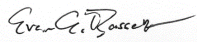**Distribution Agreement**

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Thanksgiving Psalms and the Formation of the Pious Self

By

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M.A., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2015
B.A., Western Kentucky University, 2012

Advisor: Carol A. Newsom, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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2023

Abstract

Thanksgiving Psalms and the Formation of the Pious Self
By Evan E. Bassett

This dissertation investigates the social functions of the genre of biblical psalmody known as "thanksgiving psalms." It argues that biblical thanksgiving psalms would have contributed to the formation of the self among ancient Israelite and early Jewish audiences, and it delineates the rhetorical strategies by which they would have done so. In contrast to earlier form-critical approaches, which emphasized the association of this genre with specific ritual acts, this dissertation focuses on how the rhetoric of thanksgiving psalms would have formed and influenced ancient Jewish audiences' ideas about pious selfhood, especially in relation to experiences of survived affliction. The introduction in Ch. 1 outlines the dissertation's main arguments, situates them in relation to earlier scholarship, and clarifies several points of the dissertation's overall methodology. Ch. 2 lays the foundation for subsequent chapters by providing a profile of the thanksgiving genre and arguing that several of its features would have made it a particularly effective formational instrument. Chs. 3–5 then provide case studies of individual thanksgiving psalms (Psalms 30, 32, 34, 41, 66, 73, 116, and 118), clarifying the specific ways their rhetoric would have formed the self. Overall, the dissertation provides a fresh approach to this genre of ancient psalmody while also contributing to broader conversations about the history of piety in ancient Israel and early Judaism.

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For Katy
my partner, my friend, my love

אחזו־לנו שועלים שועלים קטנים מחבלים כרמים
וכרמינו סמדר

Song of Songs 2:15

Acknowledgments

This dissertation represents, for me, the last part of a long journey of formation—and indeed, transformation—that began more than ten years ago, when I was first introduced to the study of religion as an undergraduate. During those years, I experienced significant loss of community and disaffiliation with the religious culture of my upbringing, such that my journey of scholarly formation has coincided with the rebuilding of my life following those losses. These two personal journeys are separate, of course, but in some ways, for me, they have been intertwined. I share this here only to say that those who have supported me, collaborated with me, and guided me since then have meant more to me than some of them might have even known, and they have certainly meant more to me than words can adequately express. Nevertheless, here I will attempt to acknowledge those who have been my friends, teachers, and guiding lights over the last decade of my life, since without them, neither the present work nor the journey that has led to it would have been possible.

First, I wish to acknowledge my teachers and mentors, those who have been my guiding lights along the way. How can I adequately express my sense of gratitude to this group of people? To all of you, as a group, I wish to say that you have not only made this dissertation possible, but you have changed my life forever. My life is better with the light of your examples in it. Throughout these years, one of my most compelling motivations has been that, if I were to finish this work and finish it well, I would have the honor of being counted among you as a professional colleague and conversation partner. From now on, whenever I teach or write as a scholar, I will do so in a way that honors your faith in me and your investment in my formation.

I will always be glad that my journey as a scholar and intellectual began with the deeply spirited teaching and mentorship of Dr. Ingrid E. Lilly, during my time as a student at Western

Kentucky University. At the time, I didn't really understand that professors had other things to do besides talk to curious (and in this case, enamored) undergraduates. Perhaps it speaks to Ingrid's presence as a teacher that she never made me wonder if I was keeping her from those other things. I cannot number the ways Ingrid continues to inspire me, but I think the greatest gift she gave me was that she helped me to feel, for the first time in my life, a sense of true pride in myself and my work. She told me once, "be careful how you narrate your life," and I have tried to keep that in mind. She awakened me to the gravity of intellectual engagement in today's world, modeling a deep sense of responsibility to do good work in the service of humanity. I am forever grateful for her generosity, her warmth, and her example of purposeful scholarship in the service of human flourishing.

During my time as a master's student at Fuller Theological Seminary, my intellectual world opened up even more under the guidance of several key people. No one was more influential for me during my time at Fuller than Dr. Christopher B. Hays, who not only welcomed me when I wandered into his office on one of my first days in Pasadena, but who for the next four years invested deeply in my intellectual formation, instilling in me a deep love of the Hebrew Bible, the languages and cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world, and a sense of belonging to the ongoing tradition of biblical scholarship. It was in his seminar on Israelite Religion that I first began to appreciate the wonders of the Hebrew Bible as a witness to the religious culture of ancient Israel. More than that, however, Chris modeled for me an unrelenting commitment to excellence in scholarship. Accurate, reverent, and empathetic representation of voices from the past, he taught us, is in itself a task of great moral consequence. I am thankful not only for his example, but also for his continued support and friendship.

Were it not for Dr. John Goldingay, I may never have moved to Los Angeles, where I attended Fuller, met my wife, Katy, and found friends I will have for the rest of my life. John's writing and recorded lectures had inspired me during my undergraduate years, but the honor of knowing him, teaching with him, and studying under him at Fuller changed me profoundly. John was the first person who taught me to read the Psalms in Hebrew, and it was in his class that I first encountered the thanksgiving psalms, the focus of this dissertation. John's work on the Psalms is cited numerous times in this dissertation, and I hope he will find my engagements with his readings reflective of the respect and admiration I feel for him, even when my readings diverge from his. Anyone who knows John knows that he is simply an incredible human being whose life has been a light to many. For my part, I will never forget our conversations over fish tacos under the beautiful LA sky, and I will always be grateful for the kindness, warmth, and genuine affection with which John and his wife, Kathleen, cared for me during my time in Pasadena.

Beyond these two, my time at Fuller was enriched deeply by the examples and influence of several other faculty. Dr. Leslie C. Allen, who was the first to teach me historical Hebrew grammar, was generous and kind to me through many conversations around campus, where he offered me his counsel about matters scholarly and otherwise. Dr. Marianne Meye Thompson impressed me deeply with her intellectual brilliance, theological conviction, and incisive, creative questions about the biblical text. She also hospitably engaged me in conversation about my own vocational direction on several occasions, for which I remain grateful. Dr. Tommy Givens will always be a guiding "voice in my head," reminding me, as he encourages all his students, to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16). I am grateful for his patience with me in his class, as my pride (a defense mechanism) crumbled in the presence of his

exemplary gentleness. His teaching presence helped me to learn that real joy is had when we enter into the mysteries of God not with the false security of ego, but when "you enter, singing, into it, as water in its descent" (Wendell Berry).

My years at Emory University have been full of unexpected twists and turns, national and international tumult, and the roughly comparable tumult of my two little children running around upstairs while I write. During these tumultuous years, I could not have asked for a more excellent and caring faculty of professors. My teachers at Emory have not only shaped me as a scholar, but they also have inspired me to a richer, more morally convicted life. Emory University is an amazing community that encourages interdisciplinary and collaborative scholarship, instills a sense of pride in one's belonging to its tradition, and provides students with abundant resources for pursuing their interests. The librarians at both Woodruff Library and Pitts Theological Library, especially, have supported me at every turn.

Though she had no official affiliation with my degree program, Dr. Gay Robins, Professor Emerita of Art History, treated me as if I were her own doctoral advisee from the moment I met her outside the art history building and asked about enrolling in one of her seminars. Through her seminars on Egyptian art and numerous conversations over coffee, she inspired my present interest in the social and cultural *functions* of artifacts—both textual and artistic—pushing me to think about what texts or art would have *done* for their audiences, rather than stopping only at the "flat" description of their content. More than this, however, she modeled generosity and kindness as a scholar and as a teacher. I will always be grateful for the hospitality she showed to me in my early years at Emory.

I count myself extremely lucky to have shared time reading the Hebrew Bible with Dr. Jacob L. Wright, whose brilliance and creative engagement with the text continue to impress and

inspire me. His seminar called me and my colleagues up to a new level of professionalism in our engagement with the text in both conversation and in writing. Every now and then, our fumbling with the text of Genesis called for him to stop the conversation and "explain a few things" to us. Through these bursts of mainlined insight into the text, I learned enough to keep me busy for a long, long time. I am grateful to Jacob for his standard of excellence, his energetic engagement around the seminar table, and his faith in me as a scholar.

When I first got to Emory, my first sense that I was in the right place came from Dr. Joel M. LeMon, who conveyed to me at every turn, both with and without words, that he believed in me. What greater gift can a teacher give their student than that? When I write, Joel's voice in my head reminds me of two things: first, this work needs to be *good*—seriously, it needs be really good—because it matters, and because we are privileged to be able to do it; but also, second, that I do in fact have what it takes to live up to that standard, and that I am supported by people who believe in me. Beyond this, however, my time as Joel's student has instilled in me a deep sense that nothing—none of the things that often seem most important—matters more than integrity of character and joyfulness in our work. I have learned this from him in class, but I have also learned it simply by watching his way of life in community, whether in scholarship, in the Church, or on the trumpet. Joel's way in community with others is a living reminder of the psalm: "How very good and pleasant it is, when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity!" (Ps 133:1). I can only hope that I will have more opportunities to collaborate with Joel in the future, since there is no more encouraging colleague to work with than him. I will always be thankful for the hospitality he has shown to me and the character he has modeled for me.

I met Dr. Brent A. Strawn for the first time at Fuller Seminary, where he was visiting to collaborate on some research for an Ugaritic handbook with Joel LeMon and Chris Hays—just a

bunch of rockstars doing rockstar stuff (in my mind at least). I stopped him on campus to ask him about the Ugaritic handbook, and he wryly explained that they were mostly writing it for "devotional" purposes—you know, for all the people out there looking to deepen their relationship with Baal. In this first meeting, I experienced what I would only learn more and more over time, which is that Brent is one of the most gracious, kind, and hilarious people I've ever met. When I got to Emory, I was pretty tightly wound, and felt I had a lot to prove. Brent's presence and tone as a teacher helped me to unwind some of my debilitating perfectionism and instead to find joy (and laughter!) in the shared pursuit of excellence with others. As is well known, Brent is an extraordinarily brilliant scholar, an amazingly empathetic intellectual, and a truly virtuous person, husband, and father. In so many ways, Brent is a person by whom I will continue to measure myself and a model of what I hope to become, especially in terms of the joy, warmth, and charity that characterize his presence in a classroom. I will always be grateful for Brent's attention to my work, his shining example of virtue in scholarship and teaching, and for his and his wife Holly's hospitality to me and my family during our time in Atlanta.

Finally, there is no one who deserves more acknowledgment than my advisor, teacher, and friend Dr. Carol A. Newsom. Carol took me on as a dissertator even as she entered her retirement from teaching, delaying even further some of her own appointments with her loom, and giving me the great honor of being the last student to ever compose a dissertation under her direction. Her scholarship has inspired me deeply, and her influence on the present study will be easily perceptible to anyone familiar with her work. More than this, however, Carol has given me the gift of a friendship that has brought me to deeper knowledge of myself, greater clarity in my expression of my own thoughts and questions, and a sense of felt connection to the intellectual

and moral tradition that she embodies in her own life and work. I am so honored to call her my Doktormutter.

I had heard of Carol before I ever even considered studying at Emory, as she had taught several of my own professors, and they had always spoken of her with a special tone of awe and admiration. When I arrived at Emory, I felt lucky just to be a doctoral student in coursework while she was still teaching doctoral students. Even at this stage, when I had not yet become her advisee, Carol supported me in many ways, giving me opportunities to work with her on her own research projects, sharing books and resources with me, and hosting me in conversation over cups of tea. In my last year of coursework, I had the privilege of taking a seminar with her on "Liturgies and Prayers in Second Temple Judaism," in which I wrote a paper that led to this dissertation.

Writing a dissertation under Carol's mentorship has been an experience that I will be drawing on and learning from for the rest of my life. Carol has not only given close, thoughtful attention to every sentence that I have written, she has also called me up to a greater sense of purpose, responsibility, and accomplishment in my life as a scholar, as a teacher, and as a person. On many occasions, Carol saw potential in my thinking where I could not yet see it, and in taking me seriously, she helped me to take myself more seriously, giving me the confidence to take my questions further. She has given me footholds for finding my way as an intellectual, and for articulating the reasons and motivations of my work. Further, she has helped me learn to be gentle to myself as a thinker, as a researcher, and as a writer. In short, she has done for me what I believe is the highest achievement of any teacher or mentor, and that is to make their students feel more alive. My family and I will always be grateful for Carol's presence and guidance in my life, and I will carry her friendship with me as a treasured gift in all that I do afterward.

along the way. To all of you, thank you for your love, support, and continued friendship even across great distances. Your presence in our family's life is a blessing, a hope, and a joy.

To my parents, Drake and Kelley Bassett, I give thanks for your continued support and encouragement in my endeavors, and for being the first to introduce me to the Bible. I hope my writing and teaching about the Bible, here in this work and afterward, will be an honor to you.

At last, I wish to conclude these acknowledgments by giving thanks for the deepest source of inspiration and encouragement in my whole life, my family—my wife Katy and our two wonderful children, Lily and Coen. Most of all, however, I wish to acknowledge Katy, who has been beside me through it all, and whose love has filled my life with beauty, hope, and peace. Over the last seven years, our family has endured a lot of unexpected challenges, all while I was working on a Ph.D. degree. During this time, Katy has been a steady, devoted, and loving presence not only to me, but to our children, especially during times when my work took me away from our family's life. During these years, Katy has also been our family's leader in terms of self-care, mental health, and mutual attention to each other's needs. In her treatment of herself and others, Katy models a deep respect for the dignity and worth of all living things, and she has called me to greater attunement to the sacred beauty reflected in all of us. Katy is my best friend, and nothing I have accomplished here or elsewhere would have been possible without her wisdom, encouragement, and love. She inspires me, she lifts me up, and she give me strength. She has loved me and supported me every day of this time in our lives, and for this reason, my work in this dissertation is dedicated to her.

Thanksgiving Psalms and the Formation of the Pious Self

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❧ Abbreviations

ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentary
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATSAT	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Suttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983
Bib	*Biblica*
BibEnc	Biblical Encyclopedia
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BTCB	Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CC	Continental Commentary
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CTM A	Calwer theologische Monographien. Reihe A. Bibelwissenschaft
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014
DCLY	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook
DG	J. C. L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar: Syntax*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994)
DtrH	Deuteronomistic History
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
EVV	English Versions
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FAT 2	Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FH	Fuldaer Hochschulschriften
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature

GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by Emil Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner. Subsequently revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. Study Edition. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
JAJSup	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBTh	Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie
JHebS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JM	Joüon, Paul and Takamitsu Muraoka. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Second reprint of the Second Edition, with Corrections. Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP	*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
Jud	*Judaism*
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek OT)
MT	Masoretic Text (of the HB)
NAB	New American Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEB	New English Bible
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*. Edited by Leander E. Keck. 10 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2015 (This edition is a compilation and reprint of the previously published *The New Interpreter's Bible*. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996)
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTG	Old Testament Guides

OTL	Old Testament Library
PL	Pietas Liturgica
PSPR	*Personality and Social Psychology Review*
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
RB	*Revue Biblique*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis, et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
THAT	*Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament.* Edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. 2 vols. Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1975.
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Chapter 1. Introduction

1. Topic and Main Arguments

The purpose of this dissertation is to expand our understanding of the cultural and religious significance of the thanksgiving genre of ancient Israelite psalmody, especially in relation to the history of ideas about the pious self in ancient Judaism. When considered alongside the rest of the Hebrew Bible, thanksgiving psalms stand out for their first-person portrayals of the experience of affliction in the lives of the pious, which they present as an occasion for God's praise. Typically, a thanksgiving psalm announces its speaker's experience of deliverance from affliction, retells the ordeal of affliction in some way, conveys insight afforded by the experience to an implied gathering of the pious, and concludes with praise of God for the preservation of the speaker's life.[1] While previous scholars have rightly highlighted the capacity of these psalms to celebrate God's protection and deliverance of the afflicted pious, this dissertation moves beyond this basic description to inquire about how these psalms would have served other, *social* functions. It asks, what did thanksgiving psalms *do* to the people who heard them in worship? How were people influenced, affected, or formed by thanksgiving psalms?[2]

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[1] I use the term "affliction" throughout this study rather than similar terms, drawing on a definition once given by Simone Weil. Weil defined affliction as a profound event of disruption that affects a person's whole self—their physical, psychological, and social well-being (Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951], 117). For useful discussion of Weil's use of this term, see Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 13–16.

[2] This way of putting the question (i.e., "what did thanksgiving psalms do?") is inspired by Carol A. Newsom's question about the Hodayot, "What do Hodayot do?," which Newsom explored most extensively in her book, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*, STDJ 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 191. Newsom's way of framing her approach to the Hodayot has inspired a number of scholars in recent decades to investigate questions about how texts function to construct identity and community for their users, as discussed by Eileen Schuller, "Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period," in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period*, ed. Mika S. Pajunen and Jeremy Penner, BZAW 486 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 5–23 (20).

Since the work of Hermann Gunkel nearly a century ago, scholars have approached the thanksgiving psalms mainly from the vantage of form criticism, which emphasized the relationship of psalmic genres to specific *Sitze im Leben* (i.e., settings of use).[3] Form-critical approaches, especially in the first part of the twentieth century, asked how a psalm's literary form and rhetoric could illuminate how it might have been used within the ancient Israelite cult.[4] The form-critical approach thus foregrounded the question of what worshippers *meant* to be doing with psalms when they used them, such that, for example, a thanksgiving psalm was described as functioning to facilitate the act of giving thanks.[5] While this approach has been foundational for the study of the Psalms, it has also left open some important lines of inquiry. After all, the cultural and religious significance of a psalmic genre should not only be understood in terms of what worshippers *meant* to be doing with it, since what people think they are doing with a text certainly does not encompass everything a text may be doing to them or others when they use it. As Michel Foucault has written, "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does."[6] When applied to the present discussion, Foucault's pithy observation encourages one to wonder what *else* was

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[3] Hermann Gunkel's foundational studies of the Psalms include Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926) and Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, HKAT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933); throughout this study, I will cite the English-language reference edition of this work, except when Gunkel's German wording is important to note: Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1998).

[4] Form-critical approaches to the thanksgiving psalms will be discussed at length below in my review of previous scholarship. For a general overview of the study of genre in relation to the Book of Psalms, see William H. Bellinger, Jr., "Psalms and the Question of Genre," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 313–26.

[5] For an exemplary summary of thanksgiving psalmody from a form-critical perspective, see Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, trans. R. Graeme Dunphy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 117–18. There, Seybold concisely summarizes the "purpose" of thanksgiving psalms: "Their purpose was thanks for an experience of deliverance, and praise for the deliverer in the presence of the community" (Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, 117).

[6] Michel Foucault, cited from personal communication by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 187.

happening when psalms were used in ancient Israelite worship, beyond whatever worshippers *thought* they were doing. Beyond asking what people *did with* thanksgiving psalms, then, we might also ask further what thanksgiving psalms *did to them*.

While this dissertation then builds on the earlier insights of form criticism, it also seeks to move beyond them, attending to the ways that thanksgiving psalms would have affected their users beyond their immediate awareness. So, while this dissertation builds on the idea that thanksgiving psalms facilitated the worship of God, it also aims to account for a less obvious, *social* function of the genre. More specifically, this dissertation argues that thanksgiving psalms would have contributed to the religious *formation* of their audiences, contributing especially to the formation of their ideas about piety, the self, and the meaning of affliction in the life of piety.[7] Thanksgiving psalms present pious selves undergoing, navigating, responding to, and experiencing deliverance from affliction. So, when they were used in worship, thanksgiving psalms would have exposed worshippers to normative templates of pious selfhood and religious experience, providing them exemplary models of pious selfhood with which they could identify and from which they could learn.[8] So, while this dissertation builds on the basic definition of

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[7] I use the term "formation" to denote the cultural processes by which individuals and their ideas about themselves are brought into being, as it is used in the following studies, e.g.: Judith H. Newman, "Embodied Techniques: The Communal Formation of the Maskil's Self," *DSD* 22 (2015): 249–66; Newman, "The Formation of the Scribal Self in Ben Sira," in *"When the Morning Stars Sang": Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder, BZAW 500 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 227–38; Elisa Uusimäki, "The Formation of a Sage According to Ben Sira," in *Second Temple Jewish 'Paideia' in Context*, ed. Jason M. Zurawski and Gabriele Boccaccini, BZNW 228 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 59–69; Carol A. Newsom, "How to Make a Sectarian: Formation of Language, Self, and Community in the Serek Ha-Yahad," in *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 91–190.

[8] I use the term "templates" as cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz used it in his discussion of how cultural patterns shape human behavior. E.g., at one point, Geertz writes, "Whatever their other differences, both so-called cognitive and so-called expressive symbol-systems have, then, at least one thing in common: they are extrinsic sources of information in terms of which human life can be patterned—extrapersonal mechanisms for the perception, understanding, judgment, and manipulation of the world. Culture patterns—religious, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, ideological—are 'programs'; they provide a template or blueprint for the organization of social and psychological processes, much as genetic systems provide such a template for the organization of organic processes. . . . The reason such symbolic templates are necessary is that, as has been often remarked, human behavior is inherently extremely plastic. Not strictly but only very broadly controlled by genetic programs or

thanksgiving psalms as instruments of worship, it also aims to expand this definition to account for their formational functions as well.

  This dissertation draws inspiration for its approach from the work of scholars who have directed fresh attention to the *social* functions of psalms and prayers in early Judaism.[9] These scholars will be discussed more in the review of scholarship below, but for now, a few points about their work will help to contextualize the present discussion. These scholars model a shift away from the constraints of earlier form criticism toward broader accounts of psalmic functions, especially in terms of the *effects* of psalms on communities and individuals. Marc Zvi Brettler's work, in particular, has been important for the shaping of this study's interests. Brettler has considered how biblical psalms of praise would have functioned to create identity and foster group cohesion among postexilic communities.[10] Brettler draws a contrast between what he loosely describes as the "vertical" functions of psalms (i.e., how psalms facilitate the dynamics between the worshipper and God) and their social or "horizontal" functions (i.e., how psalms affect the *people* who use them).[11] Brettler observes how earlier form-critical scholarship was

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models—intrinsic sources of information—such behavior must, if it is to have any effective form at all, be controlled to a significant extent by extrinsic ones. Birds learn how to fly without wind tunnels, and whatever reactions lower animals have to death are in great part innate, physiologically preformed. The extreme generality, diffuseness, and variability of man's innate response capacities mean that the particular pattern his behavior takes is guided predominantly by cultural rather than genetic templates, the latter setting the overall psychophysical context within which precise activity sequences are organized by the former" (Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* [New York: Basic Books, 1973], 216–18).

 [9] The second section of my review of scholarship, below, will discuss this area of biblical scholarship in more depth. Several important collections of essays may be cited here, however, as representative of this scholarly conversation. Pajunen and Penner, eds., *Functions of Psalms and Prayers*; Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl, eds., *Prayers and the Construction of Israelite Identity*, AIL 35 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019); Ariel Feldman and Timothy J. Sandoval, eds., *Petitioners, Penitents, and Poets: On Prayer and Praying in Second Temple Judaism*, BZAW 524 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

 [10] Marc Zvi Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together Stay Together: The Role of Late Psalms in Creating Identity," in Pajunen and Penner, eds., *Functions of Psalms and Prayers*, 279–304.

 [11] Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 302.

often most concerned with the "vertical" (or cultic) functions of psalms, whereas much less attention was given to the "horizontal" functions. In focusing on how thanksgiving psalms would have *formed* their audiences, this dissertation then aims to advance the study of the "horizontal" functions of biblical psalmody, especially when most of this kind of work has been done on later Second Temple Jewish psalms and prayers.

Other scholars, such as Carol Newsom, have explored the ways that prayers and psalms *outside* the biblical Psalter contributed to the formation of their users, expanding scholarly understandings of the cultural and religious significance of psalmody during the Second Temple period. In her 2004 book, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*, Newsom demonstrated the power of texts at Qumran to shape the shared identity and individual subjectivities of the members of the Yahad. In particular, Newsom's study of the Hodayot in this book demonstrated the power of *first-person* psalms to shape their audiences' ideas about identity and the self.[12] Newsom's work drew fresh attention to the *social* functions of psalmic literature in early Judaism, inspiring new interest in the question of what psalms and prayers *did* to the people who used them.

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[12] Scholars sometimes use the terms "self," "subjectivity," and "identity" interchangeably, and at other times they are very precisely differentiated. In this study, I use the terms "self" and "subjectivity" interchangeably to refer to an individual's understanding of themselves as a subject or agent in the world. I also find Newsom's definition of the term "subjectivity" helpful. She defines "subjectivity" as "the culturally specific ways in which the meaning of one's self is produced, experienced, and articulated" (Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 192). While identity is not the primary focus of this study, when this term is used, I will use it to refer to the self as defined by social relations to others, as in the work of Ohad David and Daniel Bar-Tal, discussed in Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 279–80. David and Bar-Tal build on Henri Tajfel's definition of social identity, "that part of the self-concept of the individual that derives from his knowledge about his membership in a social group(s), and from the value and the emotional meaning that accompany this membership" (Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981], 255). Building on this, David and Bar-Tal write, "Social identity . . . serves as a foundation for the explanation of how large numbers of people can be mobilized and then act in coherent and meaningful ways on the basis of a shared social reality reflected in group norms, values, and understandings" (Ohad David and Daniel Bar-Tal, "A Sociopsychological Conception of Collective Identity: The Case of National Identity as an Example," *PSPR* 13 [2009]: 354–79 [355]).

In the past two decades, scholars have continued to investigate how psalms and prayers of earlier periods might have contributed to the formation of identity and the self, often focusing on Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period or later. Judith Newman, for example, has drawn attention to the importance of prayer in the formation of scribes and sages during the Hellenistic period, especially as depicted in the book of Sirach. Her work suggests that prayer and psalmody were not only used for worship, but also functioned to *form* the subjectivity and piety of their users. Newman's work, along with that of scholars like Brettler and Newsom, has then demonstrated the importance of pushing beyond the constraints of form-critical definitions of psalmic genres to consider how else prayers and psalms might have contributed to the formation of their audiences.[13]

This dissertation then adopts a similar approach to these scholars and applies it to the biblical thanksgiving psalms, which previous scholars have mostly understood in terms of what Brettler called their "vertical" functions.[14] With this approach in mind, this dissertation pursues the following lines of argumentation.

First, this dissertation argues that thanksgiving psalms functioned to form their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood, especially in regard to experiences of affliction. This argument is presented primarily in Chapter 2, which argues that specific features of the *genre* thanksgiving would have made thanksgiving psalms particularly effective instruments for the formation of

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[13] The work of Aubrey E. Buster, *Remembering the Story of Israel: Historical Summaries and Memory Formation in Second Temple Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2022), is another example of scholarship that asks how psalms and prayers functioned socially to form aspects of identity in ancient Judaism. While Buster's focus is on questions about collective memory and communal identity (i.e., rather than the self or personal piety), her work shares with the present study an interest in foregrounding questions about the "horizontal" functions of texts (especially psalms) for Jewish communities during the Second Temple period, and in that respect, it is similar to the approach of Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together."

[14] Though there are a few exceptions, most notably Claus Westermann, Walter Brueggemann, Erhard Gerstenberger, Rainer Albertz, and Joshua T. James, all discussed in the review of scholarship below.

their audiences. To be clear, this argument does not contest the long-held consensus that thanksgiving psalms were used as instruments of liturgical praise in public settings of worship. Rather, it builds upon it, arguing that *as such* these psalms would have been formational for their audiences.

Second, in an effort to describe precisely *how* thanksgiving psalms would have formed their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood, this dissertation argues that the rhetorical strategies used in thanksgiving psalms have crucial implications for how a given psalm conveys ideas about pious selfhood. More specifically, it argues that the literary form of thanksgiving psalmody affords three main rhetorical strategies—doxology, didacticism, and exemplarity—such that all thanksgiving psalms exhibit each of these strategies to some degree. However, most thanksgiving psalms foreground one of these strategies over the others (e.g., I will argue that Psalm 30 foregrounds doxology, while didacticism and exemplarity are still present in its rhetoric, but much less prominently). When one of these strategies is foregrounded in a given psalm, this has critical implications for how that psalm conveys ideas about pious selfhood. So, the exegetical chapters of this study (Chs. 3–5) are organized around these three rhetorical strategies. Each of those chapters begins by introducing and explaining the rhetorical strategy in question and then presents case studies of psalms that exhibit that particular strategy. These chapters then clarify how the rhetorical strategies of thanksgiving psalms would have affected their capacity to form their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood.

Finally, in an effort to contextualize its findings, this dissertation also includes discussions of the socio-historical contexts in which these psalms might have been used, providing an important layer of context for its main argument about their function. For each of the main chapters, an introductory section draws together relevant contextual information for

understanding the historical and social circumstances within which the psalms in that chapter might have functioned formationally for ancient audiences. These sections serve to demonstrate how the ideas about pious selfhood conveyed by thanksgiving psalms would have been important to postexilic communities, especially, since the psalms in this study can all be dated to the postexilic period or earlier.

2. Review of Scholarship

2.1. Form-Critical Approaches to Thanksgiving Psalms

As alluded to above, the majority of past approaches to thanksgiving psalms have been in the tradition of form criticism, which in the case of thanksgiving psalms begins with the work of Hermann Gunkel. While this dissertation has concerns that reach beyond the parameters of earlier form criticism, it builds on some of the essential findings of form criticism about thanksgiving psalms. Form critics were not only the first to delineate thanksgiving as a discrete genre of psalmody; they were also the first to hypothesize the possible historical situations in which thanksgiving psalms might have been used. While constructing their arguments to this effect, form critics made important discoveries about the rhetoric and literary form of thanksgiving psalmody, and some later scholars even turned their interest to broader questions about the *social* functions of these aspects of thanksgiving psalms. The following review of form-critical approaches to thanksgiving psalms will then serve not only to present the history of approaches to this genre, but also to highlight important findings of these approaches that contribute to the foundation on which the present argument is built.

2.1.1. Hermann Gunkel

Form-critical approaches to thanksgiving psalmody begin with the work of Hermann Gunkel, who was the first to delineate the thanksgiving genre and map its defining literary features.[15] Prior to Gunkel, nineteenth-century Psalms scholarship had often focused on the historical identities of the poets who composed the Psalms and the religious experiences that had given rise to their poetry.[16] In the case of thanksgiving psalms, such approaches viewed these texts as historical "testimonies" of their composers, conveying the unique historical experiences of the individual presumed to be behind the "I" of these psalms. In response to these trends, Gunkel shifted his research away from the identities of individual poets and toward the question of how psalms reflected the spirit and forms of Israelite worship. Gunkel's two major studies on the Psalms attempted to delineate the genres (Gattungen) in the Book of Psalms and to define the associations of these genres with various settings of use in the Israelite temple cult.

Gunkel identified five main genres in the Book of Psalms, and one of these he called the "Individual Thanksgiving Song" ("Die Danklieder des Einzelnen"), which he described as a kind of praise psalm that relates the experience of one who was delivered by God from a crisis, often in answer to a previous prayer for help.[17] While Gunkel believed that the basic literary forms of

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[15] Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*. For the more recent English translation of this work, see Gunkel, *Introduction*. Note also Gunkel's commentary on the Psalms which appeared in 1926, Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*.

[16] For a useful overview of this period in Psalms scholarship, see the discussion in Susan E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1994), 174–77.

[17] Gunkel, *Einleitung*, 265. Gunkel was the first to give a list of psalms that he believed should be considered "Individual Thanksgiving Songs," while later form critics built on his original list and modified it to varying degrees. Gunkel included the following in his list: Psalm 18, 30, 32, 34, 40:2–12, 41, 66, 92, 100, 107, 116, 118, 138; Isa 38:10–20; Job 33:26–28; Jonah 2:3–10; Sirach 51; Psalms of Solomon 15, 16; Odes of Solomon 25, 29. Frank Crüsemann narrowed the list considerably to the following: Psalm 30, 32, 41, 66B, 118, 138; Isa 38:10–20; Jonah 2:3–10; Sirach 51:1–12 (Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel*, WMANT 32 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969], 216). Crüsemann's refined list provided a helpful corrective based on his determination that psalms of individual thanksgiving have two basic modes of speech, speech *to* God and speech *about* God *to* an audience. Erhard Gerstenberger later followed Crüsemann's list in his own work (Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1, With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, FOTL 14 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 15). Claus Westermann attempted to redefine major generic categories in Psalms scholarship, and with this came his own list of which psalms should be deemed individual thanksgivings, a group Westermann referred to as "declarative psalm[s] of individual praise" (Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*

the psalms had emerged in typical occasions in the Israelite cult, he argued that the psalms

preserved in the biblical Psalter were more likely later, literary imitations of oral traditions.[18] The

psalms of thanksgiving, he suggested, were reflective of a form that had developed in

conjunction with a specific thanksgiving ritual, the *tôdāh* sacrifice.[19] This determination led

Gunkel to interpret the formal elements of thanksgiving psalms primarily in terms of how they

would have facilitated a worshipper's performance during such a ritual. So, for example, Gunkel

imagined that the defining element of the genre, the "the *narrative* of the fate of the one offering

thanks," was purposed toward the glorification of God before the community of the pious

following an experience of deliverance from affliction.[20]

    To this day, scholars continue to assume the basic correctness of Gunkel's essential

insight about thanksgiving psalms, namely that they were likely used in events of public worship

and communal gatherings.[21] While we cannot know for sure how or when thanksgiving psalms

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[Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981], 102). Westermann's list includes Psalm 18, 30, 34, 40:1–12, 52, 66:13–20, 107, 116, 118, 138; Jonah 2:2–9; Lam 3:52–58; Job 33:26–28; Sirach 51; Pss. Sol. 15:1–6, 16:1–15; Add Dan 1:65; Odes of Solomon 25, 29. He also includes Odes Sol. 9:2–11 as a "mixed form," and he further includes Dan 2:20–23 as an instance in which "declarative praise is introduced by descriptive praise" (Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 102 n. 55).

[18] Gunkel is often misrepresented as having argued that all the psalms have their origin in the cult and were originally crafted as scripts for ritual performance. In fact, while Sigmund Mowinckel would go on to argue that the psalms were transcripts of actual liturgical speech acts in the Israelite Temple cult, Gunkel maintained instead that the psalms were more likely literary imitations or expansions of what had originally been much more simplistic liturgical formulae transmitted through oral tradition (Gunkel, *Introduction*, 5–13). In further contrast with Mowinckel, Gunkel even thought that some psalms likely originated from the sphere of "personal" experience in ancient Israel, rather than the official sphere of the cult (Gunkel, *Introduction*, 13). Cf. also Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), esp. 1:12–15.

[19] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 11, 199–201. Gunkel understood this to be the *tōdāh* sacrifice described in Lev. 7:12–15 and 22:29. Cf. also the references to the *tōdāh* sacrifice in Amos 4:5; Jon 2:9; 2 Chr 29:31, 33:16. For a thorough discussion of the *tōdāh* sacrifice as it appears in Leviticus, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 413–24.

[20] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 201 (italics original).

[21] Nearly a century later, scholars routinely refer to Gunkel's work in their discussion of thanksgiving psalms, demonstrating the staying power of his hypotheses about their literary form and *Sitz im Leben* in ancient Israelite religion. Cf., e.g., Friedhelm Hartenstein, "'May My Musings Please Him' (Psalm 104:34): On the Transformation of Inner Self-Awareness in Wisdom Psalms," *DSD* 28 (2021): 299–340 (305–6, n. 26). See also the introductions to

were used, this study's argument builds on Gunkel's basic insight that thanksgiving psalms would have been used in events of worship, but it turns its focus to how these psalms would have *formed* audiences when they were used, rather than attempting to reconstruct the specific rituals in which they were used.

2.1.2. The "Cult-Functional" Approach: Mowinckel, Kraus, and Weiser

Building on Gunkel's foundational work, new form-critical paradigms emerged that envisioned more elaborate reconstructions of the cultic settings in which psalms had been used. The most notable of these scholars, Sigmund Mowinckel, is often credited with founding the "cult-functional" approach, which understood the composers of the Psalms as royal cultic poets who worked primarily in service of the king in the royal court.[22] Building on comparisons with Babylonian religion especially, Mowinckel imagined that most of the psalms in the Psalter had been composed in conjunction with a hypothetical New Year festival. Hans-Joachim Kraus and Artur Weiser followed Mowinckel's general approach, arguing that most of the psalms were composed in relation to a single, central festival, though their arguments varied about the nature of this festival.[23]

The "cult-functional" approach did not deviate much from Gunkel's basic argument about the setting in which thanksgiving psalms were used, but it did involve some new reflection on the didactic rhetoric present in thanksgiving psalms. Sigmund Mowinckel picked up Gunkel's

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thanksgiving psalmody in major commentaries on the Book of Psalms, e.g., Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, Rolf Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 13–21; John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1–41*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 55–66; Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I: Die Psalmen 1 bis 72* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 32–33.

[22] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:31–43.

[23] Artur Weiser, *Die Psalmen I–II*, ATD 14–15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950); Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen, 1. Teilband: Psalmen 1–59*, BKAT 15/1, 5th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), esp. xxxvii–lvi.

interest in the *didactic* properties of thanksgiving psalmody, and in his own study of the Psalms,

he insightfully observed that the genre seems to have become useful for didactic purposes.[24]

Similarly, Hans-Joachim Kraus observed that "the *todah* has the tendency to combine didactic

messages with the retrospective descriptions of the distress and the occurrence of the turn of

events."[25] While form critics were able to note the presence of didactic rhetoric in psalms of

thanksgiving, their essential definition of the genre as facilitating an *expression of gratitude* kept

them from allowing it to influence their understanding of the genre's function. As a result, they

framed didactic elements in thanksgiving psalms as later evolutions within the genre,[26] or as the

confluence of formal elements from different genres.[27] Still, these insights about the didactic

dimensions of thanksgiving psalms anticipate and bolster the present study's argument that

thanksgiving psalms were *formational* for their audiences.

2.1.3. Psalms and the Flow of Human Life: Westermann and Brueggemann

In response to earlier approaches that focused on highly specific proposals about the settings in

which these psalms were used, a new wave of form-critical scholarship emerged that focused on

the wide applicability of the Psalms' typical and formulaic language, represented primarily in the

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[24] Mowinckel cites Psalms 32 and 73 as examples of generic evolution. While his interests are still form-critical, Mowinckel here represents an important move toward asking how this genre evolved through time to serve different *social* functions for religious communities. See Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:39. "The way in which the thanksgiving psalm developed tended to make confession, testimony and admonition the chief points of the psalm, as can be plainly seen from Pss. 32 and 73. Therefore, the thanksgiving psalm was the very type of psalm which 'wisdom poetry' and the later 'learned psalmography' would most readily adopt" (Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:39). Cf. Gunkel's remarks on this property of thanksgiving psalms in Gunkel, *Introduction*, 205.

[25] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 51.

[26] Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:39.

[27] Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 51. Cf. also Kraus's statement that, in thanksgiving psalms, the didactic poetry of wisdom literature has sometimes "left its tracks" (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 60–61).

work of Claus Westermann and Walter Brueggemann.[28] While Westermann acknowledged some useful findings of previous approaches, he was frustrated by the growing ambiguity of the term "cult" in Psalms studies, and suggested that hypothetical reconstructions of this cult had outrun their usefulness for understanding the Psalms.[29] Instead, Westermann argued that the language of the Psalms reflects traditions of praise and prayer that had emerged from the flow of "everyday life" in ancient Israel, which led to his simplification of Gunkel's psalmic categories from five to two: praise and lament.[30] Within these two categories, Westermann argued that thanksgiving psalms represent a "declarative" or "narrative" mode of *praise* in the Psalms, highlighting the importance of thanksgiving's emphasis on retrospective accounts of deliverance from affliction.[31] Westermann's approach represents an important step away from overly hypothetical reconstructions of *Sitze im Leben* toward a greater consideration of how these psalms would have been experienced by their historical audiences.

Building on Westermann's argument that the language of the psalms is best understood in terms of the "life situations" out of which they emerged, Walter Brueggemann proposed a new typology of function for the Psalms, drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur.[32] Brueggemann argued that the genres of the Psalms, especially praise and lament, corresponded well to Paul Ricoeur's account of the "flow of human life," which flows from *orientation* to *disorientation* to

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[28] Claus Westermann, *Das Loben Gottes in den Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961; Eng. trans. *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim [Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965]); Westermann, *Lob und Klagen in den Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977; Eng. trans. *Praise and Lament*; Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995; orig. pub. *JSOT* 17 [1980]: 3–32), 3–32. Cf. also Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988).

[29] Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 21.

[30] Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 11.

[31] Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 25–30.

[32] Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith."

reorientation.[33] Within this three-fold typology, Brueggemann proposed that thanksgiving psalms fit best under the rubric of *reorientation*, as they represent the perspectives of those who have gone from orientation through disorientation and have finally arrived at a place of reorientation.[34]

While it does not focus much on the formational functions of psalms, Brueggemann's insight is generative for this study in that it raises questions about what psalms *did* for the audiences who used them. Like Brueggemann, this study asks how psalms functioned *for* their audiences and it affirms that *genre* is an important tool for approaching such questions about function. The approaches of both Westermann and Brueggemann are then an important step toward models of function that build on hypotheses about how these psalms were used without limiting our accounts to those settings.

2.1.4. Psalms in Non-Temple Settings: Gerstenberger and Albertz

In the second half of the twentieth century, scholars began to inquire about non-temple contexts in which psalms might have been used, resulting in new proposals about the origins and functions of thanksgiving psalms in ancient Israel. This development is best represented in the

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[33] Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith," 11.

[34] Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith," 13–15. Note, however, Brueggemann did not intend his typology to be systematic or overly rigid. In Brueggemann's account, then, while thanksgiving psalms may lend themselves to the experience of reorientation, this is not their only possible function.

work of Erhard Gerstenberger[35] and Rainer Albertz,[36] who applied accounts of folk and family religion to studies of the Psalms.

Gerstenberger drew attention to how several genres, especially individual psalms of complaint and thanksgiving, seemed to suggest a priority on the needs of individual worshippers, pressing him to explore how psalms may have functioned for Israelite worship in smaller cultic settings outside Jerusalem, such as local and regional sanctuaries.[37] Gerstenberger suggested that while many psalms have clear affiliations with state religion and temple worship, many other psalms (especially first-person psalms) may have emerged in local settings, especially synagogues, which became crucially important for Judean communities during the Persian Period following the collapse of Jerusalem's religious institutions in 586 BCE.[38] Gerstenberger argues that individual thanksgiving psalms (along with individual complaint psalms) would have emerged in these local communities, and that the didacticism reflected in these psalms is suggestive of an interest in reflection on personal piety among Jewish communities in the Persian Period.[39]

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[35] Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2 and Lamentations*, FOTL 15 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). For later syntheses of Gerstenberger's approach, see esp. Gerstenberger, "The Psalms: Genres, Life Situations, and Theologies—Toward a Hermeneutics of Social Stratification," in *Diachronic and Synchronic— Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms*, ed. Joel S. Burnett, William H. Bellinger, Jr., and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., LHBOTS 488 (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 81– 92; Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms: The Cultic Setting Revisited," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 338–49.

[36] Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion*, CTM A/9 (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1978); Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992; Eng. trans. *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 2 vols., trans. John Bowden, OTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994); cf. also Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012).

[37] Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 5–34.

[38] Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms," 343–45. Cf. Amy Cottrill's concurrence with Gerstenberger's argument in Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual*, LHBOTS 493 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 6.

[39] Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms," 347.

In a similar vein, Rainer Albertz has argued that first-person psalms of complaint and thanksgiving likely reflect cultures of family religion and personal piety during the exilic and post-exilic periods. In particular, Albertz argues that first-person thanksgiving psalms would have been used by Jewish communities removed from Jerusalem in the generations following the collapse of their central institutions, since thanksgiving psalms highlight Yhwh's activity in the horizon of personal experiences of affliction (as opposed to the focus on Yhwh's involvement in national or international horizons found in other genres of psalmody).[40]

While Gerstenberger's and Albertz's hypotheses about how these psalms might have been used in exilic and post-exilic communities cannot ultimately be proved, their arguments about the plausible cultural importance of thanksgiving psalms during these periods fit well with this study's proposal that these psalms *formed* their audiences' ideas about piety and affliction. Even if their models cannot be fully substantiated, they still succeed in drawing attention to the features of thanksgiving psalmody that suggest their use (and possible origins) beyond temple-cultic settings such as those proposed by earlier form critics. This broadens the working model of possible ways in which thanksgiving psalms were used in the early Second Temple period, and it helps to bolster this study's argument that these psalms would have been *formational* for their audiences ideas about pious selfhood during that period.

2.1.5. Two Recent Approaches: Judith Gärtner and Joshua T. James

In the twenty-first century, two studies have given focused attention to the question of how thanksgiving psalms might have functioned for ancient audiences. The first is an article by Judith

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[40] Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 2:401–404.

Gärtner tiled, "Vom Tod zum Leben: Das Danklied als Ort theologischer Reflexion" (2018),[41]

and the second is a monograph by Joshua T. James, *The Storied Ethics of the Thanksgiving*

Psalms (2017).[42] While these studies have very different guiding methodologies, both argue that

the biblical thanksgiving psalms likely had *educational* functions for ancient audiences, which

significantly bolsters the overall argument of this study.

In her article, Judith Gärtner builds on form-critical accounts of thanksgiving psalms to

argue that this genre developed into a primarily *literary* tradition for reflecting on theological

questions during the Persian Period. Building on Gunkel's earlier argument that the thanksgiving

genre likely developed away from the temple-cult during the exilic and post-exilic periods,

Gärtner argues that the thanksgiving psalms (Gärtner uses the term "Danklied") and their first-

person accounts of affliction served as a "site of theological reflection" during the Persian

Period.[43] She places emphasis on the inclusion of thanksgiving psalms in the collection known to

us as the Book of Psalms, suggesting that this *Sitz im Buch* implies these psalms were likely *read*

by scribes in the Persian Period, whether or not they were used in cultic worship settings.[44] Her

argument then contributes a further possible way in which these psalms were used during the

early Second Temple period, namely that they were read or studied privately by scribes. Her

argument does not preclude the notion that thanksgiving psalms were used in worship during the

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[41] Judith Gärtner, "Vom Tod zum Leben: Das Danklied als Ort theologischer Reflexion," *TLZ* 143 (2018): 1211–1226.

[42] Joshua T. James, *The Storied Ethics of the Thanksgiving Psalms*, LHBOTS 658 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

[43] At the outset of her article, Gärtner states, "In dieser Zeit warden die Danklieder zunehmend zu literarischen Produkten, in denen die erfahrene Rettung im Kontext der eigenen Tradition zum Gegenstand theologischer Reflexion wird. Das Danklied wird auf diese Weise zu einem Ort der Theologiebildung. Wie die Danklieder ihre Grundmelodie so variieren dass sie zu einem Ort theologischer Reflexion warden, wollen die folgenden Überlegungen" (Gärtner, "Vom Tod zum Leben," 1211).

[44] Gärtner, "Vom Tod zum Leben," 1218–1226.

Second Temple period, but her suggestion that these texts were studied by scribes fits well with

this study's argument that they had *formational* functions for their readers/audiences.[45] Indeed,

her main conclusion is that these texts were used for their *educative* capacities, fostering

reflection on important matters of piety and the relationship between human and divine.

Joshua T. James' monograph, the most recent substantial treatment of thanksgiving

psalms, approaches this genre of psalmody through the lens of narrative ethics, arguing that these

psalms would have served to form the ethics of their ancient Israelite audiences. At its most

basic, James' argument is congruent with the main arguments and interests of this study, since

James is focused on the formational capacities of thanksgiving psalms for their ancient

audiences. His study therefore represents an important step in asking how thanksgiving psalms

would have affected, shaped, or formed their ancient audiences, and certainly it bolsters the

present study's interest in attending to the educational or formational capacities of these texts.

However, there are several ways in which James' study diverges significantly from the aims and

approach of this dissertation.

First, James' project is primarily framed in terms of modern Christian narrative ethics,

which emphasizes the power of *stories* to shape the ethics of listeners. Working within this

methodological framework, James' study approaches the thanksgiving psalms as "testimonies" or

"stories" that, when told, would have shaped the ethics of their listeners.[46] While James' assumed

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[45] However, note that Gärtner agrees with those who understand references to ritual or cultic settings in these psalms to be metaphorical or fictive, rather than denotations of the physical settings in which these psalms were meant to be used. Cf. Gärtner, "Vom Tod zum Leben," 1214.

[46] James' treatment of the thanksgiving psalms as "testimonies" draws substantially on John Goldingay's use of this term when discussing the thanksgiving psalms, though neither he nor Goldingay substantiate the claim that this is what thanksgiving psalms should be understood as. See James' repeated and interchangeable use of the terms "testimony" and "storytelling" in the introduction to his study (James, *The Storied Ethics*, 1–8). For Goldingay's use of the term, see his introduction to the thanksgiving genre in his commentary on the Book of Psalms. See Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 55–56.

setting of historical performance for these psalms is not itself problematic (i.e., that they were performed in public worship), he does not adequately establish that what one finds in thanksgiving psalms are in fact "stories" or "testimonies," such that narrative ethics would be a clearly applicable methodology for understanding these psalms. While these psalms certainly have some important narrative qualities (to be discussed in Ch. 2 of this study), they are not narrative texts or "stories," a term that James uses frequently in his study.[47] Instead, this study approaches thanksgiving psalms as poetry, and more specifically *liturgical* poetry that contains highly typified, formulaic self-presentations.[48]

Second, James' study approaches thanksgiving psalms as essentially homogeneous texts, and it does not account for the significant diversity that exists across thanksgiving psalms in the Psalter. After quoting Gunkel's earlier argument that the "narrative of the fate of the one offering thanks" is a defining element of the genre, James's argument takes for granted the essentially *narrative* character of all thanksgiving psalms (even while his study only considers three: Psalms 116, 118, and 138). While Gunkel's basic point is important, it does not justify treating the thanksgiving psalms essentially as "stories." In fact, thanksgiving psalms consist of various forms of speech, mainly framed by the language of *praise*.[49] Whereas James' argument about the formational function of thanksgiving psalms results in a reductive account of the genre itself, this study argues for a similar understanding of the formational function of thanksgiving psalms, but

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[47] Cf. e.g., James' introductory discussion in James, *The Storied Ethics*, 1–38.

[48] I use the term "liturgical" to denote *led* or *public* worship. I understand liturgical poetry, then, to be poetry composed with settings of led or public worship in mind. I understand the typical and formulaic nature of self-presentation in thanksgiving psalmody to be a function of their status as liturgical poetry. Cf., e.g., Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 14–16.

[49] To be sure, James notes the presence of didactic elements in thanksgiving psalms (e.g., James, *The Storied Ethics*, 7), but this does not affect his overall treatment of these psalms as essentially narrative texts.

it frames its argument *in terms of* the diverse rhetorical strategies exhibited by this genre of psalmody.

Finally, James' study is essentially synchronic in its treatment of thanksgiving psalms and their theological and ethical ideas, such that it constitutes a study in biblical theology and/or biblical ethics, rather than a historical-critical study of the functions of these psalms in the religious culture of ancient Israel.[50] While we cannot know for sure exactly when or how thanksgiving psalms were used in ancient Israel, we can corroborate claims about their functions and the ideas they convey by reference to contemporaneous literature and to models of their historical and cultural settings of use. In the present review of approaches to psalmody and in the introductions to Chs. 3–5, the present study locates its argument in relation to previous scholarship on the functions of psalms and discourse about pious selfhood in ancient Israel. So, while the basic argument of James' study aligns with the interests of this one, the significant methodological differences between his study and mine leave room for a more historically and methodologically precise analysis of how the thanksgiving psalms might have had *formational* functions for their ancient audiences.

