks, T. D. "The Wrath of God in the Psalms and Prophets." M.A. thesis, Northwestern University, 1968.
- Hanson, A. T. The Wrath of the Lamb. London: S.P.C.K., 1957.
- Harrelson, W. "A Meditation on the Wrath of God: Psalm 90." In Scripture and Theology. Festschrift J. C. Rylaarsdam. Pittsburg Theological Monograph Series 17, eds. A. L. Merrill and T. W. Overholt, 181-191. Pittsburg: Pickwick, 1977.
- Heinen, K. ""Jahweh, heile mich!" Klage und Bitte eines Kranken: Psalm 6." Erbe und Auftrag 48 (1972): 461-466.
- Held, M. "The yqtl-qtI (qtI-yqtl) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and in Ugaritic." In Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman, eds. M. Ben-Horin, B. D. Weinryb, and S. Zeitlin, 281-290. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962.



- Herrmann, J. "'und wenn es köstlich gewesen ist": Eine Untersuchung zu Psalm 90:10." In Verbum Dei manet in aeternum. Festschrift für Prof. D. Otto Schmitz, ed. W. Foerster, 57-70, Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1953.
- Hesse, F. "Und wenn's hoch kommt, so sind's achzig Jahre: Zum Verständnis des 90. Psalms." Pastoraltheologie 57 (1968): 297-302.
- Holladay, W. L. A. A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. 12th. corrected impression. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Root šubh in the Old Testament. Leiden: Brill, 1958.
- Hummel, H. D. "Enclitic Mem in Early Northwest Semitic, especially Hebrew." Journal of Biblical Literature 76 (1957): 85-107.
- Hunt, I. "Recent Psalm Study. Individual Psalms and Verses." Worship 49 (1975): 283-294.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Recent Psalm Study." Worship 41 (1967): 85-98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Recent Psalm Study." Worship 47 (1973): 80-92.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Recent Psalm Study." Worship 49 (1975): 202-214.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Recent Psalm Study." Worship 52 (1978): 245-258.
- Hyatt, J. P. "A Note on Yiwada in Ps 74:5." American Journal for Semitic Literature 58 (1941): 99-100.
- Jacquet, L. Les Psaumes et le coeur de l'homme. Étude textuelle, littéraire et doctrinale. 3 vols. Gembloux: Duculot, 1975-77.
- Jastrow, M. A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. 2 vols. New York, 1903; reprint New York: The Judaica Press, 1992.
- Jefferson, H. G. "Psalm LXXVII." Vetus Testamentum 13 (1963): 87-91.
- Jenni, E., and C. Westermann, eds. Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. 2 vols. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971-1976.

- Jepsen, A. "Warum? Eine lexikalische und theologische Studie." In Das Ferne und nahe Wort. Festschrift L. Rost. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 105, ed. F. Maass, 106-113. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967.
- Johnson, A. R. "Hesed and Hasid." Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift 56 (1955) = Interpretationes ad Vetus Testamentum pertinentes Sigmundo Mowinckel septuagenario missae. Oslo, Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1955, 100-112.
- Jöüon, P. and T. Muraoka. A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. 2 vols. subsidia biblica 14/I-II. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991, corrected reprint 1993.
- Kaddari, M. Z. "A Semantic Approach to Biblical Parallelism." Journal of Jewish Studies 24 (1973): 167-175.
- Kapelrud, A. S. "Die skandinavische Einleitungswissenschaft zu den Psalmen." Verkündigung und Forschung 11 (1966): 62-92.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Tradition and Worship: The Role of the Cult in Tradition Formation and Transmission." Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament, ed. D. A. Knight, 101-124. London: SPCK, 1977.
- Kautzsch, E. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. Translation: A. E. Cowley, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.
- Keel, O. Feinde und Gottesleugner: Studium zum Image der Widersacher in den Individualpsalmen. Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien 7. Stuttgart: Katholisches Biblewerk, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms. Translated by T. J. Hallet. New York: Seabury Press, 1978.
- Kessler, M. "Inclusio in the Hebrew Bible." Semitics 6 (1978): 44-49.
- Kidner, D. Psalms. 2 vols. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973-1975.
- Kim, E. K. The Rapid Change of Mood in the lament Psalms. Seoul: Theological Study Institute, 1985.
- Kirkpatrick, A. F. The Book of Psalms. Cambridge: University Press, 1902.
- Kissane, E. J. The Book of Psalms. 2 vols. Dublin: Richview Press, 1958.