2.2. The Social Functions of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism

Having reviewed previous form-critical approaches to thanksgiving psalms, this review of scholarship now turns to a briefer review of recent approaches to psalms and prayers in early Judaism, which were alluded to at the beginning of this chapter. While form-critical approaches contextualize this study's approach to *thanksgiving* psalms, in particular, they do not provide a

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[50] James frames his study in terms of the field of Old Testament ethics at several points. E.g., James, *The Storied Ethics*, 19–23.

methodological model for the overall interests of this study in the social functions of psalmody. Instead, other scholars, mostly working on later Second Temple Jewish literature (rather than biblical psalmody), have been most inspiring for this dimension of the present study's approach.[51] At a general level, then, this dissertation builds on recent scholarship that has moved past the constraints of earlier form criticism to expand the notion of the term "function" in relation to ancient Jewish psalms and prayers.

2.2.1. On the Term "Function" in Current Scholarship on Psalms and Prayers

Before proceeding further, some discussion of how the term "function" is used in present scholarship may help to clarify this review of scholarship.[52] In twentieth-century form criticism, the "function" of a psalm usually referred to the way a psalm might have been used, especially in relation to a proposed *Sitz im Leben*. However, recent study of the "functions" of psalms and prayers in early Judaism has been much more flexible in its use of the term. There seem to be at least two reasons for this. First, as more and more early Jewish psalms and prayers have become accessible through publication, scholars have sought to expand their notions of "function" to account for this drastically broadened data set, and so have often refused to limit the term to one

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[51] This scholarly conversation is represented especially well by two collections of essays on the topic: Pajunen and Penner, eds., *Functions of Psalms and Prayers*; Feldman and Sandoval, eds., *Petitioners, Penitents, and Poets*.

[52] In his editorial introduction to a volume entitled "Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period," Mika S. Pajunen comments on the volume's use of the term function, but his comments ultimately preserve a wide range of possibilities for how the term may be used: "It is true that historians cannot enter the minds of the authors and readers of these texts, but when surveying psalms and prayers and their usage in the late Second Temple period, it becomes apparent that many of the same texts were taken up and used differently in a variety of contexts. Psalms and prayers have a wide variety of functions: they can be vehicles for worship, they often promote certain aspects of identity formation, they can be read not only as history and mined for their assumed historicity, but also as prophecy, and were read with an eye to the future. Thus, in the context of this volume, at least, the term 'function' has been employed to point towards the varied contexts in which psalms are employed and their diverse purposes, and it is this particular aspect of function in which the term is used in this book" (Pajunen, "Introduction," in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers*, 2).

meaning or another.[53] Second, the new accessibility of these texts called into question some of the basic conclusions of earlier form criticism, especially the notion that "function" should always be directly related to *Sitz im Leben*. As a result, scholars have attempted to ask increasingly varied questions about the "functions" of psalms and prayers over the last several decades.[54]

While the term "function" continues to be flexible in scholarly usage, conversation about this topic can be usefully synthesized in terms of two lines of inquiry: *what people do with texts* and *what texts do to/for people*. While these two are obviously interrelated, one of them usually takes precedent in a given study of the "functions" of psalms. On the one hand, then, scholars sometimes lead with questions about how, when, why, and where psalms were *used* (i.e., what people do with texts). This kind of investigation usually foregrounds the question of *Sitz im Leben* (i.e., the settings, times, and occasions for which texts were used).[55] On the other hand,

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[53] Several publications concerning poetical and liturgical texts from the Second Temple period were especially important for encouraging new consideration of psalms and prayers from this period. Among the most important of these were Peter Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms*, STDJ 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Esther G. Chazon, ed., *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 19–23 January, 2000*, STDJ 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley, eds., *Prayer from Tobit to Qumran: Inaugural Conference of the ISDCL at Salzburg, Austria, 5–9 July 2003*, DCLY 2004 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); Eva Jain, *Psalmen oder Psalter? Materielle Rekonstruktion und inhaltliche Untersuchung der Psalmenhandschriften aus der Wüste Juda*, STDJ 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[54] Some important examples of such studies include Daniel K. Falk, *Daily Sabbath and Festival Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, STDJ 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Rodney Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution*, EJL 13 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); Judith H. Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); Eileen Schuller, "Some Reflections on the Function and Use of Poetical Texts Among the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, STDJ 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*. See also the two collections of essays in Mark J. Boda, Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney A. Werline, eds., *Seeking the Favor of God: Volume 1, The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, EJL 21 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); and Mark J. Boda, Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney A. Werline, eds., *Seeking the Favor of God: Volume 2, The Development of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, EJL 22 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

[55] Some studies representing this line of inquiry include Jeremy Penner, *Patterns of Daily Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, STDJ 104 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Thijs Booij, "Psalms 120–136: Songs for a Great Festival," *Bib* 91 (2010): 241–55; Nissim Amzallag and Mikhal Avriel, "Psalm 122 as the Song Performed at the Ceremony of Dedication of the City Wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12, 27–43)," *SJOT* 30 (2016): 44–64; Judith H. Newman,

scholars sometimes lead with questions about what *happens to audiences* when psalms are used (i.e., what texts do to/for people), whether or not this aligns with what an audience meant to be doing with those psalms. Scholars in this vein have discussed how psalms and prayers "functioned" to shape or reinforce group identity,[56] to encourage a community in the wake of catastrophe,[57] to devotionalize instruction for a disoriented community,[58] to foster the transmission of shared history and memory,[59] or to form the pious subjectivity of scribes.[60] This dissertation's argument that thanksgiving psalms *formed* their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood draws on this use of the term "function" (i.e., how psalms functioned *for* their audiences), even while matters of *Sitz im Leben* remain important to its concerns. This dissertation then contributes to scholarly understandings of how a specific genre of psalmody, thanksgiving psalms, would have functioned for ancient Jewish audiences, especially during the postexilic period.

"Embodied Techniques"; Eileen M. Schuller, "Did/Could Women Pray the Qumran Thanksgiving Psalms?," *CBQ* 81 (2019): 1–15; Nissim Amzallag, "Psalm 120 and the Question of Authorship of the Songs of Ascents," *JSOT* 45 (2021): 588–604; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Navajo Chants, Babylonian Incantations, Old Testament Psalms: A Comparative Study of Healing Rituals," *BN* 191 (2021): 99–126; Mika S. Pajunen, "From Poetic Structure to Historical Setting: Exploring the Background of the *Barkhi Nafshi* Hymns," in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her 65th Birthday*, ed. C. Wassen, K. Penner, and J. Penner, STDJ 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[56] E.g., H. Clay Smith, "Worship as Social Creativity: Social Identity and the Form of Psalm 79," *JSOT* 46 (2022): 516–29; Marc Zvi Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers*, 279–304; Shem Miller, "The Role of Performance and the Performance of Role: Cultural Memory in the Hodayot," *JBL* 137 (2018): 359–82.

[57] Stephen J. Smith, "The Shape and Message of Psalms 73–78," *CBQ* 83 (2021): 18–37.

[58] Scott C. Jones, "Psalm 37 and the Devotionalization of Instruction in the Postexilic Period," in Gillmayr-Bucher and Häusl, eds., *Prayers and the Construction of Israelite Identity*, 167–88.

[59] Aubrey E. Buster, *Remembering the Story of Israel: Historical Summaries and Memory Formation in Second Temple Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2022).

[60] Judith H. Newman, *Before the Bible: The Liturgical Body and the Formation of Scriptures in Early Judaism* (New York: Oxford University, 2018), esp. 23–52.

2.2.2. Expanding the Notion of "Function" in the Study of Psalms

Over the last several decades, as the study of early Jewish psalms and prayers has continued, it

has become increasingly clear that the functions of psalms and prayers in Second Temple

Judaism were more *diverse* than earlier form-critical models had suggested. Form criticism had

laid important foundations regarding the literary forms of psalms, but its generic categories could

not adequately account for data from extracanonical psalters and other collections of liturgical

poetry.[61] Similarly, form-critical models of the uses of psalms had not accounted for the reality

that Jewish communities used psalms differently during different periods.[62]

In response to these problems, scholars have attempted to produce more nuanced models

of the functions of psalmody during Second Temple Judaism, and the work of Mika S. Pajunen

has been particularly illuminating in this regard.[63] Pajunen's work begins by analyzing how

earlier form-critical approaches constrained their models of function according to which *Sitz im

Leben* could be reconstructed for a given psalm or psalmic genre.[64] Departing from these earlier

approaches, Pajunen argues that a given genre's range of possible functions should not be limited

to which *Sitz(e) im Leben* has been reconstructed for its earliest use.[65] Instead, Pajunen argues

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[61] For discussions of various extant psalters, both biblical and extrabiblical, see esp. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms*; and Mika S. Pajunen, "Perspectives on the Existence of a Particular Authoritative Book of Psalms in the Late Second Temple Period," *JSOT* 39 (2014): 139–63.

[62] On this point, see esp. Mika S. Pajunen, "The Influence of Societal Changes in the Late Second Temple Period on the Functions and Composition of Psalms," *SJOT* 33 (2019): 164–84; See also the important conversation about the changing functions of communal lament psalmody and penitential prayer, much of which is presented in Boda, Falk, and Werline, eds., *Seeking the Favor of God: Volume 1*.

[63] See esp. Pajunen, "Influence of Societal Changes"; Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form, Theme, and Changing Functions in Psalms and Prayers," *SJOT* 33 (2019): 264–76; Pajunen, "The Praise of God and His Name as the Core of the Second Temple Liturgy," *ZAW* 127 (2015): 475–88; Pajunen, *The Land to the Elect and Justice for All: Reading Psalms in the Dead Sea Scrolls in Light of 4Q381*, JAJSup 14 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

[64] For a presentation of Pajunen's main critiques of form criticism, see Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form," 264–69.

[65] Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form," 269. Other psalms scholars have raised similar concerns about the possible changing functions of various psalmic genres through time. Cf. Gerstenberger, "Navajo Chants"; Simon P.

that a given genre would have been used in multiple ways over the course of the Second Temple period, especially as the needs and circumstances of historical Jewish communities continued to evolve through time. In particular, Pajunen emphasizes that psalms that originally had *liturgical* functions seem to have taken on more *educational* functions over the course of the Second Temple period, while some psalms even took on *prophetic* functions for some specific communities.[66]

At a general methodological level, Pajunen's points help to illuminate why recent consideration of the *social* functions of psalmody has become so important. While a given genre may suggest an original *Sitz im Leben* (i.e., thanksgiving psalms suggest the *tôdāh* ritual, as argued by early form critics), this possible *Sitz im Leben* should not be allowed to limit scholarly arguments about the *range* of functions a genre of psalmody might have had for ancient Jewish communities. When scholars limit their arguments to a single, hypothetical *Sitz im Leben*, they also limit their ability to perceive the various ways in which a genre might have been used or experienced by ancient worshipping communities. For that matter, they also limit their ability to appreciate the literary diversity exhibited across various exemplars of a genre. For example, while scholars have often argued over whether thanksgiving psalms characterized by didacticism should even be considered "thanksgiving" psalms at all, this dissertation's consideration of the "horizontal" functions of thanksgiving psalmody allows it to appreciate such diversity as an indicator of the genre's range of social functions (see esp. Ch. 4). Pajunen's methodological directives thus highlight the importance of moving beyond the constraints of earlier form-critical

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Stocks, "'Like the Snail that Dissolves': Construction of Identity of Psalmist and Enemy in the Lament Psalms of the Individual," *JSOT* 46 (2021): 133–43.

[66] Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form," 269–72.

approaches when constructing arguments about how a genre of psalmody might have functioned for ancient Jewish communities.

2.2.3. The Formational Power of Psalms and Prayers in Recent Scholarship

While Pajunen's synthesis of the problems with earlier form criticism is helpful at the general methodological level, many other scholars have significantly improved our understanding of the functions of psalms and prayers in early Judaism by inquiring about the social functions of specific texts. In particular, a stream of scholarship has emerged that highlights the power of psalms and prayers to *form* their audiences. For example, some scholars have inquired about how psalms and prayers shaped individual and communal identities,[67] while others have focused on more specific topics, such as the importance of prayer in the formation of Jewish scribes.[68] The work of these scholars is especially important for the present study, since it models inquiry about how psalms affected or shaped their audiences, rather than focusing mainly on proposed settings of use.

As alluded to earlier, the work of Marc Zvi Brettler is particularly exemplary for the present study, since it applies concerns about the formational capacities of psalms to the study of *biblical* psalmody.[69] Brettler explains that his intention is to shift attention away from "vertical" functions of psalms (i.e., their function in the cult) to "horizontal" functions (i.e., their effects on

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[67] See, e.g., the essays collected in Gillmayr-Bucher and Häusl, eds., *Prayers and the Construction of Israelite Identity*. See also Esther G. Chazon, "Lowly to Lofty: The *Hodayot*'s Use of Liturgical Traditions to Shape Sectarian Identity and Religious Experience," *RevQ* 26 (2013): 3–19; Marc Zvi Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together"; Urmas Nõmmik and Anu Põldsam, "Psalm 86, Its Place in the Psalter, and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period," *ZAW* 130 (2018): 398–417.

[68] Newman, "The Formation of the Scribal Self," 227–38.; cf. also Newman, *Before the Bible*.

[69] Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together." Brettler notes that the functional capacity of prayer texts for "fostering and reinforcing social cohesion . . . has not received the attention it deserves in relation to the book of Psalms" (Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 279).

communities and individuals).[70] He focuses on Books 4 and 5 of the MT Psalter, arguing that psalms in these collections would have functioned to foster and reinforce communal identity during the Persian period.

Brettler's approach builds on the basic idea, often neglected by form-critical approaches, that one of the main functions of prayer in many religions is the social formation of the community.[71] Brettler's article then attempts to appreciate how Psalms 92 and 114, previously understood as doxological hymns (i.e., therefore functioning "vertically" to praise God), can also be appreciated in terms of how they would have shaped communal identity in the postexilic period. While these psalms address God in praise, Brettler argues that they should also be understood in terms of how they are "often talking internally, to the community, and not just to God."[72] Brettler then serves as a model of the present study's interest in understanding how psalms that are often "addressed to God" as praise also serve to *form* those who speak or hear them.

While Brettler's work serves as a methodological prompt for some of the present study's main questions, Carol Newsom's work on the Hodayot from Qumran has inspired this study's more specific interest in how *first-person* psalmody can contribute to the formation of ideas about *the self*.[73] In her book, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community*

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[70] Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 302.

[71] Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 279–80.

[72] Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 300.

[73] Newsom has written extensively on the Hodayot as well as on self and agency in early Judaism. But see esp. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*; Newsom, "Apocalyptic Subjects: Social Construction of the Self in the Qumran Hodayot," *JSP* 12 (2001): 3–35; Newsom, "Sin Consciousness, Self-Alienation, and the Origins of the Introspective Self," in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics: Approaches to Text, Tradition, and Social Construction in Biblical and Second Temple Literature*, FAT 130 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 225–37; Newsom, "Toward a Genealogy of the Introspective Self in Second Temple Judaism," in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers*, 63–79; and

at Qumran (2004), Newsom posed a question—"What do Hodayot do?"—that has been

influential for a number of subsequent studies.[74] In response to this question Newsom argued that

the Hodayot contributed to the formation of an alternative subjectivity in the members of the

Yahad, distinctive from other available subjectivities in Second Temple Judaism.[75] According to

Newsom, as first-person psalms that draw attention to the selfhood of their speakers, the Hodayot

were ideal literary spaces for reflection on selfhood and agency at Qumran, allowing them to

serve as instruments for the formation of the self.[76] While biblical psalms are much different

from the Hodayot in terms of both literary form and historical settings of use, this study argues

that the first-person self-presentations in biblical thanksgiving psalms would have been similarly

powerful for contributing to the formation of ideas about pious selfhood in early Jewish

worshipping communities.

    Newsom's work is also instructive in terms of theoretical foundations for research that

considers how religious literature can contribute to the formation of ideas about the self. Several

of Newsom's theoretical points are particularly important to the theoretical foundations of the

present study. First, while people experience the self as a naturally occurring phenomenon, its

construction is in fact the result of one's engagement with (mostly unchosen) cultural norms and

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Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me: Self and Agency in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism*, AYBRL (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2021).

[74] Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 191–286. The fifth chapter of Newsom's book is titled "What Do Hodayot Do? Language and the Construction of the Self in Sectarian Prayer" (Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 191). Worth noting here is Newsom's opening remark in this chapter that her "question about what Hodayot do is not a new one," which she follows with references to earlier discussions of the functions of the Hodayot. Still, while the nature of the question may not have been new, Newsom's wording of the question has proven stimulating for a number of recent studies related to the social functions of early Jewish liturgical and poetical texts.

[75] Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 193–196. Newsom acknowledges that scholarly terms for selfhood are often used differently, but she finds the term "subjectivity" to be most helpful, defining it as "the culturally specific ways in which the meaning of one's self is produced, experienced, and articulated" (Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 192).

[76] Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 204–208.

practices.[77] Second, *language* is the most important symbolic practice in a culture for constructing selfhood, and specifically language as *discourse*. A culture's forms of discourse are particularly powerful for the way a person learns the *meaning* of their world, "a sense of who one is, what experiences mean, what matters and what does not, how one is related to others, how the world works."[78] These two basic theoretical points suggest that one may look to sacred literature, especially *liturgical* literature, to inquire about which ideas about selfhood were encouraged, promoted, and modeled in a given religious culture. The present study then looks to the first-person genre of thanksgiving psalms to ask which ideas about pious selfhood are reflected in these psalms.

Newsom's work highlights one more important point about the cultural functions of models of the self, especially in religious cultures. Newsom argues that ideas about the self are not independent of the cultural contexts within which they are conceived, but rather they are directly related to them, and may even emerge in response to them. Since ideas about the self are elements of a culture's *active* discourse, Newsom argues that "the self may become the representational space in which the fundamental tensions within the culture are symbolically

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[77] This is one reason why Newsom prefers the term "subjectivity" to "selfhood" in her study. At one point, she comments on the term that there is "…a certain double meaning in the word. On the one hand subjectivity connotes an active relation to meaning and so a kind of empowerment (to be a subject rather than an object). On the other hand, it connotes a subordinate position (to be subject to a particular construction of meaning and possibility and constrained by it)" (Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 192).

[78] Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 192. At this point, Newsom draws on the seminal formulation of Clifford Geertz, citing his claim that cultural models of the self are directly related to a culture's symbolic practices (linguistic and non-linguistic). In a subsequent study, Newsom drew on the work of anthropologist Unni Wikan, whose own work called several of Geertz's most fundamental assumptions into question, to add an important corrective to Geertz's claims (Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me*, 4; Unni Wikan, *Managing Turbulent Hearts: A Balinese Formula for Living* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990). Wikan showed that, while people are often aware of how their culture expects them to act and experience the world, they are also capable of experiencing a "gap" between their own experience and the models to which they believe they are expected to conform. So, it is important to remember that while subjectivity is shaped by cultural practices and discourse, it is not limited by them, and may even develop against them or apart from them. See the discussion of this point in Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me*, 4.

explored."[79] We should expect, then, to find that the models of subjectivity on offer in a given

culture will reflect the needs of people within that culture during a given period. To put it in

terms of this study, the ideas about pious selfhood conveyed by thanksgiving psalms are not

static concepts conceived within a cultural vacuum, rather they are socially constructed

instruments with which their readers are empowered to engage the reality around them. Building

on Newsom's insights here, this study frequently engages in discussion of how the ideas about

pious selfhood reflected in these psalms would have engaged or met the needs of the Judean

communities who used them, especially during the postexilic period.

Newsom's work on the Hodayot then serves as a model for the present study's interest in

understanding how a first-person genre of psalmody might have contributed to the formation of

ideas about the self, specifically. Since biblical thanksgiving psalms are characterized by

typified, poetic portrayals of pious selves, this dissertation argues that this genre of psalmody

would have significantly influenced its audiences' ideas about pious selfhood, especially in

relation to experiences of affliction. Furthermore, building on Newsom's point that ideas about

the self are important instruments by which religious people engage with and experience the

world around them, this dissertation draws attention to how the ideas about pious selfhood

conveyed by biblical thanksgiving psalms would have been particularly compelling and

important for Judean communities during the postexilic period, the period during which the

psalms considered in this dissertation are thought by scholars to have been composed. Of course,

this dissertation is also wary of "pseudo-historicism," but it also contends that there is merit in

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[79] Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 193.

attempting to describe the way the ideas in a given text would have empowered religious communities during a given period to engage the world around them.[80]

In sum, this review of scholarship has demonstrated this dissertation's foundations in scholarship that concerns the *social* functions (i.e., the "horizontal" functions) of psalms and prayers for ancient Jewish communities. While this dissertation builds on earlier form-critical approaches, reviewed in the first half of this section, it also means to press beyond them, drawing on the findings of recent approaches to later Second Temple Jewish literature. Hopefully, this dissertation will contribute to the continued application of such approaches to biblical psalms, such that, eventually, the biblical Psalms might be integrated into a broader account of how psalms and prayers functioned for Jewish communities throughout the Second Temple period.

3. Methodology

While the previous section contextualized this study in relation to previous scholarship, this section will more directly address several important methodological issues in this dissertation. The first part of this section, "Form and Genre in the Present Study," discusses how this study will use the terms "form" and "genre," explaining how its theoretical approach to *genre*, in particular, diverges from that of earlier form-critical approaches. The second part, "The Selection of Psalms for the Present Study" discusses how and why certain psalms were selected as case studies in the main chapters of this study. Finally, the third part, "Terminology for the Study of First-Person Psalms," clarifies my approach to the authorial voice of first-person psalmody and delineates specific terms for discussing the rhetoric of first-person psalms.

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[80] Cf. Benjamin Sommer, "Dating Pentateuchal Texts and the Danger of Pseudo-Historicism," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwarz, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 85–108.

3.1. Form and Genre in the Present Study

This dissertation is focused on a specific *genre* of biblical psalmody, and in this sense, it represents a continuation of *form-critical* conversations about biblical literature. However, its main lines of argumentation also depart from earlier form-critical methodology in several important ways. In terms of continuity, this study affirms earlier form criticism's interest in *genres* of biblical psalmody. Considering the paucity of data for how and why biblical psalms were *used* in ancient Israel (i.e., their various *Sitze im Leben*), genre continues to be a profoundly important tool for inquiring about the cultural and religious significance of psalms in ancient Israel. However, earlier form criticism was constrained by some very specific methodological priorities as well as by outdated (and often unclarified) theories of genre. This section will then delineate some of the major differences between this study's approach to genre and that of earlier form criticism, beginning with a clarification of how this dissertation will use the terms "form" and "genre" throughout.

The terms "form" and "genre" can often cause confusion when left undefined, especially when used in relation to each other, so these two terms merit definition here as terms in their own right and in relation to each other. In this study, the term "form" is used to refer to the specific constellation of literary elements that makes up a text. Integral to matters of "form" are also questions about how these elements are *arranged* or *ordered*. For example, the *form* of a thanksgiving psalm is marked by opening declarations about the speaker's main intentions in the psalm, which is a *literary element*, one element among several in the constellation of elements that makes up the *form* of a thanksgiving psalm. When multiple texts can be determined to have a *shared* constellation of recurring literary elements (i.e., a shared *form*), the term "genre"

denotes the relationship between those texts, which is only visible when these texts are considered together as a group.

This study then uses the term "genre" to refer to literary *traditions* of texts that share a common *form* (i.e., a common constellation of literary elements).[81] The *genre* "thanksgiving psalms" is then marked by a recurring literary *form*. For the indigenous audiences of a text, the recurring use of a constellation of literary elements generates a set of expectations in readers/hearers based on their previous encounters with similar texts, such that readers experience the text as *related* to other texts in specific ways. In this sense, "genre" is a phenomenon experienced by audiences of texts (though it cannot be determined with certainty whether the audiences of thanksgiving psalms would have experienced these psalms as belonging to a specific *genre* of psalms). For the historical critic, "genre" names a critical instrument by which the critic perceives and defines similarities between texts, allowing the critic to group texts according to their degrees of similarity and shared literary features.[82] In this sense, beginning with Gunkel, form critics have identified "thanksgiving psalms" as one *genre* of psalmody in ancient Israel, since the critic of the biblical Psalter is able to distinguish these texts as similar to each other (relative to other psalms) based on their shared formal elements.

While this study uses the terms "form" and "genre" in ways that would be generally recognizable to earlier form critics, it also departs from form-critical methodology in important ways. One important difference concerns the *classificatory* theory of genre that underlies most

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[81] The term "tradition" as I am using it here is drawn from Alastair Fowler's discussion of genre. See Alastair Fowler, "Genre," in *The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, ed. Martin Coyle, et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 151–63 (151).

[82] This description of how the term "genre" functions for critics draws on Adena Rosmarin's pragmatic theory of genre, which differentiates between how composers, readers, and critics relate to the phenomenon of genre. See Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985).

twentieth-century form-critical scholarship. Classificatory theories of genre involve treating genre fundamentally as an instrument for *classifying* or *categorizing* texts, and it usually involves drawing very sharp lines of demarcation between genres. So, for example, earlier form critics would establish the literary form of a psalmic genre based on "typical" exemplars of that genre (e.g., in the case of thanksgiving psalms, Psalm 30 has often been held up as a "typical" or "ideal" exemplar). Psalms exhibiting deviations from the typical form of a genre were then treated as "mixed" or "deviant" forms, while other psalms were dubbed "typical" or "adherent" exemplars. One reason for this tendency was that form critics connected specific literary forms (i.e., specific *arrangements* and *orderings*, even specific phrases or expressions) with hypothetical *Sitze im Leben*, such that deviation from the typical *form* of a psalmic genre called into question whether that psalm could/would have been used in the *Sitz im Leben* hypothesized for that genre. The classificatory approaches of earlier form criticism produced strict definitions of psalmic genres that leave little room for appreciating a genre's internal diversity or possible diachronic evolution.

However, in the last half-century, biblical scholars have substantially reconsidered their engagements with genre, drawing on modern literary theory to strengthen the theoretical foundations of genre-focused biblical research.[83] Poststructuralist accounts of genre, such as in the work of Jacques Derrida, have been useful for biblical scholars seeking to move beyond the

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[83] See, e.g., Buster, *Remembering the Story of Israel*, 12–29; Molly Zahn, *Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism: Scribal Composition and Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2020), 56–66; Sean Burt, *The Courtier and the Governor: Transformations of Genre in the Nehemiah Memoir*, JAJSup 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 75–94; Michael Johnson, "Assessing the Genre of the *Maskil Thanksgiving-Prayer* (1QHª XX 7–XXI 39[?]): A New Superscription-Oriented Approach," M.A. Thesis, Trinity Western University, 2013; Carol A. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics*, 55–66; Newsom, "Pairing Research Questions and Theories of Genre: A Case Study of the Hodayot." *DSD* 17 (2010): 270–88; Sean Burt, "'It Is a Lamentation – It Has Become a Lamentation!': Subverting Genre in Ezekiel 19," in *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading*, ed. J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2018), 199–215.

constraints of earlier form criticism.[84] For example, Derrida describes the relationships between texts and genres as "a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set."[85] Derrida's approach to genre then emphasizes that genres are social conventions, and as such they come into being through a culture's ongoing discourse. This suggests that scholars should not think of genres so much as categories, within which texts do or do not fit, so much as they should think of genres as *living traditions* in which texts may participate in a variety of ways. As elements of ancient Israel's ongoing religious discourse, psalmic genres ought to be understood similarly, not as inflexible templates, but as discursive traditions distinguished from one another by dotted rather than solid lines.[86]

By treating genre as a more fluid and flexible phenomenon, this dissertation approaches thanksgiving psalms differently than many earlier form critics did. Where earlier studies might have provided a sharply-drawn profile of defining features, including and excluding psalms based on their degrees of adherence to that profile, this study treats formal and rhetorical diversity as reflecting the *life* of this psalmic genre through time. While this study does provide a working profile of thanksgiving psalmody's shared features, this profile *allows* for significant diversity in how these features present across different thanksgiving psalms. It does not treat a particular configuration of these features as "typical" or "ideal," as earlier studies did, especially since no exemplar of thanksgiving psalms can be determined with certainty to be earlier than all

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[84] See esp. Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. David Duff (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 2000; orig. pub. "The Law of Genre," *Glyph* 7 [1980]: 202–13). Cf. also Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 278–93.

[85] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 230.

[86] This wording is drawn from William H. Bellinger, Jr.'s observation that "As with most historical-critical efforts, interpreters are in the twenty-first century more modest in their claims; decisions about literary types in the Psalms are held more tentatively. The lines between categories are dotted rather than solid lines, and more than one answer to the question of genre is possible" (Bellinger, "Psalms and the Question of Genre," 322).

the others. Chapter 2 then discusses essential features shared by all thanksgiving psalms, arguing that these shared features make thanksgiving psalmody an ideal instrument for the formation of its audiences' ideas about pious selfhood. Chapters 3–5 argue for three observable strands of tradition *within* the genre, marked out by the emphatic use of the genre's main features. At the end of Chapter 2, I will employ the work of another genre theorist, Caroline Levine, in order to explain more fully my understanding of the relationship between the genre as a whole and these three more specific "strands" of tradition within it.

3.2. The Selection of Psalms for the Present Study

Since this dissertation's main focus is a specific genre of biblical psalmody, the psalms selected for consideration in its chapters are all psalms of that genre. However, not all biblical psalms of thanksgiving are considered, and further, several of the psalms treated in this dissertation are not unanimously considered "thanksgiving" psalms. So, some discussion of how psalms were selected for inclusion in this dissertation is warranted here as a matter of methodology. However, before proceeding to this discussion, some brief explanation of the origins of this project will provide some helpful context.

This study builds on foundational form-critical accounts of thanksgiving psalmody, since there is wide consensus in Psalms scholarship that many of the basic insights of earlier form criticism are still useful and correct, even while form-critical biblical scholarship itself has evolved enormously over the last century. Research for this study then began with a list of thanksgiving psalms that all or most Psalms scholars consider to represent the "individual

thanksgiving" genre: Psalms 18, 30, 32, 34, 41, 66, 73, 116, 118, and 138.[87] While consulting the work of earlier form critics, I attempted to build a working profile of the various rhetorical strategies by which pious selfhood is presented in these psalms, and I arrived at the conclusion argued in Chs. 3–5, that three main rhetorical strategies are exhibited in thanksgiving psalms: doxology, didacticism, and exemplarity.

With this schema of rhetorical strategies in mind, I revisited the reasons why some of the psalms listed above are sometimes considered *not* to be thanksgiving psalms, especially Psalms 32, 34, 41, and 73. Despite the fact that each of these psalms exhibits the essential features of thanksgiving psalmody (especially the first-person presentation of an experience of affliction and its subsequent resolution), scholars often expressed concerns about designating these psalms as thanksgivings because of their explicit didactic rhetoric or their engagement with topics normally associated with Israelite "wisdom" literature.[88] However, the poststructuralist theory of genre underlying this study allows it to approach formal diversity differently than previous scholars who still worked within the parameters of earlier form criticism. So, in my own study, instead of excluding these psalms because they have features that set them apart from more "typical" exemplars (see my previous discussion of form and genre), I understand these psalms as "participating" in the thanksgiving genre differently than those psalms form critics have understood to be more "typical" of the genre.[89] Psalms 32, 34, 41, and 73 are then treated by this dissertation as exemplars of the thanksgiving genre, even while acknowledging that scholars who

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[87] Earlier form critics who considered these psalms to be thanksgivings include, e.g., Gunkel, *Introduction*, 199 n. 2; Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 216; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 15; Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 102 n. 55.

[88] Cf., e.g., H.-J. Kraus's discussions of the relationship between thanksgiving psalmody and "wisdom" psalms in his commentary on Psalms. See Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 51–56, 58–60.

[89] For the term "participating," see my discussion of Derrida's account of genres in the previous section.

define the genre more strictly might challenge this designation. My analysis then seeks to encourage these scholars to consider the benefits of understanding genre as a more fluid phenomenon, such that genre becomes a tool for appreciating continuities between texts despite significant differences, rather than excluding texts that may illuminate a genre's multi-faceted cultural importance and/or usage.

Finally, two psalms are excluded that might easily have been included in this study: Psalms 18 and 138. On the one hand, this decision was a matter of limiting this study to two or three cases studies per chapter, for the sake of conciseness. On the other hand, there are reasons why these psalms are not ideal case studies for this dissertation. Psalm 18 presents a number of issues that are outside the parameters of this study's interests, and so it was not included. While scholars agree that Psalm 18 exhibits some of the main features of thanksgiving, all scholars also acknowledge that it is substantially different than all the other psalms listed above because of its ideological focus on the matter of kingship. Psalm 18's explicit construction of the speaking subject as *royal* suggests that its range of usage and applicability for audiences would not have been as flexible as the other psalms considered in this study.[90] As such, I opted not to include it in this study. As regards Psalm 138, while most scholars consider it to be a psalm of thanksgiving, many of them also acknowledge that the psalm only bears very general resemblance to the genre, mostly because of its use of the verb *ydh* in vv. 1–2. Other than these opening verses, the psalm presents more as a psalm of trust or devotion, and it does not bear almost any of the other significant features of thanksgiving psalmody shared by the other psalms treated in this study.

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[90] Indeed, as Pajunen discusses, the explicit presentation of kingship in Psalm 18 was determinative for how Second Temple communities read and interpreted the psalm. At Qumran, for example, Psalm 18 would be read as having prophetic insight concerning the movement's leader. Cf. Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form," 268–69.

In sum, then, this study focuses on those psalms that all or most form critics have considered to belong to the genre "individual thanksgiving," while excluding two of these because they did not align well with the main interests of the study. This study then discusses eight psalms in Chs. 3–5: Psalms 30, 32, 34, 41, 66, 73, 116, and 118.

3.3. Terminology for the Study of First-Person Psalms

One final matter of methodology merits deliberate discussion, and that is the matter of which terms are most useful for referring to the speaking persona of first-person psalms. In modern Psalms scholarship, the word "psalmist" sometimes seems to be a kind of euphemism for a set of basic but also frustratingly mysterious questions about the Psalms. Who wrote the Psalms? Whose experiences are presented in the words of the Psalms, if anyone's? And how did the historical composers of psalms relate to the "I" of their poetry? Since precise answers to these questions have not been possible based on extant data, scholars have struggled with how to refer to the composers *of* psalms and the speaking personas *in* psalms with methodological clarity.[91] This has led to significant confusion in modern Psalms scholarship, as scholars are often not sure what each other means by the terms they use for composition and authorship. Perhaps the most frequently used (and misunderstood) term in this regard is the word "psalmist," which scholars often use to refer either to the composer of a psalm or the speaker in a psalm, or to some unclarified mixture of the two.

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[91] As is well known, some psalms seem to suggest information about their composers via historical details (e.g., the experience of Jerusalem's destruction in Psalm 137) or superscriptions (e.g., the relation to a situation in David's life in Psalm 51), and some psalms even prioritize authorial attribution in an effort to guide the reception of the psalm's content (e.g., Psalm 90). Still, it is widely acknowledged in contemporary biblical scholarship that, in most cases, the historical identity of the actual scribes who composed the Psalms cannot be known to us based on currently available data. Even while some scholars may entertain theories about possible historical attributions to David, etc., most scholars agree that we cannot be sure precisely who composed any of the 150 psalms included in the MT Psalter.

One cause of this confusion may be that many psalms present themselves as anonymous compositions. While the anonymous authorship of other biblical literature has not usually caused problems for its interpretation, the poetical and liturgical character of the psalms has often made it difficult for scholars to be sure about how the composers of these texts related to their content. This is especially the case with *first-person singular* psalms, which speak from the vantage of an "I," seemingly reflecting the experiential vantage of a single human individual. When discussing first-person psalms (i.e., psalms with a speaking "I"), scholars have often operated as if the "I" of a psalm refers directly to the historical *composer* of the psalm, as if the scribe who composed the psalm meant to represent *themself* in the "I" of the psalm. When discussing psalms in this way, their term of choice for the speaking persona of a psalm has been "psalmist," such that the term seems to refer *both* to the historical person who composed the psalm *and* the poetic persona who speaks in their poetry.

On the one hand, this ambiguity is probably due to the historical-critical concerns of most twentieth-century biblical scholarship, such that questions about *author* and *dating* were always prioritized in the interpretation of texts. Biblical scholarship has often assumed modern notions of the role of authors in relation to texts, often transposing modern ideas about authorship onto ancient scribal communities, which we now know conceptualized the role of "authors" differently than modern reading communities do.[92] On the other hand, the form-critical need to discover the *Sitze im Leben* of psalms took for granted that the content of psalms reflected the actual historical setting of the psalm's composition. Regardless of the origins of the issue, this terminological ambiguity is not tenable in scholarship that aims for precision in its accounts of

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[92] For the most important studies on this topic, see David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005); Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007).

the historical functions of psalmody. Clarity about these matters is vital in any study that means to contribute to our understanding of what these psalms were, how they were used, and how their language was understood by ancient readers.

Adele Berlin has given a programmatic word of counsel to all Psalms scholars concerning the language they use when referring to psalms and their composers.[93] Berlin cautions that the word "psalmist" only adds to the confusion.[94] Instead, Berlin suggests several terms for more precise discussion of psalmody. First, on the matter of authorship, Berlin insists on distinguishing the *author* of a psalm from the *speaker* in a psalm:

> We should distinguish the author of a psalm from the speaking voice or persona within the psalm. The speaking persona may represent the views of the author, but that persona is a literary construct, not the historical author. A poet can create any persona he likes, just as a novelist can create any sort of narrator. . . . Literary skill enables an author to describe quite vividly things that happened to someone else, or that never happened at all. The intensity or immediacy of the description is no proof that the author witnessed the event.[95]

In the same article, Berlin also advises scholars to distinguish carefully between the historical *setting* in which a psalm was composed and/or used (e.g., the form-critical *Sitz im Leben*) and the literary *scenario* creatively rendered by the poet in the words of the psalm:

> The poet who creates a speaking persona also creates a scenario into which he places this persona. . . . I use the term "scenario" to distinguish it from "setting," or *Sitz im Leben*, a form-critical term that refers to the historical (or sociological or rhetorical) situation that gave rise to the psalm, or to its later use. The setting is outside the psalm; the scenario is within it. Just as the speaker is not the author, so the scenario is not the time and place where the psalm was written.[96]

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[93] Adele Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios: Imagining the First Temple in Second Temple Psalms (Psalms 122 and 137)," in Pajunen and Penner, eds., *Functions of Psalms and Prayers*, 341–55.

[94] Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios," 342.

[95] Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios," 341.

[96] Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios," 343.

This study deliberately follows Berlin's directives in order to move toward more precise description of how psalms functioned historically for their users. Much previous scholarship has been weighed down by a concern for the speaking voice *as equal to* the experience of a historical "psalmist."[97] This study is generally uninterested in questions about who exactly composed a given psalm or whether a psalm's content reflects the historical experience of a particular individual. Instead, this study is concerned with what psalms *do* preserve and transmit to later users: rhetorical, literary, and ideational content. I am interested in understanding how the rhetoric of a particular kind of psalm in ancient Israel developed and functioned for the communities who employed it in their religious acts of devotion and worship.

This study will then proceed to use the following terminology in its discussion of psalms. The term "composer" is used to refer to the historical person(s)/scribes who composed a psalm. In all the psalms considered in this volume, the composers are anonymous scribes and/or liturgists. I do not take the experiences represented in these psalms to be the historical experiences of scribal individuals, rather I understand them to be the literary creations of the scribes who composed the psalms.[98] The term "speaker" is used to refer to the poetic persona who speaks in the words of a psalm. In first-person psalmody, then, this study refers to the "I"-persona as the *speaker* of the psalm, not its composer. Relatedly, this study follows Adele Berlin's directive in using the terms "setting" and "Sitz im Leben" both to refer to the possible

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[97] Indeed, such an approach causes significant problems for any study that proposes to attend critically to the *rhetorical* qualities of psalms, as noted by rhetorician Davida H. Charney in her study of first-person psalms: "Both literary and rhetorical analysis take a first-person speaker or narrator as a construct that cannot be equated with a specific writer or writers. While some literary theories dispense with the historical context in which a text was produced, the context is essential to a rhetorical analysis, even though such contexts can be understood only partially at best" (Davida H. Charney, *Persuading God: Rhetorical Studies of First-Person Psalms*, HBM 73 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015], 10).

[98] Though I also cannot prove that this might not be the case for some psalms. It is simply beside the point of my argument, which concerns the functions of the poetry created by these liturgists for other users.

contexts of a psalm's historical *usage*. For example, a psalm's "setting" of use might be the Temple, or a Jewish synagogue. Finally, the term "scenario" is used to refer to the poetic situation rendered by the poet within the psalm, the situation in which the psalm's speaker has or lacks agency. The term "psalmist" is not used in this study, since its use is too laden with a history of ambiguous usage, and the terms just described allow for more precise discussion of the psalms in question.

4. Outline of Chapters

Having introduced and contextualized the main arguments of this dissertation, an outline of its remaining chapters (Chs. 2–5) will serve to clarify its overall strategy of presentation.

Chapter 2, "Thanksgiving Psalms as Instruments of Formation," presents the main argument on which the subsequent chapters are built. It argues that thanksgiving psalms contributed to the formation of their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood, and that they therefore should be understood as "instruments of formation." This argument is presented via a "profile" of features common to all thanksgiving psalms (i.e., a profile of the thanksgiving genre). This profile serves to highlight the literary and rhetorical features of thanksgiving psalms that, I argue, would have made them ideal instruments for the formation of their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood.

Ch. 2 concludes by explaining the three-part structure of Chs. 3–5, which are organized according to what I argue are the three main "affordances" of thanksgiving psalmody: doxology, didacticism, and exemplarity. At this point, Caroline Levine's theory of "affordances" is employed to account for the formal diversity exhibited across thanksgiving psalms. I argue that, while all thanksgiving psalms share a common literary form, some thanksgiving psalms accentuate a particular "affordance" of the genre, such that biblical thanksgiving psalms can be

grouped according to which main "affordance" is foregrounded in a psalm's rhetoric. So, while all thanksgiving psalms would have had formational effects for audiences, they would not all have formed audiences via the same rhetorical strategies. Instead, different thanksgiving psalms foreground different rhetorical strategies afforded by the genre, namely the rhetoric of doxology (Ch. 3), didacticism (Ch. 4), and exemplarity (Ch. 5).

Following this foundational chapter, Chs. 3–5 present this study's argument about *how* the rhetoric of different thanksgiving psalms would have formed their audiences and *which* ideas about pious selfhood they would have conveyed. These chapters are organized according to the three "affordances" of the thanksgiving genre outlined in Ch. 2, and each chapter presents two or three exemplars of psalms that foreground that particular affordance, either the rhetoric of doxology, didacticism, or exemplarity. Each of these chapters begins with a discussion of the historical and social contexts against which the psalms in that chapter might be understood. Each of these chapters concludes with discussion about how the ideas about pious selfhood conveyed by the psalms in that chapter might be related to the broader history of piety in early Judaism. The main arguments of Chs. 3–5 can be summarized as follows.

Chapter 3, "Doxology in Thanksgiving Psalms," argues that some thanksgiving psalms are characterized primarily by the rhetoric of doxology. It argues that, while all thanksgiving psalms have an essentially doxological character, some thanksgiving psalms foreground doxology in their rhetoric such that it becomes their main strategy for presenting the exemplary experience of their speakers. Psalms 30, 66, and 118 are presented as case studies of thanksgiving psalms that foreground the rhetoric of doxology. The foregrounding of doxological rhetoric in these psalms has important effects on how these psalms convey ideas about the pious self. More specifically, doxological rhetoric foregrounds the importance of *divine agency*, such

that the pious self is constructed mainly in terms of its *dependence* on God, and not in terms of its ability to *act* amid experiences of affliction. These psalms then emphasize the sovereignty of divine agency, and as a result, they conceptualize affliction mainly as an experience by which the pious are "tested" or "refined," producing a deeper awareness of their dependency on God and eventuating in an experience of God's powerful deliverance. These psalms then convey the idea that the afflictions of the pious should be understood as an ultimately God-glorifying event.

Chapter 4, "Didacticism in Thanksgiving Psalms," argues that some thanksgiving psalms are characterized primarily by the rhetoric of didacticism. While all thanksgiving psalms have some didactic features, the psalms discussed in this chapter (Psalms 32, 34, and 41) tend to make didactic rhetoric their main mode of presentation, such that the exemplary experiences of their speakers become the basis for explicit *instruction* in piety. The foregrounding of didacticism in these psalms means that they rhetorically emphasize the agency of their listening audience, the gathered pious. So, while these psalms assume the importance of God's sovereign agency, they primarily emphasize the agency of the afflicted pious, who are admonished to act in specific ways in response to their afflictions. These psalms then emphasize the importance of *right response* to affliction, constructing the pious self as capable of meaningful action amid their ongoing afflictions. These psalms then conceptualize affliction itself mainly as an experience that ought to move the pious to specific courses of pious action.

Finally, Chapter 5, "Exemplarity in Thanksgiving Psalms," argues that some thanksgiving psalms are characterized by the rhetoric of exemplarity. Exemplarity refers to the phenomenon of a person or literary persona being presented as an exemplar of piety to be learned from and/or imitated by the pious. So, while all thanksgiving psalms may be understood as presenting their speakers as pious exemplars, this chapter argues that Psalms 73 and 116 seem to foreground the

inner experiences of their speakers to an unusual extent, seemingly lifting them up as exemplars of piety to be imitated by audiences. These psalms are also characterized by an interest in afflictions that are experienced primarily *internally* or *cognitively*, such that the resolution of affliction is mainly depicted as an event of attaining mental serenity or a change in one's perspective. This chapter then argues that these psalms formed their audiences primarily by presenting them with exemplary pious personas who model strategies for navigating experiences of cognitive dissonance and/or disorientation.

Following the main chapters, a brief conclusion synthesizes the main findings of this study and discusses how these findings contribute to several modern scholarly discourses about the Book of Psalms, the functions of ancient psalmody, and the history of ideas about piety in ancient Judaism.

Chapter 2. Thanksgiving Psalms as Instruments of Formation

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the main argument of this study, namely that biblical thanksgiving psalms contributed to the formation of their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood, especially in regard to experiences of affliction. While subsequent chapters will present case studies of specific thanksgiving psalms, this chapter focuses on the genre as a whole, arguing that several literary and rhetorical features make this genre an ideal instrument for the presentation of ideas about pious selfhood and the formation of these ideas in ancient worshipping communities. This chapter then serves as the foundation for subsequent chapters in this study, providing a working profile of the genre thanksgiving before proceeding to more nuanced treatments of specific variations on thanksgiving psalmody.

As discussed in Ch. 1, past scholarship has often focused on the "vertical" functions of thanksgiving psalms, attempting to reconstruct their possible role within the ancient Israelite cult or in relation to a specific ritual (i.e., usually the *tôdāh* sacrifice). Like the present study, these past scholars were also focused on the literary features of thanksgiving, attempting to understand how these literary features suggested the genre's possible uses for ancient religious communities. The preponderance of *praise* language in thanksgiving psalms, especially, encouraged scholars to think in terms of how thanksgiving psalms facilitated the relationship between worshippers and Yhwh, or in relation to a specific ritual acknowledgment of Yhwh. While their accounts of thanksgiving psalmody helped to clarify its importance as praise, these accounts did little to illuminate the social or cultural importance of this genre for ancient Jewish communities.

By contrast, this study takes a different approach, following the lead of recent scholars who have drawn attention to the *social* or "horizontal" functions of psalmody. This study asks

how the literary features of thanksgiving psalms suggest something about how they would have affected or *formed* their audiences, especially in regard to ideas about pious selfhood. The strength of the argument presented in this chapter is that it is, like earlier approaches, based on close analysis of the literary and rhetorical features of this genre. However, where earlier approaches asked how these features illuminated the role of this genre in the cult, this study asks how these features reveal the impact these psalms would have had on their listeners.

While the present argument is not dependent on any single reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of thanksgiving psalms, its argument about their formational function can only be considered valid if it coheres with the best working models of the settings in which these psalms were used. For this reason, this chapter begins with a short discussion of the best current models of how thanksgiving psalms might have been used and encountered in ancient Israel, thereby establishing some basic historical and cultural parameters for its main argument about the formational functions of thanksgiving psalms.

2. How Thanksgiving Psalms Were Used in Ancient Israel

While there is no direct evidence for how thanksgiving psalms were used, this section synthesizes the insights of previous scholars to provide a range of settings in which they were *plausibly* used. Since the main argument of this dissertation does not depend on the historical veracity of one setting over another, this section does not attempt to determine which of these settings is most likely to be a correct reconstruction. Instead, it discusses possible settings of use in order to argue that the main argument of this chapter—that thanksgiving psalms formed their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood—is coherent when considered against all these possible settings of use. Review of previous scholarship (presented at greater length in Ch. 1) reveals

three main settings in which thanksgiving psalms may have possibly been used and encountered by audiences.

First, beginning with the earliest form critics, scholars have proposed that these psalms may have been used in the Jerusalem Temple to facilitate worship or accompany specific ritual acts (e.g., the *tôdāh* sacrificial ritual).[1] This proposed setting entails that a literate liturgical leader would have recited or read the psalm before a gathering of (mostly illiterate) worshippers. Sometimes, the use of a thanksgiving psalm might have been for the purpose of general worship, while other times, a thanksgiving psalm might have been used on behalf of a specific person who had experienced relief from an ordeal of affliction, such as recovery from an illness. This setting of use is plausible throughout the Second Temple period, though it would have been restricted to the temple at Jerusalem and it would have been dependent upon the leadership of cultic personnel.[2]

Second, Erhard Gerstenberger and Rainer Albertz (among others) have proposed that thanksgiving psalms were likely used in local settings of worship (i.e., communal shrines and

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[1] See above in Ch. 1, section 2.1, "Form-Critical Approaches to Thanksgiving Psalms." See also Mowinckel's development of this idea, since he took his reconstruction of the Israelite cult much further than Gunkel had done. See Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:31–43. See also the discussion of Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 51–52; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 14–16, 135–36.

For discussion of the *tôdāh* ritual, see the discussion of "Peace Offering (*šĕlāmîm*)" in Gary A. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT)," *ABD* 5:870–886 (878). See also Claus Westermann, "tôdâ," *THAT* 1:679–80. For discussion of the prescription for this kind of sacrifice in Lev. 7:12–15, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 413–24.

[2] Cf., however, Serge Frolov, "Psalms: *Sitz im Leben* vs. *Sitz in der Literatur*," in Feldman and Sandoval, eds., *Petitioners, Penitents, and Poets*, 43–67. Frolov argues that there is essentially no firm evidence that the psalms in the Masoretic Psalter were used in the Jerusalem Temple, and instead argues that scholars should shift entirely away from considering their *Sitz im Leben* to instead considering their *Sitz im Buch*. While Frolov's point is well taken that there is no clear evidence for the use of these psalms in the Jerusalem Temple, there is also no need to dispense with the hypothesis that the biblical psalms once had these associations. Instead, I think, Frolov's point should stimulate scholars to move away from *focusing* on the ritual associations of psalms as did Gunkel and Mowinckel, and instead to ask about how they would have functioned apart from the cult as devotional and liturgical literature for early Jewish communities.

synagogues) throughout Judea and the Judean diaspora as well as in the temple at Jerusalem.[3] In these more "local" settings, communal gatherings of the pious (as opposed to pilgrim worshippers) would have engaged in Torah-focused worship which likely also involved the recitation of hymns and psalms. Sometimes, even smaller numbers of worshippers may have come at specific times to offer a prayer of petition or a psalm of thanksgiving, likely facilitated by a local liturgical leader or priest. This setting of use is plausible from the exilic period onward when synagogues began to emerge as sites of worship in the Judean diaspora.[4]

Third, scholars have demonstrated that psalms and other biblical literature were used in scribal and educational settings in ancient Israel, though this setting of use is the least agreed upon by scholars. Still, some scholars have argued that psalmic literature might have been studied in private by the scribal class during the postexilic period. For example, David M. Carr has argued convincingly that ancient Israelite scribes read, studied, and memorized sacred literature, including psalms and hymns.[5] According to Carr, one reason scribes studied texts was to preserve them and transmit or perform them to illiterate audiences. For this reason, in these settings, scribes vocalized texts orally, in order to internalize them for performance.[6] However, this is not the only reason psalms might have been studied in private. As argued by Judith H. Newman, scribes also studied texts for the purposes of their own formation. In several studies on the Book of Sirach, Newman has argued that Sirach attests to the importance of daily prayer and

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[3] Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 5–34; Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms," 338–49; Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion* 2:401–404.

[4] Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms," 339–42.

[5] Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 111–173 (esp. 152–161).

[6] Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 160.

praises in the regular routine of scribes during the Hellenistic period.[7]

The Book of Psalms itself also contains several indicators that psalms were likely used in educational settings. Since the work of Gerald Wilson, scholars have generally agreed that the present shape of the biblical Psalter reflects its use as teaching literature in the late Second Temple period, suggesting that psalms would have been important in educational contexts.[8] Several individual psalms reflect practices of repetitive reading (e.g., Ps 1:2) and meditation, especially at night (e.g., Ps 77:3, 5, 7; Ps 119:148).[9] Finally, the alphabetic acrostic form of several psalms (e.g., Psalms 9–10; 25; 34; 119; 145) suggests these psalms were crafted to facilitate reading and memorization in scribal settings of use.[10] One of the psalms considered in this dissertation, Psalm 34, is an alphabetic acrostic, suggesting that at least some of its ancient audiences were scribal *readers* who studied and memorized it.

Looking back over the three settings just discussed, this section has demonstrated that a range of settings is plausible for the use of thanksgiving psalms during the Second Temple period, and it is probably impossible to determine precisely which psalms were used in which kinds of setting. The first two settings have in common a *public* setting in which psalms were used *liturgically* (i.e., in organized, led worship, likely by a literate liturgical leader). Such uses may have been purposed toward the intentional formation of audiences, but we cannot know for

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[7] Newman, "The Formation of the Scribal Self," 227–38. Cf. also Newman, *Before the Bible*, 23–51.

[8] Cf. Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985). Wilson argued that the editorial framing of the MT Psalter suggests its use as instructional literature. However, this does not entail that the psalms included in the biblical Psalter were necessarily composed for such use. Cf. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 154.

[9] Cf. Hartenstein, "'May My Musings Please Him," 299–340 (307).

[10] Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*, 154. Cf. Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form," 264–76 (271).

sure.[11] The third setting allows for the possibility that these psalms were at some times and places studied by a small number of literate elites for purposes of education, enculturation, and self-formation.

While thanksgiving psalms could have had formational functions in any of the three settings described above, the dynamics of encounter would have been different. In more public settings, such as the first two discussed above, thanksgiving psalms would have formed their audiences by facilitating an encounter between ordinary worshippers and the poetic presentations of pious selfhood they contain. In such public settings, where the psalms were likely used as instruments of worship and praise, their formational power would have been a secondary effect of their use as liturgy. In more private, scribal settings, thanksgiving psalms would have had a more directly formational effect since scribes *intended* to form themselves through such reading.

In sum, thanksgiving psalms could have functioned to form their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood in any of their plausible historical settings of use. So, while this study will reference these possible settings, it is not necessary to build this argument on one reconstructed setting over another. Having said this, most scholars agree that the vast majority of encounters with thanksgiving psalmody would have been in settings of public, liturgical worship, such as in the first two settings described above. For this reason, this dissertation will generally presuppose a setting of liturgical worship in which worshippers heard thanksgiving psalms read or recited before a gathering of the pious.

3. Thanksgiving Psalms as Instruments of Formation

This study's argument about the formational function of thanksgiving psalms has been

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[11] Cf. the discussion of the confluence of doxological and didactic rhetoric exhibited in Psalms 32, 34, and 41, at the beginning of Ch. 4 in this study.

anticipated in several ways by the insights of previous scholarship. Beginning with Hermann Gunkel, the earliest form critics observed the frequency of *didactic* language in thanksgiving psalms, which encouraged them to speculate about the genre's relationship to "wisdom" discourse and educational settings of use.[12] These early form critics not only observed the presence of didactic speech, but also noted how the self-presentations of past experience in these psalms provides an ideal rhetorical setting for admonishing gatherings of the pious.[13] Gunkel had even speculated about how the genre had developed away from its earliest *ritual* settings of use (e.g., the *tôdāh* ritual in the Temple) and "separated" itself from its ritual associations.[14]

Building on Gunkel's insights, several later form critics shifted their attention to the *social* functions of thanksgiving psalmody, raising fresh questions about how else this genre might have served ancient Jewish communities. Claus Westermann's argument that thanksgiving was simply one mode of *praise* in biblical psalmody suggested that thanksgiving psalms had likely been useful in many more settings of worship than the specific *ritual* setting proposed by earlier form critics (i.e., the *tôdāh*).[15] Building on this insight, Walter Brueggemann's threefold typology of function suggested that the rhetoric of these psalms had the power to foster

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[12] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 205, 207–209.

[13] This component of thanksgiving psalmody has led some scholars to refer to the genre using the term "testimony," as if the genre was originally meant for individuals to give their specific "testimony" about how they had a life-changing experience because of divine intervention. Cf., e.g., Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 55–56. This approach to thanksgiving psalms is taken up in the recent study of James, *The Storied Ethics*, which understands the thanksgiving psalms as "stories" that would have informed the ethical imaginations of listeners. However, cf. also William P. Brown, *Psalms*, IBT (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 54–55, who uses the term "testimony" in a way that preserves the sense of the psalms as typified, liturgical discourse, rather than historically specific "testimonies" of individuals. Brown writes, "...the hymn and the thanksgiving are sometimes difficult to distinguish, owing to common vocabulary. The thanksgiving psalm revels in the rhetoric of personal testimony to what God has done for the individual or community in response to petition" (Brown, *Psalms*, 55).

[14] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 209–11.

[15] Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 25–30.

"reorientation" for individuals or communities experiencing "disorientation."[16] Brueggemann's

insight was an important step toward broadening the conversation about the range of functions

thanksgiving psalmody might have had for ancient audiences.

While form critics expanded their notions of how thanksgiving psalms might have

functioned, Rainer Albertz's reconstructions of religious life in the exilic and post-exilic periods

offered insight into socio-historical contexts in which these psalms might have been particularly

relevant to Jewish communities.[17] When the central institutional structures of Israelite religion

collapsed in 586 BCE, Albertz argued, a period began in which Jewish communities would have

found value in psalms and prayers that foreground local and personal experiences of the divine,

rather than those that foregrounded divine activity at the international, national, or institutional

levels.[18] Albertz argued that thanksgiving psalms, in particular, would have been important to

Jewish communities during this period, since they focus on God's activity in the lives of ordinary

individuals.[19] When considered along with Gerstenberger's proposals about local and synagogue

settings in which thanksgiving psalms may have been used (discussed above), Albertz's work

provides insight into how this genre of psalmody may have taken on new cultural importance

during the exilic and post-exilic periods.

While this study builds on the insights of these previous approaches, its argument about

the *formational* power of thanksgiving psalmody is also bolstered by scholarly arguments about

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[16] Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith," 3–32 (13–15). See also Brueggemann's discussion of the "world creating" power of praise psalmody, in which he builds upon Mowinckel's earlier insights about praise (Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 1–28).

[17] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 2:401–404.

[18] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 2:401–402.

[19] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 2:402 (esp. endnotes 8–9).

the educational and formational importance of prayers and psalms in Second Temple Judaism.[20] Scholars have argued persuasively that psalms and prayers were powerful instruments for fostering group identity and allowing for the preservation of important group norms and beliefs through time, especially during a period when Jewish groups were under great political, social, and economical distress.[21] Carol A. Newsom and Judith H. Newman have demonstrated the importance of prayer and psalmody for the formation of pious selfhood in Jewish communities during the later Second Temple period.[22] Psalmody was then an important cultural instrument for the enculturation, education, and formation of pious persons. Relatedly, scholars have demonstrated that the formation of identity and pious selfhood were pronounced concerns of Jewish communities in the Second Temple period.[23] In such a context, the first-person genre of thanksgiving psalmody likely would have been particularly useful for the formation of pious selfhood.

Building on the insights of these previous scholars, this chapter asks how the literary form and rhetoric of thanksgiving psalms would have facilitated the formation of pious selfhood in ancient audiences. This study then shifts away from earlier form-critical approaches to thanksgiving psalms, which maintained a close connection between the literary form of a psalm and its setting of use (*Sitz im Leben*). Instead, this study presupposes a range of plausible settings of use for these psalms and inquires about how their literary form and rhetoric would have

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[20] See the discussion of this area of scholarship in Ch. 1, Section 2.2, "The Social Functions of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism."

[21] See esp. Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together"; Schuller, "Functions of Psalms and Prayers," 5–23.

[22] See esp. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*; Newsom, "Apocalyptic Subjects"; Newman, *Before the Bible*; Newman, "The Formation of the Scribal Self."

[23] See the discussion of this point in Ch. 1, Section 2.2.3. "The Formational Power of Psalms and Prayers in Reecent Scholarship."

formed their various audiences.

To be sure, the formational function of thanksgiving psalms would have been experienced differently (and to different degrees) by different kinds of audiences. On the one hand, "public" use of these psalms (i.e., as in the first two settings discussed above) would have resulted in a less direct kind of formation, similar to what cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz says about the function of symbolic discourses in religious cultures. According to Geertz, such discourses "[induce] in the worshipper a certain distinctive set of dispositions (tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronenesses) which lend a chronic character to the flow of his activity and the quality of his experience."[24] In public settings of worship, the first-person presentations of pious selves in thanksgiving psalms would have affected and shaped audiences' understanding of themselves in relation to experiences of affliction and in relation to God. On the other hand, more "private" uses of these psalms (i.e., by scribes, as in the third setting of use discussed above) would have allowed for more focused identification of the reader with the words of these psalms, engendering a more intense experience of formation. Such focused reading of a thanksgiving psalm would have been similar to what historian Pierre Hadot has called "spiritual exercises" in Graeco-Roman philosophical discourse, practices meant to shape and transform the self of the practitioner according to a desired norm or ideal.[25]

Having explained this chapter's argument about the formational function of thanksgiving psalms, the next section provides a profile of the genre that delineates those features of

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[24] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 94.

[25] See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 81–125. Hadot is a scholar of Graeco-Roman philosophy, so his category "spiritual exercises" does not necessarily map directly onto ancient Jewish practices. However, this category is useful for naming a practice by which an individual deliberately seeks to shape or form themselves according to a cultural norm or set of ideals. Hadot argued that "spiritual exercises" name specific practices in Hellenistic culture for accomplishing this in relation to philosophical formation and education.

thanksgiving psalms that would have made them particular effective instruments of formation. This profile serves as a foundation for this study's subsequent chapters (Chs. 3–5), which present case studies of various specific thanksgiving psalms. However, it also serves to support this chapter's argument that the *formal* and *rhetorical* features of this genre suggest it would have had formational functions for ancient audiences.

4. A Profile of the Thanksgiving Genre of Psalmody

4.1. Introduction: The Rhetorical Vantage of Thanksgiving Psalms

When considered alongside other ancient Jewish psalms, thanksgiving psalms stand out because their speakers are constructed as speaking at a specific kind of moment, or rather, within a specific *scenario*. More specifically, the speakers of thanksgiving psalms are presented as giving thanks to God for deliverance from a recently experienced crisis. Recalling Adele Berlin's exhortation to differentiate between the "settings" and "scenarios" of psalms, I am not concerned here with the historical *setting* (i.e., *Sitz im Leben*) in which a text might have been used, but with the *literary scenario* evoked by the text, as well as the implied position of the speaker within that scenario.[26] In some cases, the "scenario" and "setting" of thanksgiving psalms may seem to overlap (i.e., when they include explicit Temple or ritual imagery; cf. Ps 66:13–15; 116:17–19; 118:19–29), which is what led earlier form critics to associate this genre with settings of ritual performance. However, as Berlin has argued, "setting" and "scenario" should not be automatically equated, even in cases where the psalm's literary scenario seems to suggest a particular setting of performance. Instead, we should understand this recurring *scenario* as the defining feature of this *literary* genre, allowing for a diverse range of possible historical

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[26] Cf. Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios". See the more fulsome discussion of these points in Ch. 1, under Section 3.3, "Terminology for the Study of First-Person Psalms."

"settings" in which audiences used these psalms.[27] By way of overall introduction to the genre, this recurring literary scenario merits careful description.

Thanksgiving psalms are characterized by first-person speech spoken from a precise temporal vantage, namely the vantage of having *survived* an ordeal of affliction.[28] The speakers of thanksgiving psalms often recount their experience of affliction and their actions in response to it, but this recounting is critically rooted in their implied present. The implied present of a thanksgiving psalm is always established in some way by its opening and closing lines.[29] The effect of these openings, in particular, is to ensure the audience is anchored in the speaker's present reality (i.e., their ultimate *survival*) before the speaker recounts their suspenseful experience of affliction. From this precise vantage, the speakers of these psalms offer praise to God, on the one hand, and various kinds of admonitions to themselves and their fellow pious, on the other. The vantage of *survival* endows the speaker's voice with a special kind of authority concerning how the pious ought to experience affliction and how God relates to it. This vantage then provides the critical rhetorical foundation from which these psalms convey knowledge about pious selfhood, pious agency in relation to God, and the experience of affliction in general.

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[27] As argued by Berlin, many Second Temple audiences of psalms probably did not experience the scenario in these psalms in conjunction with the actual performance of ritual in the Jerusalem Temple, though some may have. Instead, many audiences likely experienced the scenario in these psalms as an evoked, imagined scenario that deepened their experience of the psalm's words and ideas and fostered their sense of shared connection to the Temple and its symbolic power. See Adele Berlin's discussion of Psalms 137 and 122 as examples of psalms that utilize literary scenarios as a device for remembrance of shared symbols and contexts. Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios" (esp. 354).

[28] Hermann Gunkel identified a single formal feature, the "narrative of the fate of the one offering thanks," as the genre's "certain identifying marker" (Gunkel, *Introduction*, 201). Gunkel realized that thanksgiving psalms were most essentially characterized by their focus on the retrospective vantage of their speaking subjects, but he located this essential aspect of these psalms in a single literary feature. My approach here builds on Gunkel's essential insight about the temporal vantage of these psalms without limiting the genre's "identifying marker" to a single literary feature. Instead, my approach suggests that a general rhetorical scenario characterizes these psalms, not a single recurring literary feature.

[29] E.g., the openings in Pss 30:2–4; 32:1–2; 34:2–4; 41:2–4; 66:1–4; 73:1–2; 116:1–2; 118:1–4.

With this essential rhetorical vantage in mind, these psalms can be understood as repositories of cultural knowledge about the human experience of affliction, pious selfhood amid existential crisis, and the character of the divine relative to such experiences. While it is impossible to know whether these psalms reflect literary re-presentations of their composers' actual historical experiences or fictive presentations of imagined experiences, in either case these psalms reflect culturally important ideas about how the pious ought to respond to, experience, interpret, and relate such experiences. As such, the poetic personas they present may be understood as *models* of pious selfhood, especially in relation to experiences of affliction. More than that, their speakers often directly address human audiences of the pious, signaling their interest in *shaping* ideas about pious selfhood in their audiences.

Having introduced the thanksgiving genre in terms of its defining rhetorical vantage, this section will now present four features of this genre's rhetoric and literary form that would have made it an effective instrument of *formation*. Each of the following features occurs across all the thanksgiving psalms considered in this study, though there is often diversity in *how* these features occur in the different psalms. While this section includes some initial discussion of this diversity, its main focus is to delineate *shared* features of thanksgiving psalms that suggest their capacity to form their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood.

4.2. Triangulated Address

Thanksgiving psalms are characterized by mixed, oscillating modes of *address* which often serve to convey information or ideas to the reading/listening audience in a compelling way.[30] At times, a psalm's speaker is clearly addressing God (e.g., Ps 30:1, "I will extol you, Yhwh, for you have

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[30] The complex mixtures of various forms of address in thanksgiving psalmody has been noticed by scholars since the time of Gunkel. Cf., e.g., Gunkel, *Introduction*, 205.

drawn me up").[31] At other times, a psalm's speaker is clearly not addressing God, but an implied

audience of human listeners instead (e.g., Ps 30:4, "Sing praises to Yhwh, O you his faithful

ones…"), sometimes going so far as to offer explicit instruction in matters of piety (e.g., Ps

34:12, "Come, children, listen to me! I will teach you the fear of Yhwh").[32] At all times,

however, the rhetoric of these psalms suggests that the explicit addressee of a line of poetry is

not necessarily its whole audience, such that *address* is merely one instrument of the poet's

presentation of ideas, rather than the singular determiner of whom the speech is *meant for*.[33] In

other words, while the speaker's rhetoric may be addressing Yhwh or a gathering of the pious,

their speech is clearly also meant (perhaps *primarily* meant) for the psalm's audience to

"overhear."[34]

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[31] In fact, the presence of this clearly doxological speech in thanksgiving psalms is what has caused some scholars to understand thanksgiving psalms as merely one kind of *praise* psalmody. Claus Westermann went so far as to rename this genre of psalmody "Declarative Praise," emphasizing that what had previously been understood as "thanksgiving" was merely another mode of ancient Israelite praise psalmody. See Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 25–35.

[32] The presence of this sort of direct address of human listeners is one of the aspects of thanksgiving psalmody that pushed Gunkel and his followers to associate thanksgiving psalms so certainly with a *public* and *ritual* setting of use. The constant switching between address of the deity and address of fellow pious seemed to suggest an obvious script for ritual accompaniment in public worship, though, as my discussion here shows, this is not the only possible way of understanding this rhetorical tendency of thanksgiving psalms. Cf. Gunkel, *Introduction*, 205–209.

[33] Here and throughout this discussion I use the term "addressee" to refer to the entity designated by the pronouns of discourse, while I use the term "audience" to refer to the ultimate recipients or beneficiaries of the poetry, i.e., readers or listeners, following Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2015), 187. At some points, forms of address are *mixed* such that, even within the span of a single verse, it is not possible to determine precisely who is being "addressed." Consider, e.g., Ps 41:4, "Yhwh sustains him upon his sickbed, You transform the whole bed where he lies in suffering," which mixes third-person descriptive speech about Yhwh (4a) with second-person direct address of Yhwh (4b).

[34] This point distinguishes my approach significantly from earlier form critics, who often built their arguments on the patterns of rhetorical address in psalmody, often assuming that these modes of address were explicit indicators or markers of ritual or liturgical transitions in the public performance of the psalm. In fact, the findings of modern literary theory help one to appreciate that address in these psalms is more likely a poetic device for *evoking* the sorts of scenarios that earlier form critics thought were *literally* happening when the text was being performed historically.

Consider the example of Psalm 32:3–5 (to be discussed at greater length in Ch. 4), in which the psalm's speaker recounts their own experience of failing to appeal for Yhwh's help amid an affliction caused by an earlier moral failure:

> 3   While I kept silent, my bones wasted away,[35]
>   by my groaning all day long.
> 4   For day and night your hand was heavy upon me,
>   my strength dried up as in the heat of summer. *Selah*.
> 5   I made known my sin to you,
>   and my iniquity I did not cover.
>   I said, "I will confess my transgressions to Yhwh."
>   And you, you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*.

Notice that this retrospective account of the speaker's earlier crisis is addressed to God (i.e., God is the addressee of the rhetoric; "For day and night *your* hand was heavy upon me," v. 4). The psalm continues in vv. 6–7:

> 6   Therefore let every faithful one pray to you,
>   at a time of distress,
>   Indeed, when he is overwhelmed by mighty waters,
>   they will not touch him.
> 7   You are a hiding place for me,
>   You protect me from trouble,
>   You surround me with glad songs of escape. *Selah*.

Immediately following the speaker's retrospective account of their crisis and its resolution, they move to didactic speech which is voiced as prayer to God. The speaker "prays" that, when they experience affliction, the pious will choose to appeal to God rather than failing to do so. The "therefore" in v. 6 builds this prayer upon the speaker's earlier recounted experience, in which God was shown to be a merciful and powerful responder to appeals for help. The implicit instruction in v. 6 is also undergirded by the speaker's descriptions for Yhwh in v. 7 as a hiding

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[35] All translations of Psalms 30, 32, 34, 41, 66, 73, 116, and 118 are my own throughout this study. Full translations of these psalms with translation notes are provided in the chapters in which these psalms are individually treated.

place and a protector. So, while vv. 3–7 are rhetorically *addressed* to God, their ultimate

audience is the psalm's readers/listeners, who hear in the speaker's prayer a model of right

response to affliction (vv. 3–5) and a prayer that the speaker's fellow pious will learn to do

likewise (vv. 6–7). These verses that are addressed to God are then clearly meant for the psalm's

audience to "overhear" and learn from.

In the past century, several literary theorists have identified "overheard" speech as a

defining feature of the classical genre lyric poetry. While lyric poetry is not a native genre to the

Hebrew Bible or ancient Israel, scholarly reflections on the use of "overheard" speech in lyric are

quite helpful for illuminating its analogous functions in thanksgiving psalmody. One of the most

influential formulations of the role of "overheard" speech in lyric poetry comes from the

foundational work of Northrop Frye on the topic:

> The lyric is . . . preeminently the utterance that is overheard. The lyric poet normally
> pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse. . ., a
> personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object. The lyric is,
> as Stephen Dedalus says in Joyce's *Portrait*, the poet presenting the image in relation to
> himself: it is to *epos*, rhetorically, as prayer is to sermon. The radical of presentation in
> the lyric is the hypothetical form of what in religion is called the "I-Thou" relationship.
> The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners, though he may speak for them, and
> though they may repeat some of his words after him.[36]

Frye's observations here are strikingly useful for describing the forms of address one finds in

biblical psalms of thanksgiving.[37] In biblical psalms of thanksgiving, forms of prayerful or

doxological address to God, especially, often serve as a rhetorical strategy for conveying

important information to the text's audience (i.e., the reader/listener) about the speaker's

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[36] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1957), 249–50.

[37] In fact, earlier scholars of biblical poetry often wrestled with the relationship between form of biblical poetry and more classical poetic genres such as "lyric poetry." One of the more important contributors to this discussion was S. R. Driver, who once argued that Hebrew poetry can be divided into either *lyric* or *gnomic* poetry, but also suggested that it was often too difficult to distinguish clearly between these types. See S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 360.

experience, about the activity of the deity, or about matters of piety and pious selfhood. While

the addressee of a speaker's rhetoric may explicitly be God, the psalm's composer may be

utilizing such direct address as a strategy for framing important information in a way that will

engage the text's audience differently.[38]

However, while thanksgiving psalms share many literary features with lyric poetry, as

prayer literature they are fundamentally different. As literary theorist Jahan Ramazani observes,

the poetry of prayers and hymns has a significantly different depth of sociality than the classical

lyric, since it operates within presumed institutional and communal contexts.[39] Prayer meant for

use by others does not aim for the expression of idiosyncrasy and individuality, rather it frames

presentations of the self with reference to established group norms, templates, symbols, and

imagery.[40] While the thanksgiving psalms depict pious selves, these selves are constructed using

culturally recognizable symbols and templates, such that they reinforce the notion of pious

selfhood as a matter of one's belonging to a group with a shared system of symbols.[41]

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[38] To be clear, my point here is not to disregard the indigenous integrity of these texts as *prayer* addressed to the divine. Instead, my point is to say that prayer speech itself, as speech directed toward God, is a powerful medium for framing and conveying information in a way that undergirds it with a different kind of social authority, since such speech explicitly invokes and involves the divine. On this point, see Tanya Luhrmann, "Prayer as a Metacognitive Activity," in *Metacognitive Diversity: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Joëlle Proust and Martin Fortier (New York: Oxford University, 2018), 297–318, in which Luhrmann discusses the special capacities of prayer and prayer language to direct human cognition.

[39] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), 131.

[40] Cf. Clifford Geertz's important observations (quoted earlier in this chapter) about *symbolic* discourse within religious cultures, which he argued have the power to shape worshippers' view of the world "by inducing in the worshipper a certain distinctive set of dispositions (tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronenesses) which lend a chronic character to the flow of his activity and the quality of his experience" (Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 95).

[41] Here I am alluding to Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as a "system of symbols." While no definition of religion has total explanatory power, this definition is useful for the present study's emphasis on religious texts as functional within systems of shared symbols. See Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 91.

Returning to the matter of lyrical address, Jonathan Culler has offered a useful corrective to Frye's earlier description of lyric as "overheard" utterance that is better suited to prayer texts, since it takes better account of how this form of address involves the reader rather than reinforcing a sense of otherness to the text.[42] Instead of describing lyrical address as "overheard," Culler uses the term "triangulated address" to refer to lyric poetry's capacity to "address to the reader by means of address to something or someone else."[43] "After all," Culler says,

> …we encounter lyrics in the form of written texts to which readers give voice. What we "hear" is our own ventriloquizing of ambiguously directed address, though we may, and in some cases certainly do, construe this as overhearing a distinctive poetic voice. . . To invoke or address something that is not the true audience, whether a muse, an urn, Duty, or a beloved, highlights the event of address itself as an act, whose purpose and effects demand critical attention.[44]

Culler's construal of the point draws attention to the role of the reader in giving voice to the text, such that they do not merely "overhear" it, but instead they participate in it, even with the subconscious awareness that it is not ultimately their own voice produced in their reading of the text. The term "triangulated address" then refers to a mode of address that involves speaker, addressee, and audience. In thanksgiving psalms, the speaker is always clearly the same first-person, human speaker throughout,[45] but the explicit addressee of their speech often changes to

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[42] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, esp. 186–243. Note that Culler refers primarily to "readers" because he is interested in acts of *reading* lyric poetry. While psalms would not always have been *read*, the listening audience of a psalm would have experienced its words similarly to that of a "reader." Classical lyric poetry is historically rooted in musical performance, which also presumes an audience of "listeners" rather than readers.

[43] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 186.

[44] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 187.

[45] There are a few exceptional verses in which speech occurs that is not clearly attached to one of the members of the psalm's discourse, but these are rare (e.g., Ps 32:8, cf. the discussion below in Ch. 3). There are no cases in these psalms where a secondary speaking persona enters the discourse such that the psalm's primary speaking persona is no longer the sole driver of its discourse.

the point that it may be described as "oscillating" between God, an implied gathering of the pious, or in some cases, the speaker's own self.

What Culler calls "triangulated address" is ubiquitous across the thanksgiving psalms, such that it may be considered one of this genre's defining features. Indeed, the presence of such mixed forms of address may be what has caused many scholars to struggle when attempting to explain the relationship of thanksgiving psalmody to so-called "wisdom" traditions in the Hebrew Bible.[46] Thanksgiving psalms have an unmistakably didactic tone, but they move easily between the language of prayer, liturgical address, and explicit didacticism, marking them as fundamentally different from more straightforwardly didactic texts, such as Proverbs 1–9.[47] Triangulated address then deserves to be appreciated as one of the features of thanksgiving psalms that would have allowed them to foster the *formation* of pious selfhood in their audiences, because it involves the reader/listener in the voicing of the text, even when they are not its explicit addressee. This point leads to the next feature of thanksgiving psalmody, which is first-person rhetoric that fosters the reader's identification with the psalm's speaker.

4.3. The Rhetorical Involvement of the Reader/Listener's Subjectivity

A second feature of thanksgiving psalms that would have facilitated formation is *first-person* speech, which has a remarkable capacity for directly involving the subjectivities of reading or

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[46] Gunkel perceptively discussed the affinities of thanksgiving psalmody with wisdom literature, but he left the question open as to whether and how thanksgiving psalms are directly related to the wisdom tradition. See Gunkel, *Introduction*, 211–215. See also the discussion of the confluence of sapiential forms and thanksgiving forms in Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 58–60.

[47] Proverbs 1–9's didacticism does not involve prayerful invocation of the divine, rather it maintains consistent address of the reader, who is constructed as a student/learner. This is one of the main markers of this text as unambiguously "didactic" in nature. On this point, see the discussion of didactic poetry in Proverbs in Anne W. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2016), 41–61.

listening individuals in its discourse.[48] More specifically, the use of first-person speech in these

psalms would have been particularly effective for shaping audiences' ideas about pious *selfhood*,

since first-person rhetoric foregrounds the speaker's experience of selfhood and draws audiences'

attention to it.[49]

Before proceeding to consider the specific case of how thanksgiving psalms make use of

first-person speech, some theoretical clarification of how first-person speech generates various

subject positions for audiences will help to set the stage for this discussion. The work of French

linguist Émile Benveniste and the later work of film critic Kaja Silverman provides some useful

terminology for discussing these issues.[50] In his linguistic study of the pronoun "I," Benveniste

observed that this pronoun has no inherent referent, but rather it only takes on a referent through

its use in discourse. So, the pronoun "I" only refers to whoever speaks the "I" in a given

utterance.[51] Benveniste used the term "speaking subject" to refer to the entity who speaks the "I."

In the case of a poem like a thanksgiving psalm, the "speaking subject" of a line such as "I will

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[48] Throughout this dissertation, I have preferred to use the term "selfhood" rather than "subjectivity," mainly because the term "selfhood" is a clearer term for referring broadly to ideas about the "self." Both terms refer to the meaning and experience of one's self, specifically as a culturally constructed phenomenon. While I take these terms to be essentially synonymous, the term "subjectivity" is useful because it has a specific range of connotations that draw attention to particular issues of selfhood. The term "subjectivity" connotes, on the one hand "an active relation to meaning and so a kind of empowerment (to be a subject rather than an object)," and on the other hand, "a subordinate position (to be subject to a particular construction of meaning and possibility and constrained by it)" (Newsom, "Apocalyptic Subjects," 158). Subjectivity then draws attention to the subject *positions* of both the speakers of the psalms and the reading/listening audience members who encounter their words.

[49] Harm W. M. van Grol ("Psalm, Psalter, and Prayer," in Egger-Wenzel and Corley, eds., *Prayer from Tobit to Qumran*, 41–70) states the point this way, "To a large extent, the prayers and songs of praise are deictic. They are addressed to God and to the ritual participants, and fairly often an 'I' figure speaks, or the congregation has the floor ('we'). These texts seek identification and want the 'readers' to be so involved that they become 'users.' It is difficult for those reading to refuse this identification and not to become one with the lamenting, praising or praying speaker. In this manner the texts create praying and praising people" (Van Grol, "Psalm, Psalter, and Prayer," 62).

[50] Carol Newsom's use of Benveniste and Silverman in her study of the Hodayot was instructive for this study. See esp. the discussion in Newsom, "Apocalyptic Subjects," in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics*, 161–65.

[51] Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami, 1971), 226. See Kaja Silverman's discussion of this point in Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1983), 43.

exalt you, Yhwh, for you have drawn me up" (Ps 30:1) would then be the implied authorial

persona who *speaks* the "I" in the psalm's poetry. Later, Kaja Silverman coined the term "spoken

subject" to name the subject position generated by such statements in a text's audiences (i.e., its

readers or listeners) when audience members identify with (or as) the "I" of a text's discourse.[52]

The reading/hearing of a first-person text may then foster the identification of a text's audience

with the "I" of its discourse. In such an event of identification, a reader/listener becomes absent

to themselves and instead agrees to be "spoken" by the text's discourse, such that the

reader/listener becomes a participant in the text's symbolic world. The capacity of a text to foster

such identification between a text's "speaking subject" and the text's audience is directly related

to the power of that text to form its audience's subjectivity.

Thanksgiving psalms are all characterized by first-person speech and a rhetorical focus

on the experiential vantage of their speaking subjects, but there is a range of possible ways in

which such speech may have fostered the involvement of audience subjectivities. Without further

evidence for the settings in which these psalms were used, it may be impossible to delineate with

certainty how audiences would have experienced the first-person voicing of these psalms. Still, it

is useful to outline the range of possibilities in order to demonstrate the various ways in which

these psalms would have engaged the subjectivities of their audiences.

In a public setting of worship, when a liturgical leader recited/read the words, "I will

exalt you, Yhwh, for you have drawn me up" (Ps 30:1), there are (at least) two ways in which

listeners may have related to this "I." On the one hand, listeners may have identified *with* the "I"

of the psalm, meaning that they would have related to the words of the psalm as the words of a

pious persona to whom they could relate. On the other hand, listeners may have identified *as* the

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[52] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 47.

"I" of the psalm, becoming more absent to themselves and adopting its words as their *own*. One may compare the way that a modern singer of the hymn "Amazing Grace" has both options for identification when singing the line "I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see." One may experience these words as the words of another (i.e., the lyricist), or they may choose to vocalize them as their *own*, becoming absent to themselves and taking on the persona of the hymn's lyrics. More private settings of *reading*, in which scribes personally vocalized the words of psalms for memorization, probably would have fostered a more intense identification of the *reader* with its speaking subject, though this would have been the less common way of experiencing these psalms.

While all thanksgiving psalms are characterized by continuous first-person rhetoric, there seems to be diversity in the degrees to which different thanksgiving psalms mean to encourage identification between their readers/listeners and their speaking subject (the psalm's "I"). Some thanksgiving psalms (e.g., Psalm 30) develop their speaking subject in very generalized/typified ways, allowing for an extremely broad spectrum of readers/listeners to identify with the persona presented there. Other psalms, such as Psalm 34, seem to emphasize their speaker's social location as one who has authority to teach. While audiences may have been able to identify with the general experiences of such a speaking subject, the presentation of the speaker as one who has authority to teach may have encouraged audiences to identify more readily with the *addressee* of that psalm's didactic rhetoric (i.e., the "you" of, e.g., Ps 34:12–15). Still other thanksgiving psalms, such as Psalm 73, seem much more interested in fostering a strong identification between audience and speaking subject, as they make frequent use not only of first-person pronouns but also of self-referential discourse (e.g., Ps 73:13–17). So, while thanksgiving psalms are characterized by first-person speech, there is some diversity in the

degrees to which different psalms encourage their audiences' identification with their speaking subjects.

One other matter complicates the question of how audiences would have related to the words of thanksgiving psalms, namely that thanksgiving psalms often include second-person address of the pious community (e.g., Ps 30:5–6; 32:1–2, 9–11; 34:1–23; 41:2–4; 66:1–9, 16–20; 118:1–18). For example, in Ps 30:4, the speaker addresses the community, "Sing praises to Yhwh, O you his faithful ones." In a temple or synagogue gathering, listeners may easily have identified *as* the second-person addressee ("you") of this verse. However, this does not preclude audiences' ability also to identify with the psalm's speaker, or to adopt the speaker's words as their own, because all the *human* members of a thanksgiving psalm's discourse (i.e., both the speaking "I" and the listening "you" of the gathered pious) are *most fundamentally* constructed as members of a discourse that is ultimately oriented to the divine. In other words, in a thanksgiving psalm, both the speaker and the human listeners are all constituted by their *shared* subject position before God as worshippers, allowing for audiences to identify with *both* the speaker's "I" and any second-person address of the audience as "you." This leads to this section's final point, that one of the most powerful rhetorical qualities of thanksgiving psalms is that they are essentially framed as *prayer*.

While the main argument of this dissertation is that thanksgiving psalms *formed* their audiences, it is important to understand that these psalms are not primarily framed as didactic or educational poetry, even when they foreground didactic rhetoric.[53] Instead, their discourse is framed primarily as *prayer*, i.e., speech that invokes the divine as its ultimate audience. This has

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[53] As in, e.g., Psalms 32, 34, and 41, which are the case studies discussed in Ch. 4, "Didacticism in Thanksgiving Psalms."

critical implications for how these psalms construct the relationship between their speaking

subjects (i.e., the speaking "I" of their poetry) and their spoken subjects (i.e., the listeners/readers

who agree to be "spoken" by their discourse). As prayer discourse, these psalms construct their

audience as *fellow* worshippers with their speaking subjects, oriented *with* the psalm's speaker

toward God. While a thanksgiving psalm may engage in other kinds of discourse addressed to

human listeners, the fundamental orientation of the text is always toward the divine, such that the

act of listening/reading becomes an act of worship or prayer for the text's audience.

Comparison with a more explicitly didactic text like Proverbs 1–9 may help to clarify this

point. Proverbs 1–9 clearly seeks to *form* its reader according to its ideas about piety, but unlike a

thanksgiving psalm, it frames the relationship between the text's implied author and its reader as

that between a teacher and a learner.[54] The main rhetorical event in Proverbs 1–9 is then the

instruction of the text's audience. By contrast, in a thanksgiving psalm, the relationship between

the text's implied author (i.e., the speaking subject) and its audience is that between *fellow*

worshippers of God, such that the main rhetorical event in a thanksgiving psalm is not

instruction, but worship. The speaker of the psalm is then figured not as the reader's teacher *per*

se, but as a kind of liturgical leader in a "spiritual exercise" in which both leader and listener are

oriented to the divine.[55]

The shared orientation between speaker and audience in thanksgiving psalms then

involves the subjectivities of the text's audience in a way that makes them particularly open to

formation. Scholars have long observed the power of prayer and liturgical performance to form

the subjectivities of devotees, and some have argued that prayer language encourages modes of

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[54] Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs*, 42.

[55] The term "spiritual exercise" comes from the work of Pierre Hadot. See note 26 above.

cognition that are not otherwise easily achieved.[56] Further, prayer discourse not only shapes the reader's subjectivity in relation to God, but it also fosters a sense of shared identity with past and present communities of the pious.[57] As literary theorist Jahan Ramazani observes, prayer language is characterized not so much by self-reflexivity, but by "self-forgetfulness," in that prayer draws the reader into a fictive persona that is not their own yet which they still recognize by virtue of its orientation to shared symbols (in the case of thanksgiving psalms, the god Yhwh and traditions about him).[58] As poetry that frames didactic rhetoric within the overarching discourse of prayer and praise, thanksgiving psalms are then particularly powerful instruments for involving the subjectivities of their audiences and thereby contributing to the formation of the self.

4.4. Self-Presentations of Affliction and Resolution

Since the earliest form-critical accounts of thanksgiving psalms, scholars continue to agree that the genre is marked by its inclusion of retrospective presentations of the speaker's experience of affliction and resolution, what Gunkel called "the narrative of the fate of the one offering thanks."[59] These "narratives" are always focused on whatever significant *change* the speaker has experienced, and as Gunkel observed, they proceed according to a predictable pattern of three general events: the speaker's affliction, the speaker's action in response to their affliction, and

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[56] Luhrmann, "Prayer as a Metacognitive Activity," 297–318.

[57] Cf. Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together." Of course, as will be discussed in Ch. 3, several thanksgiving psalms (Psalms 32, 34, and 41) foreground didacticism to such an extent that the speaker *is* figured, to some extent, as a teacher. Still, even these psalms are framed by direct second-person address of Yhwh, such that they are still a very different kind of "didactic poetry" than, e.g., a text like Proverbs 1–9.

[58] Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others*, 135.

[59] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 201.

the resolution of the speaker's affliction.[60] The typical nature of these "narratives" raises an important question that must be dealt with before proceeding: in what sense should these sections of thanksgiving psalms be understood as "narrative"? Gunkel's initial use of the term "narrative" has been influential for later interpreters of these psalms.[61] Before proceeding, it is important to clarify the degree to which this term is appropriate for what these psalms contain.

As the title of this section indicates, this study opts to refer to this element of thanksgiving psalmody as "self-presentations" rather than "narratives," because while there are important narrative dimensions to this element of thanksgiving psalmody, there are several reasons why it is prudent not to treat them *mainly* as narrative texts. The discussion of these reasons will also serve to introduce the reader to some of the basic features of these "self-presentations" in thanksgiving psalms.

First, while some psalms include lengthy presentations of the experiences of their speaking subjects (e.g., Ps 30:6–12; Ps 118:5–18), others limit their retelling to only a few short verses at most. So, for example, the "narrative" in Psalm 138 is only one verse in length ("On the day I called, you answered me, you increased the strength of my soul," Ps 138:3), and is highly formulaic in nature. Similarly, the speaker's "narrative" in Psalm 66 is only a few lines in length (Ps 66:17–19). By contrast, other psalms present their speaker's past experience at great length, sometimes including more details (e.g., which words the speaker prayed, Ps 30:10–11; how

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[60] These are my own formulation of the three "parts" of these "narratives," since Gunkel's schema privileges what he and other form critics considered to be more typical exemplars of the genre (e.g., Psalm 30). Gunkel described the three parts as follows: "the report of the poet's distress, his summons to YHWH, and his deliverance" (Gunkel, *Introduction*, 202). My formulation allows for the fact that in some psalms, the speaker's action in response to their affliction is not a prayer for help, but some other action (i.e., entering God's sanctuary in Psalm 73:17).

[61] Gunkel's use of the term "narrative" is cited, e.g., in the work of Joshua T. James, whose study approaches the "narratives" in thanksgiving psalms through the lens of contemporary Christian narrative ethics (James, *The Storied Ethics*, 1–8). James' use of the term "testimony" draws on the work of John Goldingay, who uses the term to refer to thanksgiving psalms (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 55–56).

many enemies the speaker faced, Ps 118:5–18). To label this element of thanksgiving psalmody a "narrative" obscures the fact that thanksgiving psalms develop this element of their poetry to significantly different degrees, some more and some less.

Second, while there are important diversities across self-presentations in thanksgiving psalms, they are *highly typified and formulaic*, suggesting that they are more concerned with presenting the speaker's self in terms of a conventional template of religious experience than presenting autobiographical "stories" of unique individuals. [62] While the self-presentations often emphasize different ideas or experiences, they can all easily be mapped onto a common template, which Gunkel recognized (affliction, action taken in response, and resolution). They are characterized by terse language, parallelism, and stock terminology, and they do not develop any narrative "characters" other than the persona of their speaking subject. This study's preferred term, "self-presentation," then highlights the way these parts of thanksgiving psalms are mainly concerned with presenting the speaker's self in various states, or at various points in time. The result is a text that is less like "narrative" and more like a constellation of successive images of the speaker's experience that serve a greater rhetorical purpose, usually stated at the beginning of the psalm.

Third, and by way of expanding upon the previous point, the self-presentations in thanksgiving psalms are always rhetorically framed as *expansions* upon the psalm's main rhetorical claims, such that the audience experiences them not as an unfolding narrative, but as an explanation of the speaker's joyful state in the psalm's implied present. For example, Psalm

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[62] The term "template" comes from Clifford Geertz's discussion of religious discourse having the power to shape the experiences of worshippers. See Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 92–93. The term "stories" refers to Joshua T. James' work on this subject in James, *The Storied Ethics*. Cf. my discussion of James' work in Ch. 1, Section 2.1.5, "Two Recent Approaches: Judith Gärtner and Joshua T. James."

30 begins with the speaker praising God for "drawing me up" and "not letting my foes rejoice over me" (Ps 30:1). The opening line then contains the main points that the later "narrative" will explicate: the speaker was afflicted, they cried out to God, and God delivered them.

To clarify this third point, an analogy with filmic montage, drawn from the world of film theory, may be helpful here. When attempting to convey information about a character's past that provides background for a character's *current* changed state, filmmakers will utilize *montage* to convey "flashback" material from a character's life without actually developing a full-blown narrative sub-plot.[63] Such a montage presents different temporalities from the character's life in rapid succession, beginning and ending with the character's present state. Further, filmmakers will often use a single, continuous piece of film score throughout such a montage to create the experience of viewing these past temporalities from the vantage of the present moment they seek to explicate.[64] The effect is that the montage is not experienced as a narrative in its own right, but rather as a constellation of images that deepen the viewer's appreciation of the character's *present* state. In psalms of thanksgiving, the tenor established by a psalm's opening (e.g., "I will exalt you, Yhwh, for you have drawn me up," Ps 30:1) is like a piece of film score that continues playing during the speaker's presentation of their past experience. The self-presentation itself is then like a montage of images that adds depth to the audience's understanding of the speaker's present state.

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[63] For a useful overview of editing techniques in film and, more specifically, various montage techniques, see Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (New York: Dover, 1970), 118–138.

[64] An example from a contemporary film is Paolo Sorrentino's use of montage in the final scenes of his 2013 film, *La Grande Bellezza* (Eng. "The Great Beauty"). During this montage, film scorer Lele Marchitelli plays John Tavener's "The Lamb" (sung by the Temple Church Choir of London, England), while we see the main character's present situation juxtaposed with earlier episodes in his life. For a useful discussion of this montage, see this short article at the Princeton Film Society's website, https://princetonfilmsociety.wordpress.com/2017/03/08/the-role-of-montage-in-la-grande-bellezza/.

The previous discussion has demonstrated my reasons for opting not to think of these self-presentations mainly as "narratives," but it is still important to understand that these self-presentations often have an important narrative quality, namely the linear *configuration* of the speaker's past experience. While they are not primarily "narratives," these self-presentations do present a linear sequence of experiences which follow a template, as Gunkel had observed. According to Paul Ricoeur, one of the primary functions of narrative is to "configure" selected events in order to produce a particular *kind* of story.[65] The configuration of events in thanksgiving psalms consistently produces a schema that renders the world according to a particular set of convictions. Most importantly, thanksgiving psalms configure their speaker's experience such that affliction itself is always presented as a *middle* or *transient* state from which the pious may always be delivered. Thanksgiving psalms then utilize the self-presentations of their speakers to highlight important ideas about the agency of pious selves in relation to experiences of affliction and in relation to God's sovereign power.

Having discussed the literary character of these self-presentations, we may now consider how their rhetorical functions within thanksgiving psalms contribute to the formational power of this genre. There are three ways these self-presentations function within psalms of thanksgiving. First, most importantly, they present the audience with exemplary models of pious selfhood amid affliction to learn from and emulate. They then serve as normative portraits of pious selves negotiating experiences of affliction and exercising their agency appropriately. Second, these self-presentations provide an experiential basis for instructions and insights about piety conveyed within these psalms. While some psalms connect the self-presentation more explicitly to

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[65] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 156.

instruction than others (e.g., the didactic psalms discussed in Ch. 4), all thanksgiving psalms use

the self-presentation as the basis for whatever ideas about piety are conveyed within the psalm.

Finally, they serve as "sites for reflection" on specific questions about dynamics of human and

divine agency and right responses to affliction.[66] One of the most diverse aspects of the

thanksgiving genre is the nature of the crisis experienced by speakers and how they choose to

respond to it. This will be discussed at greater length in chapters 3–5, but or now, it is important

to note that the self-presentation seems to have been utilized by composers for exploring

different problems of pious selfhood and agency while still adhering to the "template" common

to all thanksgiving psalms. For these three reasons, self-presentations of affliction and resolution

contribute significantly to the power of this genre of psalmody to form ideas about pious

selfhood in their audiences.

4.5. The Worldview of Thanksgiving: Affliction as Meaningful

The fourth feature of thanksgiving psalmody that contributes to its capacity for the formation of

the pious self is its presentation of the world as an orderly system in which affliction is a

meaningful and even productive experience for the pious. The Soviet literary theorist Pavel

Medvedev emphasized that genres are "means of seeing and conceptualizing reality," such that

the artist "must learn to see reality with the eyes of the genre."[67] Medvedev drew attention to the

way that literary genres establish their own rules and expectations about reality, such that the

reader experiences reality through the lens of that genre's ideological worldview. As normative

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[66] The term "sites for reflection" is drawn from Judith Gärtner, "Vom Tod zum Leben: Das Danklied als Ort theologischer Reflexion," *TLZ* 143 (2018): 1211–1226, in which she argues that thanksgiving psalms provides "sites of theological reflection" for audiences during the Persian period.

[67] Pavel N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1978), 133.

liturgical poetry, thanksgiving psalms convey a world in which the most chaotic of human experiences (i.e., affliction) can be described in hindsight as meaningful and within the power of the deity. Within this worldview, the pious are those who understand that, despite the disorienting nature of affliction, it can be survived, processed, interpreted, and even celebrated as an event of divine intervention in one's life.

To explain this point a different way, thanksgiving psalms have a singular and uncontested view of the world's order and justice. Their speakers do not contest the justice of God in experiences of affliction, and they do not depict the pious as ever being *ultimately* overwhelmed by affliction or failing to appreciate its meaning once delivered. To use Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation, thanksgiving psalms are "monological" texts, which render the world according to a single consciousness or voice, rendering all other possible subjects as objects within the discourse, rather than as having their own valid views of the world.[68] Like Bakhtin's "monologism," the words of a thanksgiving psalm "pretend to be the ultimate word," depicting reality itself as a closed system in which even the worst affliction eventuates in the glorification of God.[69]

One of the ways thanksgiving psalms project this worldview is by modeling a direct relationship between the experience of affliction and the acquisition of insight into the life of piety, the nature of God, or the meaning of affliction. While all thanksgiving psalms model this relationship between experience and insight, they often formulate the relationship in different

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[68] For Bakhtin's most important discussions of this idea, see Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984); and Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), 259–422. For a useful discussion of these ideas, especially as they relate to biblical scholarship, see Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *JR* 76 (1996): 290–306.

[69] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 293.

(though overlapping) ways. So, for example, in Psalm 32, the speaker's affliction is worsened when they fail to respond rightly to it (Ps 32:3–4), but when they choose to respond rightly, their affliction is relieved (Ps 32:5). The speaker's subsequent instruction to the community to do as they have done models an understanding of affliction as educative. In another case, Psalm 73, the speaker's affliction is brought on by an experience of cognitive dissonance between received wisdom and their lived experience of the world. The speaker's affliction is resolved when it eventuates in a new perspective on the matter that originally confused the speaker, modeling affliction as an enlightening or productive experience. The recurring depiction of affliction as inherently generative allows thanksgiving psalms to depict the world as a fundamentally ordered place under God's sovereign power, in which the pious are those who understand that even the most difficult experiences can be appreciated as meaningful.