- Koch, K. The Growth of the Biblical Tradition. The Form Critical Method. Translated by S. M. Cupitt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969.
- Koehler, L. and W. Baumgartner. Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros. 3rd edition. Leiden: Brill, 1967-1990.
- Kraus, H. J. "Der lebendige Gott." Evangelische Theologie 27 (1967): 169-200.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Psalms 1-59: A Commentary. Translated by H. C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Psalms 60-150: A Commentary. Translated by H. C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Theology of the Psalms. translated by K. Crim. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986.
- Kugel, J. The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.
- Lelièvre, A. "Yahweh et la mer dans les Psaumes." Revue D'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses 56 (1976): 253-275.
- Levensen, J. D. Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Technical Meaning for n'm in the Hebrew Bible." Vetus Testamentum 35 (1985): 61-67.
- Ludwig, A. G. "Remembrance and Re-Presentation in Israel's Worship." STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St.Louis, 1991.
- Lund, N. W. Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1942.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Chiasmus in the Psalms." American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature 49 (1933): 281-312.
- Luyten, J. "Perspectives on Human Suffering in the Old Testament." In God and Human Suffering. ed. J. Lambrecht and R. F. Collins, 1-30. Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990.
- Macintosh, A. A. "The Spider in the Septuagint Version of Psalm XC. 9." Journal of Theological Studies n.s. 23 (1972): 113-117.

- Maillot, A. Les Psaumes. 3 vols. Vol. 1, 2nd. ed. Vol. 2-3, 1st. ed. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1972, 1966, 1969.
- McCurley, F. R. Ancient Myths and Biblical Faith: Scriptural Transformations. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- McKenzie, S. J. "A Note on Psalm 73(74):13-15." Theological Studies 11 (1950): 275-282.
- Melamed, E. Z. "The Breakup of Stereotype Phrases as an Artistic Device in Biblical Poetry. In Studies in the Bible, C. Rabin, 115-153. Scripta Hierosolymitana 8. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961.
- Michel, W. L. "šLMWT, "Deep Darkness" or "Shadow of Death?" Biblical Research 29 (1984): 5-20.
- Miller, P. D. "Current Issues in Psalms Studies." Word and World 5 (1985): 132-143.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Prayer as Persuasion: The Rhetoric and Intention of Prayer." Word & World 13 (1993): 356-362.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Trouble and Woe: Interpreting the Biblical Laments." Interpretation 37 (1983): 32-45.
- Mirsky, A. "Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew." Semitics 5 (1977): 9-23.
- Mowinckel, S. O. P. Psalmenstudien. 6 vols. Kristiania (= Oslo): Jacob Dybwad, 1921-1924.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Psalms in Israel's Worship. 2 vols. translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962, Reprint Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992.
- Muilenberg, J. "The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usage of the Particle ki in the Old Testament. Hebrew Union College Annual 32 (1961): 135-160.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style." Supplement to Vetus Testamentum 1 (1953): 97-116.
- Müller, H. P. "Der 90. Psalm: Ein Paradigma exegetischer Aufgaben." Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 81 (1984): 265-285.