The ordered worldview of thanksgiving psalms is then appropriate for their function as *normative* liturgy, and this worldview would have made them ideal instruments for the formation of the pious self. Unlike the Book of Job, for example, thanksgiving psalms do not stage a dispute between different perspectives on the matter of affliction. Instead, they insist that affliction can be narrated within the order of God's world, and they model discourse by which the pious might frame their own understanding of such experiences. Even so, these texts should not be understood as theologically simplistic or naïve, but important participants in a larger matrix of religious discourse around pious selfhood and affliction that included other dissenting voices (e.g., the Book of Job). Within this matrix, they represent a foundational, normative approach to understanding experiences of affliction.

5. The Affordances of Thanksgiving:
Doxology, Didacticism, and Exemplarity

Thus far, this chapter has presented the first main argument of this dissertation, namely that psalms of thanksgiving formed their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood and that specific literary features of thanksgiving psalms facilitated their capacity to do so. However, as discussed in the introduction to this study, this dissertation also argues that thanksgiving psalms exhibit a diverse range of rhetorical strategies by which they convey their ideas about pious selfhood, and that these rhetorical strategies have critical implications for which ideas about pious selfhood a specific thanksgiving psalm conveys most prominently. Having considered the genre as a whole, this section then turns to this second component of this study's argument, which concerns what I will refer to as the "affordances" of thanksgiving psalmody.

This study's use of the concept of "affordances" draws on Caroline Levine's theoretical work on the topic of *form*.[70] For Levine, whose philosophical interests are much broader than the present study, the term "form" refers broadly to any "arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping," such that her discussion includes both material and non-material forms.[71] When discussing literary texts, Levine then uses the term "genre" to denote a group of texts that have a similar form, thereby allowing them to have similar cues for their reception in a social context. So, for Levine, form is important to genre, but the term "genre" refers to the *social* functions of texts in a way that "form" does not.[72]

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[70] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2015).

[71] Levine, *Forms*, 3. This is similar to this study's use of the term "form" to denote a constellation of literary elements. See the discussion in the introduction.

[72] Levine, *Forms*, 13.

Levine's most important insight for the present study is that any given form (i.e., an arrangement of elements) has a specific range of functional *affordances*.[73] Levine uses the example of a fork (among several others) to explain her point. A fork is made of steel, a material which has its own range of functional affordances, "strength, smoothness, hardness, and durability," making it a good material for a range of actions and uses.[74] One may construct many forms out of steel, but a fork is a specific "form" (i.e., an arrangement of elements) which then *affords* a range of specific functions. A fork affords "stabbing and scooping," while a doorknob's arrangement of the same material affords "not only hardness and durability, but also turning, pushing, and pulling."[75]

Levine's insights about how forms have affordances are highly useful for the present study and for discussions of psalmic genres more generally. The present study is concerned with a genre of psalmody, a group of psalms that share a similar literary form (i.e., arrangement and ordering of literary elements). The literary form of thanksgiving psalmody, discussed at length in the previous section, can then be said to *afford* a range of possible functions. While other forms of psalmody (e.g., the historical psalm) may arrange the "material" of symbolic discourse to afford specific functions (e.g., commemoration and education in collective memory), thanksgiving psalms are arranged to afford their own range of functions concerned with the formation of ideas about pious selfhood.

Based on analysis of biblical thanksgiving psalms and drawing on the profile of features presented in the previous section, this study argues that the literary form shared by thanksgiving

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[73] Levine, *Forms*, 6–7.

[74] Levine, *Forms*, 6.

[75] Levine, *Forms*, 6.

psalms affords three main functions, or more specifically, *rhetorical strategies* of presentation: doxology, didacticism, and exemplarity. First, by framing their discourse primarily as praise, thanksgiving psalms afford "doxology" (i.e., a thanksgiving psalm *praises* or *glorifies* God). Second, by drawing statements of insight and instruction out of the speaker's presentation of experience, thanksgiving psalms afford "didacticism" (i.e., a thanksgiving psalm *instructs* its audience). Third, by ordering their discourse around the presentation of an exemplary pious persona, thanksgiving psalms afford "exemplarity" (i.e., a thanksgiving psalm *exemplifies* pious selfhood in the persona of its poetic speaker). A thanksgiving psalm may theoretically afford other functions too, but these are the functions exhibited most prominently in the thanksgiving psalms contained in the biblical Psalter.

Levine's theory of affordances therefore serves as a useful tool for negotiating questions about diversity within genres of psalmody. Scholars have often engaged in heated debates about how to classify a given psalm, whether it belongs to one genre or another, or how exactly it seems to exhibit features of multiple genres.[76] In the case of thanksgiving psalms, Levine's theory of affordances suggests that, while all thanksgiving psalms exhibit all three of thanksgiving's affordances, some thanksgiving psalms may "flex" or foreground one affordance such that others are backgrounded or diminished in prominence. A fork may afford both "stabbing" and "scooping," but some forks are arranged such that they are much more useful for stabbing than for scooping, or vice versa. Similarly, while a thanksgiving psalm may afford doxology, didacticism, and exemplarity, some thanksgiving psalms seem to accentuate one of

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[76] Cf., e.g., the disagreements over the genres of Psalms 32, 34, and 41, each discussed in the introductions to those psalms in Ch. 4. In the cases of these psalms, scholars argue over whether or not they can truly be considered "thanksgiving" since they also exhibit significant amounts of didactic rhetoric and sapiential language and imagery. Cf., e.g., Bernd Willmes' discussion of the genre of Psalm 32 in Willmes, *Freude über die Vergebung der Sünden: Synchrone und diachrone Analyse von Psalm 32*, FH 28 (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1996), 28.

these affordances over the others (e.g., Psalm 30 foregrounds doxology, while Psalm 34 foregrounds didacticism). Levine's theory of affordances then empowers the interpreter to move away from strict classificatory approaches to diversity within a genre and instead appreciate how diversity may reflect the different degrees to which a genre's affordances are being "flexed" in different exemplars.

To elucidate this argument, the remaining chapters of this dissertation are organized according to the affordances (i.e., rhetorical strategies) most prominently exhibited by specific thanksgiving psalms: doxology (Ch. 3), didacticism (Ch. 4), and exemplarity (Ch. 5). Each chapter will first introduce the affordance in question by discussing (1) its presence in thanksgiving psalms more generally, and (2) how it manifests in psalms in which it is foregrounded. Each chapter will then present two or three case studies of thanksgiving psalms that foreground that particular affordance. Finally, each chapter will discuss how the affordance in question affects the presentation of ideas about pious selfhood, clarifying the ways different kinds of thanksgiving psalms foreground different ideas about pious selfhood.

While Chapters 3–5 will discuss these affordances in greater detail, some brief introduction to them here will serve as useful orientation for the reader before proceeding further. Here I list the three affordances of thanksgiving as I have construed them, followed by brief description of the nature of that affordance:

Doxology (Ch. 3). Thanksgiving psalms that foreground *doxology* include Psalms 30, 66, and 118. The word "doxology" names the preponderance of explicit praise of God in these psalms (i.e., their main rhetorical purpose is the praise of Yhwh). By emphasizing doxology in their rhetoric, these psalms portray the pious self as utterly dependent on God's sovereign agency. These psalms then emphasize *God* as the primary agent in effecting the speaker's

transformation, suggesting that the survival of affliction is primarily a matter of endurance and dependence on God. While the experience of affliction may be meaningful, it mainly serves to make the speaker aware of their dependency on God, eventuating in an event of deliverance that brings glory to God.

Didacticism (Ch. 4). Thanksgiving psalms that foreground *didacticism* include Psalms 32, 34, and 41. As the name of this affordance implies, these psalms figure the relationship between the psalm's speaker and its audience primarily as that between a teacher (or liturgical leader) and a learner. In contrast to doxological thanksgiving, the foregrounding of didacticism in these psalms rhetorically portrays the pious self as having agency amid affliction, though divine agency is still sovereign. These psalms emphasize how the pious ought to rightly respond to affliction, and in doing so, they depict the pious as *agents* in relation to their afflictions. While doxological psalms draw attention to divine sovereignty in order to emphasize the *dependency* of the pious on God, these didactic psalms assume divine sovereignty as the underlying reality that makes the actions of the pious in response to their afflictions meaningful and effective.

Exemplarity (Ch. 5). Thanksgiving psalms that foreground *exemplarity* include Psalms 73 and 116. The term "exemplarity" here refers to the phenomenon a poetic or literary persona serving as an "exemplary" figure for readers.[77] While these psalms also afford doxology and didacticism, they exhibit literary features—e.g., an emphasis on first-person speech and self-referential discourse—that suggests a relatively higher capacity for fostering the reader's identification with their speakers, or at least encouraging self-reflexivity in their readers. All

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[77] The concept of "exemplarity" previewed here draws on the work of several scholars who have highlighted the importance of exemplarity in Second Temple Jewish literature, esp. Hindy Najman (e.g., Najman, "The Quest for Perfection in Ancient Judaism," in *Past Renewals: Interpretive Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity*, JSJSup 53 [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 219–34). In Chapter 5, I will situate this study's discussion of "exemplarity" in relation to this broader scholarly discourse.

thanksgiving psalms present their speakers as exemplary personas, but these psalms seem to foreground this function of thanksgiving psalmody through their vivid presentations of the internal lives of their speakers and their focus on crises that are mainly cognitive or mental in nature. The exemplary speakers of these psalms model a dependence on God for clarity of mind, or, in the case of Psalm 116, assistance with the lack of such clarity. The pious self is then constructed as one who trusts their mental capacities to God amid existential crises.

Chapter 3. Doxology in Thanksgiving Psalms

1. Introduction

This chapter begins with the argument that some thanksgiving psalms are characterized primarily by the rhetoric of *doxology*. For earlier form critics, the doxological rhetoric in thanksgiving psalms suggested only their "vertical" functions in the Israelite cult, i.e., the praise of God. However, this chapter argues that doxological rhetoric has important "horizontal" functions as well, especially when it is the main rhetorical strategy of a psalm's presentation of its speaker. So, rather than understanding the doxological rhetoric of these psalms as a mere byproduct of their cultic functions, this chapter approaches doxological rhetoric as a deliberate strategy for presenting ideas about pious selfhood and affliction, arguing that doxological rhetoric draws attention to specific aspects of pious selfhood.

When considered alongside other thanksgiving psalms in this study, it becomes clear that doxology in thanksgiving psalms would have had particular formational effects for audiences. Doxological rhetoric emphasizes *divine* action, often portraying the afflicted pious as utterly dependent on that action, rather than as a powerful actor amid their own afflictions. In these psalms, the pious are portrayed as acknowledging divine sovereignty during and at the resolution of their afflictions. These psalms then would have been particularly powerful for forming in audiences a sense of the utter dependence of the pious on God's sovereign agency.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. The introduction begins by providing historical and cultural context for the importance of doxological psalmody during the Second Temple period. Then, a second introductory section clarifies the main argument of this chapter concerning the doxological character of the psalms it considers. It also outlines how the doxological rhetoric of these psalms shapes their specific ideas about pious selfhood. After the introduction, three case

studies (Psalms 30, 66, and 118) serve to demonstrate the arguments of this chapter, and a conclusion serves to relate its findings to the broader history of ideas about piety in the Second Temple period.

1.1. Contexts for Doxological Psalmody in the Early Second Temple Period

Since the time of Gunkel, scholars have significantly expanded our understanding of the cultural importance of psalmody during the Second Temple period, pushing beyond the confines of earlier "cultic" hypotheses and asking broader questions about how psalms served "the rhetorical needs of a postexilic community."[1] Psalms exhibiting highly doxological rhetoric, in particular, have often been reduced to their possible cultic functions (i.e., how they were used in hypothetical temple rituals), while questions about how doxological rhetoric would have met the needs of postexilic communities has received less attention. To redress this gap, scholars have begun to discuss the importance of doxological psalmody for the formation of various aspects of identity during this period, including the construction of the self.[2]

In the historical context of Judea under the Persian Empire, there are several reasons why doxological psalmody would have been a valued cultural instrument of formation for communities and individuals. Scholarly reconstructions of Judean culture during the Persian period have emphasized its social complexity and religious diversity, in particular emphasizing the reality of "ongoing Judean arguments about identity, ethnicity, and nationality" among

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[1] Jon L. Berquist, "Psalms, Postcolonialism and the Construction of the Self," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist, SemeiaSt 50 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 195–202 (197). Cf. also Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 279–304; Jonathan Magonet, "On Reading Psalms as Liturgy: Psalms 96–99," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, AIL 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 161–177.

[2] See esp. Berquist, "Psalms, Postcolonialism and the Construction of the Self"; Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together." Cf. also the collected essays in Gillmayr-Bucher and Häusl, eds., *Prayers and the Construction of Israelite Identity*.

Yahwistic communities in Judea and elsewhere.[3] In this cultural environment, doxological

psalms that foreground overt theological discourse concerning Yhwh's activity in the world and

his relationship to various groups (e.g., *ḥasidim*, cf. Ps 30:5; 132:9; 149:1) would have been

valued for their ability to enculturate and educate their Judean audiences, especially in matters of

piety.[4] Relatedly, the experience of exile and the continued reality of colonized life under

imperial rule would have pressured Judean communities to wrestle with questions about Yhwh's

sovereignty in the world, not only on the level of national/international politics, but also in the

realm of local and personal piety.[5] Doxological psalmody often foregrounds matters of divine

sovereignty (at all levels of experience), and as will be argued in this chapter, the rhetoric of

doxology is especially effective for exploring questions about Yhwh's involvement in the

afflictions of the pious, a matter that was undoubtedly relevant to Judean life in the wake of exile

and later under Persian rule. For these reasons, it is likely that doxological psalmody was used

frequently in communal worship contexts during the postexilic period, whether in the Jerusalem

Temple or in local worship settings (i.e., synagogues).[6]

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[3] Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013), 167. For broader treatments of this topic, see esp. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming, ed. *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006); Louis Jonker, ed., *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in the Hebrew Bible and Related Texts*, FAT 2/53 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Dalit Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th–5th Centuries BCE)*, LHBOTS 543 (New York: T&T Clark, 2013); Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana V. Edelman, ed., *Imagining the Other and Constructing Israelite Identity in the Early Second Temple Period*, LHBOTS 456 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). On the matter of religious pluralism in Judea during this period, cf. also Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 172.

[4] As argued in Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together."

[5] See esp. the discussion of Berquist, "Psalms, Postcolonialism and the Construction of the Self," 195–202. For discussion about how the realms of family and personal piety wrestled with concerns about Yhwh's sovereignty under Persian imperial rule, see Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 2:508–22.

[6] See Ch. 2 for discussion of the possible settings of use for thanksgiving psalms. For arguments about the use of psalmody in synagogues during this period, see esp. Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms," 338–49; cf. also Gerstenberger, "The Psalms: Genres, Life Situations, and Theologies," 81–92.

These historical reasons that doxological psalmody would have been important to Judean religious communities are corroborated by its prominence in both the Hebrew Bible and later Second Temple literature. In fact, Mika Pajunen has argued that, while doxological psalmody was certainly important for earlier Israelite religion, it seems only to have grown in importance throughout the Second Temple period, eventually constituting the "core of the Second Temple liturgy."[7] Most psalms and prayers inserted into prose narratives during this period are doxological (e.g., Jon 2; 1 Sam 1–2; Isa 38) suggests a general preference for doxological psalmody. Further, the fourth and fifth books of the MT Psalter, which scholars generally agree were compiled in the postexilic period, are comprised almost entirely of doxological psalmody.[8] Both of these points suggest a general preference for the use of doxological psalmody during the Persian period. Finally, as observed by Pajunen, the psalms used at Qumran are nearly all doxological in nature, suggesting the Yahad's preference for praise-focused liturgy.[9]

The importance of doxological psalmody during the Second Temple period suggests that the psalms discussed in this chapter would likely have been used by Judean religious communities for purposes of worship and formation. The next section will narrow this discussion to consider how doxological rhetoric functions in thanksgiving psalms more specifically, and how thanksgiving psalms that foreground such rhetoric would have contributed to the formation of the pious self during the Second Temple period.

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[7] Pajunen, "The Praise of God and His Name."

[8] Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 283. The present shape of the MT Psalter likely reflects the formation of books 4 and 5 after the Babylonian exile. At the macro-level, the placement of Psalm 89 at the end of book 3 suggests this schema of dating, since that psalm reflects the end of the Davidic dynasty in the sixth century BCE (cf. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 406). Of course, this does not mean that psalms contained in books 4 and 5 were necessarily composed in the post-exilic period.

[9] Pajunen, "Influence of Societal Changes," 164–84 (171).

1.2. Doxology in Thanksgiving Psalms: The Afflictions of the Pious as God-Glorifying

In terms of their shared literary form, thanksgiving psalms are essentially doxological, even when they feature other rhetorical strategies (e.g., didacticism). Early form critics observed that thanksgiving psalms are fundamentally characterized by the language of praise, and that their *raison d'être* always appears to be an occasion of deliverance for which the speaker now praises God.[10] For this reason, early form critics rightly explained the formal features of thanksgiving as facilitating their doxological function. First, the openings (and sometimes closings) of thanksgiving psalms praise God by way of summarizing the speaker's experience of deliverance.[11] Second, thanksgiving psalms utilize self-presentations of the speaker's experience of affliction and deliverance (e.g.,) to expand upon these introductions and "narrate" their declarations about God's action in their lives. While this study focuses on the formational capacities of such self-presentations, earlier form critics understood them primarily as serving to publicly praise God before the gathered pious.[12] Finally, when thanksgiving psalms include insights or instructions directed at a gathering of the pious, they often frame these insights doxologically (e.g., Ps 30:5, "Indeed, [Yhwh's] anger is for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime"), such that they contribute to the psalm's overall doxological purpose.[13]

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[10] Cf. Gunkel, *Introduction*, 199–207; See also Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, who understood thanksgiving psalmody as one type of praise in ancient Israel. Westermann foregrounded the *occasional* nature of praise in thanksgiving psalms when he proposed renaming the genre "declarative praise" (i.e., psalms that declare God's action in a specific occasion of deliverance).

[11] E.g., Ps 30:2–4, 12–13; 32:1–2, 11; 34:2–4; 41:2–4, 12–13; 66:1–4, 20; 116:1; 118:1–4, 28–29. Cf. Gunkel, *Introduction*, 201. However, while earlier form critics limited this formal element to overt statements of praise (usually marked by the use of specific verbs for praise; cf. Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formsgeschichte*), my approach broadens this formal component to include forms that blend didacticism with doxology, as in the opening of Psalm 32:1 ("Happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven, the one whose sin is covered"). This point will be discussed further in the introduction to Ch. 4, which deals with didacticism in thanksgiving psalms.

[12] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 201–205.

[13] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 205.

While the literary form of thanksgiving suggests its general doxological character, this chapter is interested specifically in how some thanksgiving psalms *foreground* doxology as their main rhetorical strategy. In the psalms of the present chapter, doxology is not simply the general category to which these psalms belong (i.e., praise), but rather doxological rhetoric shapes nearly every aspect of these psalms. To be clear, "doxological rhetoric" here refers to rhetoric that focuses on *praising God*, either directly, via second-person address (e.g., "I exalt you, O Yhwh," Ps 30:2) or indirectly, via third-person discourse about God (e.g., "He turned the sea to dry land," Ps 66:6). Doxological rhetoric therefore frames reality as primarily a consequence of God's action (or inaction) rather than the actions (or inactions) of other beings. This chapter then argues that Psalms 30, 66, and 118 make doxology their primary rhetorical strategy of presentation, and that this has implications for the specific ideas about pious selfhood that these psalms convey. By its nature, doxological rhetoric frames reality in terms of divine agency, such that the pious self is framed primarily as *dependent* on God's action.

While there are some significant differences among these psalms, their shared emphasis on doxological rhetoric results in the foregrounding of several specific ideas about pious selfhood:

1. First, these psalms emphasize an essential *contrast* between divine and human agency. In these psalms, the speaking subjects are presented as lacking whatever agency is required to resolve their affliction, and instead are depicted as surviving their affliction purely as a result of God's power to deliver them.

2. Second, following from the first point, the doxological rhetoric of these psalms foregrounds the idea of God's *sovereignty* at all times, both during affliction and when it is resolved. These psalms then seem to share a theological understanding of God as an

agent of *both* affliction and restoration.[14] However, they do not exhibit explicit interest in questions about whether God afflicts based on past wrongdoing.[15] Rather, these psalms betray little interest in the *reasons* for affliction. Instead, they focus on depicting affliction as an ultimately God-glorifying event. The focus is then not on whether the speaker has brought about their own affliction. Rather, the focus of these psalms is on God's sovereign power both to afflict and to deliver from affliction.

3. Finally, since the retributive function of affliction is not emphasized in these psalms, and since God is depicted as sovereign during both affliction and its resolution, these psalms tend to conceptualize the experience of affliction in the lives of the pious as an experience of "testing" or "refining."[16] The undergoing and survival of these ordeals of affliction are therefore presented as events of God's glorification, by which the pious are humbled in relation to God and God is glorified as sovereign in all things.

The following section will then present case studies of Psalms 30, 66, and 118 in order to demonstrate how these psalms present the ideas just discussed. My purpose here is not to show how these three psalms are all the same—they are not. Each of the following three psalms have qualities that set them apart significantly from the others. Rather, the following case studies will

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[14] Similar ideas are expressed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, of course. Cf., e.g., the depiction of God's relationship to creation in Psalm 104:24–27.

[15] As in, e.g., penitential prayers of the postexilic period. On this topic, see the discussion in Samuel E. Balentine, "I Was Ready to Be Sought Out By Those Who Did Not Ask," in Boda, Falk, and Werline, eds., *Seeking the Favor of God: Vol. 1*, 1–20.

[16] In some cases, these psalms employ verbs that explicitly denote these ideas. Cf. the use of בחן ("to test, try"; Ps 66:10a), צרף ("to refine"; Ps 66:10b), and יסר (Piel, "to discipline"; Ps 118:18). However, while these verbs make these ideas explicit, the conceptualization of affliction as a "test" is not limited to these instances, as will be discussed below. Cf. John Barton's discussion of "suffering as educative" (John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Oxford University, 2014], 223–24), in which suffering is "oriented less to the past than to the future—in other words, as a warning rather than as a punishment" (223). Affliction is not always depicted as a "warning" in these psalms (although Psalm 30 may come close in this regard, as will be discussed below), but it does seem more oriented to what it *produces* in the afflicted than what it punishes or responds to.

focus on demonstrating how the rhetoric of doxology in these psalms generates an emphasis on the ideas about pious selfhood and affliction just described.

2. Case Studies: Psalms 30, 66, and 118

2.1. Psalm 30

2.1.1. Psalm 30: Introduction

Psalm 30 has often been used as an example of what earlier form critics considered a "typical" psalm of thanksgiving due to its relatively clear organization of formal elements.[17] Structurally, the psalm consists of a doxological opening (vv. 2–4), a call to praise including insights for the education of the pious (vv. 5–6), and the retrospective self-presentation of the speaker's experience of affliction and resolution (vv. 7–13).[18] Scholars are unable to propose a precise range for the date of Psalm 30.[19] The superscription of the psalm in the MT Psalter suggests that it may have been used at the dedication of the Temple in 164 BCE (cf. 1 Macc 4:52; 2 Macc 10), or at least that it was to be read in association with this event.[20] The psalm's inclusion in the first

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[17] Cf., e.g., John Goldingay's description of Psalm 30 as a "textbook example of a thanksgiving or testimony psalm" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 424). Cf. also Bernd Janowski's discussion of Psalm 30 in Bernd Janowski, *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*, trans. Armin Siedlecki (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 251–65.

[18] The structure presented here is widely agreed upon by Psalms scholars. For lengthier discussions of Psalm 30's structure and organization, cf. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC 19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 252. Cf. also Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 133.

[19] Scholars agree that the psalm's superscription most likely refers to the re-dedication of the Jerusalem temple in 164 BCE under Judas Maccabeus, but scholars also note the possibility that the superscription could refer to the dedication of the second temple after the exile, around 515 BCE (cf. Ezra 6) (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 133; Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 289). The superscription thus suggests a *terminus ad quem* of 165 BCE for Psalm 30, though it is clearly much older than this if it was selected for use at this occasion. Otherwise, there is little evidence with which to date Psalm 30, and scholars largely refrain from attempting to do so.

[20] Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 252. Cf. James L. Mays, *Psalms*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 140; Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, AOTC (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 157. Mays notes the possibility that the psalm may have been used earlier at the dedication of the second temple in Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 6:16–18; Neh 12:27–43; Mays, *Psalms*, 140). Craigie notes the Mishnah's report that the psalm was also used at the presentation of the first fruits (*Bikkurim* 3.4; cf. Deut 26:1–11).

Davidic Psalter, however, suggests that it was composed by the postexilic period.[21]

Psalm 30 is a psalm of overt praise offered by a speaker whose affliction is depicted as having "humbled" their previous sense of self-assured independence. By presenting the speaker's affliction and its resolution as taking place according to God's will, the psalm upholds the notion of God's sovereignty in the afflictions of the pious. By depicting the speaker's affliction as having an educative dimension, the psalm depicts affliction as an experience that tests or refines the pious, making them wiser and/or correcting the orientation of their piety. On the whole, the psalm depicts the speaker's affliction as an event that ultimately glorifies God by forcing the speaker's appreciation of their dependency on God, eventuating in the speaker's commitment to praise God forever.

2.1.2. Psalm 30: Translation

1	*a psalm. a song for dedication of the temple. of David.[a]*
2	I will exalt you, Yhwh, for you have drawn me up,[b]
	and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.
3	Yhwh, my God
	I cried out to you, and you healed me.
4	Yhwh, you brought up my life from Sheol,
	you kept me alive from going down to the pit.
5	Make music to Yhwh, his faithful ones,
	and give thanks to his holy name,[c]
6	Indeed, his anger is for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime,[d]
	Weeping stays for the evening,
	but in the morning, a shout of joy!
7	And I, I said in my prosperity, "I will never be shaken."
8	Yhwh, in your favor, you had established me as a strong mountain.[e]
	You hid your face,
	I was terrified.
9	To you, Yhwh, I called

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[21] Cf. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen, Psalm 1–50*, NEchtB 29 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993), 14–16.

> To^f my Lord^g I made my prayer for grace.
>
> 10   What is the profit in my blood?
>   In my going down to the abyss?
>   Will the dust praise you?
>   Will it tell of your faithfulness?
> 11   Listen, Yhwh, and be gracious to me,
>   Yhwh, be a helper to me.
>
> 12   You turned my mourning to dancing for me,
>   You undid my sackcloth and girded me with joy,
> 13   So that my heart will make music for you,
>   and not be silent,
>   Yhwh my God, I will praise you forever.

Notes to Translation of Psalm 30

^a LXX has the superscription Εἰς τὸ τέλος ("for the end") for למנצח ("for the leader").

^b This translation agrees with BDB, which posits this verse as the sole occurrence of *dālâ* in the Piel stem (this verb usually occurs in the Qal, i.e., "to draw (water)" (BDB, 194). While it is an admittedly odd occurrence of this verb, its use here creates imagery that coheres with the imagery of v. 4 ("Yhwh, you brought me up..."), as Craigie notes (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 253; cf. also Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 290). Note that Goldingay disagrees with this translation (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 423), understanding the verb instead as the Piel of *DCH*'s *dālâ* II, "to hang down," which Goldingay argues has a similar meaning to *dālal* ("be low") and *dal* ("poor, lowly").

^c A literal translation of MT here would be, "to the remembrance of his holiness" (לְזֵכֶר קָדְשׁוֹ). Rolf A. Jacobson notes that "the sense here is to give thanks to the mention of God's holy name" (Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 291). LXX preserves the awkwardness of the Hebrew in its translation, τῇ μνήμῃ τῆς ἁγιωσύνης αὐτοῦ (LXX Ps 29:5).

^d Ancient versions (LXX, Vulgate, and several ancient Jewish commentators) translate "For he is angry but a moment, and when he is pleased there is life," translating such that the opposition is between the effects of God's anger and the effects of God's favor. NRSV translates the opposition between a "moment" and a "lifetime," which Clifford (*Psalms 1–72*, 159) agrees with. Clifford states here that "the psalmist's main point is that the crisis, reflecting God's wrath, is part of a process leading to life."

^e MT is difficult in this verse, and as some note, likely corrupt (Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 291 n. 7). BHS notes that LXX has translated τῷ κάλλει μου ("my beauty") for לְהַרְרִי, which suggests that LXX has read להדרי for להררי. Craigie, citing the Targum, proposes understanding the consonants of MT as a plural construct (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 251 n. 8b), but as Jacobson notes, this does not explain the singular adjective עֹז ("strong") that follows (Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 291 n. 7). Jacobson proposes eliminating the first-person singular suffix, so that he translates "you had established me as a strong mountain." John Goldingay, by contrast, does not see a problem with the present state of MT, translating rather awkwardly, "you had established strength for my mountain" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 424), and going on to say that this is apparently a way of saying "you established me with the strength of a mountain." My translation then follows Jacobson's directive and the implied meaning of Goldingay's translation.

^f Syriac and Targum both add a second-person singular object suffix here, so that they read "to you."

^g 4QPs^r has יהוה instead of MT's אֲדֹנָי, while LXX has τὸν θεόν μου ("my God").

2.1.3. Psalm 30: Analysis

Verses 2–4

Psalm 30 begins with an opening expression of praise (vv. 2–4) in which the speaker praises God

and concisely summarizes their experience of affliction and resolution. Rhetorically, this opening

expression of praise is voiced in the first-person, addressing God directly ("I exalt you, Yhwh,

for you have drawn me up," v. 2). Since the psalm begins with direct address of God and not its

human audience, the psalm's audience is mainly figured as fellow worshippers, oriented to the

divine with the psalm's speaker, who "overhear" the speaker's praise. In terms of its formational

capacities, the psalm is then engaged in a kind of indirect formation of its audience, inviting

them to share the subject position of the speaker and perhaps to identify with it as fellow

members of the community of the pious.

The opening expression of praise (vv. 2–4) also has critical implications for how the

psalm figures the relationship between the speaker and God as reflecting an essential contrast

between human and divine agencies. More specifically, the imagery and verbs of these opening

verses contribute significantly to how this relationship is figured. From its opening words in v. 2,

the psalm introduces the conceptual imagery of "high" and "low" states of being, which will

recur throughout the psalm in significant ways. Verse 2 begins the psalm by depicting God's

exaltation (רום, Polel) of the speaker, underscoring the *right* understanding of God as "high" in

relation to the speaker who was "low."[22] Verses 3 and 4 reinforce this relational dynamic in

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[22] The verb רום ("to exalt"; *polel*) not only has to do with lifting things up, but it often implies the "lowering" of other things in relation to them. So, John Goldingay observes that this verb occurs elsewhere in parallelism with the verb "bow low" (חוה, Hishtaphel) as in Ps 99:5, 9. So, Goldingay observes, "exalting Yhwh correlates with a willingness that [the speaker] should be lowered" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 426).

parallel images. In v. 3, the speaker "cried out" to God, and God "healed" them, and in v. 4, God "brought up" the speaker from the threat of death (i.e., "Sheol," "the pit") and preserved their life. These three verses then open the psalm with depictions of the speaker's utter dependence on the actions of God amid affliction.[23] In thanksgiving psalms, an opening often serves to establish realities that have become clear to the speaker as a result of their ordeal, and in this case, the psalm suggests that right knowledge of God consists of understanding that God is sovereign and active while humans are dependent on God's actions.

By presenting abbreviated summaries of the speaker's experience, the psalm's opening also functions to establish the speaker's implied *present* (i.e., their survival) as the most important temporality for understanding the meaning of their affliction. While the psalm will review the speaker's experience of affliction, this review will take place entirely from the vantage of their survival. This has the effect of framing even their most disoriented moments as essentially transient and leading to an eventual resolution.

Verses 5–6

After its opening expression of praise, the psalm moves to convey insight to the community of the pious which the speaker has gained through their experience of affliction. Verses 5–6 are marked apart from the psalm's opening by a rhetorical shift from direct address of God (vv. 2–4) to direct address of an implied gathering of the pious ("Make music to Yhwh, his faithful ones…," v. 5). These two verses are the only verses in the psalm that address an entity other than

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[23] Scholars often note that the verb "healed" (רפא) may indicate a medical crisis as the background to the composition of this psalm, but nothing else indicates that it should be read this way. As noted above, the liturgical poetic nature of these psalms suggests against readings that attempt to reconstruct a historical situation "behind" this poetry. It is therefore preferable to assume that this image is rich with poetic meaning, not historical meaning. (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 426).

Yhwh directly. Otherwise, the psalm presents its ideas entirely in doxological style, addressed to God while the listening audience "overhears." In v. 5, the speaker invites the pious to join them in praising God, and in v. 6, the speaker shares insights gained through their experience with the pious. The use of the emphatic adverb adverb כִּי at the beginning of v. 6 signals that the insights shared in v. 6 are the reason why the pious should respond to the speaker's invitation to praise in v. 5.[24]

Through its use parallelism, v. 6 declares that affliction is an essentially transient reality, while the welfare afforded by God's favor is, by comparison, an essentially permanent or lasting reality. Rhetorically, the statements in v. 6 are framed as insights gained through the experience of affliction. I have translated v. 6 as follows:

> Indeed, his anger is for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime,
>   Weeping stays for the evening, but in the morning, a shout of joy!

Yhwh's "anger" and human "weeping" are paralleled in the first half of each line, while Yhwh's "favor" and human "joy" are paralleled in the second half. The first pair of ideas is associated

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[24] Scholars generally agree that v. 6 is meant to be read as an "explanation" of the call to praise in v. 5. See, e.g., Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 428, who suggests that vv. 5–6 are meant to encourage the listening audience to hear the speaker's testimony as having implications for their own lives. Goldingay suggests that v. 5, then, explains "why Yhwh's act on behalf of one person is good news for other people…. The general truths that this act evidences relate to the way Yhwh is and to the way human experience therefore is" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 428). Artur Weiser argues that the statements of v. 6 cannot be taken as "frivolous" remarks about suffering, so that they are taken to mean that the psalm suggests listeners "not take the wrath of God too seriously, since it would, after all, blow over soon" (Artur Weiser, *Psalms: A Commentary*, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1962], 270). Kraus calls v. 6 a "creedlike explanation" of the call to praise in v. 5 (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 353). Kraus argues that v. 6 means to say that *from the perspective* of the speaker's current situation, restoration, the experience of affliction *seems* like it was only for a moment, now that the reality of restoration will determine the speaker's "lifetime" (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 355). Kraus even quotes John Calvin to support this perspective. Brueggemann states, "…the community of covenant-keepers contrasts the 'before' of anger and the long, durable 'after' of divine favor, the brevity of weeping and the durability of joy" (Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, NCBC [New York: Cambridge University, 2014], 152). Later, he says, "Israel knows that divine anger is not defining for YHWH; it is rather always YHWH's purpose to move beyond anger to restorative favor and rescue" (Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, 153).

See the discussion of the emphatic adverb כִּי in *IBHS* §39.3.4e. Here Waltke and O'Connor make the case that כִּי should be understood in general as an emphatic adverb that sometimes indicates logical relationships (rather than the common understanding that it is a subordinating conjunction).

with transience. Yhwh's anger lasts only for a "moment" and human weeping stays only for an evening. In contrast, the second pair of ideas is associated with ultimacy and permanence. Yhwh's favor is for a "lifetime," while "joy" arrives in the morning to finalize the weeping of the evening before.

The insights conveyed in v. 6 are crucial for how the psalm conveys ideas about the pious self in relation to God's sovereignty and in relation to experiences of affliction. An important feature of these insights in this regard is their construction in terms of *time* (i.e., the images of a "moment" and a "lifetime"). The speaker's insights presume an essential component of the human experience, namely the fact that humans experience time *linearly* and one "moment" at a time. Given such conditions, affliction is challenging for the pious because it overwhelms them. Amid affliction, the pious may struggle to perceive its transience, because while they can remember God's actions in the past, they cannot with certainty predict the future. Verse 6 then offers a poetic teaching about the truth of affliction's transience in relation to the permanence of divine favor. The pious are then those who learn to perceive affliction as a transient phenomenon that cannot and will not outlast God's favor.

The claims of v. 6 also underscore the notion of God's sovereignty at all times, both during affliction and in its resolution.[25] Verse 6 projects a binary spectrum of divine activity ("anger" and "favor") that corresponds to a binary spectrum of experiences ("weeping" and "joy") in the lives of the pious. The presumption that affliction (i.e., "weeping") is attributable to divine anger suggests that affliction does not happen randomly or outside of God's control. Rather, it is the manifestation of divine anger, here broadly understood as the withdrawal of

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[25] Cf. Mays, *Psalms*, 141, who argues that Psalm 30 emphatically upholds God's sovereignty throughout different seasons of human experience.

God's presence from the pious.[26] Conversely, the presumption that affliction's resolution (i.e., "a shout of joy," v. 6) is attributable to divine favor underscores that just as God is powerful in affliction, so God is powerful to deliver from affliction. For this psalm, the resolution of affliction in the life of the speaking subject itself indicates the sovereignty of God *during* the speaker's affliction. While the pious may experience affliction as outside God's control, they are encouraged here to understand all things, including affliction, as taking place according to God's sovereign will.[27]

Verses 7–13

The psalm's remaining verses (vv. 7–13) contain the speaker's self-presentation of affliction and resolution, which expand upon the speaker's opening declarations (vv. 2–4) in a retrospective retelling of the speaker's crisis (vv. 7–8), prayer for help (vv. 9–11), and ultimate deliverance (vv. 12–13). Rhetorically, these verses shift away from the direct address of human listeners in vv. 5–6, instead opting to present the speaker's experience as if expressed *to* God. This is a good example of what Culler calls "triangulated address," in which the speaker addresses his words to God as a rhetorical device for the compelling presentation of their experience to the psalm's audience.[28] The effect is that the speaker's recalled experience is voiced as an act of praise which draws the audience into the shared subject position of *worshippers* with the speaker. However, the rhetorical purpose of the self-presentation in vv. 7–13 is to convey an exemplary model of

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[26] As Clifford notes, "divine wrath refers primarily to God's withdrawal from the people rather than to God's emotions" (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 159).

[27] Cf. Clifford's observation that the message of vv. 5–6 can be distilled to "Appreciate the nature and purpose of divine wrath!" (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 159).

[28] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*. Cf. the discussion of this idea in Ch. 2.

pious selfhood which upholds God's sovereignty and reinforces the notion of affliction as a God-glorifying event in the lives of the pious.

The speaker's self-presentation begins in v. 7 by drawing attention to the *past state* of the speaker (i.e., before their affliction), which ultimately serves to provide a kind of anti-model to the psalm's vision of the ideal pious self. The emphatic use of the first person (i.e., ואני אמרתי, v. 7) begins the presentation by drawing attention to the speaker's self. The subsequent line, "I said in my prosperity, 'I will never be shaken,'" presents the speaker's prior self as constituted primarily by self-assurance about their own invulnerability. While a general depiction of "pride" is probably intended here, the use of the Niphal stem of the verb מוט ("to totter, shake, slip") suggests that the speaker's point is not only that they will never shake in any way, but that they will never *be shaken* (בל־אמוט; v. 7). In other words, the speaker's words emphasize the *non-contingent* nature of their existence, namely that no other will ever act *upon* them, which is the opposite of a pious self that lives in acknowledgment of their dependence on God's sovereign power.[29]

By contrast, v. 8's presentation of the speaker's crisis draws attention to God's sovereignty both in providing for the speaker's prosperity (v. 8a) and in withdrawing from their life (v. 8b). Looking back now from the vantage of having survived their ordeal, the speaker acknowledges the providence of God in the prosperity that characterizes life before their crisis ("Yhwh, in your favor, you had established me as a strong mountain," v. 8a). This statement then

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[29] Commentators generally agree that this verse is meant to highlight the speaker's claim to *independence* rather than *dependence* on God (cf., e.g., Mays, *Psalms*, 141–42; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 254). Clifford suggests that the speaker's words here parallel those of the speaker in Ps 73:2–3 (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 158), but while that psalm does depict its speaker as transitioning from a "wrong" perspective to a "right" one, the issues there are much more complex with regard to the speaker's presentation of their past perspective, as will be discussed in my analysis of Psalm 73 in Ch. 5.

highlights the contrast between the speaker's rightly ordered self in the psalm's implied present and the wrongly ordered and "proud" self of v. 7. The next statement likewise underscores the sovereignty of God in the speaker's life, since the one who could "never be shaken" (v. 7) was instantly "terrified" by the simple removal of God's presence from their life ("You hid your face, I was terrified," v. 8b). Verse 8 underscores the notion of God's sovereign power by suggesting that even God's *inaction* (i.e., the *removal* of God's presence) was enough to completely upend the speaker's reality.

Taken together, vv. 7–8 clearly present the speaker's affliction as directly related to their prior state of self-assured invulnerability, suggesting that affliction is here understood as an instrument by which God "tests" or "refines" the faith of the pious. There is no mention of previous moral failure or "sin" in this psalm, though as some commentators have suggested, the speaker's depiction of their earlier state may be intended to highlight pride or arrogance.[30] Instead, the speaker's affliction is depicted as an experience of God's absence from their life, not an experience of punitive action. As Richard Clifford notes, the direct correlation of the speaker's proclaimed independence with God's withdrawal from their life suggests that affliction is presented here as means by which God "tests" or "refines" the pious, or at least by which God

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[30] Cf., e.g., Craigie, who has written, "In his health and prosperity, [the speaker] had come to a position of self-confidence, thinking that what he had was a consequence of his own achievement" (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 254). Similarly, Rolf A. Jacobson has argued that the phrase בְשַׁלְוִי, which Jacobson translates "in my complacency," clearly indicates that the speaker's previous state was not only one of confidence, but of confidence based on "personal pride" (Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 295). Jacobson argues for his translation of this term as "complacency" based on its use in Prov 1:32, "the *complacency* of fools destroys them." By contrast, Goldingay argues that there is no reason to conclude that v. 7 suggests the speaker had "lapsed into false self-confidence" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 430). Goldingay argues that the speaker's attribution of their prosperity to Yhwh in v. 8 suggests that they had not been overly prideful.

allows them to be tested.[31] This theme is developed further by the speaker's recalled prayer for help in the next verses.

The prayer for help in vv. 9–11 serves to model for the psalm's audience the pious response to affliction, namely, to acknowledge God as the only agent capable of resolving affliction and to appeal to God for help. The rhetorical questions in v. 10 underscore this point by appealing to God not on the basis of the speaker's own worth, but on the basis that the speaker's deliverance would bring glory to God. According to the speaker, there will be no "profit" for God in the speaker's death (v. 10a–b), because "dust" cannot offer "praise" or attest to God's "faithfulness" (v. 10c–d).[32] These rhetorical questions then aim for maximal petitionary power with minimal self-promotion, emphasizing the point that the resolution of the speaker's affliction would bring glory to God, which in turn would mean that the whole experience of affliction had brought glory to God.

While the resolution of the speaker's crisis is not depicted until vv. 12–13, the self-presentation of the speaker's experience in vv. 7–11, when taken as a whole, depicts the speaker's ironic transition from a "high" point (v. 7) to a "low" point (vv. 9–11). In terms of its formational capacity, these verses are a psalmic portrayal of the wisdom conveyed by Prov 16:18, that "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."[33] However, the

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[31] Clifford argues that the psalm presents its speaker as undergoing such a "test" in this psalm, eventually emerging successful because of their willingness to appreciate their affliction as an experience meant to strengthen or refine them (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 159).

[32] Clifford, (*Psalms 1–72*, 160) argues that the speaker's prayer functions to protest the silence of death.

[33] As argued by Rolf Jacobson, who writes, "the psalmist looks back on a period of pride that led to downfall" (Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 295). Craigie also understands the psalm this way, arguing that the speaker's affliction is depicted as a result of their proud attitude (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 254). Craigie argues that the speaker's affliction is depicted as meant to bring the speaker low and right his disposition, such that they were ultimately able to glorify God at the psalm's conclusion. Similarly, Clifford argues that the speaker's crisis was meant to shake them out of the complacency depicted in v. 7, encouraging renewed dependence on God (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 158–59).

presentation of this experience through first-person psalmody invites audiences to identify with the speaking persona in a way that a *mashal* does not.[34] The doxological formulation of this concept invites audiences to internalize this wisdom in solidarity with a "fellow worshipper," i.e., the speaker of the psalm.

The conclusion of the psalm (vv. 12–13) completes the self-presentation of affliction and resolution, reinforcing most importantly the notion that the affliction of the pious eventuates in the glorification of God. While the speaker's welfare has been restored, their disposition now reflects a permanent posture of acknowledgement of God's sovereignty ("Yhwh my God, I will praise you forever," v. 13). This suggests that the whole experience of affliction has been *educative* for the speaker, bringing them down from their place of pride, putting them in a place of total dependence on God, and eventuating in a resolution that brought glory to God.[35]

2.1.4. Psalm 30: Conclusions

As a thanksgiving psalm characterized mainly by doxological rhetoric, Psalm 30 uses the self-presentation of its speaker to emphasize the sovereignty of God throughout experiences of affliction in the lives of the pious. While the psalm does not depict its speaker's affliction as punitive, it does depict it as the result of the removal of God's presence, suggesting that the speaker's affliction was *allowed* by God. Ultimately, the speaker's affliction serves to "lower" the speaker to a place of renewed awareness of their dependence on God, which contributes to the psalm's overall depiction of affliction as having an *educative* function (i.e., as "testing" or

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[34] Cf. Anne W. Stewart's discussion of how *mashalim* figure the relationship between text and reader in Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs*, 55–61.

[35] As Peter Craigie has argued, the psalm is a portrait of affliction as useful for teaching the true nature of human beings as *dependent* on God and reinforcing the notion that they are not self-sufficient creatures (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 254–55).

"refining" the speaker). The speaker's willingness to praise God amid their affliction and at its resolution models for the community a fundamental component of the pious self, namely the continual acknowledgment of Yhwh's sovereignty. That the speaker sees their survival as having implications for the whole community suggests also that the pious ought to conceptualize their afflictions mainly in terms of their potential to glorify God and reaffirm the beliefs of the community. As a whole, then, Psalm 30 serves both to glorify God for the speaker's deliverance and to model a template by which the pious may understand their own afflictions in relation to the reality of Yhwh's sovereignty.

2.2. Psalm 66

2.2.1. Psalm 66: Introduction

Psalm 66 contains two main parts, the first of which praises God for collective experiences of affliction and resolution (vv. 1–12), and the second of which praises God for God's deliverance of an individual speaker from their own experience of affliction (vv. 13–20). The psalm reflects a blend of concerns with God's activity on national and personal horizons, and as such it is a good example of a psalm that would have been powerful for postexilic communities struggling with the lived reality of imperial subjugation. As Rainer Albertz has argued, doxological presentations of God's activity in the realm of the personal would have affirmed for Judean communities the continued presence and sovereignty of the God who had previously acted as such for the people as a whole.[36]

Scholars who assign a date to Psalm 66 date its composition to the exilic or postexilic period, drawing especially on vv. 10–12, which seem to depict the experience of the Babylonian

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[36] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 2:508–22.

exile.[37] The psalm's liturgical character and various "calls to praise" (vv. 1–4, 5, 8–9, 16) along with its use of ritual imagery (vv. 13–15) strongly suggest that the psalm was used in public settings of worship.[38] Therefore, throughout this analysis, I will assume a setting in which a liturgical leader read or recited the psalm before a listening audience.

Psalm 66 stands out for its two-part structure, which has caused some scholarly controversy about whether it should be read as a unity or not. Before proceeding to analysis of the psalm in relation to this chapter's argument, a brief discussion of these structural issues will clarify my own reasons for reading the psalm as a unified composition.

Scholars have often disagreed over the structure of Psalm 66 because of the change from first-person plural ("we") to singular ("I") that takes place between vv. 12 and 13. First, early form critics divided the psalm into two parts, mainly because their generic categories did not allow for the possibility of mixing plural and singular voice within the same psalm.[39] These earlier approaches have been largely refuted as being too dependent on hypotheses about the cultic *Sitze im Leben* of psalmic genres.[40] Since then, many scholars have focused on how the

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[37] Joachim Becker, *Israel deutet seine Psalmen*, SBS 18 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966), 57–58, argues that the present form of the psalm looks back to the exile as the collective affliction discussed in the first part of the psalm; Marvin E. Tate (*Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 [Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990], 148) agrees that the psalm is either exilic or postexilic; Mays, *Psalms*, 221, says "the combination of group and individual praise seems to reflect the service of thanksgiving as a general institution in the postexilic period . . . as in the case of Psalm 118"; Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 308, says, "Though one tends to think of the sixth-century exile and restoration [in vv. 8–12], almost any significant national setback and rescue might have been the original situation."; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 30, states "The liturgy was performed in times of hardship (for exiled and repressed Jews under Babylonian and Persian rule, pressures were probably always just around the corner), in order to celebrate small, daily victories of survival, and to strengthen one another in the community and in relation with a dependable deity."

[38] Cf. the discussions of Mays, *Psalms*, 221; Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 308; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 145–47; John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalms 42–89*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 287–88. As will be discussed below, some scholars rely on extensive reconstructions of ritual settings for the setting of this psalm's use (e.g., Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 147).

[39] Cf., e.g., Gunkel, *Introduction*, 207; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 30; Mays, *Psalms* 221.

[40] Hossfeld and Zenger note that these earlier form-critical approaches also often failed to account for other various details of the psalm (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 30). On the other hand, they criticize overly detailed structural analyses for producing arbitrary structural divisions that are barely defensible (cf., e.g., Pierre Auffret,

psalm may be read as a unity while accounting for the significant break in vv. 12–13.[41]

While the psalm's speaking voice suggests a break in vv. 12–13, other aspects of the psalm's rhetoric suggest that it may be read as a unity. Most significantly, the gap in vv. 12–13 is bridged by a continuity of *address* in vv. 10–15. The first part of the psalm (vv. 1–9) addresses various non-divine audiences (i.e., "all the earth," vv. 1–7; "peoples," vv. 8–9), but in v. 10 there is a shift to direct address of God via second-person address ("For you, O God, have tested us," v. 10). This direct address of God continues throughout vv. 10–15, until the singular speaker of vv. 13–20 addresses their human audience again in v. 16 ("Come and listen . . . all you who fear God," v. 16). This continuity of direct address to God is one element that suggests the gap between vv. 12 and 13 is not as significant as it seems.

This study then agrees with scholars who think that while the psalm clearly exhibits a structural change between vv. 12 and 13, it should be read as a poetic unity that was likely *used* as a poetic unity in the period prior to its inclusion in the MT Psalter.[42] In this approach, the psalm is read as if a single voice is speaking first *as* or *for* the gathered community (vv. 1–12) before shifting to a more self-oriented rhetoric in vv. 13–20. In this reading, the "we" of the first part of the psalm functions as a strategy for involving the listening audience in the shared traditions recounted in vv. 1–12. This serves to connect the singular voice of vv. 13–20 to the

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Voyez de vos yeux. Étude structurelle de vingt Psaumes don't le Psaume 119, VTSup 48 [Leiden: Brill, 1993], 153–74). Hossfeld's own structural outline of the psalm has five sections, as follows: "call for and quotation of praise" (vv. 2–4), "challenge to behold the deeds of God, functioning as a reason for the call to praise" (vv. 5–7), "call to praise and report of a 'we' group" (vv. 8–12), "report of the fulfilling of a vow" (vv. 13–15), and "appeal and account of being heard" (vv. 16–20) (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 144).