- Muraoka, T. Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew. Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1985; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985.
- Nötscher, F. Die Psalmen. Echter-Bibel. Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1953.
- Oesterley, W. O. E. The Psalms. London: S.P.C.K., 1962.
- Oswalt, J. N. "The Myth of the Dragon and Old Testament Faith." Evangelical Quarterly 49 (1977), 163-172.
- Patton, J. H. Canaanite Parallels in the Book of Psalms. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1944.
- Perlitt, L. "Anklage und Freispruch Gottes." Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 69 (1972): 290-302.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Die Verborgenheit Gottes". In Probleme biblischer Theologie. Festschrift G. von Rad, ed. H. W. Wolff, 367-382. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971.
- Preminger, A. and E. L. Greenstein, eds. The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism. New York: Ungar, 1986.
- Pritchard, J. B., ed. Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament. 3rd. ed. with Supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Raabe, P. R. "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter." Journal of Biblical Literature 110 (1991): 213-227.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Human Suffering in Biblical Context." Concordia Journal 15 (1989): 139-155.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Psalm-structures: A Study of Psalms with Refrains. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 104. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Two "Faces" of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament." In And Every Tongue Confess: essays in Honor of Norman Nagel. ed. G. S. Krispin and J. D. Vicker, 283-310. Chelsea, Michigan: Book Crafters, 1990.
- Ridderbos, J. De Psalmen. Commentaar op het Oude Testament. Kampen: N. V. Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1955.

- Ridderbos, N. H. Die Psalmen: Stylistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1-41. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 117. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972.
- Ringgren, H. The Faith of the Psalmists. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Psaltaren 1-41. Kommentar till Gamla Testamentet. Uppsala: EFS-förlaget, 1987.
- Roberts, J. J. M. "Of Signs, Prophets, and Time Limits: A Note on Psalm 74:9." Catholic Biblical Quarterly 39 (1977): 474-481.
- Robinson, A. "A Possible Solution to the Problem of Psalm 74:5." Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 89 (1977): 120-121.
- Robinson, T. H. "Anacrusis in Hebrew Poetry." Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 66 (1936): 37-40.
- Rogerson, J. W. and J. W. McKay. Psalms. Vol I and II. The Cambridge Bible Commentary. London: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Sabourin, L. The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning. 2 vols. Staten Island: Alba House, 1974.
- Sakenfeld, K. D. The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry. Harvard Semitic Monographs. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978.
- Schmidt, H. Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament. Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 49. Giessen: Alfred Topelmann, 1928.
- Schreiner, S. "Erwägungen zur Struktur des 90. Psalms." Biblica 59 (1978): 80-90.
- Seybold, K. Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1973.
- Sharrock, G. E. "Psalm 74: A Literary-Structural Analysis." Andrews University Seminary Studies 21 (1983): 211-223.
- Smit Sibinga, J. "Gedicht en getal. Over de compositie van Psalm 6." Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift 42 (1988): 185-207.

- Soggin, J. A. "Philological and Exegetical Notes on Psalm 6". Pp. 133-142 in Old Testament and Oriental Studies, Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1975, = "Osservazioni filologiche ed esegetiche al Salmo VI". Pp. 293-302 in Studi sull'Oriente e la Bibbia offerti al P. Giovanni Rinaldi, Genoa: n. p., 1967.
- Sollamo, R. "The Simile in Ps 74:5: A Wood-cutter Entering a Forest Wielding Axes?" Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok 54 (1989): 178-187.
- Sorg, D. R. Hesed and Hasid in the Psalms. St.Louis: Pio Decimo Press, 1953.
- Stoebe, H. J. "Die Bedeutung des Wortes hāsād im Alten Testament." Vetus Testamentum 2 (1952): 244-254.
- Stuhlmüller, C. Psalms. 2 vols. Old Testament Message, A Biblical-Theological Commentary. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc, 1983.
- Sutcliffe, E. F. "The Labour and Sorrow of Life: A Note on Psalm lxxxix, 10." Scripture 5 (1952-53): 97-98.
- Tate, M. E. Psalms 51-100. World Biblical Commentary. Dallas, TX: Word, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Psalm 88." Review and Expositor 87 (1990): 91-95
- Terrien, S. The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Thomas, D. W. "צְלַמְתָּ in the Old Testament." Journal of Semitic Studies 7 (1962): 191-200.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Note on הַיָּיִן הַיָּהוֹן in Psalm XC 5." Vetus Testamentum 18 (1968): 267-268.
- Tournay, R. J. "Notes sur les Psaumes." Revue Biblique 79 (1972): 39-58.
- Tsevat, M. "Psalm XC 5-6." Vetus Testamentum 35 (1985): 115-116.
- Van der Ploeg, J. P. M. "Réflexions sur les genres littéraires des Psaumes." In Studia Biblica et Semitica Theodoro Christiano Vriezen Dedicata, eds. W. C. van Unnik and A. S. van der Woude, 265-277. Wageninen: H. Veenman en Zonen, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Psalm 74 and its Structure." In Travels in the World of the Old Testament. Studies presented to Professor M. A. Beek, eds. M. S. H. G. H. Van Voss, Ph. H. J. Houwink ten Cate, and N. A. van Uchelen, 204-210. Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1974.