[41] Beth Tanner represents a kind of middle ground in her commentary on the psalm: "…as the psalm stands here, it is one complete piece with a huge poetic gap" (Tanner in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 536).

[42] Scholars who take this position include Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 144; Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 2*; and Weiser, *Psalms*, 468.

shared traditions of the community, fostering a sense that the God of Israel's collective memory

is also active in the lives of the individual pious.

2.2.2. Psalm 66: Translation

for the leader. a song. a psalm.

1   Shout to God, all the earth.*^a*

2   Make music to the glory of his name,
          Give glory to his praise.*^b*

3   Say to God:
          "How awesome your works!*^c*
          Because of the greatness of your strength,
              your enemies wither before you.*^d*

4   All of the earth bow down before you,
          they make music for you,
          they make music for your name." *Selah.*

5   Come and see the things God has done,
          awesome is his work among humans:

6   He turned the sea to dry land,
          Through the river they passed on foot.
      There we rejoiced in him,

7   A ruler in his might forever.
      His eyes keep watch on the nations,
          Let the rebellious not rise against him. *Selah*.

8   Bless our God, O peoples,
          may the sound of his praise be heard.

9   The one who has kept our life among the living,
          and did not allow our feet to slip.

10   For you, O God, have tested us.
          You have refined us, like the refining of silver.

11   You have brought us into the stronghold,*^e*
          You have set a burden upon our backs.

12   You let people ride over our head,
          We came through fire and water,
          But you brought us out into abundance.

13   I will come into your house with burnt offerings,
          I will make good on my vows to you,

14   Those for which my lips opened,
          and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.

15   Burnt offerings of fatlings I will bring up to you,

> with the smoke of rams,
> I will offer bulls and goats. *Selah.*

> 16   Come and listen, and I will recount, all you who fear God,*f*
>   what he has done for my life.
> 17   My mouth cried out to him,
>   and exaltation was under my tongue.*g*
> 18   If I had found iniquity in my heart,
>   the Lord would not have listened.*h*
> 19   But God has listened,
>   He has listened to the voice of my prayer.
> 20   Blessed is God,
>   who did not turn away from my prayer,
>   nor his faithfulness away from me.

Notes to Translation of Psalm 66

a LXX adds ψαλμοῦ ἀναστάσεως ("a psalm of resurrection").

b The verb here, √שׂים, seems to have two objects. Hossfeld and Zenger observe that כבוד occurs as the object of שׂים in Josh 7:19 and Isa 42:12, but in both of those cases the verb also has a dative object, marked by the preposition ל (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 144 n. a). The construction is therefore not otherwise attested. It might be taken as a construct phrase, or, as I have done here, it might be translated as having a dative sense, in accord with its parallel line in v. 2a, "to the glory of his name."

c The Niphal participle in this line (נורא) is singular, while the following noun (מעשׂיך) is plural. Gesenius notes that such disagreement occurs normally in Hebrew under a number of different circumstances. In *GKC* §145h, Gesenius observes that plurals which have a singular meaning are often construed with the singular, taking singular subjects or predicate adjectives. Such variations occur frequently when the predicate precedes the subject, and so, inflections are omitted in several different cases, including adjectives in a noun-clause (*GKC* §145r). Following this point, I have translated "awesome" as the predicate adjective of "your works."

    Hossfeld and Zenger agree with this decision and do the same (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 143). On the other hand, Goldingay cites JM §149b, which emphasizes how rarely a predicate adjective disagrees with its noun. He therefore "take[s] it that the asyndetic exclamation forms an extraposition leading into the parallel colon" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, 285 n. 1). To me, this seems overcomplicated, while a short burst of declarative praise ("How awesome are your works!") makes sense directly following the opening calls to praise God.

d The verb יכחשׁו is difficult. Hossfeld and Zenger suggest that it has a special meaning here, "[to] feign surrender, bow down," which they argue is also found in Ps 18:45 and Ps 81:16 (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 144 n. b). But John H. Eaton argues that the contexts in which this verb is found make the sense of hypocritical submission or "feigned surrender" unlikely, though these translations have developed logically from what else we know about the verb's usage. Eaton argues instead that the verb should be translated "to wither" or "to grow lean," which agrees with suggestions found in BDB. See John H. Eaton, "Some Questions of Philology and Exegesis in the Psalms," *JTS* 19 (1968): 603–9 (603–4). Goldingay notes Eaton's discussion and follows his suggestion in his commentary's translation of the psalm (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, 285 n. 2).

e As noted by Hossfeld, the word מצודה is often disputed (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 143–44). Some understand it to derive from the root צוד ("to hunt"), perhaps indicating some practice of hunting or ensnaring. Scholars taking this position take the verb as a noun meaning "net" (e.g., Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, 144; Tanner in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 533). Others think it may derive from the root צור ("to confine, bind, besiege"), perhaps indicating a "fortress" or "stronghold" of some kind (as in the translation

of Hossfeld, "stronghold"; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 144). In any case, the context suggests that the noun refers to something that indicates a confinement or constraint. My translation agrees with Hossfeld, who follows the MT, which suggests that the word derives from the root צור ("to confine, bind, besiege"). However, other translations, such as those of Tanner and Goldingay, are also possible.

ᶠ The word translated "I will recount" here is BH ואספרה, from the root √ספר. According to BDB, in the Piel, this word has the meaning "to recount, rehearse, or declare" (BDB, 708). *HALOT* gives the following possible meanings for the Piel of this root: (1) "to count out, count over again"; (2) "to count up"; (3) "to make known, announce"; (4) "to report, tell" (*HALOT*, 766). All considered, the verb clearly has to do with an action that is oriented toward an audience, not just the speaker's own self. What the speaker is about to do is different than just abstract praise. The speaker is about to "rehearse" or "recount" things that have *happened*, and now need to be made known. This will require the instrument of *narrative*, on some level. See also Ps 107:22; 118:17.

ᵍ The meaning of the phrase "under my tongue" (תחת לשוני) is not clear, though there have been attempts to explain it. Goldingay translates: "and he was extolled on my tongue" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, 286, 295). Hossfeld translates: "and praise was under my tongue" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 143). Hossfeld offers no comment at all on the content of v. 17. Weiser translates: "and high praise was under my tongue" (Weiser, *Psalms*, 467). In his discussion, Weiser comments: "In his account of the way in which his prayer has been answered the worshipper stresses the sincerity of his heart (v. 18) and his firm trust in the grace of God which had sustained his petitions in time of trouble and had put in his mouth even then praise for the assurance given him that his prayer would be granted (v. 17b)" (Weiser, *Psalms*, 471). Kraus translates: "but a song of praise was (already) under my tongue" (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989], 34). Kraus then interprets this line to mean that the speaker is expressing that "at the time of his cry in adversity the certainty of being heard was already alive. Under the complaining tongue the song of praise of one giving thanks lay ready.

The phrase "under the tongue" is used in several other psalms. Psalm 10:7: "under his tongue are harm and iniquity." The first part of this verse says, "His mouth is full of oppression and deception." This suggests that what is *under the tongue* has to do what is really meant by whatever is coming out of someone's mouth. Cf. also Psalm 140:3, "under their lips is the venom of vipers."

ʰ The verse literally reads "iniquity – if I had seen – in my heart." I translated "found" to bring out the sense that "seen" here has to do with self-examination, and the point of the statement is to do not just what is simply seen, but what is "found" or "discovered" within oneself upon examining oneself.

2.2.3. Psalm 66: Analysis

Verses 1–4

Psalm 66 opens with a call to praise (vv. 1–4) that frames the psalm as an essentially doxological

exercise. Since both the implied audience of the psalm (i.e., the "we" of vv. 5–12) and the

speaking subject of the psalm (i.e., the "I" of vv. 13–20) are presented as having recently

experienced intense afflictions, the doxological opening of the psalm models the psalm's

conviction that the right response to God at all times, during affliction and at its resolution, is

praise. Rhetorically, vv. 1–4 figure the psalm's audience as fellow worshippers who "overhear"

the speaker's call for "all the earth" to acknowledge God's sovereignty (v. 1). In a postexilic context, framing this call to praise as addressed to "all the earth" would have been powerful for fostering a sense of shared commitment to the idea of God's sovereignty in a world visibly dominated by Persian imperial power.[43]

The opening call to praise (vv. 1–4) also underscores that God's "works" in the world are "awesome" (v. 3), which establishes critical context for a review of *afflictions* experienced by God's people through time (vv. 5–12). By establishing the essential goodness of God's works in the world, the psalm sets the stage for framing the affliction of both the people (vv. 5–12) and the psalm's speaker (vv. 13–20) as *good works* that ultimately benefited the people and brought glory to God before "all the earth."

Verses 5–7

Rhetorically, the psalm's second section (vv. 5–7) is marked apart from the opening by its invitation to "come and see" (לְכוּ וּרְאוּ, v. 5, cf. v. 16). The invitation is not yet directed to the psalm's audience, but rather it is framed as addressing "all the earth," as a continuation of vv. 1–4. The psalm's audience, instead, is incorporated into a shared subject position with the speaker through the use of first-person plural speech ("we") and a remarkable succession of verbs that move from third-person plural reference to the exodus group ("Through the river *they* passed on foot," v. 6b) to first-person plural in the final colon ("There *we* rejoiced in him," v. 6c). The effect of this succession is to foster the listening audience's sense of shared identity with the group whom God is said to have delivered from affliction in Egypt in v. 6.[44] Overall, the

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[43] Cf. Berquist, "Psalms, Postcolonialism and the Construction of the Self," 195–202; Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together."

[44] This effect is furthered by the cohortative tense of the final verb in v. 6, which suggests an invitation to rejoice *in the* present. Of course, the cohortative dimension of this verb is extremely difficult to render in English

rhetorical effect of this section is to involve the psalm's audience in the psalm's discourse, fostering their identification with the speaking subject (i.e., the "we") of this first half of the psalm (vv. 1–12).[45]

Verses 5–7 also continue to develop themes established in the opening, calling attention to God's "work among humans" (v. 5), especially in delivering them from their affliction Egypt (v. 6).[46] The remembrance of the exodus event is the psalm's first depiction of God's "work" with human beings, preceding the review of the present group's afflictions (vv. 10–12) and those of the psalm's speaker (vv. 13–20). God's "work" with the people at the sea establishes an

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translation without sacrificing comprehensibility. Goldingay has decided to understand the verb as a "pseudo-cohortative," which has a past reference (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, 291 n. 26). To support this understanding, he cites explanations of this phenomenon in *IBHS* 34.5.3, *GKC* 108g, and DG 68. On the idea of present worshippers identifying with earlier generations in the Psalms, see Harry P. Nasuti, "Historical Narrative and Identity in the Psalms," *HBT* 23 (2001): 132–53 (see 137–38).

The rhetorical equation of a present generation with an earlier generation who experienced a mighty act of God is, of course, well known in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. This rhetorical maneuver is vital to the strategies of Deuteronomy, for example. See, e.g., Deut 26:5–9.

[45] Cf. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 149; Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 308–9; Mays, *Psalms*, 221. Hossfeld states, "The purpose of the sequence is to construct a continuity from the persons involved in those events to the persons praying the psalm. This is an example of the solidary culture of memory in the Bible, which cuts across all times (cf. Deut 5:2; 26:5–6; or 6:20–26). Liturgical remembering brings together time and space. Thus, the continuity between the remembered events and the remembering subject is established" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 145). Artur Weiser also draws attention to this verse as important for indicating the psalm's intention to identify those participating in the liturgy with the historical group described in v. 5 (Weiser, *Psalms*, 470).

[46] Scholars dispute whether the two acts described in v. 6 (i.e., passing through a "sea" and a "river") are the same or different events. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 145) notes that the first two cola of v. 6 may plausibly be understood as a synonymous parallelism (i.e., as referring to a single deed expressed in two different ways) or as a climactic parallelism (i.e., referring to two different deeds, highlighting their common character). Does נהר in v. 6 refer to the Jordan, or is it used here to denote the same waters that are referred to by the word ים in the first colon? Hossfeld points out that נהר is never used elsewhere to denote the Jordan River, while Jonah 2:4 and Ps 93:3–4 both use it as a synonym to either ים ("sea"; Jon 2:4) or מים רבים and משברי־ים ("mighty waters" and "waves of the sea"; Ps 93:4). On the basis of this philological evidence, Hossfeld concludes that it is best to assume that the bicolon about God's action in Ps 66:6 refers to a *single* event, namely, the miracle at the Sea of Reeds. I follow his conclusion in my analysis here, though it does not bear significantly on my argument.

It should be noted, however, that the targum explicitly associates the events depicted in v. 6 with the crossings of the Red Sea and of the Jordan. This is a normal aspect of translation in the targum, i.e., giving "explicit reference to an event which the biblical text has alluded to implicitly" (Moshe Bernstein, "A Jewish Reading of Psalms: Some Observations on the Method of the Aramaic Targum," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, VTSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 476–504 (493). However, it does indicate that early translators of this text found the use of the two different words for water to be a convenient opportunity to mention the two significant events of water-crossing in the Hexateuch. It does not, however, necessarily indicate anything about what the composers of the Hebrew psalm had in mind.

implied *pattern* of affliction, deliverance, and ultimate rejoicing (cf. the praises in v. 7,

suggesting this pattern eventuates in God's glory). This pattern upholds not only the idea of

God's sovereignty, but more importantly the idea that God is sovereign throughout the whole

experience of affliction, and that the pious can trust their afflictions will ultimately be resolved

by God to God's glory before "all the earth" (v. 1). For a postexilic audience, this implied pattern

suggests that the visible defeat of the nation Israel and its subjugation to Persian rule do not

indicate a lapse in God's sovereignty, but rather may be a part of a progression in which the

afflicted become a site of God's glorification.[47]

Verses 8–12

After depicting God's earlier deliverance of the people in the exodus event, the psalm transitions

by calling all "peoples" to praise God for preserving the people through their more recent

afflictions (v. 8–9). Before proceeding to review the people's more recent afflictions, the speaker

celebrates God as "the one who has kept our life among the living" (v. 9a) and who "did not

allow our feet to slip."[48] Both of these images reinforce God's sovereign power even *amid* the

people's afflictions. These descriptions of God suggest that the *survival* of the pious indicates

God's sovereignty more compellingly than their affliction calls it into question.

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[47] Richard Clifford understands the psalm's overall purpose as wrestling with the problem of why God would allow God's people to come so close to extinction in earlier times and in the event of the Babylonian exile (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 308).

[48] As noted by Hossfeld (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 146), the image of "slipping feet" refers to disaster and failure (cf. Pss 15:5; 17:5; 55:23; and 121:3). In this context, it seems to refer to God's prevention of the people's premature demise. Some scholars suggest understanding these verses as an allusion to the period of wandering in the wilderness (e.g., McCann, "Psalms," 938). Beth Tanner takes this approach, suggesting that the image of "testing" corresponds to how the Israelites "tested" God at Massah (cf. Exod 7:7; Deut 6:16; 33:8; Ps 95:8–9; Tanner in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 535). However, this cannot be correct, since this psalm concerns God's testing of the people, not their testing of God. Other scholars, rightly I think, place more emphasis on how the images of "testing" and "refining" in vv. 10–12 cohere with prophetic language for the experience of exile, and so understand these verses also to be referring to the period of exile (Mays, *Psalms*, 222; Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 308; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 146, esp. n. 8).

In vv. 10–12, the psalm shifts to direct address of God in order to review a recent collective experience of affliction ("For you, O God, have tested us…," v. 10). Scholars speculate about whether this section refers to a known historical occurrence (i.e., either the Babylonian exile or colonized life under Persian rule in the postexilic period) or an unknown, generalized experience of collective affliction. Most scholars agree that vv. 10–12 likely depict the Babylonian exile from a postexilic standpoint, since they conclude with the experience of being "brought out into abundance," which could refer to the experience of returnees at the end of the sixth century BCE.[49] It is impossible to say for sure whether these verses refer to a specific experience. In any case, the use of this psalm during the postexilic period would have certainly allowed for audiences to understand it as referring to the afflictions of life under imperial rule, whether Babylonian or Persian.

Verses 10–12 are critical for the psalm's overall depiction of affliction in the lives of the pious as an experience by which God "tests" or "refines" them before eventually restoring them to "abundance" (v. 12). The key verbs in v. 10 are בחן ("to test, examine") and צרף ("to refine, smelt"), which are often used together in the Latter Prophets to describe God's wrath in the Babylonian period.[50] Both of these verbs connote processes of refinement or purification that expose impurities and allow for their removal.[51] It is important to note that, while God is the

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[49] Scholars who argue that the psalm refers to the exilic experience include Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 308; Mays, *Psalms*, 222–223; Hossfeld (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 146), who suggests that v. 11 could refer specifically to the deportation to Babylon; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 30. By contrast, Kraus insists that a pre-exilic date for the psalm's composition cannot be ruled out (Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 35–36).

[50] Cf. Isa 48:10; Jer. 6:27–29; Jer 9:7; Ezek 22:17–22; cf. also the use of similar "testing" imagery in Psalms 11:4–5; 17:3; and 26:2. As will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, Christo Lombaard has argued that the idea of God "testing" the people through experiences of affliction rose to cultural prominence during the Second Temple period, especially during the Hellenistic period. See Christo Lombaard, "Testing Tales: Genesis 22 and Daniel 3 and 6," in Gillmayr-Bucher and Häusl, eds., *Prayers and the Construction of Israelite Identity*, 113–123.

[51] Weiser, *Psalms*, 470–71. Hossfeld also notes the use of these words in connection to the purification of metals in Pss 17:3 and 26:2, and he also note that this image is used frequently in the prophets (Hossfeld and Zenger,

subject of the "testing" and "refining," the afflictions themselves are framed as the actions of others that God has allowed. As in Psalm 30, the afflictions of the pious are then associated with the removal of God's protective presence, such that they are exposed to afflictions that "test" them (cf. Ps 30:7–8).

While vv. 10–12 present God as allowing the people's affliction, they are crucially framed by doxological celebration of God as the one who has also preserved and delivered the people (vv. 8–9, 12c). This has the effect of presenting the whole event of the people's affliction as a praiseworthy act of God by which God brought the people into abundance (v. 12). On the whole, then, the first half of the psalm's reviews of the people's afflictions has served to reinforce the good purposes of God in afflicting the people, such that affliction itself is modeled for the psalm's audience as an instrument of God's "awesome works" among humans (v. 5). This sets the stage for the speaker's presentation of their own experience of affliction and resolution as similarly God-glorifying, exemplifying for the psalm's audience the notion that the pious are those who acknowledge God's sovereignty throughout their afflictions and at their resolution.

Verses 13–20

The psalm transitions in v. 13 from its focus on the group's experiences of affliction (vv. 1–12) to a singular presentation of the speaker's own experience of affliction and resolution. (vv. 13–20). The transition is most clearly marked by the shift from plural ("we") to singular ("I") voicing, but it is also marked by the description of an individual's ritual actions of thanksgiving in vv. 13–15. While these verses may indicate a ritual setting for the psalm's use, as some scholars think,[52]

Psalms 2, 146 n. 8). Furthermore, M. Tsevat argues that צרף means "to seek to attain knowledge or understanding through trial or temptation" (M. Tsevat, "בחן," *TDOT* 2:70).

[52] E.g., Tate (*Psalms 51–100*, 147) relies heavily on reconstructions of a vow-fulfillment ritual, as do earlier form critics. Hossfeld suggests that the large quantity of animals described in v. 15 suggests that if this does reflect

they may just as easily may be understood as a purely literary scenario that evokes the temple as the symbolic center of Yahwistic faith among Judean communities.[53] In any case, this section draws attention to a singular pious persona who will voice the remainder of the psalm from the vantage of one who has been afflicted and restored according to the same pattern illustrated in the psalm's first half.

In the psalm's final section (vv. 16–20), the speaker addresses "all those who fear God" (v. 16) in order to relate their own individual experience of affliction and resolution as a model of pious selfhood. As the speaker had earlier invited the whole earth to "come and see" God's awesome works with God's people, so now the speaker invites the pious to "come and listen" to "what he has done for my life" (v. 16). As in the first part of the psalm, the speaker frames the experience of affliction as a work of God deserving of praise, only now the speaker's own life is the horizon of experience rather than the collective memory of a people.

While brief, the speaker's self-presentation of their experience in vv. 17–18 contributes to the psalm's overall concern with conveying that God sovereign and deserving of praise both amid affliction and at its resolution. By crying out to God (v. 17a), the speaker models the only right response to affliction, namely, to acknowledge that God alone has the power to deliver from it. The speaker's statement that "exaltation was under my tongue" has caused disagreements among translators, but commentators agree that the expression essentially denotes the speaker's

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an actual ritual, it would have been a very substantial event, probably presided over by a priest or other leadership figure (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 147). On the other hand, Mays suggests that the size of the animal sacrifice probably indicates hyperbole, and therefore the ritual should be understood as a fictive literary device (Mays, *Psalms*, 223).

[53] Here I refer to the discussion in the introduction to this study of Adele Berlin's contrast between historical "settings" and literary "scenarios," which are not always necessarily the same (Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios"). Cf. also Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 289.

willingness to glorify God amid their affliction, reflecting the speaker's rightly configured self.[54]

Building on this theme, the statement, "If I had found iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (v. 18) models a readiness to self-examine amid affliction. While v. 18 does not use the language of "testing" or "refinement," it underscores the importance of this conception of affliction by suggesting that the speaker's affliction had moved them to introspective self-examination. The point here is not that God does not listen to those who have moral flaws, but rather that God listens to those who are willing to attend to what affliction may reveal.[55] The psalm's doxological conclusion (vv. 19–20) frames the speaker's own experience of affliction and resolution as an event that ultimately upholds the sovereignty of God conveyed by the review of group experiences in the psalm's first half.

2.2.4. Psalm 66: Conclusions

On the whole, the psalm unites the horizons of communal and individual experience to convey a model of how the pious ought to conceptualize God's role in experiences of affliction and the ultimate purpose of affliction. The psalm depicts God as sovereign in all things, such that affliction and its resolution both unfold according to God's will. Relatedly, the psalm's doxological framing of its presentations of various afflictions suggests that the affliction of the pious is a God-glorifying event. The pious are those who are willing at all times to acknowledge God's sovereignty, even amid affliction, and who understand that affliction is often an instrument by which God "tests" and "refines" God's people.

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[54] For further comment on this phrase, see the note for this verse in my translation of Psalm 66 above.

[55] Cf. Mays, "The statement is more one of witness to the way of God who listens to those who fear him (34:19, 15–18) than it is a claim of self-righteousness" (Mays, *Psalms*, 223). Cf. also Hossfeld (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 147) who understands the line to essentially constitute a declaration of innocence.

2.3. Psalm 118

2.3.1. Introduction

The final case study in this chapter, Psalm 118, has long been recognized as an exemplar of the thanksgiving genre, though it is marked by antiphonal liturgy (vv. 1–4) and explicit ritual language (vv. 19–29). The psalm depicts the experience of a speaker who was overwhelmed by life-threatening afflictions, defended themselves by the help of Yhwh, and ultimately lived to celebrate their survival amid the whole community of the pious. At one point, the speaker interprets their experience of affliction as "discipline" from Yhwh (v. 18), which the speaker was allowed to survive. The speaker's ordeal in Psalm 118 then functions to exemplify in the persona of the speaker the reality of God's sovereignty amid affliction and God's power to deliver the pious from afflictions. It also models the conceptualization of affliction as "discipline" (v. 18) that may serve to test or refine the pious. The entrance liturgy in vv. 19–29, as a whole, enacts the idea that the afflictions of the pious ought to be understood as paradigmatic events of God's glorification that illuminate the reality of God's sovereignty *throughout* experiences of affliction.

Scholars agree that Psalm 118 was likely used during liturgical performance in the Jerusalem temple during the postexilic period.[56] Most scholars date Psalm 118 to the postexilic period, while Erich Zenger has argued on the basis of intertextual data that it should be dated more precisely to the fourth century BCE.[57] In terms of genre, scholars have long agreed that

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[56] Cf. DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 864. Gerstenberger (*Psalms Part 2*, 308) has argued that the psalm was most likely used in the context of Judean communal worship during the postexilic period, and unlike many other scholars, does not limit the possible settings of its use to the temple. Instead, Gerstenberger argues that it could have been used in various situations of Judean communal worship. For early form-critical proposals about the ritual to which this psalm would have corresponded, see esp. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:5–6, 120, 123, 171, 180–181. Cf. also Reuven Hammer, "Two Liturgical Psalms," *Jud* 40 (1991): 484–97 (see esp. 489–97).

[57] Zenger in Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 242. Other scholars who argue for the psalm's postexilic origins include Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen II: Die Psalmen 73 bis 150* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 254; Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 204; Mays, *Psalms*, 374–75; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 308; Kraus argues that the psalm's date is

Psalm 118 should be considered a thanksgiving psalm, though many commentators qualify this point by drawing attention to the psalm's antiphonal features (esp. vv. 1–4) and concluding entrance liturgy (vv. 19–29).[58] These features suggest that the form of individual thanksgiving has been expanded in Psalm 118 to include more liturgical components of communal engagement, likely reflecting its use in temple liturgy. One should also note that some scholars have argued that the psalm may have originally been understood as reflecting a *royal* speaker.[59] However, while this reading is possible, it is not the only possible way to understand the psalm, and so my analysis below does not depend on this specific understanding of the psalm's speaker.

2.3.2. Psalm 118: Translation

1	Give thanks to Yhwh,[a] for he is good;
	his love endures forever.
2	Indeed,[b] let Israel say,
	"his love is forever."
3	Indeed, let the house of Aaron say,
	"his love is forever."
4	Indeed, let those who fear Yhwh say,

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impossible to determine (Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 396). Leslie C. Allen argues that it may have been composed as early as the pre-exilic period, but was likely used during the postexilic period by ordinary audiences for communal worship (Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., WBC 21 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002], 163) For an argument for the psalm's pre-exilic date, see Harry S. May, "Psalm 118," in *Religions in Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 97–106.

[58] Cf. esp. the discussion of Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 394, who sees the individual form of thanksgiving interwoven with communal liturgy in this psalm. Other scholars who understand Psalm 118 as a thanksgiving psalm include Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 300–301; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 231–32; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 163; John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3: Psalms 90–150*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 354; Weiser, *Psalms*, 724–25; Mays, *Psalms*, 374–75; Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, 506; Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, HAT I/15 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), 459. Cf. also those scholars who emphasize Psalm 118's possible origins as "a conglomeration of independent fragments" (Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, ECC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003], 783).

[59] E.g., Leslie Allen argues that the psalm was composed in the voice of a leader, and perhaps for the king (Allen, *Psalms 100–150*, rev. ed., 164). Similarly, Goldingay suggests that the language of vv. 10–12, especially, suggests that the psalm was intended for use by "a king or other leader" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 3*, 354). However, also noted by Goldingay, Mishnah tractate *Sukkah* 3.9 and 4.5 say this psalm was used at Sukkot (Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 3*, 355). As the last of the "Egyptian Hallel" collection, the psalm was also used at Pesach and on other occasions. So, even if the psalm reflects the perspective of a royal figure, the psalm's range of possible settings of use should not be constricted according to the perspective of its speaking persona. For further discussion of the possible "identities" of the "I" of Psalm 118, see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 231–33.

"his love is forever."

5   I called out to Yh*c* from a narrow place,
         Yh answered me in a broad place.*d*
6   Yhwh is for me, I will not fear.
         What can a human being do to me?
7   Yhwh is for me, my helper,*e*
         and I, I will look upon those who hate me.
8   It is better to take refuge in Yhwh,
         than it is to trust in a human being.
9   It is better to take refuge in Yhwh,
         than it is to trust in elites.

10   All nations surrounded me,
         in the name of Yhwh, I fended them off.*f*
11   They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me,
         in the name of Yhwh, I fended them off.
12   They surrounded me like bees,
         they were extinguished like fire in brambles,*g*
     in the name of Yhwh, I fended them off.

13   You pushed me hard, so that I fell,*h*
         but Yhwh helped me.
14   Yh is my strength and my might,
         he has become salvation to me.*i*
15   A sound of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous
         The right hand of Yhwh does valorously.
16   The right hand of Yhwh, it exalts,*j*
         The right hand of Yhwh does valorously.
17   I shall not die.
         Indeed, I shall live,
     And proclaim the works of Yh.
18   Yh disciplined me severely,*k*
         but did not give me to death.

19   Open to me the gates of the righteous,
         I will enter into them,
             I will give thanks to Yh.
20   This is the gate of Yh,*l*
         (Only) the righteous enter through it.*m*
21   I give thanks to you, because you have answered me,
         and you have become my salvation.

22   A stone that the builders rejected,
         has become the capstone.*n*
23   This is from Yhwh,

a wonder in our eyes.

24   This is the day Yhwh has worked,
        let us rejoice and be glad in it.*ᵒ*

25   O Yhwh, save!
        O Yhwh, fulfill!

26   Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Yhwh.
        We bless you from the house of Yhwh.

27   Yhwh is God,
        He has made light shine on us.
    Tie the festal beast with cords,*ᵖ*
        (tie it) to the horns of the altar.

28   You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
        you are my God, I will exalt you.

29   Give thanks to Yhwh, for he is good,
        his love is forever.

Notes to Translation of Psalm 118

ᵃ Translating with MT. LXX has this psalm beginning with the "Hallelujah" that closes Psalm 117 in MT, but Hossfeld and Zenger argue that MT has the earlier version of this text (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 229 n. *a*).

ᵇ I have translated "indeed" at the start of vv. 2–4 to reflect the presence of the particle נָא in these verses.

ᶜ Leslie Allen suggests that this use of the shortened form of the tetragrammaton, יָּה ("Yh") was "inspired by the formula used in Exod 15:2 at v 14" (Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 162 n. 5.b).

ᵈ Literally, "from narrowness (מִן־הַמֵּצַר) I called out to Yh" (v. 5a). The word מֵצַר is from the verbal root √צרר, which has to do with the idea of distress more generally (reflected in many EVV by the phrase "Out of my distress"), but etymologically the root has to do with restriction, constraint, narrowness (see *HALOT* 2:1058 for various translations and usages). Commentators have rightly pointed out that the image of "narrowness" in v. 5a contrasts directly with the image of "wideness" in v. 5b, when the speaker says, "Yh answered me in a broad place (lit. "wideness"; בַמֶּרְחָב)." Hossfeld and Zenger discuss the important point that these terms generally indicate a transition from constraint to freedom of movement, a transition which is furthered explored in v. 6–12. For their further discussion of these terms, see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 229 n. *f*, 238.

ᵉ MT reads בְּעֹזְרָי ("my helpers"), while LXX (Ps 117:7) reads κύριος ἐμοὶ βοηθός ("my helper"). Allen (*Psalms 101–150*, 162 n. 7.a), Goldingay (*Psalms, Vol. 3*, 352 n. 3), and and Zenger (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 229 n. *h*) all agree that the ב in בְּעֹזְרָי should be understood as *beth essentiae*. (On the use of *beth essentiae*, see *IBHS*, 11.2.5e; JM §133c; and *GKC* §119i.) Zenger notes that the plural of the noun may be an "intensive plural," following the lead of *GKC* §119i which suggests the formulation "as [belonging to the category of] my helpers." He then chooses to translate "Yhwh is on my side as one of my helpers." On the other hand, Allen and Goldingay seem to follow the lead of JM §136f which sees the construction as an "intensive" plural. So, they translate the term as effectively singular, as LXX does, "my helper." Mitchell Dahood offers a further angle for considering the construction (Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101–150*, AB 17A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970], 157). Dahood insightfully observes that the plural form makes for assonance and rhyme between עֹזְרָי and שֹׂנְאָי in the second colon (v. 7b).

ᶠ The verb אֲמִילַם, which occurs three times in the repeated formula בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֲמִילַם (vv. 10–12), is a *hapax legomenon* for which scholars have proposed a wide array of possible translations. While this note will review several significant possibilities, space does not permit a full review of past scholarly proposals. For the best

detailed review, see Joel M. LeMon, "Cutting the Enemy to Pieces: Ps 118,10–12 and the Iconography of Disarticulation," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 59–75 (esp. 59–64).

Most scholars agree that the verb should be understood as a Hiphil imperfect form of the root מול/מלל. The problem of this verb's translation arises from the fact that the meaning of this root in the Qal is "to circumcise" (*HALOT* 1:555), which does not seem to be a sensible translation for this context of use. However, there are no other occurrences of this root in the Hiphil, leading scholars to propose a variety of textual emendations or possible translations relating to the general sense of "to cut." Of course, some scholars have simply translated the word according to this most common meaning (e.g., Mitchell Dahood, who translates "indeed, I cut off their foreskin," *Psalms III*, 154, 157), but most scholars agree that this is not a satisfactory solution.

Apart from LeMon's more recent treatment, Martin Mark has produced the other most substantial review of possibilities for the verb (Martin Mark, *Meine Stärke und mein Schutz ist der Herr: Poetologisch-theologische Studie zu Psalm 118*, FB 92 [Würzberg: Echter, 1999], 436–38). Mark's solution draws on a blend of ancient witnesses (primarily Greek and Latin) to argue that the verb should be translated "sich wehren" ("to defend oneself") or "sich rächen" ("to avenge oneself"). Mark also argues that this translation makes sense in the literary context of the psalm, since his proposed understanding of אֲמִילַם ("to defend oneself") is a plausible antonym for to סְבָבוּנִי ("they surrounded me"; v. 10a) and a plausible synonym for דֹּעֲכוּ (Pual, "to be extinguished"; v. 12b). *HALOT*'s proposal of a second root, מול ("to fend off, repel") represents a similar proposal on slightly different linguistic grounds (*HALOT* 1:556). In his commentary on the psalm, Erich Zenger ultimately settles on a similar solution, translating the verb "I repelled them" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 228–29, esp. n. *i*).

In addition to providing the most thorough review of scholarly proposals, LeMon also proposes one of the most compelling available solutions to this problem (LeMon, "Cutting the Enemy to Pieces"). LeMon reinvigorates discourse around this verb by drawing on ancient Near Eastern art and iconography. LeMon's review of Egyptian and Neo-Assyrian art, in particular, demonstrates the commonality of the practice of disarticulating the defeated bodies of one's enemies, especially by kings, as an action symbolic of the finality of one's victory over enemies. Incorporating this iconographic data with previous philological proposals (which have usually ranged from "cutting" to "defending," as in Mark's proposal discussed above), LeMon suggests that the verb be understood as referring to this known practice of disarticulation. LeMon then translates אֲמִילַם in vv. 10–12 as "I cut them to pieces" (LeMon, "Cutting the Enemy to Pieces," 74).

Ultimately, my translation reflects agreement with scholars such as Mark and Zenger, opting to understand the verb as denoting a *defensive* action, rather than one involving the assertion of power or dominance, such as that proposed by LeMon. While LeMon's argument is compelling, the translation "I cut them to pieces" does not fit, in my estimation, with the overall literary depiction of the speaker's experience in vv. 5–18. Unlike some other texts which emphasize decisive defeat (e.g., Psalm 18:37–42), this review of the speaker's experience seems to emphasize that they were overwhelmed and barely survived (cf. esp. v. 5, and the use of סְבָבוּנִי, "they surrounded me" in vv. 10–12. Further, as will be discussed in my analysis of the psalm below, the imagery in v. 12 of swarming bees and a brush fire seems to suggest a scenario in which the speaker's enemies were defeated by "running themselves out" against the speaker's amazing resilience, instead of a scenario in which the speaker defeated their enemies decisively. Finally, vv. 13, 17, and 18 all similarly suggest the narrow survival of the speaker, not the speaker's decisive victory over enemies. For these reasons related to the literary context of the verb, I choose to translate אֲמִילַם "I fended them off," in order to give the sense of repeated episodes of *defensive* action against enemies.

[g] Zenger observes that דֹּעֲכוּ is Pual, and therefore denotes the *extinguishing* of the fire in the brambles, "which flares up quickly and dies just as quickly" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 229 n. *k*). LeMon ("Cutting the Enemy to Pieces," 60) affirms this translation. For further discussion see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, n. *k* and LeMon, "Cutting the Enemy to Pieces," 60 n. 7.

[h] Interpreters have struggled with the referent of the singular "you" that begins v. 13 (i.e., the second-person masculine verb דְּחִיתַנִי, "you pushed me"). The ancient translations (LXX and Syriac) evidently detected this problem too, and they sought to resolve it by translating a first-person, singular, passive verb at the beginning of v. 13a (e.g., LXX's ἀνετράπην), "I was pushed" (followed by many contemporary EVV).

Some scholars continue to follow the lead of the ancient translations. E.g., Allen has argued that following MT is not possible, because "[i]t cannot refer to Yahweh, who essentially is not addressed in the second person until v. 21" (Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 162 n. 13b). But Allen's point is not sufficient to imply that MT is as problematic as he suggests (and as the ancient translations seem to suggest). What we may call "rhetorical

oscillation" in thanksgiving psalms (cf. the discussion of "triangulated address" in Ch. 2) is enough to suggest that readers should expect such quick transitions between second-person and third-person addresses of Yhwh, and indeed, while the case of Ps 118:13a involves a particularly abrupt transition, other cases of such transitions are not unknown. Cf., e.g., the transition from Ps 66:9 to 66:10, which involves changing from third-person report about Yhwh to second-person address of Yhwh all within a single rhetorical unit. The nature of thanksgiving psalms as public prayer means that rapid transition between speaking *to* Yhwh and speaking *about* Yhwh to the audience is to be expected.

But the second tension—that Yhwh "pushes" the speaker in v. 13a but "helps" them in v. 13b—still remains as the second factor that has driven scholars to be wary of understanding Yhwh as the referent of "you" in v. 13a. However, this tension is also unproblematic when considered in the context of the whole psalm. The speaker later states, in v. 18, that Yhwh "disciplined me severely" (18a), "but did not give me to death" (18b), clearly indicating Yhwh's active role in both the speaker's affliction and the speaker's deliverance. Concerns about this tension are therefore resisting an idea sustained across the whole psalm, not just an odd phrasing that appears once in v. 13.

On the basis of these observations, I agree with those scholars who retain MT (despite other ancient translations) and translate דַחֹה דְחִיתַנִי (v. 13a) as "you pushed me hard," taking the "you" in this statement to refer to Yhwh. Cf. Zenger (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 230 n. *l*); James, *The Storied Ethics*, 80 n. 14; DeClaissé-Walford in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 868.

[i] Verse 14 as a whole is a direct quotation of Exod 15:2a. Note also that Exod 15:2b is quoted (though only partially) by v. 28, below. Zenger argues that this creates a frame, suggesting that the whole of Exodus 15 is important to the hermeneutical horizon within which Psalm 118 is meant to be understood (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 239).

[j] Following the suggestions of both BDB and *HALOT*, Hossfeld and Zenger argue that רוֹמֵמָה is a Polel participle from the verb √רום ("to exalt, to raise"), but without its normal preformative מ. However, they urge translating it as an active verb, i.e., "it exalts" rather than "it is exalted," as many EVV translate. See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 228, 230 n. *n*. See also Goldingay's discussion of this verb (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 3*, 353 n. 10).

[k] BH יַסֹּר יִסְּרַנִּי יָּהּ. The verbal root √יסר has the meaning "to instruct" in Qal. Its meaning in Piel is essentially a more emphatic sense of the Qal, "to chastise, rebuke," conveying a more disciplinary kind of "instruction" (*HALOT*, 1:418). Most importantly, then, the word suggests a dynamic that includes *instruction* and/or *education*, not merely punitive action as consequence for wrongdoing. With this in mind, the common translation of this verse, "Yh *punished* me severely," should be rejected as inaccurate. EVV often translate the verse this way (e.g., NRSV's "The Lᴏʀᴅ has punished me severely"), but so do some prominent commentators. E.g., Erich Zenger translates the line, "Punished, yes, Yʜ has punished me severely." Zenger gives no explanation for his decision to translate יסר as "punish" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 228).

The word "punish" does not clearly express the didactic connotations of √יסר, but instead suggests that Yhwh's action is a punitive *response* to some impious action on the part of the speaker. This has resulted in understandings of the psalm that assume some background drama in which the speaker committed some misdeed for which they are now being punished, but that is not made clear anywhere else in Psalm 118. Instead, the emphasis of this word is on the nature of the speaker's affliction as *instructive*, an idea that appears elsewhere in thanksgiving psalms (e.g., see the discussions of Psalms 30 and 66 in this chapter) and in the Hebrew Bible more generally.

[l] The gates referred to here may be either the gates of the temple or the city gates, as John Goldingay observes. There is no way to be certain, but it does seem clear that the psalm's literary scenario is a procession into the city, or more likely, into the temple (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 3*, 360). David Hamidović has argued that the gates in this psalm refer to the city gates (David Hamidović, "'Les portes de justice' et 'la porte de YHWH' dans le Psaume 118,19–20," *Bib* 81 [2000]: 542–50).

[m] The parenthetical "only" is not in the Hebrew text, but I have added it to emphasize the sense of this verse, following the lead of Zenger, who also reads the verse this way (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 228). The point of the statement is to make a claim about which people enter through the gate of Yh, namely, the righteous. The speaker then identifies with the righteous by entering through this gate.

n The phrase לְרֹאשׁ פִּנָּה at the end of v. 22 has been a topic of much debate, especially since the 1999 article by Michael Cahill ("Not a Cornerstone! Translating Ps 118,22 in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *RB* 106 [1999]: 345–57) directed scholars to avoid the translation "cornerstone." Cahill observed that a "cornerstone" marks the beginning of a building project, while something like "capstone" or "cornice" might be a more appropriate term for a stone that marks its completion (Cahill, "Not a Cornerstone," 350), which is what seems to be indicated in the context of Ps 118:22. However, Cahill's own suggestion that פִּנָּה be translated as "castle" has not been received well by scholars, presumably because the term "castle" evokes European architecture and so seems inappropriate for the cultural context of ancient Israelite psalmody (Cahill proposes translating the line, "the stone rejected by the builders now crowns the castle"; Cahill, "Not a Cornerstone," 357).

Since Cahill's article, some scholars have posited other options instead of "cornerstone," but there simply does not exist in English an obvious option for translating this term. Allen has translated "the main corner support" (Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 162 n. 22b), citing NIV's translation "capstone" as another good option, and citing Cahill's article. Erich Zenger translates "keystone," which is problematic because a "keystone" implies a Roman-style arch, which was not invented at the time this text was composed (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 229–30). Other scholars have continued to translate "cornerstone," despite the problems with the term (e.g., Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, 354; DeClaissé-Walford in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 866).

Despite disagreement among scholars regarding the translation of the term, the literary function of the term is generally agreed upon, as represented well in the words of Hans-Joachim Kraus, who has written, "In any case, a despised stone has come to a prominent and important position" (Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 399–400). At this point, a good translation of the term seems impossible in English, so my translation simply uses "capstone," following the note of Leslie Allen, mentioned above. This translation intends to convey that the stone in question is imagined as having been first tossed aside by builders at the start of a building project, but eventually selected as the final, most prominent stone in the project.

o On this verse, see Adele Berlin, "Critical Notes: Psalm 118:24," *JBL* 96 (1977): 567–68. Berlin argues that the pronominal suffix at the end of v. 24 (בוֹ) refers to the work Yhwh has done ("it") rather than Yhwh himself ("him"). Her argument draws attention to the fact that the rest of the psalm concerns Yhwh's powerful *act* of deliverance and draws attention to it, rather than the person of Yhwh. She then translates, "let us exult and rejoice in it (i.e., what God has done)" (Berlin, "Critical Notes," 568).

p The use of the verb אסר√ in this verse suggests that the word חַג refers not to a festival or a festival ritual in itself, but more specifically to a festal offering, almost certainly a beast for sacrifice. Goldingay has argued that the verse then has to do with tying up an animal prior to its slaughter, but because the practice of tying an animal to an altar is not otherwise attested, Goldingay suggests that the verse implies a lapse between the tying of the animal and its being led to the altar. So, Goldingay suggests understanding the verse as follows: "tie the festal offering with cords [until it comes] up to the horns of the altar" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 3*, 364).

2.3.3. Psalm 118: Analysis

Verses 1–4

Psalm 118's doxological character is clear in its framing call to praise (הודו ליהוה, vv. 1, 29) which in the psalm's opening is followed by a series of antiphonal exchanges in which various

groups are invited to repeat the refrain "His love endures forever" (vv. 2–4).[60] As in both Psalms 30 and 66, the framing of the psalm with *praise* establishes the essentially praiseworthy nature of whatever works of God the psalm will review, in this case the affliction and deliverance of a representative member of the community (i.e., as discussed above, the speaker is presented as one with leadership, perhaps even the king). The repeated refrain concerning God's "love" (חסד) suggests that the psalm's audience understand what follows as a story that displays God's love in the experience of the speaker.

The claim that God's love "is forever" (לעולם), is found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, but in the context of this psalm it should be understood in relation to the question of affliction in the lives of the pious, which is the focus of the rest of the psalm.[61] The refrain that God's "love is forever" functions similarly here as the speaker's words of insight in Ps 30:6 ("his anger is for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime," v. 6; discussed above in this chapter), suggesting that God's devotion to the pious outlasts any instance of God's wrath (i.e., God's allowance of their affliction) in their lives. As in Psalm 30, the psalm draws its audience's attention to the *permanence* of God's love for the pious before presenting a review of the speaker's experience (vv. 5–18) that will emphasize the terror of affliction while also underscoring its essential *impermanence* in comparison to God's devotion.

Overview of Verses 5–18

After the psalm's opening call to praise (vv. 1–4), the next major part of the psalm is an extended

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[60] It is possible that at the time of the psalm's earliest use, the references to these groups served specific purposes. However, in subsequent use, they would likely have had the effect of inviting "all" to join in praise of God (DeClaissé-Walford in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 867).

[61] The claim that God's "love is forever" (חסדו לעולם) occurs elsewhere in 1 Chr 16:34, 41; 2 Chr 5:13; 7:3, 6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11; Pss 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 136:1–26; Jer 33:11.

presentation of the speaker's experience of affliction and resolution (vv. 5–18). While the

structure of this part of the psalm has been variously assessed by scholars, Erich Zenger's

proposal of a "double narrative of rescue" in vv. 5–18 compellingly elucidates the rhetorical

structure of this lengthy section. Zenger argues that vv. 5–12 present an "external" account of the

speaker's affliction in terms of human enemies/attackers, while vv. 13–18 focus more on the

"internal" experience of the affliction as God's "discipline" of the speaker.[62] Amid both of these

sections are two didactic "interruptions" (vv. 8–9 and 16) which present "maxims" or insights

that have emerged from the speaker's experience.[63] Zenger's observation draws attention to an

important aspect of my own argument about thanksgiving psalms, namely that they tend to *blend*

the rhetoric of personal experience with didacticism such that instruction is a component of their

doxological function. As discussed in Ch. 2, this blend allows for audiences to internalize

instruction while also identifying with the speaker who delivers it as one of their own (in contrast

to didactic texts which figure the listener as a student, e.g., Prov 1–9).

Verses 5–12

In vv. 5–12, the speaker presents their experience in two parts (vv. 5–9 and 10–12) that both

emphasize the sovereignty of God's agency, on the one hand, and the impermanence of affliction,

on the other. In the first of these two parts, vv. 5–9, the speaker shares insights they gained

through their experience with the implied gathering of the pious (cf. Ps 30:5–6, which uses a

similar rhetorical strategy). This begins with v. 5, which summarizes the speaker's experience

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[62] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 233, 237–40. Zenger argues that the "…first narrative, vv. 5–12, speaks from an external perspective about danger from an enemy, while vv. 13–18 interpret the same event from an internal perspective as Yʜᴡʜ's chastisement…" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 233).

[63] Zenger argues that both parts of the "double narrative" in vv. 5–18 (i.e., vv. 5–12 and vv. 13–18) have general "maxims" as their structural centers (vv. 8–9 and v. 16), which they argue "are proposed as the quintessence of the experience of rescue attested by the petitioner" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 233).

similar to other individual psalms of thanksgiving (cf., e.g., Ps 30:2–3; 66:16–17; 116:1–2). The use of spatial imagery in v. 5 (i.e., "narrow place . . . broad place") draws attention to the *constraint* from which God—who by contrast is essentially unconstrained—was able to deliver the speaker.[64]

Building on the opening summary of the speaker's experience in v. 5, the didactic statements in vv. 6–9 draw the audience's attention to the essential *contrast* between human and divine agency exhibited by that experience. The presence of this overtly didactic praise in vv. 6–9 again signals this genre's capacity for the formation of its audiences amid the act of worship. The first pair of claims, in vv. 6–7, draw an explicit contrast between the effectiveness of divine agency and the relative impotency of human agency ("Yhwh is for me . . . what can a human being do to me?," v. 6). The statement models the rightly formed pious self as one that acknowledges that any sense of stability or safety a pious person can have in life should be founded on convictions about God's sovereign agency. The speaker's statement in v. 6 can be usefully contrasted with Ps 30:7, in which the speaker's problematic past self is represented in the statement "And I, I said in my prosperity, 'I will never be shaken.'" These psalms then share a concern with constructing the pious self in terms of God's sovereignty *throughout* experiences of affliction, not in terms of the invulnerability of the pious to affliction.

In the context of the postexilic period, the claims of vv. 8–9 would have had powerful political overtones for worshippers living under Persian imperial subjugation. The claim that

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[64] Zenger describes the two terms as "antonymic spatial descriptions" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 238). For הַמֵּצַר he suggests translating "confinement" or "distress", and for בַמֶּרְחָב he suggests "broad place." He argues further that the use of these contrasting terms is meant to describe the speaker's experience of rescue as "a concrete bringing-out from the situation experienced as crushing, oppression, and fear into a condition of freedom ('free space'), expansion of life ('living space'), and security ('protected space')." He also notes that semantic parallels of these words (מצר, "confinement," in Ps 116:3; Lam 1:3; and מרחב, "broad place," in Ps 18:20 = 2 Sam 22:20; Ps 31:9) suggest that they evoke "Israel's rescue from Egypt as well as from the exile."

"refuge in Yhwh" (vv. 8a, 9a) is better than that afforded by "human beings" (v. 8b) or "elites" (v. 9b) depicts God's sovereignty as an alternative to human systems of power.[65] In a period when the imperial government treated the vast majority of the Judean population as fuel for the imperial economy, vv. 8–9 would have resonated strongly with Judean audiences.[66] The notion that the pious self is dependent on Yhwh's sovereign power, and not the exploitative and untrustworthy power of human elites, suggests that a rightly formed self is an instrument for resilience within the oppressive constraints of colonial life. So, while the doxological rhetoric of Psalm 118 has easily transcended times and places over the centuries, its emphasis on divine sovereignty would have been particularly powerful for constructing the self amid the afflictions of colonized life in postexilic Judea.

The speaker's "first narrative" of their experience concludes in vv. 10–12, in which the psalm's conviction about divine sovereignty allows affliction itself to be depicted as at once overwhelming and at the same time essentially *impermanent* or *transient*. In vv. 10–12, the speaker recounts the most acute episode of their affliction in terms of repeated attack by surrounding enemies, which the speaker again and again "fended off" by invoking the name of Yhwh (vv. 10–12).[67] The depiction of the speaker as repeatedly overwhelmed in vv. 10–12 coheres with the speaker's recollection of calling out from a "narrow place" (v. 5), underscoring

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[65] Zenger points out that the form "better … than …" (טוב … מן …) is common in the wisdom literature (e.g., Qoh 7:1–10; Prov 15:16–17). See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 238.

[66] Cf. Samuel Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Lousiville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 130–145; Berquist, "Psalms, Postcolonialism, and the Construction of the Self," 195–98.

[67] There is a long and complex argument over the translation of the verb אֲמִילַם, which is a *hapax legomenon*. On my decision to translate this verb, "I fended them off," see the lengthy discussion in translation note *f* above. My translation agrees with those who understand the speaker's action in this verse to be essentially *defensive* in nature, against other proposals that suggest a more assertive action of decisive defeat. In addition to the explanation in the translation note, my discussion in this section will more fully explain some of my reasons for preferring this understanding of the verb.

the speaker as having narrowly escaped a dire situation (cf. also vv. 13, 17–18).

Verse 12's metaphorical depictions of the speaker's affliction as swarming "bees" and "fire in brambles" further underscore the idea of affliction as simultaneously ferocious and yet essentially transient. A swarm of bees cannot be defeated, rather one can only hide from them or "fend them off" (vv. 10–12). Similarly, a fire in wild brambles burns fiercely and is nearly impossible to contain, but eventually it burns itself out for lack of fuel.[68] Claudia Sticher has argued that the metaphors in v. 12 reinforce an idea common to biblical wisdom literature, namely that the end of the wicked is brought about by their own ways of being.[69] Affliction itself is then depicted in vv. 10–12 as being at once a terribly disorienting experience and at the same time essentially unable to *outlast* the speaker's own resiliency, which derives from the sovereign power of Yhwh. The psalm then conveys a model of the pious self as grounded in reality even more powerful than affliction, namely God's *permanent* devotion to the pious (cf. vv. 2–4; also compare the presentation of the same concept in Ps 30:5–6).

Verses 13–18

The next part of the psalm (vv. 13–18) builds on the previously developed theme of God's sovereignty to depict God as actively involved the whole timeline of the speaker's affliction. In the affliction itself, God acted as "disciplinarian" for the speaker (v. 18), but in the resolution of the affliction, God acted as the speaker's savior (vv. 13–16). The framing verses of this section

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[68] Cf. Martin Mark's discussion of this imagery, which emphasizes their depiction of a simultaneous ferocity and transience (Mark, *Meine Stärke*, 435–36).

[69] Claudia Sticher, *Die Rettung der Guten durch Gott und die Selbstzerstörung der Bösen: Ein theologisches Denkmuster im Psalter*, BBB 137 (Berlin: Philo, 2002), 260–76. Hossfeld and Zenger also discuss this point briefly, observing that the most frequent image for this idea is the snuffing out of a lamp, light, or fire (e.g., Job 18:5, "Surely the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of their fire does not shine"; they also cite Job 21:17; Prov 13:9; 20:20; 24:20). They agree with Sticher that Ps 118:12 is an allusion to this traditional imagery (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 239).

(vv. 13 and 18) depict Yhwh as actively involved in the speaker's affliction, while the middle verses (vv. 14–17) celebrate Yhwh's deliverance of the speaker from that affliction, using language derived from Exodus 15.[70] The depiction of Yhwh as the speaker's "disciplinarian" in v. 18 is similar to the depiction of affliction as an experience of "testing" or "refinement" in Psalms 30 and 66 (against those interpreters who suggest that it connotes punitive or retributive action).[71] Verse 18 suggests that affliction itself is an instrument by which God shapes, teaches, or strengthens the pious, and that when the pious survive their afflictions, it is because God has brought them through this experience successfully.

The dualistic portrayal of God as disciplinarian and deliverer in vv. 13–18 emphasizes

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[70] Verse 14 is an explicit quotation from the Song of the Sea in Exod 15:2a, and this section continues to draw on the imagery of Yhwh being a savior.

[71] Many commentators have interpreted Yhwh's action here as a retributive act of punishment in response to a particular event of wrongdoing, but the psalm never mentions wrongdoing on the part of the speaker (cf. elsewhere, where a speaker's wrongdoing is an explicit element of supplicant's situation before God, e.g., Ps 41:4; 51). A good example is Erich Zenger's commentary, which supports its exegetical claims with exemplary attention to detail at many other points. However, in this case Zenger interprets Yhwh's יסר in v. 18 as punitive without any explanation and despite the lack of any other evidence in the psalm to this effect. Zenger translates v. 18 as follows: "Punished, yes, Yh has punished me severely, but he has not delivered me over to death" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 228). In his comments, Zenger writes,

> [In vv. 13–18], Yhwh is himself the cause of the crisis situation, which the petitioner experiences, on the one hand, as being violently cast down and laments as a painful *punishment*, only immediately to declare, on the other hand, that Yhwh has shown himself in this very situation to be his helper and the savior of his life (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 233 [emphasis added]).

Later in his discussion, Zenger proposes understanding the psalm as reflecting a similar retributive theology as the Deuteronomistic History, which interpreted Judah's exile as a *punishment* from Yhwh. Zenger notes that his understanding of the psalm's congruence with the theology of the Deuteronomistic History affects his translation and interpretation of v. 18 (see, e.g., Zenger's comments in Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 240). However, he never offers any other support for this decision based on the contents of Psalm 118.

Other scholars rightly avoid imputing a punitive dimension to the "discipline" of v. 18. Rather, they take it as connoting disciplinary action with *educational* intent, which was nevertheless quite painful for the psalm's speaker. John Goldingay argues that both EVV and scholars like Zenger are wrong to read יסר here as denoting "punishment." Goldingay points out that "even when *yāsar* suggests a parent's or a teacher's chastisement, it does not denote retributive punishment, but action designed to teach (cf. [Ps] 16:7; 94:10, 12; LXX uses *paideuō*, but Jerome *arguo*)" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 3*, 360). Goldingay goes on to argue that v. 18 suggests that Yhwh put the speaker under severe pressures in order to push them to learn certain things about themselves. I agree with Goldingay and other scholars who see Yhwh's action here as disciplinary and educational, which is why I have translated, "Yh disciplined me severely…"

that the afflictions of the pious unfold according to the same divine sovereignty that ensures deliverance from those afflictions. Following the model of the speaker in vv. 13–18, the pious can understand even their most disorienting experiences of affliction as ultimately indicative of God's sovereign power. For postexilic communities under imperial rule, the psalm's construal of affliction as God's "discipline" of the pious would have been profoundly empowering for constructing selfhood in a world in which Yahwistic Judeans had very little control over their own lives. On the one hand, it resolves the tension between the experience of their ongoing subjugation and the sovereignty of their traditional God, and on the other, it allows for individuals and communities experiencing ongoing affliction to recover some agency in the description of their own lives. Affliction becomes an experience of divine involvement in the lives of the pious, rather than an experience that challenges the foundations of their faith.

Verses 19–29

The rest of the psalm (vv. 19–29) is a doxological liturgy for celebrating the deliverance of the afflicted speaker, containing antiphonal statements of praise concerning God's responsivity to the prayers of the afflicted and God's power to bring life out of situations of certain death. Rhetorically, the continuous first-person singular portion of the psalm concludes in v. 18, and the voicing of vv. 19–29 (i.e., the implied speaker(s) of each verse) has been variously assessed by scholars, since it seems to reflect a liturgical arrangement the details of which are no longer known.

Verses 19–21 are an entrance liturgy for enacting the conviction that *praise* is the right response of the pious to a survived ordeal of affliction.[72] Scholars generally agree that vv. 19 and 21 are voiced by the psalm's main speaker (i.e., the speaker of vv. 5–18), while v. 20 is the response of a liturgical leader characterized as a symbolic "gatekeeper" in this liturgy.[73] In terms of the psalm's effects for its audience, it is important to understand that the audience "overhears" this exchange. The admission of the afflicted through the "gates of the righteous" (v. 19–20) symbolically enacts the idea that affliction and its resolution are works of God to which the community ought to attend as revelatory events for the pious.[74] The performance of such a liturgy would have conveyed for worshippers a normative "template" for the experience of affliction, which ends in the reaffirmation of one's belonging to the community. Affliction, then, is not the mark of those not favored by Yhwh, but rather an experience by which one receives Yhwh's discipline, witnesses Yhwh's power to save, and ultimately through which one brings glory to God. The afflicted pious self is then constructed by this liturgy as a locus of divine activity in the world that binds the community together and reinforces shared commitment to God's sovereignty.

The psalm concludes with a communal hymn (indicated by first-person *plural* voicing) in

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[72] As argued by S. B. Frost in an early article, "Asseveration by Thanksgiving," *VT* 8 (1958): 380–90. Frost argued that the doxological words of v. 21 are the speaker's indirect way of self-identifying as a member of the community of the pious.

[73] As noted by Zenger, a similar entrance liturgy is reflected in Pss 15; 24:3–6; and Isa 33:14–24 (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 241).

[74] Zenger suggests that by "righteous," the leader in v. 20 means "those shown by Yhwh (through their being saved) to be righteous, those who worship him alone…" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 241). Zenger builds this point on his earlier discussion about how distress, in general, was seen as indicating that one's relationship to God had become problematic, i.e., that they were distant from God.

Scholars generally agree that the "gates of righteousness" are referring to the gates of the inner court of the Temple (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 241). Some scholars, however, have argued that the term refers to the city gates of Jerusalem. For a relatively recent example, see Hamidović, "Les portes de justice."

vv. 22–27 that interprets the affliction and restoration of one of the community's own as confirmation that "Yhwh is God" (v. 27). The proverb that begins this hymn suggests a specific interpretation of the speaker's experience. Like a stone rejected by builders, its potential having been reduced to nothing, the speaker's life seemed to be at an end. However, like a rejected stone being selected as the prominent cornerstone, God's resolution of the speaker's affliction made them a symbol of God's power for the whole community.[75] Verses 23–24 underscore the point that while the afflicted are the symbol of God's power, the work of the transformation itself belongs to God alone. In a word of appeal (v. 25), the community now assumes the posture exemplified by the psalm's speaker, following this appeal with affirmations of the one transformed (v. 26) and celebrations of God's sovereignty (v. 27).

The psalm concludes in vv. 28–29 with the singular voice of the psalm's main speaker celebrating the realities that their experience revealed for them and the community, namely that God's "love is forever" (v. 29), in contrast to even the most disorienting experiences of affliction, which ultimately cannot outlast God's devotion to the pious.

2.3.4. Psalm 118: Conclusions

The preceding analysis has demonstrated how Psalm 118 utilizes the rhetoric of doxology to frame the experience of its speaker as a symbolic revelation of God's sovereignty. The speaker's experience is lifted up as paradigmatic for the community of the pious, modeling especially the

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[75] There are many interpretive proposals for v. 22, but in general, I agree with the simple and careful reading of Erich Zenger, who argues for reading this stone as a "pediment" or "capstone that signals the completion of the building" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 242). Zenger argues this point on intertextual bases, pointing to other contexts where a capstone seems to be indicated (e.g., Zech 4:7). But he also argues that the whole point of the metaphor in its context in the psalm is to highlight the visibility of the speaker's experience to the community (and to those enemies before whom the speaker has been vindicated). Therefore, Zenger states, it cannot be referring to a stone located in the foundation, but rather must be a stone in some higher part of the building, a place in the structure visible to onlookers (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 242).

idea that the endured afflictions of the pious are inherently God-glorifying events, such that the pious may understand themselves and their afflictions as sites of God's glorification. The depiction of the afflicted speaker as being "disciplined" by Yhwh underscores the psalm's conviction that God is sovereign *throughout* experiences of affliction and that affliction itself is an instrument for God's testing or refinement of the pious.

3. Conclusions:
Doxology and the Formation of the Pious Self

This chapter has argued that the doxological rhetoric in Psalms 30, 66, and 118 has critical implications for how these psalms would have formed their audiences' ideas about the pious self. By emphasizing the sovereignty of divine agency, these psalms convey that affliction in the lives of the pious unfolds according to God's will, but that God is also powerful to protect and deliver the pious from their afflictions. Based on these ideas, the speakers of these psalms model a willingness to acknowledge God's sovereignty both during affliction and at its resolution. Because of their exemplary *dependence* on God's sovereign action amid their afflictions, the eventual deliverance of the speakers in these psalms transforms the whole event of their affliction into a God-glorifying event.

For Judean communities in the postexilic period, a model of pious selfhood built on the notion of God's continued sovereignty amid affliction would have been powerful for shaping the lives of the pious amid the challenges of colonized life. On the national level, the sovereignty of Israel's God had been called into question by the destruction of the temple and the collapse of central institutions. In this environment, as Rainer Albertz once argued, psalms that celebrate the action of God in the individual lives of the pious would have been encouraging to communities for whom the visibility of God's sovereignty on the national horizon had mostly become a

cherished memory.[76] These psalms would have encouraged a conceptualization of the pious self as a locus of God's sovereign action in the world.

Perhaps the most powerful idea conveyed by the psalms in this chapter is the notion that the experience of affliction in the lives of the pious is not a challenge to divine sovereignty, but that it ultimately functions as a *manifestation* of divine sovereignty. In framing the afflictions of the pious as events that unfold according to God's will, these psalms portray the afflicted pious self as a locus of God's ongoing activity with God's people, sometimes with reference to earlier collective memories like the exodus (cf. Ps 66:5–7). For afflicted Judeans during the postexilic period, these psalms would have fostered a way of seeing ongoing affliction as a product of Yhwh's sovereign agency, rather than as a product of the agency of any earthly antagonist, such as the Persian king or corrupt local rulers. Pious selfhood is then constructed here in terms of an openness or willingness to understand one's affliction in relation to God's continued sovereignty, such that the eventual experience of deliverance can be expected to illuminate the whole event of affliction as ultimately God-glorifying.

Closely related to the idea that God's sovereignty is manifest in the afflictions of the pious is the conceptualization of affliction itself as an experience of "testing" (Ps 66:10) or "discipline" (Ps 118:18). Conceptualizing affliction in the lives of the pious as a "test" or as divine "discipline" reframes affliction itself as a work of God and the endurance of affliction as a mark of pious identity. In the postexilic period, conceptualizing affliction as a test to be endured would have empowered the pious to new perspectives on the felt lack of agency characteristic of colonized life. As Christo Lombaard has argued, the presence of this motif in other literature of the postexilic period (e.g., Gen 22:1–19, Dan 3, Dan 6) suggests that the concept of affliction as

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[76] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 2:508–22.

"testing" rose to cultural prominence in this period, likely because it served the needs of postexilic communities well.[77] The psalms in this chapter then belong to a period in the history of early Jewish piety when models of the pious self were forced to reckon with the reality of ongoing affliction at both national and local levels. Their conceptualization of affliction as a process by which God tests or disciplines the pious would have contributed powerfully to the development of models of personal piety that are capable of reframing the afflictions of the pious as themselves God-glorifying events.

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[77] Christo Lombaard, "Testing Tales." Lombaard argues that, while the idea of God's testing of pious individuals may have existed in earlier periods, it seems to have risen to cultural prominence during the postexilic period, based on its presence in Persian-period prose contexts.

Chapter 4. Didacticism in Thanksgiving Psalms

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on thanksgiving psalms that are primarily characterized by *didactic*

rhetoric. While earlier form critics often saw these psalms as difficult to categorize, this

dissertation proposes understanding them as thanksgiving psalms in which the didactic

affordance of thanksgiving is "flexed" significantly, such that their didactic power is

maximized.[1] Building on this approach, this chapter explores how the didactic rhetoric of these

psalms would have had critical implications for their capacity to form their audiences' ideas

about pious selfhood.

While didactic rhetoric is inherently purposed toward the formation of its audiences, the

psalms in this chapter are not "purely" didactic texts. Rather, as psalms that were most likely

used in settings of liturgical worship, they blend their didacticism with doxology, producing a

medium that functions to form audiences while also facilitating worship. These psalms then

attest to a confluence of doxological and didactic rhetoric that took place in the history of

psalmody, and more specifically in the history of the thanksgiving genre.[2]

The didacticism of these thanksgiving psalms has important implications for how these

psalms would have contributed to the formation of their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood.

Didactic rhetoric inherently foregrounds the agency of the addressee, figuring them as capable of

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[1] On my use of the term "affordance" here, refer to the discussion at the end of Ch. 2, in which I introduce Caroline Levine's theory of "affordances" as useful for understanding the thanksgiving genre. Cf. Levine, *Forms*.

[2] This "confluence" has been recognized and discussed by other scholars, most notably Erhard Gerstenberger, who devoted a substantial excursus to the question of the setting of this confluence in his historical survey of Israelite religion during the Persian period (titled "Communal Instruction as Life Setting"). Cf. Erhard Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann, BibEnc 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 228–252. For a thorough review of scholarship on the confluence of "wisdom" literature and psalmody, cf. Catherine Petrany, *Pedagogy, Prayer and Praise: The Wisdom of the Psalms and Psalter*, FAT 2/83 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 5–41.

meaningful action. So, while these psalms certainly share the presupposition of God's sovereign agency with other thanksgiving psalms, they place more emphasis on the implications of this idea for how the afflicted pious should *act* in response to their afflictions.

This chapter has three parts. First, the introduction provides historical and social context for the confluence of doxological and didactic rhetoric exhibited in these psalms, arguing that this confluence reflects significant social changes in the postexilic period. After providing this context, the introduction outlines the basic argument of this chapter, listing the specific ways that didactic rhetoric shapes ideas about the pious self in these psalms. The chapter's middle section presents three case studies (Psalms 32, 34, and 41), which demonstrate the main arguments of this chapter and draw attention to the shared ideas about right response to affliction in these psalms. Finally, a conclusion summarizes the chapter's findings and briefly situates them in relation to the history of ideas about piety in the Second Temple period.

1.1. Contexts for Didactic Psalmody in the Early Second Temple Period

The confluence of doxological and didactic rhetoric exhibited by the psalms in this chapter has often made it difficult for scholars to reconstruct socio-historical contexts for their use.[3] On the one hand, they exhibit clear liturgical features, such as the plural address of a gathered congregation (Ps 32:9–11; 34:2–4, 8–11, 12–15).[4] On the other, the depiction of the speaking

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[3] An early example of how scholars struggle with the settings of didactic psalmody is Roland Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification, 'Wisdom Psalms,'" in *Congress Volume: Bonn, 1962*, ed. G. W. Anderson, VTSup 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 161. For a more recent consideration of how didactic elements of established genres of psalmody function within individual psalms, see Catherine Petrany, "Instruction, Performance, and Prayer: The Didactic Function of Psalmic Wisdom," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, AIL 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 87–103. Cf. also Catherine Petrany, *Pedagogy, Prayer and Praise*.

[4] While Psalm 41 contains no direct address of an implied audience, but the rhetoric of the opening macarism (vv. 2–4) followed by the self-presentation of the speaker's past prayer (vv. 5–11) suggests that an audience is assumed (cf. Mays, *Psalms*, 171).

voice as that of a *teacher* suggests use by liturgical leaders or priests in communal worship (as opposed to ordinary worshippers or visitors to the temple). Further, all the psalms considered in this chapter are generally dated to the exilic or early postexilic period.[5] These points suggest that these psalms reflect an early Second Temple context in which there was a confluence of doxological and sapiential poetry in psalmody, a phenomenon which becomes much more pronounced in later Second Temple literature, such as appears in the wisdom of Ben Sira and the Hodayot from Qumran.[6]

For several reasons, the postexilic period (especially the fifth century BCE) is a plausible context for the confluence of doxological and sapiential rhetoric exhibited in these psalms. The loss of national independence and the lack of a native king brought significant changes to the social organization of Judean society, among them a rise in the cultural prominence of religious elites, especially the Aaronide priesthood and the Levites. As Mark Leuchter has demonstrated, the Aaronide priesthood not only had the most power in the postexilic temple cult, it was also a vital instrument in the Persian administration of the Judean province, such that priests were seen not only as cultic administrators but also as cultural figureheads.[7] During this period, the Jerusalem temple and any affiliated shrines would have been the main contexts in which

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[5] For more detailed discussion of the datings of psalms considered in this chapter, see the introductory discussions of these psalms in the case studies below. For now, however, note that Hossfeld and Zenger have argued that the redaction of book 1 (Pss 1–41) of the MT Psalter took place in the early postexilic period as a response to the collapse of religious, political, and social institutions during the exile. See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen, Psalm 1–50*, 14–15.

[6] Scott C. Jones has proposed that a process he calls the "devotionalization of instruction" took place in the early postexilic period, reflected by psalms such as Psalm 37 (Jones, "Psalm 37 and the Devotionalization of Instruction"). Jones argues that Sirach and the Hodayot are later examples of this cultural development (Jones, "Psalm 37 and the Devotionalization of Instruction," 168).

[7] Mark A. Leuchter, "Cultic Traditions in the Writings: Priests and Levites in the Postexilic Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University, 2019), 67–83 (68–72). Cf. also Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 1: Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 216.

psalmody would have accompanied communal worship.[8] The leadership of priests and Levites in these spaces seems to have contributed to a significant increase in their social authority, such that they took on a new and deeper degree of *revelatory* authority.[9] Further, the ability of these liturgical leaders to *read* and *recite* sacred literature undergirded their status as figures of revelatory authority and likely contributed to their rise as *exemplary* figures who embodied the teachings they conveyed from sacred texts.[10]

The rise in prominence of liturgical leaders during the postexilic period then provides a plausible context against which scholars might understand the confluence of doxological and didactic rhetoric exhibited in Psalms 32, 34, and 41.[11] While these psalms reflect liturgical settings of worship, they also draw attention to the social authority of their speakers in a way that suggests a special degree of religious authority. One can easily imagine the psalms in this chapter

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[8] Leuchter emphasizes that the rebuilt Jerusalem temple would have been the only sanctuary in Yehud that the gola community claimed as a symbol of their group identity, such that the priesthood of this temple would have been the only sacral caste recognized by this community (Leuchter, "Cultic Traditions," 71).

[9] Leuchter, "Cultic Traditions," 73. Leuchter discusses the point that the decline of "classical prophecy" during this period seems to have contributed to the rise of the priest as a figure of prophetic revelation, endowing the priesthood with a greater degree of revelatory authority in the eyes of the general population.

[10] Leuchter discusses how the High Priest, in particular, became understood as an earthly embodiment of heavenly authority, who was expected to maintain the strictest standards of holiness in his everyday conduct (Leuchter, "Cultic Traditions," 73–74). The later words of Ben Sira (in the Hellenistic period) attest to the status held by the High Priest by the middle of the Second Temple period (cf. esp. Sirach 50). On the relationship of priests to scribal culture, Leuchter also notes that the Aaronide priesthood during this period would have overseen the training and curriculum of Jerusalem temple scribes and liturgists, such that they would have been directly involved in overseeing the shaping and editing of these texts for Persian period audiences (Leuchter, "Cultic Traditions," 73).

[11] I am not aware of any other scholarly work that posits the rise in prominence of liturgical leaders during this period as a context against which the confluence of doxological and didactic rhetoric in psalmody can be understood. However, as noted above, Gerstenberger has written a thoughtful excursus on the question of this confluence, titled "Communal Instruction as Life Setting," in which he largely focuses on the emergence of the synagogue in the early postexilic period as the context in which this confluence should be understood (Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period*, 228–252). However, Lester Grabbe has argued elsewhere that the earlier scholarly consensus that regular synagogue use began during the exilic period (i.e., due to the lack of a temple, etc.) is probably incorrect. Instead, Grabbe argues that the earliest evidence for synagogue use in Judea comes from the Hellenistic period, suggesting that synagogues were not a significant part of religious life in Judea during the Persian period. See Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 1:236–37.

being read publicly by a priest or Levite before a gathering of the pious in the second Jerusalem temple. While other settings of use are also plausible,[12] this proposed setting adds socio-historical context to the literary analyses of this chapter, which concerns the foregrounding of didactic rhetoric in an essentially doxological genre of psalmody. Keeping this plausible setting in mind gives some historical texture to the argument of this chapter, which primarily concerns the capacity of these psalms to *form* their audiences during the early Second Temple period.

Beyond reflecting changes in social organization, the confluence of doxological and sapiential rhetoric in these psalms likely also reflects the needs of Persian-period communities who struggled to maintain their religious identity under the pressures of imperial rule.[13] In this social situation, psalms that model right response to affliction would have been powerfully relevant for Judean worshippers, most of whom lived in poverty and all of whom lived with the ongoing afflictions of colonized existence.[14] As will be discussed below, two of the psalms in this chapter deal explicitly with the plight of the "poor" (עֲנָוִים, Ps 34:3; עָנִי, Ps 34:7; דָּל, Ps 41:2), and while scholars debate the original connotations of these terms, they generally agree that such terminology would have resonated specifically with postexilic populations as reflective of their ongoing socio-political afflictions.[15] Further, the move to blend *praise* of God's sovereign power,

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[12] Cf., e.g., Gerstenberger's insistent argument that psalms were used in other non-cultic, local settings during the postexilic period. Gerstenberger's proposal aligns well with what has been discussed here, as his proposal assumes the presence of local cultic leaders and/or liturgists who oversaw the reading/reciting of psalms for ordinary worshippers (cf. Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms").

[13] Cf. Berquist, "Psalms, Postcolonialism and the Construction of the Self."

[14] On the point that most of the postexilic population of Judea lived in poverty, see Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 1:193–195. Grabbe explains that while the effects of imperial taxation on the quality of everyday life in Yehud is difficult to estimate, it seems clear that most people lived in "grinding poverty" by modern standards, and that there was certainly no "middle class" in postexilic Judean society, only vast numbers of poor and a very small minority of rich (Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 1:193).

[15] These terms will be discussed more in the case studies below. For the point that an emphasis on the needs of the poor in didactic psalms suggests a social situation in which much of society saw themselves as living in ongoing affliction, see Nõmmik and Põldsam, "Psalm 86," 410.

on the one hand, with *instruction* for those experiencing affliction, on the other, speaks directly to the social situation of the postexilic period, during which Judean communities likely sought ways to conceptualize their afflictions in relation to their shared traditions about Yhwh's sovereignty.

1.2. Didacticism in Thanksgiving Psalms

While the thanksgiving genre clearly suggests its use as an instrument of praise, the genre's focus on self-presentations of pious personas generates an ideal literary space for *didacticism* as well. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, a speaker's "self-presentation" allows not only for the relating of past experience, but also for the communication of insights or exhortations to the pious community based on that experience (cf. Pss 30:5–6; 66:16–18; 118:6–9). As noted by Gunkel, thanksgiving psalms in general tend to include insights or instruction based on the past experience of their speaking subjects.[16] However, while all thanksgiving psalms exhibit this basic tendency toward didacticism, some thanksgiving psalms seem to reflect their composers' interest in accentuating this affordance of the genre, such that didacticism becomes their main rhetorical purpose.

This chapter argues that Psalms 32, 34, and 41 foreground didacticism in their rhetoric to such an extent that the *instruction* of the audience becomes the main rhetorical purpose of these psalms. While the psalms considered in Ch. 3 exhibited some didacticism, the psalms considered in this chapter "flex" the didactic potential of the genre to its extreme, such that the psalms are framed as instruments for education in piety. Instead of including brief didactic "moments" (e.g.,

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[16] Gunkel, *Introduction*, 205. Cf. also Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 51, 59. Weiser also draws attention to the didactic qualities of thanksgiving psalmody. Weiser observes that thanksgiving "occasionally turns from personal matters to matters of common concern, in particular to exhortatory and didactic matters" (Weiser, *Psalms*, 86).

Ps 30:5–6), psalms considered in this chapter feature overtly didactic openings (Ps 32:1–2; 41:2–4) and whole sections of uninterrupted instruction of the pious (Ps 32:8–11; 34:12–23; 41:2–4), such that commentators often argue over whether these psalms can rightly be considered "thanksgiving" at all.[17] Further, the psalms in this chapter all exhibit the use of language or imagery drawn from sapiential literature (cf. the use of macarisms beginning with Heb. אַשְׁרֵי in Ps 32:1–2; 34:9; 41:2–4), which suggests their composers' intentional confluence of doxological and sapiential discourse.

Rhetorically, these psalms are marked apart from other thanksgiving psalms by two important features. First, their overtly didactic rhetoric figures the relationship between the psalm's speaker and its audience as that between a *teacher* and *learners*, even while maintaining the liturgical dynamic of constructing both as fellow worshippers oriented to the divine. While thanksgiving psalms in general depict speakers who have a certain degree of "authority" to share insights based in their experience, these psalms present their speakers as having the more substantial authority of a liturgical *leader* or *teacher* in the community (cf., e.g., Ps 34:12, "Come, children, listen to me! I will teach you the fear of Yhwh"). Considering this point, it is likely that audiences would have identified *with* the speaking voices of these psalms, but not so much *as* them. Instead, audiences would likely have identified more readily with the addressee of these psalms' didactic rhetoric. Second, the "self-presentation of affliction and resolution," which is common to thanksgiving psalms, is here deployed primarily as the rhetorical *basis of instruction*. Since the speaker is figured as a teacher, their experience is rhetorically presented as a locus of authoritative insight into matters of piety. As a result, there is a much more explicit

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[17] Cf., e.g., John Goldingay's comments on Psalm 34 (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 477). The prominence of didactic rhetoric in Psalm 34 leads Goldingay to assert that it cannot be considered a thanksgiving psalm, since its purpose is so clearly to address human listeners, not to give praise to God.

connection in these psalms between the self-presentation of the speaker's experience and the specific insights/instructions given to the audience.

The foregrounding of didacticism in Psalms 32, 34, and 41 has several implications for how these psalms convey specific ideas about the pious self to their audiences:

1. First, since the nature of didactic rhetoric is to endow the listener with a significant degree of agency, these psalms construct the pious self as an agent capable of meaningful action in relation to experiences of affliction. So, in contrast to doxological rhetoric, which emphasizes the effectiveness of *divine* action, the didacticism of these psalms emphasizes actions the pious should take in order to rightly respond to affliction. The pious self conveyed by these psalms is then a capable agent, whose actions are meaningful *because* God is sovereign, and because God is concerned with the welfare of the afflicted pious. In a world constrained by imperial power, these psalms conveyed agency to their audiences by figuring their *responses* to affliction as meaningful.

2. Second, following on the last point, these psalms share an emphasis on the *specific* action of *seeking God* amid affliction, primarily in the form of *prayer*. The decision to pray amid affliction marks the pious apart from those who do not acknowledge God's sovereignty, and it orients the pious to the one who alone is capable of effecting meaningful change for the afflicted.

3. Finally, as a result of these emphases, these psalms conceptualize affliction itself as an experience that ought to move the pious to action, specifically the actions of self-examination and prayer. These psalms then place less emphasis on the notion of affliction as a "test" that must be endured, and instead, focus is placed on how the pious respond to affliction, regardless of its meaning.

The case studies of Psalms 32, 34, and 41 will demonstrate how each of these psalms, in its own way, conveys these ideas about the pious self in relation to affliction.

2. Case Studies: Psalms 32, 34, and 41

2.1. Psalm 32

2.1.1. Psalm 32: Introduction

Psalm 32 is a prime example of the confluence of didacticism and doxology discussed in the introduction to this chapter. The psalm opens with two macarisms that celebrate the blessedness of being numbered among the righteous, especially through the forgiveness of sin (vv. 1–2). The middle portion of the psalm contains the speaker's self-presentation of affliction and resolution (vv. 3–7). In vv. 3–4, the speaker recalls how they remained "silent" amid their affliction (i.e., did not appeal to Yhwh), but later, the speaker's decision to appeal to Yhwh for help by way of confession (v. 5) allowed for a swift resolution of their affliction by way of forgiveness. In vv. 6–7, the speaker's prayer exhorts the pious to the practice of *prayer* amid affliction, drawing on the model of the experience described in vv. 3–5. In the psalm's remaining verses (vv. 8–11), the speaker urges the pious to be wise in appealing to God amid their afflictions (vv. 8–10) before concluding with a call to praise (v. 11).

While most scholars consider Psalm 32 a thanksgiving psalm, its mixture of doxology and didacticism has caused many to disclaim it as a thanksgiving with strong sapiential influences.[18] Building on poststructuralist approaches to genre, and drawing specifically on

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[18] Beginning with Hermann Gunkel, who classified the psalm as an "individual thanksgiving psalm" with elements from wisdom poetry (Gunkel, *Introduction*, 199), most scholars have posited a mixture of thanksgiving psalmody and "wisdom" elements. Cf., e.g., Phil J. Botha, who argued the psalm "should not be read as a thanksgiving psalm with secondary wisdom elements, but as a wisdom teaching psalm replicating elements from a psalm of thanksgiving" (Phil J. Botha, "Psalm 32: A Social-Scientific Investigation," *OTE* 32 [2019]: 12–31 [13–14]); similarly, Peter Craigie, "…just as the wisdom characteristics of the text tend to undermine the classification as an individual thanksgiving psalm, so too the thanksgiving elements (and particularly the concluding verse) tend to undermine the classification of the text as a wisdom psalm in any conventional sense" (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 265);

Caroline Levine's theory of "affordances," this study understands Psalm 32 to be a thanksgiving psalm in which the didactic affordance of thanksgiving is prominently "flexed," such that the rhetorical vantage of thanksgiving (i.e., one who has survived affliction and now speaks about it to the community) becomes an occasion for the instruction of the pious.[19]

Scholars have been unable to determine a specific date for Psalm 32, but many place it in the postexilic period, especially due to its emphasis on the practice of *confession* in relation to affliction caused by sin, since this emphasis parallels similar themes in postexilic penitential prayers (e.g., Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, Daniel 9; cf. Lev. 26:40–45).[20] Scholars agree, however, that the psalm reflects use in communal settings of worship, despite its sapiential discourse.[21] This analysis then proceeds on the assumption that Psalm 32 likely was used in the temple or other local spaces of worship during the postexilic period, and likely reflects the growing social authority and influence of liturgical leaders during this period.[22]

Bernd Willmes describes it as having a "mixture of styles," calling it "ein Dankpsalm mit Motiven der Belehrung, so daß man von einer Stilmischung sprechen kann" (Willmes, *Freude über die Vergebung der Sünden*, 28); similarly Beat Weber (*Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 158), "Bei Ps 32 handelt es sich um ein weisheitlich eingekleidetes Danklied…"; cf. also Weiser, *Psalms*, 281; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 143; Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 134, "ein Dankpsalm mit einem starken weisheitlichen Einschlag"; Tanner in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 306; Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 452.

[19] See the last section of Ch. 2 for my discussion of Caroline Levine's theory of "affordances" and how it relates to this study's understanding of thanksgiving psalms. Cf. Levine, *Forms*.

[20] Scholars who note these themes as possible indications of the psalm's date include Mays, *Psalms*, 145; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 143.

[21] E.g., Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 141–3, who suggests that the psalm's mixture of communal liturgical address and didacticism likely reflects the changed social structure of the postexilic period, in which gatherings of the pious regularly involved praise and instruction (*Psalms Part 1*, 143); Weiser, *Psalms*, 282; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 265, who suggests that Psalm 32 is a wisdom poem adapted to thanksgiving for cultic use; Mays, *Psalms*, 145; Tanner (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 306), who emphasizes its liturgical character for use in public worship.

[22] Cf. Mays' comment that "the psalm . . . belongs to the late phase of psalmody when the pedagogical role of worship became more significant" (Mays, *Psalms*, 145).

2.1.2. Psalm 32: Translation

1   *of David. a maśkîl.*

    Happy is the one whose transgression[a] is forgiven,
        the one whose sin is covered.[b]
2   Happy is the person to whom Yhwh reckons no iniquity,
        and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3   While I kept silent, my bones wasted away,
        by my groaning all day long.
4   For day and night your hand was heavy upon me,
        my strength[c] was dried as in the heat of summer. *Selah.*

5   I confessed my sin to you,
        and my iniquity I did not cover.
    I said, "I will confess my transgressions to Yhwh."
        And you, you forgave the iniquity of my sin.[d] *Selah.*
6   Therefore[e] let every faithful one pray to you
        at a time of distress,[f]
    Indeed, when he is overwhelmed by mighty waters,
        they will not reach him.
7   You are a hiding place for me,
        You protect me from trouble,
        You surround me with glad songs of escape. *Selah.*

8   I will instruct you, and I will teach you,
        in the way that you should go.
    I will counsel you,
        my eye upon you.

9   Do not be like a horse or mule,
        in whom there is no understanding,
    whose advance[g] must be controlled with bit and bridle,
        never coming near you.
10 Many are the pains of the wicked,
        but the one who trusts in Yhwh,
        [Yhwh's] love surrounds him.
11 Delight in Yhwh,
        Rejoice, you righteous ones!
           Shout for joy, all you upright of heart!

Notes to Translation of Psalm 32

[a] Cf. the use of פֶּשַׁע in Ps 51:5, in which the speaker claims to know their own transgression. Cf. also Job 31:33, in which Job declares his own piety by claiming that he has not covered (כסה) his transgression.

^b The construct phrases נְשׂוּי־פֶּשַׁע and כְּסוּי חֲטָאָה are epexegetical genitive phrases, a much rarer type of genitive than the more common attributive genitive. In this construction, the second (genitive) noun is characterized by the first (construct) noun, in this case a passive participle. For epexegetical genitives see *IBHS* §9.5.3c. Waltke and O'Connor explicitly refer to the first of the two phrases in Ps 32:3 in *IBHS* §37.3c, #26.

^c Literally, "my juice was turned/changed" (נֶהְפַּךְ לְשַׁדִּי). The noun לְשַׁד occurs only here and in Num 11:8 (as noted by Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 451). Kraus (*Die Psalmen 1*, 253 n. a) suggests the emended reading לְשׁנִי ("my tongue") for MT's problematic לְשַׁדִי ("my juice"). Craigie agrees with Kraus, translating, "my tongue was turned as in summer drought" (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 264 n. 4a).

^d Philip Botha has observed that verse 5 reuses two of the key verbs in the beatitude of v. 1, כסה ("to cover") and נשא ("to forgive") (Botha, "Psalm 32," 18). Botha suggests that the reuse of these two key verbs signals inclusio from vv. 1–5, in which the speaker first proclaims the blessedness of all those who experience forgiveness and "covering" of their sins, and then follows this blessing with the account of their own experience of this blessedness. The inclusio therefore identifies the speaker as belonging to the "blessed" group of v. 1, a member of the exemplary pious.

^e The Hebrew prepositional phrase עַל־זֹאת is more literally translated "upon/on this," but here I understand the preposition עַל as functioning to indicate that the instruction that follows is given on the basis of the information conveyed in vv. 1–5 of the psalm. Waltke and O'Connor state that the preposition עַל may sometimes serve to "introduce a *norm* (the basis on which an act is performed)," and they cite Exod 24:8 (עַל כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה; "*in accordance with* all these words"; *IBHS* §11.2.13e).

^f This line is very difficult to translate as it appears in MT, לְעֵת מְצֹא רַק. Scholars have proposed many solutions, but no consensus exists, since the line is so difficult. The most common solution, however, is an emendation to the text that involves emending the last two words of the line from מְצֹא רַק to the noun מָצוֹק ("stress, straits"). Craigie explains the logic of this emendation when he writes, "if the *waw* was written erroneously as a *resh*, the *aleph* in MT may have been introduced to resolve the anomalous form" (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 264). This emendation is reflected in several English versions, including the RSV, NAB, NEB, and NRSV. Scholars who follow this emendation include, e.g., Craigie (*Psalms 1–50*, 264; "at a time of stress") and Beth Tanner (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 307; "at a time of distress"). Some other scholars, such as John Goldingay, attempt to maintain the MT as it appears. Goldingay translates, "Therefore every committed person should plead with you when he is found, Yes, when he is overwhelmed..." (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 452), which translates the particle רַק at the end of the line as the first word of the next line, "Yes." Goldingay notes that the verse is quite "elliptical," however. My translation here agrees with the emendation followed by Craigie and Tanner.

^g I translate עֶדְיוֹ as a noun from עדה I, "to walk along" (*HALOT*, 789), with Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 452 n. i. For a list of several of the many other possibilities suggested by scholars, see DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 307 n. 8.

2.1.3. Psalm 32: Analysis

Verses 1–2

Psalm 32 opens with two macarisms (vv. 1–2), signaling the psalm's overall intent to *instruct* its audience in matters of piety.[23] The macarism of v. 1 ("Happy is the one whose transgression is

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[23] The macarisms in vv. 1–2 (using Hebrew אַשְׁרֵי, "happy") stand out from other similar sayings in the biblical Psalter in that they focus on the happiness of those who have experienced forgiveness of sin. Cf., e.g., Pss 1:1; 2:12;

forgiven, the one whose sin is covered") comes very close to the idea expressed by Eliphaz in

Job 5:17, "How happy is the one whom God reproves (Hiphil, יכח); therefore do not despise the

discipline of the almighty."[24] The opening blessing of Psalm 32 then not only signals didactic

intent, but frames the speaker's experience of affliction as brought on by moral failure and

resolved by God's forgiveness.

The opening macarisms in vv. 1–2 also serve to summarize the speaker's experience in

the way that other thanksgiving psalms do via *doxological* openings.[25] The opening then serves a

kind of double function, summarizing the speaker's experience of deliverance (which will be

expanded upon in vv. 3–7), while also synthesizing the psalm's main teaching that it is wise to

seek God when beset by overwhelming affliction, even when affliction may be related to past

moral failure.

Overview of Verses 3–7

The psalm's middle section (vv. 3–7) contains the speaker's self-presentation of their past

experience (vv. 3–5) and the insight that issued from it (vv. 6–7), all of which are voiced as

prayer addressed directly to Yhwh. This section of Psalm 32 is an excellent example of the use

of "triangulated address" to frame a teaching within the discourse of *prayer*. The effect of

addressing these verses to God (and not to the listening audience, as in vv. 1–2) is to figure the

speaker and their audience as fellow worshippers oriented to the divine, such that the audience is

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33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4, 5, 12; 89:15; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1–2; 127:5; 128:1; 144:15; 146:5, all of which have to do with the "happiness" of those who adhere to the way of Yhwh, his Torah, or otherwise are associated with righteousness.

[24] Cf. a similar idea in Ps 94:12, "Happy are those whom you discipline (Piel, יסר), O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law."

[25] Cf., e.g., Ps 30:2–4; 66:1–4; 118:1–4; 34:2–4; 116:1–2.

drawn into internalizing the speaker's presentation as an act of devotion. While the speaker is "teaching" the audience, they are also praying in solidarity with them as fellow pious, but their prayer functions to exemplify the pious self amid affliction (vv. 3–5), and their petitions function to exhort the community of the pious to right action (vv. 6–7).

Verses 3–5

The self-presentation of affliction and resolution in vv. 3–5 has often been assumed by scholars to be a classic "penitential" event that depicts the speaker's deliberate *concealment* of their sin and the catharsis of eventual "confession," which unburdens their guilty conscience.[26] However, in light of recent work by David A. Lambert on the nature of penitential discourse in the Hebrew Bible, some clarification of these verses is warranted.[27] There are two key moments in this section that have caused scholars to understand this section as just described, namely the phrase "while I kept silent" (כִּי־הֶחֱרַשְׁתִּי; v. 3a) and the depiction of the speaker's "confession" in v. 5 (Hiphil, ידה), which results in God's forgiveness of their sin and the resolution of their affliction. Previous scholars then understand the speaker's crisis to be primarily their intentional *concealment* of sin, such that resolution comes about through their decision to "confess" (i.e., *reveal*) their sin. A brief review of some of Lambert's main insights will contextualize a reframing of the dynamics at work in this text.

In a recent monograph, David Lambert has convincingly argued that scholars have largely misunderstood the the theme of "repentance" (and related "penitential" language) in the

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[26] Cf., e.g., Beth Tanner's commentary on the psalm, "[Verses 3–5] speak of how unconfessed sin feels. . . Verse 5 describes the release from our torture" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 308). Cf. also the discussions of Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 455–56; Weiser, *Psalms*, 281–85; and Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 266–67.

[27] David A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2016).

Bible, often projecting modern assumptions about the dynamics of penitence and confession onto biblical texts.[28] Three insights from Lambert's work are especially helpful for the matter of interpreting Psalm 32:3–5. First, Lambert argues that the more general category of "appeal" is better than the more narrow category of "repentance" for understanding pious responses to affliction in Israelite religion, especially when related to guilt or sin.[29] Second, Lambert argues that the "logic of appeal" works the same way in Israelite religion whether one's affliction is related to past moral failure or not: appeal is about seeking Yhwh's help in resolving one's affliction.[30] This is because, according to Lambert, appeal is primarily about *acknowledging Yhwh as sovereign* and therefore the only agent capable of fully resolving one's affliction (whether it originated in moral failure or not).[31] Failure to appeal amid affliction (i.e., "silence" amid affliction, as depicted in Ps 32:3–4), is then offensive to Yhwh because it suggests an unwillingness to acknowledge Yhwh as sovereign. Finally, it follows that "confession" in Israelite religion is not so much concerned with the expression of emotions as it is with the *naming of what's wrong* so that God can deal with it.[32] These insights have important implications for understanding how a text such as Ps 32:3–5 models ideas about the pious self

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[28] Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, esp. 33–67.

[29] Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 34. Lambert explains this point well at one point: ". . . to ask for forgiveness is a plea for help like any other. There is no need to superimpose an unmentioned penitential event onto these prayers in order to understand their efficacy. What we encounter is a spectrum whereby sin figures more or less explicitly. On one side of the spectrum, we have the vast majority of psalms, which do not allude to sinfulness. On the other side, we have those psalms and narrative cases that are marked by pleas for forgiveness of sin. Where we are along the spectrum, however, does not impact appeal's basic function, the securing of physical well-being" (Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 38).

[30] Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 34–39.

[31] Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 35.

[32] Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 62. Note that this does not mean that confession never involves the expression of remorse or other similar emotions, but that the act of confession as a matter of piety is *defined* by its function of describing the nature of a problem so that the deity can respond and resolve it well.

amid affliction.

With Lambert's help, we are able to see that vv. 3–5 are less concerned with depicting the drama of a "burdened conscience" and more concerned with conveying the wisdom of seeking Yhwh and the foolishness of remaining "silent" amid affliction. In vv. 3–4, the presentation of the speaker's crisis begins with the phrase "while I kept silent" (v. 3a), suggesting that their prolonged affliction in vv. 3–4 was only worsened by their failure to appeal to Yhwh for help.[33] The heaviness of Yhwh's hand upon the speaker suggests the experience of divine wrath (v. 4), underscoring the notion of God's sovereignty amid affliction, and heightening the irony of the speaker's decision to remain "silent" about their affliction. Later, the speaker will instruct the pious not to be stubborn "like a horse or mule" (v. 9), which will build on the self-presentation in vv. 3–5 in order to underscore the wisdom of appealing to Yhwh when beset by affliction.

The speaker's affliction is resolved in v. 5 when they decide to break their silence and "confess" their sin to Yhwh, thereby modeling the *decision to appeal* amid affliction, a hallmark of the pious self according to Psalm 32. Notably, v. 5 draws attention to the speaker's internal deliberation about their decision to appeal (v. 5c, "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to Yhwh'"), exemplifying for listeners that it is never too late to break silence and reorient oneself to the divine amid affliction.[34] The immediate response of Yhwh in v. 5 serves emphatically to confirm the wisdom of the speaker's decision. Yhwh's quick "forgiveness" of the speaker also

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[33] Again, it may be the case that the failure to appeal in vv. 3–4 connotes a *concealment* of sin, and that this concealment resulted in psychosomatic anguish brought on by a guilty conscience, as many commentators have previously speculated (e.g.,). However, my point here is that the psalm is less concerned with depicting the emotional burden of concealing one's wrongdoing than it is with depicting the foolishness of failing to trust God with one's afflictions, such that they might be powerfully resolved, as they are in v. 5.

[34] Cf. Bildad's advice to Job in Job 8:1–7, in which Bildad responds to Job's unwillingness to make right supplication by advising yet again that Job should "seek God and make supplication to the Almighty" (Job 8:5), after which God will surely "rouse himself" and restore Job in dramatic fashion.

serves to confirm that Yhwh is powerful to deal with all kinds of affliction, whether they are brought on by moral failure or not. The most important thing is that, when beset by affliction, the pious remain willing both to examine themselves and to acknowledge Yhwh as the only sovereign agent capable of resolving their afflictions.

Verses 6–7

Following the self-presentation of the speaker's affliction, vv. 6–7 transition immediately to conveying insights to the pious that have emerged from this exemplary account. The conjunction "therefore" (i.e., the Heb. prepositional phrase עַל־זֹאת, v. 6a) signals the close rhetorical connection between vv. 3–5 and the insights that follow, such that the speaker's own experience is presented as the *basis* of the instruction given in the rest of the psalm.[35] On this basis, then, the speaker prays that "all the faithful" (כָּל־חָסִיד; v. 6a) would *pray* whenever they find themselves overwhelmed by affliction, here depicted as "mighty waters" (v. 6c). The speaker's prayerful exhortation to prayer in v. 6 again emphasizes the point that the psalm is less concerned with the unburdening of a guilty conscience and more concerned with conveying a kind of template for right response to affliction.[36] The psalm does not instruct those who conceal sins to bring them into the open, rather it instructs all the faithful to *pray* whenever they find themselves overwhelmed by affliction. Whether the pious are burdened with sin or not, their response to affliction ought always to be to seek God, who alone is capable of delivering them.

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[35] On this conjunction, see the note in the translation of v. 6 above.

[36] Cf. those commentators who emphasize that the psalm is meant to teach "penitence." E.g., Mays, *Psalms*, 145, "the practice of penitence is taught as a lesson"; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 143, "the psalm is a homily on penitence"). The psalm is less concerned with "penitence" and more concerned with the general willingness of the pious to seek God's help amid affliction.

The speaker's self-presentation in vv. 3–7 concludes with words addressed to God (v. 7) that exemplify the right posture of the pious amid affliction while also praising God for the speaker's own deliverance in vv. 3–5. By describing God as a "hiding place" (v. 7a), a protector (v. 7b), and one who "surrounds" the speaker with "songs of escape" (v. 7c), the speaker emphasizes their portrayal of God as not only capable of delivering the pious from their afflictions, but also lovingly devoted to their welfare. When one considers the postexilic context in which this psalm was likely used, it is notable that the speaker does not depict God as aggressively defeating the speaker's afflictions, but rather as a place in which the speaker can "hide" from them safely. God's sovereignty is here conceptualized as providing a place of "hiding" for the pious amid the "mighty waters" of overwhelming affliction (cf. v. 6c). For communities struggling with the ongoing affliction of colonized life under a foreign government, the idea that God's sovereignty is manifest in the ongoing survival of the pious amid overwhelming affliction would have been powerful and encouraging.