- Vawter, B. "Postexilic Prayer and Hope." Catholic Biblical Quarterly 37 (1975): 460-467.
- Virolleau, C. Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit V. Mission de Ras Shamra XI. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale and Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1965.
- Von Rad, G. Old Testament Theology. 2 vols. London: SCM, 1962-1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Psalm 90." Chapter 19 in God at Work in Israel. translated by J. H. Marks. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Statements of Faith in the Old Testament about Life and about Death." Chapter 18 in God at Work in Israel. translated by J. H. Marks. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980 = Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung 71 (1938): 826-834.
- Wächter, L. "Drei unstrittene Psalmstellen." Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 78 (1966): 61-69.
- Wahl, Th. P. "Strophic Structure of individual lamnents in Psalms Books I and II." Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1977.
- Waltke, B. K. and M. O'Connor. An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 1990; 4th. corrected printing, 1993.
- Watson, W. G. E. Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984.
- Weber, F. Vom Zorne Gottes: Ein biblisch-theologischer Versuch. Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1862.
- Weiser, A. The Psalms. Translated by H. Hartwell. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.
- Weiss, M. The Bible From Within: The Method of Total Interpretation. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Die Methode der "Total-Interpretation": Von der Notwendigkeit der Struktur-Analyse für das Verständnis der biblischen Dichtung." Supplement to Vetus Testamentum 22 (1972): 88-112.



- Westermann, C. "Boten des Zorns: Der Begriff des Zornes Gottes in der Prophetie." In Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff, eds. J. Jeremias and L. Peritt, 147-156. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981. The article is reprinted in Erträge der Forschung am Alten Testament: Gesammelte Studien III. Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Der 90. Psalm: Zusammenhang und Aufbau." Pp. 344-350 in Forschung am Alten Testament: Gesammelte Studien. Theologische Bücherei. Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Living Psalms. Translated by J. R. Porter. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989 = Ausgewählte Psalmen. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Praise and Lament in the Psalms. Translated by K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. What Does the Old Testament Say About God. edited by F. W. Golka. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979.
- Whitley, C. "The Text of Psalm 90:5." Biblica 63 (1982): 555-557.
- Widengren, G. "Konungens vistelse i dödsriket: En studie till Psalm 88," Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok 10 (1945): 66-81.
- Willesen, F. "The Cultic Situation of Psalm LXXIV." Vetus Testamentum 2 (1952): 289-306.
- Williams, R. J. Hebrew Syntax: An Outline. 2nd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Willis, J. T. "Alternating (ABA'B) Parallelism in the Old Testament psalms and prophetic literature." In Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, ed. E. R. Follis, 49-76. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 40. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987.
- Yaron, R. "The Meaning of ZANACH." Vetus Testamentum 13 (1963): 237-239.
- Yeivin, I. Introduction to the Tiberian Masora. Translated and edited by E. J. Revell. Chicago: Scholar Press, 1980.
- Young, W. A. "Psalm 74: A Methodological and Exegetical Study." Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1974.

Ziegler, J. "Die hilfe Gottes "am Morgen"." Bonner Biblische Beitrage 1 (1950):  
281-288.