Verses 8–11

The psalm's final section reinforces the teachings of its first half by underscoring the prudence of acting according to the speaker's model (vv. 3–5) and exhortations (vv. 6–7). While vv. 8–11 can be generally described as didactic, scholars are divided on how to understand the rhetorical nuances of voicing especially in vv. 8–9. The main problem is that v. 8 is addressed to a singular addressee, while vv. 9–11 are addressed to a plural audience. Scholars are then divided on how the singular address of v. 8 should be understood in relation to the rest of the psalm. Scholars presuming a setting in which oracular revelation is blended with liturgical address propose that vv. 8–9 both be understood as a divine oracle in the voice of Yhwh, perhaps directed to the

speaker of vv. 3–7.[37] Other scholars suggest that v. 8 should be read in the voice of the psalm's

main speaker addressed to a single/typical listener.[38] Still others suggest that v. 8 should be

understood as the voice of Yhwh, while v. 9 should be understood as the voice of the teacher

addressing the gathered pious.[39] Since there is no way to know for sure how these words might

have been understood by listeners,[40] it is probably best to presume that, in a public setting of

reading these words would have been understood variously by listeners. In any case, vv. 8–10, as

a whole, present as a series of didactic statements aimed at the psalm's audience, despite the

singular addressee of v. 8.

Taken as a whole, vv. 8–11 assure a beleaguered community that the response to

affliction modeled by the psalm is wise, despite the ongoing and overwhelming nature of the

afflictions a Judean audience would have been dealing with during this period. As such, they

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[37] Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 158; Kraus, *Psalmen 1*, 254; Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 134.

[38] Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament*, JSOTSup 357 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 101; Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 111; Weiser, *Psalms*, 286; Mays, *Psalms*, 145; and Tremper Longman III, *Psalms 1*, TOTC 15 (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 165; Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, 162; J. Clinton McCann, "Psalms," *NIB* 3:393. Among these interpreters, two important points are often cited in support of this reading:

First, scholars point out that there is no indication of speaker-change from v. 7 to v. 8. So, e.g., Carleen Mandolfo states, "The voicing shift in v. 8 is not discernible grammatically, leading most scholars to identify no shift in discourse" (Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 101). They also point out that there is no indication of a change *back* to a human speaker in v. 8 or 9, and that Yhwh is referred to twice in the third person in vv. 10–11.

Second, as Samuel Hildebrandt observes, this position seems to be reflected already in the Peshitta, which omits the "Selah" at the end of v. 7, so that v. 8 is read seamlessly with the previous verse (Samuel Hildebrandt, "Whose Voice is Heard? Speaker Ambiguity in the Psalms," *CBQ* 82 (2020): 197–213 (207). For the verse in question, see D. M. Walter, *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshiṭta Version, Part II, Fascicle 3: The Book of Psalms* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 31. In contrast, note that LXX retains the "Selah" (διάψαλμα) in all versions.

[39] This position is supported by the fact that the second-person addressee of v. 8 is *singular* ("I will instruct you [אַשְׂכִּילְךָ]...") while the second-person addressee of v. 9 is *plural* ("Do not be [אַל־תִּהְיוּ] like a horse or mule"). Scholars who take this position include Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 458–59; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I, Psalm 1–50*, 200; and Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 267.

[40] As maintained by Rolf A. Jacobson, *Many Are Saying: The Function of Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOTSup 397 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 59; Ellen T. Charry, *Psalms 1–50: Sighs and Songs of Israel*, BTCB (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 168–69; Tanner in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 308–309. For a more recent and different approach to this position that argues the ambiguity is an intentionally ambiguous rhetorical device, see Hildebrandt, "Whose Voice is Heard?," 207–209.

frame the whole psalm with assurance that those who trust in Yhwh amid affliction (v. 10) will

be watched over (v. 8) and "surrounded" by Yhwh's love (i.e, Yhwh's חֶסֶד, v. 10c). As noted

earlier, v. 9 uses wisdom imagery to warn the pious against becoming stubborn (i.e., unwilling to

trust in Yhwh amid afflictions, as the speaker was in vv. 3–5).[41] During the postexilic period,

ongoing afflictions may have tempted many to abandon Yahwistic practice and regular prayer

(i.e., what the speaker here depicts as foolish stubbornness and unwillingness to appeal). The

psalm instead urges the pious to a kind of *resilience* amid affliction characterized by trust that

Yhwh is powerful to respond to the prayers of the pious.

2.1.3. Psalm 32: Conclusions

Psalm 32 uses the exemplary model of its speaker to undergird its teaching about pious selfhood

with the rhetoric of authoritative experience. The psalm models in its speaker the foolishness of

withdrawal from Yhwh amid affliction and the wisdom of appeal by contrast, especially in the

form of prayer (v. 6). While Yhwh is understood as fundamentally sovereign amid affliction, this

sovereignty entails a particular *response* of the pious amid their afflictions. If God is sovereign,

the psalm argues, then the pious are those who acknowledge that reality by refusing to become

"silent" amid their afflictions, and instead ought always to continue to make appeal to the one

who is solely capable of delivering them.

2.2. Psalm 34

2.2.1. Psalm 34: Introduction

Psalm 34 is the most overtly didactic psalm considered in this study, marked by its use of explicit

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[41] The images of horse and mule are quite common in wisdom literature (cf., e.g., Prov 26:3), but this comparison is unique in the biblical psalms (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 459).

forms of communal didactic address (cf. v. 12, "Come, children, listen to me! I will teach you the fear of Yhwh") and its lack of any direct address of Yhwh.[42] In this psalm, the didactic potential of the thanksgiving genre is realized to its fullest. While the psalm is rhetorically structured around the exemplary experience of its speaker—one who experienced deliverance by seeking Yhwh amid affliction (cf. esp. vv. 5–7)—its main rhetorical purpose is to instruct its audience in "the fear of Yhwh" (vv. 8, 10, 12), exhorting them to trust in Yhwh amid ongoing afflictions. The speaker's self-presentation therefore serves mainly to locate the psalm's teaching in relation to an exemplary pious persona, undergirding it with the social authority of the psalm's speaker, who is depicted as a teacher of the community.

Like other psalms that do not neatly adhere to early form-critical categories, scholars have proposed many different options for Psalm 34's genre and possible settings of use. In terms of genre, as in the case of Psalm 32, many scholars have proposed their own variations of the idea that the psalm "mixes" elements of thanksgiving psalmody and "wisdom" literature.[43] Another group of scholars more confidently asserts that the psalm is clearly a thanksgiving psalm, usually noting that it contains an unusual amount of didacticism for a thanksgiving.[44] A

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[42] As many commentators have observed, the confluence of liturgical/communal address (i.e., address of a plural audience in an implied setting of worship) and didacticism in v. 12 is unparalleled in the MT Psalter (cf., e.g., Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 147).

[43] Craigie (*Psalms 1–50*, 278) observes that the first part of the psalm (vv. 2–9) resembles a thanksgiving psalm, while the second part (vv. 10–23) has the "general characteristics of wisdom or *didactic* poetry, but in the form of a literary creation within the acrostic structure, analogous to Ps 25."; Kraus argues that the psalm is most likely a psalm of thanksgiving that has been crafted with deliberate didactic intentions (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 283); similarly, Beat Weber suggests that the psalm has the character of a thanksgiving psalm that expands into didactic discourse as it goes on (Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 166); Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 141; John Goldingay argues that while it bears the form of a thanksgiving psalm, "we should hardly call it a thanksgiving, since there is not one line addressed to Yhwh" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 477).

[44] E.g., Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 148. Gerstenberger argues that while Psalm 34 clearly has didactic aims, it reflects the congregational environments of the earliest synagogues in the postexilic period and was likely used there as a psalm of thanksgiving with didactic capacities. Similarly, Clifford argues that "the psalm is an individual thanksgiving psalm that publicizes the psalmist as an encouragement for all who struggle to remain loyal to their God" (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 173). Mays says, "the psalm is a general thanksgiving that gives instruction…" (Mays, *Psalms*, 151). Weiser argues that it is a thanksgiving psalm (Weiser, *Psalms*, 296). Jacobson suggests that the psalm

few scholars argue that it cannot be classified at all.[45] Again, drawing on Levine's theory of

"affordances," this study approaches the psalm as a thanksgiving in which the didactic

affordance of the genre has been "flexed" to an extreme degree. The psalm is rhetorically

constructed around the self-presentation of an exemplary pious who has survived an ordeal of

affliction, but it uses that self-presentation as the rhetorical basis for its mainly didactic purposes.

Like the other psalms considered in this chapter, the psalm then reflects the use of the

thanksgiving genre as a medium of instruction during the postexilic period.

Psalm 34's acrostic structure has also occasioned much scholarly discussion, often

influencing scholars' positions on its possible settings of use. The psalm is an alphabetic acrostic,

lacking a *waw*-verse.[46] Its acrostic structure mirrors that of Psalm 25, and since these psalms are

the first and final psalms of the subcollection in Psalms 25–34, scholars have argued that their

mirrored structure is an intentional device that symbolically represents the concerns of these

psalms (and this subcollection) with *teaching* the fear of God to audiences.[47] Scholars have

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"mimics the form of the individual song of thanksgiving. . . Rather than a prayer composed by one who has freshly passed through crisis, it is more likely a poem composed on behalf of a community—written in order to instruct the community on how to move in and out of such crises" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 321).

[45] E.g., Frank Crüsemann, who concludes, "This psalm is not a song of thanksgiving, but it is also not a hymn and not a wisdom song. It escapes entirely from classification in the normal types. None of the form elements noticeable in it characterizes its form overall. The acrostic form has in this case completely burst out of all the traditional types; something new and distinctive has arisen" (Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 296).

[46] Though some scholars consider the second half of v. 6 to represent the *waw*-verse. E.g., Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 1*, 477; Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 321–24.

[47] David Noel Freedman, "Patterns in Psalms 25 and 34," in *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Festschrift J. Blenkinsopp*, ed. Eugene Ulrich, et al., JSOTSup 149 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 125–38; Erich Zenger, "Der Psalter als Buch: Beobachtungen zu seiner Enstehung, Komposition und Funktion," in *Der Psalter in Judentum und Christentum*, ed. Erich Zenger (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 1–57 (20–22). Drawing on the earlier work of P. W. Skehan ("The Structure and Meaning of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy (32:1–43)," *CBQ* 13 [1951]: 156–68), Sophie Ramond provides an excellent discussion of how Psalm 34's acrostic structure communicates its intention to *teach* the fear of God to its audiences (Sophie Ramond, "'Seek Peace and Pursue It' (Ps 34:15): A Call to Beleaguered Members of a Community," *JHebS* 19 [2019]: 1–14). Both psalms have no *waw*-verse, and both add a *pe*-line after their final *taw*-verse (both also use the root פדה in this final *pe*-line). Skehan argued that the *pe*-line completes a combination with the *aleph* of the first line and the *lamedh* of the middle line (Ps 25:11 and Ps 34:12), so that "by going from *aleph* to *taw* and then adding *pê*, one makes *lamed* the exact middle of the series and sums up

sometimes suggested that the acrostic structure of Psalm 34 (along with its sapiential rhetoric)

suggests it would not have been used in settings of worship, but instead its use would have been

limited to settings of scribal education (i.e., its audience would have been *readers* not

listeners).[48] However, other scholars have rightly rejected these suggestions based primarily on

the psalm's own rhetorical indications of communal use.[49] Erhard Gerstenberger, for example,

draws attention to the plural cohortative invitation to praise in v. 4b ("let us exalt his name

together") and the plural didacticism of v. 12 ("Come, children, listen to me!"), both of which he

suggests indicate that the psalm was composed for use in communal settings of worship.[50]

Many scholars have been wary to assign a date to Psalm 34, but those who have

attempted to reconstruct the psalm's social setting agree that it most likely reflects the concerns

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the whole alphabet in the name of its first letter" (Skehan, "The Structure of the Song of Moses," 160). Ramond notes further that the verbal stem *aleph* formed by these letters is found in wisdom texts such as Prov 22:25, Job 15:5, 33:33, and 35:11, where it refers to learning (Qal) or teaching (Piel) wisdom. The overall structure of these two psalms then betrays their primary interest in both the teaching and learning of the fear of God (Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It," 6).

For further discussion of Psalm 32's acrostic form, see Anthony R. Ceresko, "The ABCs of Wisdom in Psalm xxxiv," *VT* 35 (1985): 99–104; Victor A. Hurowitz, "Additional Elements of Alphabetical Thinking in Psalm xxxiv," *VT* 52 (2002): 326–33; Leon J. Liebreich, "Psalms 34 and 145 in Light of Their Key Words," *HUCA* 27 (1956): 181–92; H. Wiesmann, "Ps 34," *Bib* 16 (1935): 416–21; Pierre Auffret, *Hymnes d'Égypte et d'Israël*, OBO 34 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 89–91; Freedman, "Patterns in Psalms 25 and 34."

[48] Cf., e.g., Leo Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, SBLDS 30 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 279. Perdue states, "Certainly the thanksgiving psalm of strophe I (i.e., vv. 2–11) was originally a cultic psalm, but it has been taken by a wisdom teacher and used as a model thanksgiving for the instruction of young schoolboys" (Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 279). Cf. also a similar position taken by Serge Frolov, though for different reasons, in Frolov, "Psalms: *Sitz im Leben* vs. *Sitz in der Literatur*," 62–63.

[49] The psalm's own indications of its communal use are a good reason for rejecting arguments that its acrostic structure suggests its limited, private use by scribes. However, there is another broader reason. While a text's acrostic structure may reflect its origins in scribal culture and may facilitate its reading and memorization by scribes, it does not preclude the notion that this reading and memorization took place in order to prepare for public recitation. As argued by David Carr, devices for facilitating memorization may have facilitated the work of liturgical leaders just as much as they facilitated the work of private memorization and transmission. Cf. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 160.

[50] Gerstenberger argues that while Psalm 34's voice of "communal instruction" is unique in the MT Psalter, it was likely for congregational use during the postexilic period. See Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 148. Other scholars who understand the psalm as having been used in communal settings of worship include Phil J. Botha, "The Social Setting and Strategy of Psalm 34," *OTE* 10 (1997): 187–97; Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It."

of postexilic Judean communities.[51] Phil Botha, for example, has argued that the psalm serves to encourage Judean communities to continue trusting in Yhwh's power to save them despite their continued humiliation at the hands of Persian overlords.[52] Similarly, Sophie Ramond has argued that the psalm should be understood as "a call to beleaguered members of a community designed to encourage them to remain faithful to their faith and traditions."[53] This study of Psalm 34 then presumes the postexilic period as its main setting of use, understanding its confluence of doxological and didactic rhetoric to reflect the dynamics of social change discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Its almost sermon-like quality is a prime example of the sort of rhetoric we might expect to have evolved at a time when the social prominence and exemplarity of liturgical leaders were rising in Judean society.

2.2.2. Psalm 34: Translation

1   *of David. when he changed his affect before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went.*

2 (א)   I will bless Yhwh at all times,
          his praise will continually be in my mouth.
3 (ב)   My soul boasts in Yhwh,
          Let the poor hear and rejoice!
4 (ג)   Magnify Yhwh with me,
          and let us exalt his name together.

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[51] Cf. Botha, "The Social Setting and Strategy of Psalm 34"; Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It"; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 147. Cf. also the remarks of Beat Weber (*Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 165–66), who notes the language used for groups of the pious suggests a date in the postexilic period. Several earlier scholars considered the psalm to be a postexilic composition, including F. Nötscher, *Die Psalmen* (Würzberg: Echter, 1947), 64; A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms I: Psalms 1–72*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972), 268. For a general review of proposals for the date of Psalm 34, see LarsOlov Eriksson, *Come, Children, Listen to Me! Psalm 34 in the Hebrew Bible and in Early Christian Writings*, ConBOT 32 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991), 88–93.

[52] Phil J. Botha, "The Social Setting and Strategy of Psalm 34," 189. Botha argues that the extensive descriptions of the people's various afflictions throughout the psalm and especially in its second half support understanding it as having been composed for oppressed Judean communities in the postexilic period. Cf. also Phil J. Botha, "Psalm 34 and the Ethics and Editors of the Psalter," in *Psalmody and Poetry in Old Testament Ethics*, ed. Dirk J. Human (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 56–75.

[53] Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It," 14.

5 (ד) I sought Yhwh, and he answered me,
    and he delivered me from all my terrors.
6 (ה) Look to him and be radiant;[a]
  (ו)   and your faces will not be put to shame.[b]
7 (ז) This poor one cried out, and Yhwh listened,
    he delivered him from all his troubles.
8 (ח) The angel of Yhwh encamps
    around those who fear him, and he delivers them.
9 (ט) Taste and see that Yhwh is good,
    happy is the man[c] who takes refuge in him.
10 (י) Fear Yhwh, his holy ones,
    for there is no lack for those who fear him.
11 (כ) Young lions lack and hunger,[d]
    but those who seek Yhwh lack nothing good.

12 (ל) Come, children, listen to me!
    I will teach you the fear of Yhwh.
13 (מ) Whoever is one who desires life,
    Who longs each day to see good,[e]
14 (נ) Keep your tongue from evil,
    and your lips from speaking deceit.
15 (ס) Turn aside from evil, and do good,
    Seek peace, and pursue it.

16 (ע) The eyes of Yhwh are attentive to the righteous,
    and his ears to their cry.
17 (פ) The face of Yhwh is against evildoers,
    to cut off their memory from the earth.
18 (צ) The righteous cry out, and Yhwh listens,[f]
    he delivers them from all their troubles.
19 (ק) Yhwh is near to those with shattered hearts,
    and those with crushed spirits, he saves.
20 (ר) Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
    But Yhwh delivers them from them all.
21 (ש) He keeps all their bones,
    not one of them will be broken.
22 (ת) Evil itself will bring death for the wicked,
    and those who hate the righteous will be held guilty.
23   Yhwh redeems the life of his servants,
    All those who take refuge in him will not be held guilty.

Notes to Translation of Psalm 34

[a] In this line, I translate the verbs as imperatives, following Jerome, the Peshiṭta, and LXX. Cf. also Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 1*, 475; Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 322. On the meaning of the negative אַל, see *GKC* §109e and §152e–g.

[b] Reading a second-person-plural pronominal suffix, with LXX, the Peshiṭta, and Jerome. Cf. the textual note in BHS.

[c] In keeping with the rest of the translations in this study, my translation does not neutralize the gendered sense of the Hebrew text, for the purpose of precision in my analysis. Hebrew גֶּבֶר denotes a male (cf. Prov 30:19; Jer 30:6; Deut 22:5).

[d] As J. J. M. Roberts has shown, "young lions" is not strange in the context of the Psalms. See J. J. M. Roberts, "The Young Lions of Psalm 34:11," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 262–65. However, John Goldingay thinks "apostates" may be a better translation, based on the root's meaning in later Hebrew (Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 1*, 476 n. c). Goldingay also suggests "apostates" fits better in a context concerned with the fortunes of those who choose to seek Yhwh and those who choose otherwise. However, this translation keeps "young lions," drawing especially on the analysis of Roberts.

[e] With Rolf Jacobson (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 323), I translate Hebrew יָמִים as denoting habitual or repetitive action (cf. *IBHS*, 121–22).

[f] MT has only "they cry out, and Yhwh listens." LXX adds οἱ δίκαιοι ("the righteous") as the subject of this verb, which seems to be meant to clarify that v. 18 resumes the claims of the earlier v. 16 (rather than v. 17, which it follows directly). Although, note John Goldingay's interesting translation of this verse, "People cry out and Yhwh listens," which retains the ambiguity of צָעֲקוּ as it appears in MT (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 476).

2.2.3. Psalm 34: Analysis

Verses 2–4: Opening Call to Praise

Psalm 34 begins with a call to praise (vv. 2–4) that models the psalm's main teaching in the speaker's own words (v. 2) and frames the psalm's didacticism as an act of worship in and of itself (vv. 3–4). The speaker's words, "I will bless Yhwh at all times, his praise will continually be in my mouth" (v. 2) model the posture of piety the psalm will encourage the community to adopt, namely an unfailing devotion to Yhwh "at all times," even amid ongoing affliction. After the call to praise (vv. 2–4), the rest of the psalm (vv. 5–23) contains the psalm's "teaching," which has three smaller sections. Verses 5–11 contain the speaker's self-presentation of their own experience mixed with some words of exhortation and instruction. Verses 12–15 shift to overt

didacticism, calling the pious to specific actions that constitute the "fear of Yhwh" (v. 12). Finally, vv. 16–23 conclude the psalm by exhorting the pious to faithfulness by contrasting God's concern for them with God's rejection of the wicked, whose ultimate demise is contrasted with the ultimate redemption of the righteous community.

While Psalm 34 consists mostly of didacticism, the core of its rhetorical strategy is the exemplary experience of its speaker, which is presented not only as an example of the ideas the psalm teaches, but also as paradigmatic for the community's own experiences of affliction. The psalm's speaker is figured as one of the community's own, describing themselves in v. 7 as one of the "poor" (זֶה עָנִי), the same term used to characterize the psalm's audience in v. 3 ("Let the poor [עֲנָוִים] hear and rejoice!"). The speaker had been afflicted, but after seeking Yhwh's help, they were fully restored. The speaker's example at once models the right response to affliction (i.e., seeking Yhwh's help) and also affirms the wisdom of maintaining trust in Yhwh throughout affliction (cf. vv. 8–11). On the basis of the speaker's exemplary experience, the rest of the psalm then urges the community to form themselves similarly, such that others too will continue to enjoy the protection and deliverance of Yhwh amid their "many afflictions" (v. 20).

The psalm opens in vv. 2–4 with a call to praise directed at an audience of the pious, addressing this audience as "the "poor" (עֲנָוִים, v. 3). In postexilic Judea, the term "the poor" likely had connotations beyond general economic poverty. Instead, as Susan Gillingham has argued, it likely referred to the Judean population as a whole, connoting their afflictions (both physical and non-physical) as subjects of foreign imperial power.[54] In fact, Hossfeld and Zenger

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[54] Susan Gillingham observes that, while the term עֲנָוִים (pl. "poor, humble") has general associations with physical poverty, it is often used in the Psalms to describe the "physical affliction of the whole nation" (Gillingham, "The Poor in the Psalms," *ExpTim* 100 (1988): 15–19 [17]). Cf., e.g., Ps 9:13 and 10:12, which use the term to refer to the nation as oppressed by foreign powers; Ps 18:23, which suggests by its use of the term עַם־עָנִי ("a poor people") that the term can refer to a collective identity; Ps 68:11, in which God's protection of his "flock" is used in parallel with God's protection of the עֲנָוִים; Ps 74:19, 21, which seem to refer to the poverty of the nation as related to

have argued that the rhetoric of "the poor," especially in book one of the Psalter, took on new meaning in the postexilic period under Persian rule. During this period, they argue that terms for "the poor" (esp. in Psalms 25–41) likely referred to the people Israel who were oppressed by foreign power and who depended on Yhwh for preservation and protection.[55] So, in agreement with these and several other scholars, I take "the poor" in v. 3 to denote the Judean population and the afflictions of colonized existence, such that the psalm should be understood as encouraging the postexilic community under Persian rule.[56]

Verses 5–11

Verses 5–11 contain the speaker's self-presentation of affliction and resolution, though in Psalm 34, this regular element of thanksgiving psalmody is limited to just two verses (vv. 5 and 7), which are interwoven with instruction concerning Yhwh's ability to deliver "those who fear him" (v. 8). This section alternates frequently from exemplary to exhortative/imperative rhetoric, suggesting that the speaker's self-presentation has been intentionally interwoven with didacticism for the purposes of communal instruction.[57] On one level, the speaker's self-

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its oppression by enemy powers. Gillingham also notes that the term can be used to denote a group of "pious poor," i.e., the afflicted nation which maintains commitment to "fear of God" (Gillingham, "The Poor in the Psalms," 18). Cf., e.g., Ps 22:27, in which עֲנָוִים is used in parallel to דֹּרְשָׁיו ("those who seek him"), as well as Pss 10:17 and 37:11, which depict the restoration of the עֲנָוִים as an eschatological hope. The depiction of the עֲנָוִים as eventually inheriting "the land" in Ps 37:11 especially suggests that the term refers to the Judean population as a whole, since it looks forward to a day when this group will have independent possession of the Judean homeland.

[55] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen, Psalm 1–50*, 12–16. Cf. Nõmmik and Põldsam ("Psalm 86," 410), who argue that the use of the terms "poor" and "lowly" in book one of the Psalter suggest that those who understand themselves as "the poor" have intervened in the redaction of these psalms and their present positions in the Psalter. Cf. also the related discussion of Sophie Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It," 3–5.

[56] In agreement with Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It," and Botha, "The Social Setting and Strategy of Psalm 34." Cf. Scott C. Jones' similar understanding of the rhetoric of "the poor" in Psalm 37, which he understands to be an "exercise in identity construction that encourages a way of being in the world that is at odds with the regnant way of seeing reality" (Jones, "Psalm 37 and the Devotionalization of Instruction," 168).

[57] Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 147.

presentation serves to exemplify the psalm's main teachings in highly typical terms, especially the idea that "the righteous cry out, and Yhwh listens" (v. 18). On another level, the self-presentation serves to identify the speaker's experience as paradigmatic for their community, since the speaker here self-identifies as "this poor one" (זֶה עָנִי, v. 7). The speaker's self-identification as "this poor one" is a convenient use of *zayin* for the psalm's acrostic structure, but it also fosters the listening audience's identification with the speaker, since the audience has earlier been addressed with the plural form of a synonymous term, עֲנָוִים (v. 3).[58] This wording then suggests that the speaker's experience is paradigmatic for their audience, again figuring the speaker as an influential and authoritative member of the worshipping community.

The speaker's self-presentation in vv. 5–11 also introduces two terms that relate to the psalm's main teaching about piety, דרש ("to seek") and ירא ("to fear"). The first term relates to the idea of *seeking Yhwh* (vv. 5, 11; cf. v. 15), modeled especially in the speaker's willingness to "seek" Yhwh during affliction (v. 5), but also referenced in the instruction of v. 11 ("those who *seek* Yhwh lack nothing good"). This idea is developed also in calls for the audience to "look to" Yhwh (v. 6) and to "taste and see that Yhwh is good" (v. 9), both of which invite the audience to orient themselves to Yhwh and trust in him amid affliction. The second term relates to the idea of *fearing Yhwh* (vv. 8, 10a, 10b), which in the context of Psalm 34 has to do with living in acknowledgement of Yhwh's sovereignty. The speaker's self-presentation urges that while

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[58] While some scholars argue that the terms עָנָו ("bowed," *HALOT* 1:855) and עָנִי ("poor, wretched, in a needy condition," *HALOT* 1:856) may have connoted different social groups during the postexilic period, most scholars urge caution when attempting to differentiate between these two terms, instead arguing that the terms are probably best understood within the contexts of individual psalms. In Psalm 34, they seem to be used synonymously, as my discussion demonstrates. For some discussion of the possible different meanings of these terms, see Gillingham, "The Poor in the Psalms," 17–19. Cf. also Peter Craigie's remarks on the two terms in Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 115 n. 13b). It is noteworthy that the two terms are often mixed in the Qere and Ketiv, which often suggest one for the other (cf., e.g., Job 24:4; Ps 9:13, 19; 10:2; Prov 3:34; 14:21; 16:19).

seeking Yhwh is the right response to affliction, *fearing Yhwh* is the mode of living that merits Yhwh's attention, ongoing protection, and guarantee of deliverance. Those who fear Yhwh have the "angel of Yhwh" encamped around them (v. 8). Further, those who fear Yhwh will receive sustenance for survival, since "there is no lack [מַחְסוֹר] for those who fear him" (v. 10).[59] The imagery of "young lions" (v. 11a), used as a contrast to the ideal pious, denotes those who proudly refuse to acknowledge the divine.[60] The psalm then presents *seeking Yhwh* and *fearing Yhwh* as the two postures of piety the postexilic community is exhorted to adopt amid their ongoing afflictions. The speaker's own experience serves as a paradigmatic model of these postures and the security they ensure.

Verses 12–15

After exhorting the audience in v. 10 to "fear Yhwh," the speaker shifts in vv. 12–13 to teach the audience what "fear of Yhwh" entails. The speaker's address in v. 12 ("Come, children, listen to me! I will teach you the fear of Yhwh") figures the speaker explicitly as a *teacher* to the psalm's audience, suggesting a communal context in which a liturgical leader addresses a gathering of the pious. While the "familial" form of address in v. 12 (i.e., "Come, children") occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (cf., e.g., Prov 4:1; 5:7; 7:24; 8:32), it is unparalleled in the Psalter.[61] In addition to figuring the relationship between speaker and audience as that between a teacher and

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[59] The word מַחְסוֹר often refers to economic need or "lack" (cf. Deut 15.8; Judg 18:10; 19:20; Prov 6:11 (=24:34); 11:24; 14:23; 21:5; 22:16; 28:27).

[60] As argued by Roberts, "The Young Lions of Psalm 34:11," 262–65. Roberts demonstrates that, in ancient Near Eastern literature, lions often symbolize foolish self-confidence and an unwillingness to acknowledge divine authority or to act in accord with oracular revelation (see Roberts, "The Young Lions of Psalm 34:11," 263–64). In the Psalms, lions often symbolize those who prey on the helpless (cf. Ps 10:9; 35:17; 57:4; 58:6).

[61] William P. Brown observes that this is the single occurrence of "familial direct address" in the whole Book of Psalms (i.e., the address to "children" in Ps 34:12), though this form of address is very common in didactic wisdom literature (William P. Brown, "Psalms," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff [Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2020], 67–86 [67]).

students, this form of address also evokes the symbolic world of the patriarchal family. By relating to the audience as a "father" to his "children," the speaker encourages a sense of shared identity among listeners (as in a family) and opens them to internalizing the speaker's teaching as they would the teaching of a parent or familial patriarch.[62]

The teaching itself in vv. 12–15 focuses on the idea that the "fear of Yhwh" consists of ethical actions. For Psalm 34, then, the "fear of Yhwh" is not only exhibited by crying out to him during affliction, but by righteous living at all times. The psalm then seeks to encourage its audience to maintain their commitments to ethical living despite the discouragements of life under imperial rule. An emphasis on *active* commitment to piety is underscored by the use of five consecutive imperative verbs in vv. 14–15: "keep your tongue" (נְצֹר לְשׁוֹנְךָ, v. 14a), "turn aside from evil" (סוּר מֵרָע, v. 15aα), "do good" (וַעֲשֵׂה־טוֹב, v. 15aβ), "seek peace" (בַּקֵּשׁ שָׁלוֹם, v. 15bα), and "pursue it" (וְרָדְפֵהוּ, v. 15bβ). So, while the pious are to maintain a cognitive and emotional awareness of Yhwh's sovereignty amid affliction (cf. v. 6), these imperatives underscore that the outward mark of this awareness is an *enacted* commitment to the "fear of Yhwh."

Sophie Ramond has argued convincingly that the exhortations of vv. 14–15, which concern deceitful *speech* (v. 14) and the pursuit of *peace* (v. 15), seem intended to promote unity among the postexilic Judean population, especially since divisions among pious groups were

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[62] Carol A. Newsom has written about patriarchal discourse in the formation of subjectivity, especially as it is employed extensively in Proverbs 1–9 (Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9," in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics*). At one point, Newsom writes: "Since it is in the family that one's subjectivity is formed, the malleability called for in the text is made to seem innocent, natural, inevitable. In addition, the symbol of the family causes the discourse to appear to stand outside of specific class interests. This is not a landed aristocrat speaking, not a senior bureaucrat, not a member of the urban middle class or a disenfranchised intellectual, but 'your father.' Families are not ideologically innocent places, but because everyone has one, they give the appearance of being so" (Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 40–41).

common during this period.[63] In the socio-historical context of the postexilic period, the model of piety this psalm advocates is then meant to foster group *solidarity*, especially in regard to the collective affliction of colonized existence under the Persians.[64] The pious are then urged, for the sake of their own welfare,[65] to maintain their commitments to "fear of Yhwh" despite ongoing affliction at the hands of foreign powers.

Verses 16–23

In the psalm's final section (vv. 16–23), the speaker moves from expounding the "fear of Yhwh" (vv. 12–15) to a discourse focused on the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked. This section begins by contrasting Yhwh's close attention to the righteous (v. 16) with Yhwh's opposition to "evildoers" (v. 17), those who do not seek or fear Yhwh and who impede the efforts of the pious to do so. Into this contrast the speaker inserts language that blends the template of the speaker's own experience with general observations about the life of piety. Compare the speaker's self-presentation in v. 7 with the more general didactic statement of v. 18:

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[63] Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It." Ramond argues, "At this stage it can be said that, even if anthological, Psalm 34 delivers a unified message: in a situation of antagonism, Yhwh is on the side of those who are beleaguered and take refuge in him. Persecution has to do with speaking deceit, i.e., with deceptive and misleading words that undermine people's confidence and faith. In that context, seeking and pursuing peace is almost equivalent to seeking Yhwh, as suggested by the use of the complementary verbs דרש (v. 11 with Yhwh as complement) and בקש (v. 15 with peace as complement). Peace is not the absence of war but a faithful and trusting relationship with God and therefore, inference [sic], mutual support within the community" (Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It," 4). For her understanding of "peace" as "mutual support within the community," Ramond cites the parallel usage of these two verbs in Ps 24:6, 105:4, and Prov 11:27. She also cites the use of the verb דרש with the noun שלום in Deut 23:7 and Ezra 9:12, in which "peace" denotes "not the absence of war but rather a lasting and trusting relationship between diverse people" (Ramond, "Seek Peace and Pursue It," 4 n. 9).

[64] The psalm's interest in fostering group solidarity is also indicated by its frequent use of terms and phrases that refer to its audience as a group in terms of their relationship to Yhwh or their experience as afflicted pious. Cf. "the poor" (עֲנָוִים, v. 3), "those who fear him" (לִירֵאָיו, v. 8), "his holy ones" (קְדֹשָׁיו, v. 10), "those who seek Yhwh" (וְדֹרְשֵׁי יהוה, v. 11), "children" (בָנִים, v. 12), "the righteous" (צַדִּיקִים, v. 16, 18, 20, 22), "those with shattered hearts" (לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי־לֵב, v. 19a), "those with crushed spirits" (דַּכְּאֵי־רוּחַ, v. 19b), "[Yhwh's] servants" (עֲבָדָיו, v. 23a), "all those who take refuge in him" (כָּל־הַחֹסִים בּוֹ, v. 23b).

[65] Cf. v. 13, "Whoever is one who desires life, Who longs each day to see good..."

7	This poor one cried out, and Yhwh listened, he delivered him from all his troubles.	זֶה עָנִי קָרָא וַיהוָה שָׁמֵעַ וּמִכָּל־צָרוֹתָיו הוֹשִׁיעוֹ
18	The righteous[66] cry out, and Yhwh listens, he delivers them from all their troubles.	צָעֲקוּ וַיהוָה שָׁמֵעַ וּמִכָּל־צָרוֹתָם הִצִּילָם

While vv. 7 and 18 use different verbiage for "crying out" (קרא in v. 7; צעק in v. 18) and "delivering" (ישע in v. 7; נצל in v. 18), they otherwise mirror each other's claims. So, while the speaker's discourse draws on traditional wisdom about the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked, the speaker has also blended the rhetoric of their own paradigmatic *experience* into psalm's overall persuasive strategy. This section of the psalm is therefore undergirded by the earlier exemplary presentation of the speaker's own experience, perhaps making it more compelling in a historical setting in which liturgical leaders had a high degree of social authority.[67]

This final section of the psalm also serves to affirm the ongoing reality of affliction in the lives of the pious even while it urges the pious to remain faithful to righteous living. Verse 19 utilizes striking metaphors to characterize the pious as the victims of ongoing oppression, declaring that Yhwh stays near "those with shattered hearts" (לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי־לֵב, v. 19a) and saves "those with crushed spirits" (דַּכְּאֵי־רוּחַ, v. 19b). Sigrid Eder has demonstrated that these metaphors refer generally to intense existential anguish, and that they likely denote the people's collective oppression under imperial power.[68] Verses 22–23 then add to these affirmations a series of claims

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66 See the translation note above for the point that ancient versions (LXX, Syriac, and the Targum) which suggest adding "the righteous" to the beginning of v. 18 in order to clarify that v. 18 resumes v. 16's points about Yhwh's close attention to "the righteous." MT simply reads "they cry out."

67 See the discussion in the introduction to this chapter above about the rise in prominence of liturgical leaders during the postexilic period.

68 Sigrid Eder, "'Broken Hearted' and 'Crushed in Spirit': Metaphors and Emotions in Psalm 34,19," *SJOT* 30 (2016): 1–15. Eder points in particular to the use of דכא in Ps 94:5 to describe the collective and ongoing oppression of the righteous at the hands of the wicked, especially foreign power.

about the contrasting destinies of the righteous and their oppressors, the wicked. The wicked are those whose own ways of life ensure their eventual consumption by "evil itself" (v. 22a), and they will be "held guilty" for their oppressive ways of living (vv. 22b). By contrast, the righteous, whose lives are beset by ongoing affliction, will be "redeemed" at last by Yhwh (v. 23a), who will vindicate all those "who take refuge in him" (v. 23b). The psalm's final section then uses the contrasting destinies of the righteous and the wicked to assure the psalm's audience that their commitment to Yhwh amid their afflictions is not in vain.

2.2.3. Psalm 34: Conclusions

As the most overtly didactic psalm in this study, Psalm 34 represents an extreme example of how thanksgiving psalmody may be "flexed" to foreground the agency of its audiences, rather than the agency of the divine. Through its didactic rhetoric, the psalm conveys agency to its listener, constructing its audiences (i.e., the gathered pious) as capable of meaningful action in response to their afflictions. More specifically, the psalm urges the pious (1) to *seek Yhwh* when beset by afflictions, rather than neglecting to do so, and (2) to maintain their commitment to the *fear of Yhwh*, despite ongoing afflictions. While their afflictions are "many" (v. 18), the pious are encouraged still to acknowledge Yhwh's sovereignty, mainly by continuing to seek and fear Yhwh, adopting the exemplary posture of their teacher, who continues to "bless Yhwh at all times" (v. 2).

Psalm 34 thus conveys a model of the pious self focused on *right responses* to affliction. The pious are those who, when beset by ongoing afflictions, continue to acknowledge Yhwh's sovereignty by seeking Yhwh (i.e., through prayers for help) and by maintaining their commitment to piety despite the pressures of affliction. As other scholars have noted, the psalm was likely intended to encourage Judean audiences to remain committed to the life of piety

despite the pressures of life under Persian rule. While the psalm would have been effective for this purpose, its model of the pious self as a powerful *agent* amid affliction would have been empowering for all Jewish audiences throughout the Second Temple period. On the whole, the psalm suggests that, though the pious are continually beset by afflictions (vv. 18–20), they retain the capacity to act rightly in response to them, bringing glory to God and simultaneously recovering agency for themselves in a world dominated by foreign power.

2.3. Psalm 41

2.3.1. Psalm 41: Introduction

Like the other two psalms in this chapter, Psalm 41 exhibits a confluence of didactic and doxological rhetoric. The psalm opens with a macarism (v. 2a) and a series of related doxological claims about Yhwh's protection and sustenance of the righteous amid their afflictions. The opening then marks the psalm's didactic intent, but the psalm quickly transitions to the speaker's self-presentation of affliction, which in this case takes the form of a recalled prayer for help (vv. 5–11). Finally, the psalm concludes in vv. 12–13 with the speaker's glad declaration that God "upheld" them and vindicated them before their enemies. As a whole, then, the psalm instructs the pious concerning God's protection of the righteous while lifting up its speaker's prayer as an example of how the pious ought to seek God in prayer when beset by affliction.

While scholars have argued over the genre of Psalm 41, most have agreed that it should be understood as a psalm of thanksgiving with pronounced didacticism.[69] However, there are a few who understand it as a psalm of complaint, though this position depends on reading a key

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[69] Scholars who understand the psalm primarily as a psalm of thanksgiving include Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 209; Mays, *Psalms*, 171; Weiser, *Psalms*, 343; McCann, "Psalms," 846–847; Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 385; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 430; Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 580–81; Gianni Barbiero, "Psalm 41:14, or the Unity of Masoretic Psalm 41," *OTE* 32 (2019): 317–42.

qatal verb as present-tense (v. 5a) and arguing that vv. 2–4 are spoken by someone other than the speaker of the rest of the psalm.[70] With the majority of scholars, then, this study agrees that the psalm should be understood as a thanksgiving that exhibits the same confluence of didacticism and doxology observable in Psalms 32 and 34. Scholars are reluctant to assign a specific date to Psalm 41, though its position at the conclusion of the first Davidic Psalter (Pss 3–41) suggests it was composed by the beginning of the postexilic period.[71]

2.3.2. Psalm 41: Translation

1   *for the leader. a psalm of David.*

2   Happy is the one who considers[a] the helpless,[b]
     In the day of trouble, Yhwh rescues him.
3   Yhwh protects him and keeps him alive,

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[70] Gerstenberger (*Psalms Part 1*, 177) is the main proponent of this position. The main point of contention is whether the *qatal* verb in v. 5a (אָמַרְתִּי, "I said"/"I say") indicates the prayer in vv. 5–11 as a *recalled* prayer or a *present* prayer. Gerstenberger understands the use of *qatal* in the verb phrase אֲנִי־אָמַרְתִּי to indicate *past* tense ("I said"), such that what follows in vv. 5–11 is understood as the speaker's recalled prayer that they prayed amid past affliction. He then translates this verb as a *present* statement ("I say"), taking what follows to be the main substance of the psalm, the speaker's *present* petition for help. This reading also depends on hypothetical reconstructions of the psalm's performance. Gerstenberger argues that vv. 2–4 should be understood as the words of a cultic administrator, a blessing over the one who has come to offer petition, while vv. 5–13 are the petition offered by the supplicant (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 177; cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 319). In this reading, vv. 12–13 are understood as spoken only after the cultic administrator of vv. 2–4 has given the supplicant an indication that their petition has been well received.

There are at least three reasons for rejecting this position: First, this position takes the *qatal* form of v. 5 as present based on the present sense of the *yiqtol* forms that begin in v. 6 ("My enemies talk evil [אוֹיְבַי יֹאמְרוּ] against me..."), but this contradicts the much more common usage of *qatal* to designate past action, and the present tense of the *yiqtol* verb in v. 6 may just as easily be understood as something the speaker had prayed *in the past*. Second, as many scholars have argued, the opening claims about God's rescue and protection (vv. 2–4) correspond well to the conclusion of the psalm (vv. 12–13), since they both focus on God's protection from enemies (v. 3c, 12b) and God's preservation and protection (vv. 2b–4, 13). As in Psalm 32, then, it seems that the opening beatitude of Psalm 41 (v. 2a and the related statements in vv. 2b–4) means to summarize the *conclusion* of the speaker's experience (cf. Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 209). The recalled prayer of vv. 5–11 upholds the ideas in both vv. 2–4 and 12–13, and it serves to illustrate the dire affliction from which God delivered the speaker. Finally, Gerstenberger's argument that vv. 2–4 are spoken by a different party than vv. 5–13 is entirely speculative, and since there is no other reason to reject the psalm's rhetorical unity, I am persuaded to understand the psalm as spoken by a single speaker throughout, along with the majority of other scholars.

[71] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen, Psalm 1–50*, 14–15; cf. also Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, "'Selig, wer auf die Armen achtet' (Ps. 41,2). Beobachtungen zur Gottesvolk-Theologie des ersten Davidpsalters," in *Volk Gottes, Gemeinde und Gesellschaft*, ed. Ingo Balderman, et al., JBTh 7 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1992), 21–50.

And he will bless him*c* in the land.
  You will not give him over to the desire*d* of his enemies.
4 Yhwh sustains him upon his sickbed,
  You transform the whole bed where he lies in suffering.

5 I myself had said,
    "Yhwh, act graciously toward me,
      Heal me, for I have sinned against you.
6   My enemies talk evil against me,
      'When will he die? And his name fade away?'
7   When they come to visit,
      they speak falsity,*e*
    Their hearts gather trouble within,
      when they go outside, they speak it.
8   Together all those who hate me whisper against me,
      they assume the worst about me:
9   'A deadly disease of Belial has been poured out on him,*f*
      once he falls asleep, he will not rise again.'
10   Even my good friend,*g*
      in whom I trusted,
    The one who ate my bread,
      has lifted his heel over me.*h*
11   But you, Yhwh, act graciously toward me,
      raise me up, so that I may repay them."*i*

12 By this I know that you delight in me,
    that my enemy does not shout triumphantly over me.*j*
13 And I—in my integrity, you upheld me,
    and you have established me in your presence forever.*k*

Notes to Translation of Psalm 41

a The Hiphil singular participle מַשְׂכִּיל, in this context, suggests one who not only "considers" or "gives thought" to the helpless, but one who habitually integrates that consideration into their way of life. So, e.g., Beat Weber, "Glückselig, wer auf den Armen acht hat" (Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 194) and John Goldingay, "The good fortune of the person who thinks about the poor" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 580). On the other hand, Rolf Jacobson translates, "Happy are they who consider the helpless" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 385).

b See note 73, below, for a discussion of why the term דָּל is better translated "weak" or "helpless" in the context of Psalm 41. This translation follows Rolf Jacobson in translating it as "helpless" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 387).

c The MT Qere has a Pual verb, suggesting that the subject of this verb is the "one who considers the helpless" of v. 1. However, the Kethib suggests an active verb (reflected also in LXX, Peshiṭta, and the Targum), which suggests that the subject of the verb is God, which agrees better with the context of the surrounding lines in v. 2a and 2c (as noted by Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 319). My translation therefore reflects the Kethib.

^d In spite of LXX, εἰς χεῖρας (which suggests Heb. בְּיַד), this translation retains MT (with support of the Targum), with Heb. נֶפֶשׁ having the sense of "desire." So Beat Weber, who translates "der Gier" (Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 194); Rolf Jacobson and John Goldingay also translate "desire" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 385; Goldingay, *Psalms 1*, 580).

^e While Hebrew שׁוא can sometimes mean "emptiness," it is more appropriately translated "falsity" here, since v. 7 draws a contrast between the speech of visitors while they are with the speaker and after they leave (v. 7d). For the translation "falsity," see John F. A. Sawyer, "שׁוא," *THAT* 2: 882–884. Cf. Barbiero, "Psalm 41:14," 330.

^f The meaning of דבר בליעל is debated by scholars. Cf. Ps 101:3, which emphasizes the immoral nature of the term's referent.

^g MT literally reads "man of my peace" (אִישׁ שְׁלוֹמִי), which is in parallel to "the one in whom I trusted" in v. 10b. The parallel phrase suggests that "man of my peace" refers to a good or trusted friend, as opposed to the general visitors of vv. 6–9.

^h But see Goldingay (*Psalms, Vol. 1*, 581 n. 2) for the argument of translating "cheat, supplanter" rather than "heel." See Jacobson (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 386 n. 14) for disagreement with Goldingay and the argument that "lifted his heel" makes better sense in this context, denoting "turning one's back on a friend."

ⁱ Note the very different possibilities for this verb. Against most others, Goldingay has "raise me up and I will be friends with them" (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 581). Others take the verb to indicate vengeful "repayment." So, Jacobson has "raise me up that I might repay them" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 386). So also Beat Weber, who has "Ja, richte mich auf, damit ich es ihnen vergelten kann!" (Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I*, 194).

^j With Jacobson (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 386), I take רוע here to mean a triumphant sort of shouting, considering the scenarios the speaker's enemies had been envisioning in vv. 6–10.

^k I have left v. 14 out of this translation, since scholars agree that it should be understood as the closing doxology of Book 1 of the Psalter, rather than an integral part of the composition in Psalm 41.

2.3.3. Psalm 41: Analysis

Verses 2–4: Opening

Psalm 41 opens with a macarism that serves to signal the psalm's didactic intent and introduce the speaker's main teaching. The wording and rhetorical purpose of the macarism in v. 2a has occasioned much discussion among scholars. Here is the Hebrew text and my translation of this opening line:

אַשְׁרֵי מַשְׂכִּיל אֶל־דָּל
Happy is the one who considers the helpless (v. 2a)

The Hebrew wording of this line presents several challenges. First, the Hiphil participle מַשְׂכִּיל ("one who considers") is unparalleled in the Psalms and only occurs once elsewhere in the

Hebrew Bible (Prov. 16:20). There and elsewhere, the root suggests intellectual consideration or close attention to a matter, so scholars agree that in the context of Ps 41:2a it refers to one who is thoughtful for or considerate of the helpless.[72] Second, the word דָּל has several possible meanings, though most scholars agree that, in the context of Ps 41:2a, it seems to have the *general* meaning of "poor," i.e., one who is "weak" or "helpless."[73] Taking these points together, the opening macarism can be understood as pronouncing the happiness of those whose lives are marked by consideration of the helpless. In other words, "one who considers the helpless" in v. 2a is simply a more specific way of describing those whose are generally characterized by righteous living (i.e., those who are concerned for the helpless). Verses 2b–4 then go on to describe how God protects, sustains, and delivers such people when they are beset by affliction. Having clarified the meaning of the words in the psalm's opening beatitude, we are now in a position to discuss its rhetorical relationship to the rest of the psalm.

The psalm's opening (vv. 2–4) plays a critical role in the psalm's overall teaching, but its rhetorical function in relation to the rest of the psalm has caused some disagreement among scholars. This is mainly because the psalm's wording does not make it clear how the speaker understands themselves in relation to its opening macarism. It is possible that the speaker

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[72] As observed by Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 210. The use of the term in Ps 41:2a is further complicated, however, by its use with the preposition אל. As Gianni Barbiero ("Psalm 41:14," 327) observes, the only other use of the Hiphil form of שכל followed by the preposition אל is in Neh 8:13, which states "On the second day the heads of the ancestral houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to the scribe Ezra in order to study the words of the law (וּלְהַשְׂכִּיל אֶל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה)" (NRSV). Barbiero argues that this seems to support understanding the verb in Ps 41:2a as denoting intellectual activity, i.e., to "grasp" or "understand" something.

[73] My translation above uses the term "helpless." See the discussion of Susan Gillingham, "The Poor in the Psalms," *ExpTim* 100 (1988): 15–19 (esp. 16). Many other scholars agree that, in the context of Psalm 41, the term seems to refer generally to being "weak" or "helpless," rather than to a specific social class, religious group, or economic situation. Cf., e.g., Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 209, who suggests that the term here refers to "those similarly suffering illness and rejection"; Mays, *Psalms*, 171, who suggests it refers generally to those who are "weak"; Rolf Jacobson, who suggests that "the helpless" is probably a better translation here than "the poor," "since in the context of the psalm the term seems to encompass more than economic distress (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 387); Barbiero, "Psalm 41:14," 327.

understands themselves as "the helpless" (i.e., rather than "one who considers the helpless"), as some scholars argue, such that the psalm's review of its speaker's affliction is meant to compel audiences to show consideration for the helpless on analogy with God's care for the speaker.[74] More likely, however, is the majority position that the speaker understands themselves as "one who considers the helpless" (i.e., one who is righteous).[75] In this reading, the psalm's review of its speaker's affliction is meant to illustrate the truth of vv. 2–4, namely that God protects and delivers the righteous (i.e., those "who consider the helpless") from dire afflictions. When understood this way, it becomes clear that vv. 2–4 serve to summarize the speaker's insight, which they gained through their own experience of affliction and deliverance.[76] The macarism in Ps 41:2a then functions similarly to the macarisms in Ps 32:1–2. In both cases, macarism is used to announce the joyful conclusion of the speaker's experience and relate it in didactic form to their fellow pious.

Taken altogether, the preceding discussion suggests that the psalm's opening (vv. 2–4)

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[74] Scholars who read the psalm this way include, e.g., Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 582–83; Barbiero, "Psalm 41:14," 327; and Weiser, *Psalms*, 344, whose statement of the position is illustrative of the approaches of these others': "...the psalmist praises the blessedness of those who will 'pay attention' to him and to what he is now going to say to them—because by doing so they will share his joyful gratitude for God's help, which he is about to praise and which will reveal to them also the grace of their Lord. He who owes to God his deliverance from the affliction of an illness and from the pursuits of his enemies, is himself the man who is 'considered' to be 'lucky' . . . he is a living witness to God's gracious protection and help, and in his fate are implied a warning and a promise for the whole community of the godly. If we see the opening verses in this light, then they fit quite smoothly into the context of the whole psalm" (Weiser, *Psalms*, 344). Important to note is that these scholars allow for the possibility that the psalm's opening may be understood in multiple ways.

[75] Scholars who read the psalm this way include, e.g., Mays, who writes that v. 2 refers to "those who are concerned about the weak and in this respect are righteous" (Mays, *Psalms*, 172); Peter Craigie, who writes that v. 2 suggests that those who are concerned for the helpless may seek God's help in times of trouble (Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 320); Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., who write "It is as though the psalmist has reflected on his own rescue and has concluded that he is rescued because of his social engagement on behalf of the economically vulnerable. . . . YHWH acts to enhance life for those who enact YHWH's compassion and justice in the world" (Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, 200); cf. also Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 432–33; and Jacobson in DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 385. Kraus urges that both possibilities should remain open (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 431–32).

[76] As argued by, e.g., Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 210; Barbiero, "Psalm 41:14," 326.

serves to summarize the insight gained by the speaker through their experience, which is that those who are righteous (i.e., those who "consider the helpless") can depend on God's protection and sustenance, especially during times of affliction. As a whole, then, the psalm is framed as a teaching about God's commitment to the pious. But while this is the main teaching conveyed by the psalm's opening (and closing, vv. 12–13), the bulk of the psalm consists of the speaker's recalled prayer in vv. 5–11, which serves to exemplify the *right response* to affliction entailed by its main teaching.

Verses 5–11

While speaker's overall experience of deliverance (vv. 12–13) corroborates its teaching about God's commitment to the pious (vv. 2–4), the speaker's recalled prayer (vv. 5–11) *models* an essential implication of this teaching, namely that whenever the pious are beset by dire affliction, they should *pray to God* for help. Previous scholars have not been able to explain the structural prominence of the recalled prayer in vv. 5–11 in relation to its briefer opening and closing sections. I propose that the prayer serves both to exemplify right response to affliction (i.e., prayer to God) and also to illustrate the point that the afflicted pious can turn to Yhwh for help when forsaken by all others, friend and enemy alike. In vv. 5–11, then, "the speaker models the message."[77] The speaker's declaration of God's deliverance (vv. 12–13) would be enough to confirm the psalm's opening teaching that God responds to the righteous when they are in

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[77] This is Kent Aaron Reynolds' phrase, which he uses to describe Psalm 119's presentation of the exemplary Torah student through its lengthy first-person discourse. See Kent Aaron Reynolds, *Torah as Teacher: The Exemplary Torah Student in Psalm 119*, VTSup 137 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 14. Reynolds argues that "instead of admonishing the reader to study and obey Torah, the author portrays someone who does so. By means of the portrayal, the author creates—in the persona of the speaker—a model for the reader to follow. . . . Thus, the speaker models the message" (Reynolds, *Torah as Teacher*, 14).

trouble (vv. 2–4). The speaker's recounted prayer (vv. 5–11), however, goes further in modeling *right response* to affliction if the claims of vv. 2–4 are true.

The recalled prayer in vv. 5–11 is framed by petitions in vv. 5 and 11 that model the speaker's posture of dependence on Yhwh and a willingness to self-examine amid their affliction.[78] In vv. 5 and 11, the speaker petitions for Yhwh to "act graciously" (יְהוָה חָנֵּנִי), but in both cases, this standard petition is followed by more specific ones. In v. 5, the speaker adds a petition for healing (רְפָאָה נַפְשִׁי, v. 5b), with the additional phrase "for I have sinned against you" (כִּי־חָטָאתִי לָךְ, v. 5b). The speaker's confession of sin in v. 5 exemplifies self-examination and a willingness to confess sinfulness before Yhwh.[79] One might compare the speaker's ready confession of sin here with the speaker's failure to confess in Ps 32:2–4. As in Psalm 32, the point here is not the confession of previously concealed sin, but a willingness to name the speaker's sinfulness when petitioning Yhwh for help amid affliction.[80] Such a willingness to confess sinfulness, the psalm suggests, is an important component of how the pious ought to

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[78] Rhetorically, v. 5 marks a shift from the psalm's didactic opening to explicitly first-person voicing ("I myself had said...," v. 5a), which continues through the end of the psalm in v. 13. The *qatal* verb in v. 5a (אָמַרְתִּי; "I said") indicates that what follows is a *recalled* prayer, prayed by the speaker amid an episode of affliction. Against those interpreters who understand the verb in v. 5a to be *present* tense, such that what follows is a present petition (e.g., Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1*, 177; Barbiero, "Psalm 41:14," 333). On this point, see the note above in the introductory discussion to Psalm 41.

[79] As argued by Richard Clifford, the confession of sin in v. 5 should not be understood to indicate that the speaker understands their affliction to be the result of a *specific* sinful action, but rather it should be understood to indicate a willingness to accept that affliction may be the result of previous sinfulness (Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 211). The speaker's characterization of themselves as "one who considers the helpless" (v. 2a), on the one hand, and their declaration of their own "integrity" (v. 13a) both suggest that the speaker does not consider their affliction to be the result of a specific sinful action in the past. Indeed, the speaker's claim about their integrity in v. 13 has even driven some scholars to argue that the speaker's confession of sin in v. 5 is a later redactional insertion. Cf., e.g., Fredrik Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms*, ConBOT 37 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), 319–21. Lindström argues that the affirmation of integrity in v. 13 suggests that the psalm's speaker clearly does not understand their affliction to be the direct consequence of a specific moral failure. Cf. also the discussion of Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 433, in which Kraus argues that the confession of sin in v. 5 does not preclude the speaker's integrity as expressed in vv. 12–13.

[80] For more on this point, see my earlier discussion of David Lambert's arguments about the dynamics of appeal and confession, in the analysis of Psalm 32 above. Cf. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 62.

respond to affliction. The speaker's coupling of petition with confession here in Ps 41:5 then exemplifies the notion that contrition and humility ought to characterize the petitions of the pious amid affliction.[81]

After the speaker's petition for healing in v. 5, the middle part of the prayer laments the speaker's abandonment by friend and enemy alike. Critically, this lament is voiced to Yhwh, underscoring the point that the afflicted pious may call on Yhwh even amid the most dire and isolating situations of affliction. In vv. 6–7, the speaker depicts their "enemies" as exploitative of the speaker's illness, hoping it will not only be the end of their life ("When will he die?," v. 6b), but also the end of their good reputation ("And his name fade away?," v. 6b). Unlike the speaker ("one who considers the helpless," v. 2a), the speaker's enemies perceive situations of helpless as opportunities for exploitation.[82] Verse 7 expands on this point, depicting the duplicitous interests of those who visit the speaker in their vulnerable state. One can imagine postexilic audiences perceiving their own political situation similarly during the fifth century. Like the speaker of Psalm 41, the Judean population was vulnerable and impoverished, exploited by their imperial overlords for whatever profit they could generate in their weakened condition. The psalm suggests that those who are vulnerable and surrounded by enemies who hope to exploit their vulnerability have the guarantee of God's continued protection.

Verses 8–9 continue this portrayal of the speaker's malicious onlookers by depicting them as "whispering against" them, "assuming the worst" about them, and presuming that their

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[81] Cf. the repeated suggestion by Job's friends that acknowledgment of sin is an important component of appealing to God for help amid affliction (see, e.g., the words of Eliphaz in Job 22:21–30, of Bildad in Job 8:1–7, of Zophar in Job 11:1–6).

[82] As Gianni Barbiero has written, "Whereas, for God, sickness and weakness are the time for mercy, for men, they are the opportunity to eliminate the adversary because he is not able to defend himself" (Barbiero, "Psalm 41:14," 330).

affliction is retribution (i.e., "a deadly disease of Belial") for some previously committed evil.[83] Once again, the speakers hopefully predict the speaker's death (v. 9, cf. v. 6), contrasting their selfish interests with God's interest in sustaining the afflicted pious (cf. v. 4). In v. 10, the speaker laments that "even my good friend, in whom I trusted" has abandoned them to their affliction, hoping for their demise (v. 10). As a whole, then, vv. 6–10 emphasize that *everyone*, friend and enemy alike, have left the speaker alone in their affliction, even hoping that it will be their end. The speaker's final petition in v. 11, "raise me up, so that I may repay them," primarily indicates the speaker's desire for *vindication* before enemies who have wrongly hoped for their demise.[84] This section then serves to frame Yhwh as dependably protective of the afflicted pious even when all others, friend and enemy alike, have abandoned them to their affliction.

In the postexilic period, impoverished Judean populations likely experienced similar feelings of abandonment by their own religious leaders and by the imperial government. This prayer's depiction of Yhwh as available and accessible to the afflicted pious, despite their abandonment by all others, would have been powerful for communities during this period seeking to maintain their commitment to righteous living amid ongoing exploitation and abandonment by those in power. Of course, the psalm does not explicitly refer to the collective experience of the Judean population during this period, but the portrayal of its speaker as one

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[83] The meaning of the phrase "disease of Belial" is contested by scholars, but most agree that it generally refers to a "sinister power of death" imagined to visit the wicked as retribution for their wickedness (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 432). Cf. the similar use of this term in Ps 18:4, where it denotes an evil power in parallel to the image of the "cords of death."

[84] In agreement with those scholars who understand the speaker's desire to "repay" () their enemies not as a desire to enact vengeance, but as a more general petition for Yhwh to vindicate the speaker before them, putting them to shame. Cf., e.g., Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 212; Mays, *Psalms*, 172; cf. also Kraus, who writes "the 'retribution' must consist of the thought that the slanderers may through the saving intervention of Yahweh be revealed as רשעים and may in shame and disgrace suffer a judgment of God to come over them" (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 432–33). Alternatively, some scholars propose that the verbal root suggests not a desire for vindication or vengeance, but for reconciliation, since the verbal root שלם may be translated "to make sound or complete, to restore, to recompense, or to reward" (Terrien, *The Psalms*, 346).

both committed to righteous living (cf. v. 2a and their "integrity" in v. 13) and abandoned and exploited amid affliction would have resonated with the ordinary pious of the postexilic period.[85] The psalm as a whole suggests that those who are committed to righteousness, despite their abandonment and exploitation by others, will never be forsaken by Yhwh, and will at last be vindicated before those who have forsaken them or spoken evil about them in their vulnerable state.

Verses 12–13

The psalm's last verses (vv. 12–13) depict God's preservation of the afflicted speaker as confirmation of their righteousness. Returning to the themes of vv. 2–4, these closing verses suggest that the afflicted pious can depend on Yhwh for vindication before those who have hoped for their demise.[86] These verses also suggest that the ongoing commitment of the pious to righteousness amid their afflictions merits God's protection and deliverance, such that the psalm urges the afflicted pious to remain faithful to their ethical commitments, as does Psalm 34, considered earlier in this chapter. So, while the main teaching of the psalm conveys the essential truth that God protects and sustains the pious amid their afflictions, the recalled prayer in vv. 5–11 models how the pious ought to respond to affliction based on the truth of this teaching. If God is sovereign and committed to protecting the afflicted pious, then when the pious are afflicted, they ought to seek Yhwh in prayer, knowing that Yhwh will remain loyal to them despite abandonment and persecution by others.

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[85] Cf. the depiction of similar dynamics in the Book of Job. Job is both a man of "integrity" (Job 27:5) and is celebrated for "having considered the poor" (Job 31:16–23). The speeches of Job are then a challenge to the idea conveyed in Psalm 41 that those who are characterized by righteous living will be protected by God from affliction. (Cf. the discussion of Terrien, *The Psalms*, 347).

[86] As argued in Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, 212; Mays, *Psalms*, 172; Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, 201.

2.3.3. Psalm 41: Conclusions

As a whole, Psalm 41 draws on the experience of its speaker to convey a teaching about God's ongoing commitment to the righteous amid their afflictions. According to the psalm's opening verses (vv. 2–4), the righteous (i.e., those who "consider the helpless," v. 2) ought to consider themselves blessed since, like the speaker, they have the ongoing protection and sustenance of God. The speaker's experience also serves to confirm that when the righteous are afflicted, even when they are forsaken in their afflictions by those around them, they can depend on Yhwh for deliverance.

The speaker's prayer in vv. 5–11, the middle part of the psalm, serves to model the right response to affliction (i.e., praying to God for help) while also exemplifying right postures of petition. On the one hand, the prayer models contrition and a willingness to self-examine, especially in the speaker's confession of sin in v. 5. On the other hand, the prayer maintains the speaker's confidence in their "integrity" (cf. v. 13), presenting the speaker as a victim of unjust abandonment and oppression. Together with the psalm's closing verses, the prayer in vv. 5–11 then models pious response to affliction as involving a tension between contrite willingness to self-examine and confident assertion of one's integrity.

3. Conclusions:
Didacticism and the Formation of the Pious Self

The previous section presented Psalms 32, 34, and 41 as case studies of thanksgiving psalms in which *didacticism* is the main rhetorical strategy. These case studies demonstrate how the use of didacticism in thanksgiving psalms shapes the ideas about piety they convey. In particular, this chapter has argued that didactic rhetoric in these psalms generates an emphasis on the pious self as an *agent* capable of *meaningful action* amid experiences of affliction. While psalms with

mainly doxological rhetoric emphasize the effectiveness of *divine* agency amid the afflictions of the pious, these more didactic psalms are more concerned with how divine sovereignty ensures that actions taken by the pious in response to affliction (e.g., prayer) are meaningful and effective. Furthermore, beyond emphasizing the capability of the pious to act meaningfully amid affliction, these psalms also exhort and urge the pious to follow *specific* courses of action in response to affliction. Specifically, these psalms encourage the pious to *seek God* when afflicted (cf. Ps 32:6; 34:5, 7, 11, 16, 18, 23; 41:5–11).

On the whole, then, the psalms in this chapter contribute to a discourse on piety in ancient Israel that conceptualized affliction primarily in terms of the *responses* it ought to elicit in the pious. These psalms betray no interest in the origins or ultimate meaning of affliction, but rather they urge the pious to focus on responding rightly to affliction, with the implication being that one's response to affliction reveals much about one's commitment to the idea of Yhwh's sovereignty.

The ideas about piety conveyed by the psalms in this chapter would have been especially empowering for Judean audiences during the postexilic period who sought to understand themselves in relation to ongoing afflictions far beyond their control. These psalms suggest that affliction is a normal, ongoing reality for the pious (cf. Ps 34:20, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous"), and as such they would have affirmed the experiences of communities who lived amid ongoing afflictions while remaining committed to the ideals of their religious traditions. By focusing on *right response* to affliction, then, these psalms also recover some agency for the afflicted amid circumstances beyond their control: they frame the event of affliction as mainly defined by one's response to it, rather than as defined by its origins, which may or may not be known. Following on this point, the specific emphasis on *seeking God* (i.e., in prayer) as right

response to affliction encourages the afflicted pious to *orient* themselves not primarily to their *present* experience of affliction, but to the *eventual resolution* of their afflictions of which they believe Yhwh to be capable. This orientation toward future resolution empowers the pious to resilience amid ongoing affliction.

The emphasis in these psalms on *right response* to affliction has strong resonances with another important work of the Persian period, the book of Job.[87] More specifically, the speeches of Job's friends eloquently articulate models of pious response to affliction that have remarkable overlap with the admonitions of the psalms in this chapter.[88] While space does not permit a thorough review of similarities, a brief discussion of the points of contact between these traditions will help to situate the findings of this chapter in relation to another important witness to Persian-period discourse about the pious self.

In their efforts to admonish Job concerning how he should respond to his own affliction, Job's friends eloquently express traditional Israelite ideas about piety, placing particular emphasis on responding rightly to affliction. Vital to the friends' worldview is the belief that God

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[87] For an overview of factors involved in dating the book of Job, see the discussion in C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 39–45. Seow concludes this discussion by observing that, "despite its setting, the book is most at home between the very late sixth and the first half of the fifth century and in Yehud" (Seow, *Job 1–21*, 45). While Seow's proposed date is quite narrow, his dating agrees with several other scholars who date the book generally to the postexilic period. Cf. Newsom, "The Book of Job," *NIB* 3:24; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC 17 (Dallas: Word, 1989), lvii; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 17–20.

[88] Cf. Carol Newsom's guiding remarks at the start of her chapter on the friends, "Consolations of God: The Moral Imagination of the Friends," in Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 90–129. There she writes, "Part of what I want to attempt is a self-conscious rehabilitation of the friends. Criticized ever since Elihu, they have fared particularly badly in twentieth-century readings. Frequently, the friends are interpreted as religiously narrow, mean-spirited hypocrites. Even when given credit for sincerity and initial compassion, they are seldom taken seriously as articulating a view of reality that might have its own claims to truth. Such reactions toward the friends, whether hostile or merely condescending, seem motivated, at least in part, by a sense that to take their arguments seriously is somehow to join in a vicious blaming of the victim, a further act of violence against Job. Such an attitude, though nobly motivated, diminishes the intellectual challenge of the book. What is lost when the friends are dismissed is the generic force of the wisdom dialogue as a confrontation between two significant but incommensurable perspectives" (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 90–91).

is sovereign and that, accordingly, affliction in the lives of the pious unfolds according to God's will. Like the psalms considered in this chapter, the friends presume that one's ultimate destiny is inherently related to the moral quality of one's life.[89] So, while the pious may undergo afflictions for various reasons which may or may not be known, their righteousness ensures their ultimate security, such that the pious may *hope* amid affliction for a resolution that both transforms them and brings glory to God.[90]

Beyond their basic worldview, the friends of Job also share with the psalms in this chapter an emphasis on *seeking God* through the acts of prayer and confession. The friends repeatedly urge Job not to hold back from seeking God, but rather to make supplication.[91] One of the ways the friends support this point is through renditions of God's powerful ability to transform the plight of pious sufferers, which the friends often depict in doxological hymnody that strongly resembles the language of thanksgiving psalms.[92] Like the psalms considered above, then, the friends often reframe affliction in terms of the ultimate *resolution* the pious may hope for, rather than focusing on the question of its present justification (which is, of course, Job's main concern, against his friends' advice).

With God's power to deliver as their ultimate point of focus, the friends also encourage Job to examine himself and approach God with contrition. The friends believe that, while one

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[89] Cf., e.g., Job 4:1–11, in which Eliphaz uses the imagery of "sowing and reaping" to underscore this point. Cf. also Edward L. Greenstein, "The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job," in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*, ed. Nili Sacher Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, and Michael J. Williams (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 333–63 (338–39). Here Greenstein discusses the point that Job and his friends both seem to presume a general "principle of just retribution."

[90] Cf. the words of Bildad in Job 8:1–22.

[91] E.g., Job 5:8–16; 8:5–7, 20–22; 11:13–20; 22:21–30.

[92] E.g., in his first speech, Eliphaz admonishes Job to "seek God" (Job 5:8) and then supports this advice with a series of hymnic declarations about God's power to transform dire situations (Job 5:9–16).

may have their integrity, no human being can be considered just in relation to God, who is always just.[93] So, while the friends do at points affirm Job's integrity (e.g., Job 4:1–11), they also urge Job to adopt a posture of contrition when seeking God's help. For example, in Job 11, after reprimanding Job for his claims to moral purity before God, Zophar instructs Job concerning a proper course of appeal to God, which involves a rightly oriented heart, outstretched hands, and a willingness to examine oneself and remove any iniquity (Job 11:13–14). Zophar explains that such course of action would not only resolve Job's afflictions, but would radically transform his situation, bringing newfound security, safety, and hope (Job 11:15–19).

Zophar's advice to Job closely resembles the program of contrite appeal one finds modeled in the psalms above, especially in Psalm 32. There, the speaker, who keeps "silence," continues to "waste away" in their afflictions (Ps 32:3). Recalling the earlier discussion above, "silence" in Ps 32:3 refers not to total silence, but to the speaker's failure to rightly *appeal* to Yhwh. So, while Job speaks many words in the dialogues with his friends, Job is "silent" in this same sense, hence the sharp criticisms of Job's friends, who, like the speaker of Psalm 32, have come to believe that right response to affliction involves making right appeal to God. Psalm 34 similarly urges that the afflicted pious should "seek" God (Ps 34:5, 11), while Psalm 41 models this contrite "seeking" in the recalled prayer of its speaker. (Ps 41:5–11). These psalms then share with the friends of Job a vision of the pious self that focuses on how one acts in response to affliction, placing particular emphasis on contrition, self-examination, and a willingness to make appeal to God.

The resonances of these psalms with the friends of Job suggest that the psalms in this chapter (as well as other thanksgiving psalms) were part of a larger discourse in postexilic

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[93] Cf., e.g., Job 4:12–21.

Judaism concerning how the pious ought rightly to respond to affliction. While a text like Job

engages ideas about the pious self in the form of sapiential poetry, the thanksgiving psalms

considered in this chapter, through their use in public worship, would likely have contributed to

the *formation* of the pious self among Judean worshippers. The psalms in this chapter may then

be understood as some of the texts by which Israelite worshippers in the postexilic period would

have *learned* and *internalized* the ideas about pious selfhood that are exemplified in the speeches

of Job's friends.

Chapter 5. Exemplarity in Thanksgiving Psalms

1. Introduction

In this final chapter, I argue that some thanksgiving psalms formed their audiences' ideas about

pious selfhood mainly by the rhetoric of exemplarity. The term exemplarity, as I am using it here,

refers to the quality of being a good or ideal example for others to learn from, emulate, or

imitate. So, this chapter argues that while some thanksgiving psalms foreground the rhetoric of

doxology or didacticism, the psalms considered in this chapter exhibit a pronounced focus on the

subjectivity and inner life of their speakers, such that their speakers are presented as exemplary

pious selves.

Working from the assumption that thanksgiving psalms were used as normative liturgical

poetry, there is a sense in which the speakers of *all* thanksgiving psalms might be considered

exemplary. The communally established authority of their traditional language and imagery

combined with charismatic aspects of their performance, perhaps, would have endowed their

speaking personas with some degree of exemplarity. However, while all thanksgiving psalms

may have this basic degree of exemplarity, the psalms considered in this chapter exhibit a special

degree of focus on their speakers, and they lack the explicit didacticism of the psalms considered

earlier. Instead of telling audiences what they should learn from the speaker, these psalms model

their message in the poetic personas of their speakers.[1]

Because these psalms lack explicit didacticism and focus instead on the inner experiences

of their speakers, they generate a focus on the mental or cognitive aspects of pious selfhood,

especially in regard to experiences of affliction or inner turmoil. While other psalms drew

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[1] This wording draws from Reynolds, *Torah as Teacher*, 14. Reynolds' work is discussed more below.

attention to the dependence of the pious self on divine agency (Ch. 3), or right responses of the pious self to affliction (Ch. 4), the speakers of these psalms exemplify right mental strategies, attitudes, and dispositions for grappling with acute crises of cognitive dissonance (Ps 73) and overwhelming affliction (Ps 116). They then present audiences with exemplary templates of inner discourse for moving through dilemmas common to the life of piety.

Like the chapters before it, this chapter has three parts. First, an introduction discusses the concept of exemplarity in recent scholarship and in the literature of Second Temple Judaism, providing social and historical context for the argument of this chapter. The introduction also clarifies the chapter's main argument further, explaining how the rhetoric of exemplarity shapes these psalms' ability to convey ideas about the pious self. The chapter then presents two case studies, Psalms 73 and 116, which serve to demonstrate the main argument of this chapter. Finally, a conclusion summarizes the main findings of this chapter and briefly relates them to the broader discourse about pious selfhood in Second Temple Judaism.

1.1. Contexts for Exemplarity in Second Temple Judaism

The concept of exemplarity has become an important topic in the study of Second Temple literature, and especially in scholarly conversations about how models of piety were constructed and encountered in early Jewish discourse. It seems that, over the course of the Second Temple period, the depiction and study of exemplary figures of piety became increasingly important to Jewish communities for maintaining connections to earlier traditions and for constructing models

for pious living in a rapidly changing world.[2] Most recent scholarship on exemplarity has focused on literature of the Hellenistic period or later, but in this introductory discussion, I will suggest that the phenomenon of exemplarity is a useful category for discussing how first-person thanksgiving psalms may have formed their audiences ideas about pious selfhood in the earlier Second Temple period as well.

Current scholarly discourse on exemplarity in ancient Jewish literature owes much to the work of Hindy Najman on pseudepigraphical attribution, which significantly advanced our understanding of how exemplarity functioned to construct "paths of living" in early Jewish communities.[3] Najman argued that exemplarity happens on two levels in pseudepigraphical literature.[4] On a primary level, Najman argues that the authors of pseudepigraphical texts emulate the exemplary founder of their discourse in the very act of writing (e.g., the author's emulation of Ezra in *4 Ezra*), in what Najman refers to as a "spiritual discipline, an asceticism of self-effacement."[5] On a secondary level, Najman argues, exemplars function *within*

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[2] See esp. Najman, "The Quest for Perfection in Ancient Judaism"; Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2014); Newman, *Before the Bible*; Elisa Uusimäki, *Lived Wisdom in Jewish Antiquity: Studies in Exercise and Exemplarity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), which focuses primarily on "the rise of the conception of the sage as a living embodiment of wisdom, i.e., as a wise person who serves as an exemplar to be followed by those who desire and pursue wisdom" (Uusimäki, *Lived Wisdom*, 19).

[3] This phrase is taken from Hindy Najman's work on the "quest for perfection" in ancient Judaism. At one point, she writes that, in ancient Judaism "we seem to be able to identify a thread . . . of using exemplary figures to construct paths of living—in texts and in people. The two, we might say are inextricably linked" (Najman, "The Quest for Perfection," 231).

[4] See esp. Hindy Najman, "Reconsidering *Jubilees*: Prophecy and Exemplarity," in *Past Renewals*, 189–204 (esp. 199–203).

[5] Hindy Najman, "How Should We Contextualize Pseudepigrapha? Imitation and Emulation in *4 Ezra*," in *Flores Florentino*, ed. Anthony Hilhorts, Emile Puech, and Eibert Tigchelaar, JSJSup 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 529–36 (535). The full quotation is as follows, "My suggestion is that *pseudonymous authorship should be seen as a metaphorical device, operating at the level of the text as a whole, whereby the actual author emulates and self-identifies as an exemplar*. Accordingly, the practice of pseudonymous attribution should be seen as a spiritual discipline, an asceticism of self-effacement" (italics original; Najman, "How Should We Contextualize," 535).

pseudepigraphical texts as well. So, while the author of *4 Ezra* identifies *as* "Ezra," this author

also imitates other exemplary figures in the text of *4 Ezra*, such as Daniel, Moses, and Jeremiah.

According to Najman, while *4 Ezra*'s author *emulates* Ezra (i.e., identifies as them), they *imitate*

other exemplars, acting *like* them in specific ways (e.g., receiving an apocalyptic vision, like

Daniel).[6]

While Najman drew attention to the phenomenon of exemplarity in pseudepigraphical

literature, Benjamin G. Wright III has explored how her ideas might illuminate how other texts,

which are not explicitly linked to a founding figure, function "to construct paths of living"

through the rhetoric of exemplarity. Wright has argued, for example, that the book of Sirach does

this by lifting up its authorial persona, Ben Sira, as a figure of exemplary piety for imitation by

audiences.[7] So, while the book of Sirach instructs its audience via overt didacticism, it also

models exemplary piety in the persona of its author, especially through sections that use

pronounced first-person discourse.[8] Wright's work demonstrates how the category of exemplarity

developed by Najman might be used to understand further dimensions of how poetical and

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[6] To explain the difference between imitation and emulation, Najman refers to the distinction between metaphor and simile (Najman, "How Should We Contextualize Pseudepigrapha?," 534). A metaphor, Najman explains, is when Romeo says that "Juliet is the sun," such that Juliet is identified *as* the sun. A metaphor is "indeterminate and pregnant with possibility, she is radiant, warm, generous, light, remote, or untouchable, *and so on*" (Najman, "How Should We Contextualize Pseudepigrapha?," 534). However, when Romeo says "Juliet is like the sun," this is a simile, which is inherently *determinate*. "Whereas a simile deals in analogies, we might say that a metaphor effects an *identification*" (Najman, "How Should We Contextualize Pseudepigrapha?," 534). Similarly, to *emulate* an exemplar is to *identify as* them in an indeterminate sense, as when the author of *4 Ezra* identifies through pseudepigraphic attribution *as* the Ezra of the Second Temple period. By contrast, to *imitate* an exemplar is to identify *with* some determinate aspect of their persona, as when the author of *4 Ezra* acts *like* Daniel by receiving apocalyptic visions.

[7] Benjamin G. Wright, III, "Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar," in *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint*, JSJSup 131 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 165–82. Cf. also Judith Newman's discussions of Ben Sira as an exemplary sage in Newman, *Before the Bible*, 23–51; Newman, "The Formation of the Scribal Self."

[8] Wright, III, "Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar," 168–69, 171–78. Wright, III, specifically analyzes Sir 22:25–23:6; 24:30–34; 25–26; 33:16–19; 34:9–13; 39:12–13, 32–35; 42:15; 43:32; 50:25–26; 50:27; and 51 as cases of such first-person discourse that facilitates Ben Sira's self-presentation as an exemplar of piety.

instructional literature functioned for audiences in ancient Jewish communities.

Wright's arguments about exemplarity in the self-presentations of Sirach raise questions about how other, earlier first-person literature might have had exemplary functions for postexilic audiences. The work of Susan Niditch on personal religion in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods adds helpfully to this line of questioning. Niditch has argued that, as early as the Neo-Babylonian period, there was a growing interest among Judean scribes in producing more sophisticated literary presentations of the personal dimension of religious experience.[9] Niditch argues that the books of Qoheleth and Job in particular, which reflect a new level of sophistication in their use of first-person discourse, reflect increased concern with representing the experience of pious personas "grappling with questions of God's justice, revealing a deep engagement with personal identity."[10] The speaker of Qoheleth, for example, seems not only to have been interested in conveying their experience and wisdom, but also in drawing readers into the specific *vantage* of first-person discourse.[11] Niditch's arguments about the increased interest in the representation of personal religious experience mesh well with other scholars' arguments about the later importance of exemplarity observable in Hellenistic works like Sirach. Taken together, these various arguments suggest that poetical self-presentations, especially with explicitly didactic features, became more and more useful as cultural models of exemplary piety throughout the Second Temple period.

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[9] Susan Niditch, *The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods*, AYBRL (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2015).

[10] Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 52.

[11] Eric S. Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes*, JSOTSup 280 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), has demonstrated that Qoheleth makes use of first-person, self-referential discourse to an extent that is otherwise unattested in the Hebrew Bible, which suggests that its self-referential language is a deliberate strategy by the author to foreground the subjectivity of the speaker, especially in Qoheleth 1–2. Christianson argues that Qoheleth's use of first-person functions "to intensify the presence and significance of Qoheleth's experience" (Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 41); cf. Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 40–44.

During the Second Temple period, then, it is certainly plausible that the speaking personas of first-person psalmody (e.g., thanksgiving psalms) served as exemplars of piety for audiences to learn from and imitate in their own lives. While scholars have not previously developed such an argument in regard to biblical thanksgiving psalms, a few scholars have draw attention to the capacity of psalms more generally to present their speakers as pious exemplars. For example, in his study of the changing functions of psalmody during the Second Temple period, Mika S. Pajunen has argued that psalms were used for educational purposes by Jewish communities, such that their speaking personas were increasingly understood as exemplars of piety.[12] Relatedly, in a monograph-length study of Psalm 119, Kent Aaron Reynolds has argued that the unusual length and literary form of Psalm 119 serve to present its speaker as an exemplar of pious devotion to Torah, such that "the speaker models the message" of the psalm.[13] Reynolds then argues that the main point of the psalm is not simply to convey its stated ideational content, but to *exemplify* right orientation and devotion to Torah as a model for readers to internalize through the act of reading.

Based on the preceding discussion, then, there is ample reason to conclude that first-person thanksgiving psalms would have had exemplary functions for readers, forming them not only through overt doxology and didacticism, but also through their presentation of exemplary pious personas. However, while most previous work on exemplarity has focused on texts that

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[12] Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form"; see also Pajunen, "Influence of Societal Changes." Pajunen cites the examples of two extant penitential prayers of Manasseh, which never served a liturgical function, but instead were used for "education concerning Manasseh's sins and subsequent repentance that served as penitential models to be emulated by the audiences" (Pajunen, "Differentiation of Form," 270); cf. Pajunen, "The Prayer of Manasseh in 4Q381 and the Account of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33," in *The Scrolls and Biblical Traditions: Proceedings of the Seventh Meeting of the IOQS in Helsinki*, ed. G. Brooke, et al., STDJ 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 143–161; Judith H. Newman, "The Form and Settings of the Prayer of Manasseh," in Boda, Falk, and Werline, eds., *Seeking the Favor of God: Vol. 2*, 105–125.

[13] Reynolds, *Torah as Teacher*, 14.

would have been encountered primarily by *readers* (i.e., scribes in private study), this chapter

explores how the concept of exemplarity illuminates the formational capacities of psalms that

would likely have been encountered primarily through public reading and recitation in worship.

While private reading allows for a more intimate kind of identification *as* the speaking subject of

a psalm, public listening in communal worship would have probably fostered a more communal

sense of identification *with* the speaking voice of psalms as a fellow pious.[14] In Najman's terms,

the public reading/recitation of thanksgiving psalms, such as those presented in this chapter,

would have provided audiences templates of pious attitudes, postures, mentalities, and

experiences for *imitation* by audiences.[15] In this sense, then, the exemplarity of thanksgiving

psalms would have contributed to the formation of their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood.

1.2. Exemplarity in Thanksgiving Psalms: Poetic Personas as Pious Exemplars

At a general level, the thanksgiving genre is an ideal literary instrument for presentations of

exemplary pious selves. The genre is marked by first-person rhetoric and self-presentations, and

it presents pious personas at critical junctures in the life of piety, more specifically experiences of

affliction and existential threat. In previous chapters, we have already seen how the speakers of

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[14] Of course, it is possible that the psalms considered in this chapter were read and studied privately by scribes during the Second Temple period, but throughout this study I have continued to assume settings for the uses of thanksgiving psalms that draw on the best existing scholarly arguments for their use. In the early Second Temple period, the most plausible site of encounter for thanksgiving psalms is the Jerusalem temple, and beyond that, local/communal spaces of worship (cf. Gerstenberger, "Non-Temple Psalms"). See Ch. 2 for more detailed discussion of these points.

[15] Najman emphasizes that *imitation* (as opposed to *emulation*) involves a *determinate* aspect of the exemplar's persona. E.g., in *4 Ezra*, the speaker, "Ezra," imitates Daniel by receiving apocalyptic visions, but the speaker does not fully *become* or *identify as* Daniel (cf. Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 62–66). Rather, an aspect of Daniel's traditional persona is imitated. In the case of thanksgiving psalms, the anonymous authorial persona is entirely presented in terms of their piety and pious engagement with experiences of affliction. No other aspects of their persona are developed or presented. It follows then that audiences would not have attempted to *become* "the speaker of Psalm 73," but rather they would have gleaned specific attitudes or postures of piety from the speaking personas of psalms that would have served as exemplary templates of pious selfhood for *imitation* in the lives of the pious.

thanksgiving psalms often draw attention to themselves and their experience as a source of education for the pious. Doxological psalms (Ch. 3) often present their speaker's experience as educational or insightful for the community of the pious (e.g., Ps 30:5–6). Didactic psalms (Ch. 4) seem particularly concerned with lifting up their speakers as exemplary figures of piety, since their speakers often draw on their own experience in order to instruct their audiences (e.g., Ps 32:5–7). However, some thanksgiving psalms go beyond presenting their speakers as generally exemplary and instead draw attention to the *inner* experiences and attitudes of the exemplary pious self.

This chapter presents two psalms, Psalms 73 and 116, as cases of thanksgiving psalms that reflect a pronounced interest in depicting their speakers as exemplars of pious selfhood. While Psalms 73 and 116 have significant differences, they both utilize the form of thanksgiving to depict their speakers amid experiences of cognitive dissonance and/or disorientation. Both psalms reflect a higher degree of first-person and self-referential discourse than other psalms considered in this study, and relatedly, both psalms depict their speakers as navigating a range of mental states. The speakers of these psalms then exemplify the right ordering of the pious mind when confronted by overwhelming or confounding circumstances. In these psalms, the main implication of Yhwh's sovereignty amid affliction is not specific *action* the pious may undertake in response to affliction (as in the didactic psalms of Ch. 4). Rather, in these psalms, Yhwh's sovereignty entails that whenever the pious are beset by cognitive dissonance or disorientation, a kind of serenity is always attainable amid the chaos of their experiences.[16]

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[16] In this regard, these psalms may be considered early exemplars of the turn toward "interiority" that some scholars have argued took place in Second Temple Judaism. While it is true that a basic sense of interiority seems to have existed even in very early Israelite literature, as Christian Frevel has demonstrated (Christian Frevel, "Von der Selbstbeobachtung zu inneren Tiefen: Überlegungen zur Konstitution von Individualität im Alten Testament," in *Individualität und Selbstreflexion in den Literaturen des Altes* Testaments, ed. Andreas Wagner und Jürgen van Oorschot, VWGTh 48 [Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017], 13–44), some other scholars have begun to develop the argument that a fresh wave of interest in cultivating interiority can be detected in texts dating to the

While exemplarity is a general feature of thanksgiving psalmody, Psalms 73 and 116 are marked by three common features that foreground the exemplarity of their speakers in their rhetoric:

1. First, these psalms are marked by the frequent and pronounced use of first-person speech and a corresponding lack of address or acknowledgment of a listening audience. In contrast to the other psalms considered in this study, which contain sections of ambiguous voicing (i.e., broad liturgical address in Ps 118:1–4; generalized didacticism in Ps 32:1–2), Psalms 73 and 116 are characterized by the uninterrupted first-person voice of their speakers. This continuous use of first-person draws the audience's attention to the speaker's "I" and fosters a less mediated kind of identification with it. Relatedly, the lack of explicit acknowledgment of the listening audience in these psalms suggests that the psalm's speech is less like the speech of a liturgical leader and more like the speech of one engaged in private prayer.

2. Second, following closely from the last point, these psalms include explicit instances of self-referential discourse and/or self-dialogue, in which the speaker of the psalms addresses themselves or negotiates with themselves concerning their experiences (Ps 73:1–17, 28; 116:7, 12). The "triangulated address" of these psalms has therefore shifted somewhat to accommodate a more sophisticated portrayal of the speaker's internal life. Where the "triangle" of other psalms includes the speaker, Yhwh, and the listening audience, in these psalms, the speaker's "I" relates to the speaker's "me" like a liturgical

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Second Temple Period. Carol Newsom has argued for such a development in early Judaism that was likely related to corresponding changes in the nature of self-experience itself during the postexilic period (Carol A. Newsom, "'If I had said…' (Ps 73:15): Retrospective Introspection in Didactic Psalms of the Second Temple Period," in Feldman and Sandoval, eds., *Petitioners, Penitents, and Poets*, 69–82). At one point, Newsom observes, "the development of a richer vocabulary for interiority, the creation of practices, and the highlighting of role models likely do represent real changes in the nature of self-experience" (Newsom, "If I had said…," 71).

leader might relate to their audience.[17] In this sense, the speaker's self *as subject* ("I") and

the speaker's self *as object* ("me") occupy different positions in the discourse, such that

these psalms are presented more as internal dialogue than they are as public liturgical

address.[18] These psalms then model for audiences the inner discourse of the pious self,

exemplifying the ability to admonish and instruct oneself in matters of piety.[19]

3. Finally, these psalms call attention to the exemplary inner life of their speakers by

    depicting affliction primarily as an experience *internal* to the speaker. Where other

    thanksgiving psalms depicted their speakers' afflictions as *external* in nature (e.g.,

    enemies in Ps 118, illness in Ps 41), these psalms depict their speakers afflictions in terms

    of cognitive impasse. Correspondingly, then, these psalms also depict the *resolution* of

    affliction in terms of a change in outlook or perspective within the speaker. The portrayal

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[17] My wording here draws inspiration from Kenneth Burke's notion of "an 'I' beholding its 'me.'" Drawing on the work of Herbert Mead, Burke writes "It is by this ability (implemented by the character of language) to put oneself in the rôle of the other, that human consciousness is made identical with self-consciousness, that the subject can see itself as object (an "I" beholding its "me"), and that the subject can mature by encompassing the maximum complexity of rôles" (Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973], 380).

[18] The idea of differentiating between the self as subject and as object is drawn from the psychological writing of William James (William James, *The Principles of Psychology* [New York: H. Holt, 1890]). In attempting to describe the human capacity for self-referential cognition, James differentiated the self as the *subject* of experience ("I") from the self as the *object* of experience ("Me"). This point in James' work was brought to my attention by Carol Newsom's recent study of self and agency in ancient Israel. See Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me*, 7. There Newsom also directs attention to the work of Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, who instead use the terms "subject" and "self" to refer to the self-as-subject ("subject") and the self-as-object ("self"). See Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 267–89.

[19] The recent work of Patrick McNamara on the neuroscience of religious experience bolsters this point, as McNamara has argued that the "divided self" is often one of the main inhibitors to a healthy sense of one's selfhood. See Patrick McNamara, *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience* (New York: Cambridge University, 2009), 156–66 ("The Role of Executive Cognitive Functions in Religious Self-Transformation"). According to McNamara, a "divided self" may be remedied through the deliberate strengthening of what McNamara calls "the central executive self," a term which for McNamara refers to a sense of unified conscious agency within oneself. As Judith Newman argues, prayer can function as a practice that allows for the strengthening of the "central executive self" (Newman, *Before the Bible*, 28–29). In this chapter, I consider two psalms that I believe were deliberately meant to serve this precise function as both present speaker's experiencing crises of intensely divided selves that eventuate in the resolution of an ordered self.

of affliction as an experience interior to the speaker allows for the exemplary depiction of techniques for overcoming inner affliction and cognitive impasse in the speaker's discourse.

In the case studies that follow, this chapter will demonstrate that Psalms 73 and 116 both exhibit each of the features just outlined. In doing so, I argue, these two psalms foreground exemplarity in their rhetoric, presenting their speakers as pious selves who exemplify an ability to order their minds rightly amid overwhelming or disorienting circumstances.

2. Case Studies: Psalms 73 and 116

2.1. Psalm 73

2.1.1. Psalm 73: Introduction

While scholars generally agree that Psalm 73 draws on the form of thanksgiving psalmody, Psalm 73 is certainly the most *unlike* the other psalms considered in this study, primarily because it does not depict its speaker as calling on Yhwh for help. Instead, the psalm depicts an intensely *cognitive* crisis, in which its speaker wrestles with a contradiction between received wisdom (i.e., that God is good to the pure in heart) and lived experience (i.e., that the wicked seem always to prosper). The psalm depicts the speaker's assessment and response to this dilemma, eventually depicting its resolution when an experience in a space of worship elicits a change in the speaker's perspective on their dilemma. Overall, then, while the psalm is quite different from the other psalms in this study, it shares with them an interest in utilizing the experiential vantage of its speaker to convey a model of pious selfhood. Beyond this, however, the psalm's intense focus on its speaker's inner discourse suggests that it means to lift up its speaker as an *exemplar* of piety, one whose grappling with the problem of the prosperity of the wicked provides a template for the pious to learn from and imitate in their own lives.

Psalm 73 reflects a strong sapiential orientation, such that scholars have often disagreed over how its genre should be understood. Most scholars, however, argue that the psalm is either a thanksgiving psalm, a "wisdom" psalm, or some mixture of the two.[20] The structure of the psalm has been equally controversial. All scholars note that the particle אַךְ ("truly, indeed") marks three major sections within the psalm (vv. 1, 13, 18), but there are numerous arguments about how the psalm's rhetorical movements should be understood.[21] My own approach is to follow the psalm's own structuring device, separating it into three main sections, vv. 1–12, 13–17, and 18–28.[22]

Scholars generally agree that the psalm should be dated to the postexilic period.[23] Many scholars have suggested that the psalm's explicit concerns with the prosperity and oppression of

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[20] Hermann Gunkel initially treated Psalm 73 under his chapter on "Wisdom Poetry in the Psalms," but in his discussion of the psalm, he notes the extreme closeness of this psalm's character to that of his category of "thanksgiving song" (Gunkel, *Introduction*, 297). Since then, scholars have tended to note both "wisdom" and "thanksgiving" in their description of the psalm's genre.

Scholars who understand the psalm as thanksgiving with sapiential features include Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 224 (cf. also Erich Zenger, "Psalm 73 als christlich-jüdisches Gebet," *BK* 74 [1992]: 184–87 [184]); Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 74; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 84–85; Roland Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification 'Wisdom Psalms,'" in *Congress Volume Bonn 1962: Fourth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament*, ed. George W. Anderson, et al., VTSup 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 164; Kenneth Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel—Their Rhetorical, Thematic and Formal Dimensions," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Jackson J. Jackson and Martin Kessler, PTMS 1 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974), 186–222 (207).

Some scholars argue that the psalm resists any classification at all. Cf., e.g., John Vassar, *Recalling a Story One Told: An Intertextual Reading of the Psalter and the Pentateuch* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 2007), 67; and most recently, Stephen J. Smith, *The Conflict Between Faith and Experience, And the Shape of Psalms 73–83*, LHBOTS 723 (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 71. Beth Tanner discourages paying attention to the question of this psalm's genre, as previous attempts to describe it have been unsuccessful in her estimation (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 584). For detailed discussion of earlier approaches to the genre of Psalm 73, see Leslie Allen, "Psalm 73: An Analysis," *TynBul* 33 (1982): 107–18; J. Clinton McCann, "Psalm 73: An Interpretation Emphasizing Rhetorical and Canonical Criticism" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1985), 88–101; and Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 231–3.

[21] For a thorough review of thirty-four(!) different proposals for Psalm 73's structure, see McCann, "Psalm 73," 49–75; see also Allen, "Psalm 73"; cf. also Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 72; Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 16. Most recently, Stephen J. Smith has argued that the psalm divides into two halves (vv. 1–16; 18–28) arranged around the pivotal v. 17 (Smith, *The Conflict Between Faith and Experience*, 72).

[22] With Erich Zenger (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 226).

[23] Zenger in Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 226; cf. also Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 70; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 86.

the economically wealthy suggest the psalm's origins in the postexilic period, during which Judean communities suffered gross inequities due to the constraints of imperial rule.[24] Of course, such considerations cannot prove the psalm's origins during the postexilic period, but for present purposes, these points highlight the psalm's relevance for postexilic communities struggling with the difficulties of colonial existence.

2.1.2. Psalm 73: Translation

1 *a psalm of Asaph*

 Truly God is good to Israel,[a]
  To those who are pure in heart.
2 But I, my feet had almost stumbled,
  My steps had nearly slipped.
3 For I envied the boastful,
  the welfare of the wicked I saw.
4 For they never have life-threatening afflictions,[b]
  and their bellies are full.
5 They have no part in the troubles of humanity,
  and they are not plagued along with human beings.
6 Therefore pride is their necklace,
  Violence is wrapped around them like a cloak.
7 Their iniquity seeps out because of its fatness,[c]
  their hearts overflow with evil schemes.
8 They scoff and sneer with malice,
  and from on high they plot exploitation.
9 They set their mouth against heaven,
  and their tongue ranges over the earth.
10 Therefore the people turn to them,
  and greedily lap the water of their words.[d]
11 They say, "How can God know?"
  And, "Is there any knowledge in the Most High?"
12 See, these are the wicked:
  always at ease, yet ever stronger.

13 Truly, in vain have I kept my heart pure,
  and washed my hands in innocence.

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[24] E.g., Erhard Gerstenberger argues that the psalm was composed in an environment in which the "pure hearted" (cf. v. 1) were acutely conscious of "gross ethical imbalances, by way of their own suffering" (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 71). Cf. also Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 237.

14   Still I have been plagued all day,
        met with rebuke every morning.
15   If I had said, "I will keep talking like this,"
        See, I would have betrayed the community of your children.*e*
16   When I tried to consider all this,
        it seemed impossibly daunting.
17   Until I came to the sanctuary of God,
        and I understood their end.

18   Truly, you set them on slippery ground,
        you make them fall to ruin.
19   Ah! How they come to desolation in a moment!
        Swept away completely by terrors!
20   Like a dream upon waking, O my Lord,
        like a terrible nightmare.*f*
21   When my heart was embittered,
        when my spirit was pierced through,
22   I was brutish and ignorant,
        like a beast I was with you.
23   But I am always with you,
        You have held my right hand.
24   By your counsel you have led me,
        and afterward, in glory you will take me.
25   Who (else) do I have in the heavens?
        And with you, there is no other I desire in the earth.
26   Though my flesh and my heart should fail,
        the rock of my heart and my portion is God forever.
27   For behold, those who are far from you perish,
        You bring an end to all those who are unfaithful to you.
28   But I—nearness to God is good for me,
        I have made my Lord Yhwh my refuge,
            to tell about all your works.

Notes to Translation of Psalm 73

a BHS proposes emending the Hebrew text from לְיִשְׂרָאֵל ("to Israel") to לְיָשָׁר אֵל ("to the upright") but without citing any manuscript evidence. Many twentieth-century commentators preferred this emended reading, especially since it makes for good parallelism between "upright" and "pure in heart" (v. 2b). However, this proposed emendation is based only on conjecture, so it should be rejected (against several mainstream English translations, including NRSV, which translates "Truly God is good to the upright"). Scholars who reject the emendation include, among others, Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 2*, 397; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 221; Newsom, "If I had said…," 76 n. 22.

b The difficulty of v. 4a in MT (כִּי אֵין חַרְצֻבּוֹת לְמוֹתָם) has caused many translators to follow an emendation of the colon's last word from לְמוֹתָם ("to their death") to לָמוֹ תָּם ("to them … pure"). The resulting translation might be, as Zenger translates, "Indeed, they suffer no pain, fat and sleek their belly" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 221). Zenger supports this emendation by arguing that MT is "scarcely possible in the context of the psalm, since according to v. 17 death, at least, means the end of the wicked's happiness" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 223).

While their concern is understandable, the lack of manuscript evidence for this emendation suggests that other options be considered for translating MT. In an effort to stay close to MT's Hebrew, Goldingay translates the verse, "Because there are no pressures for them threatening their death" (Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 2*, 398). While Goldingay's translation takes some creative liberties, it has several merits. First, it preserves the Hebrew of MT. Second, it fits well with the ideas expressed in the following verse, v. 5, which focus on how the wicked do not experience life's tribulations in the same ways that other people do. For these reasons, I follow the sense of Goldingay's translation, but my wording tries to bring out the line's meaning a bit more clearly in English. The sense of the line is that, while the wicked may have afflictions in life, they never seem to be afflicted in ways that bring them truly low or make them fear for their lives.

[c] In MT, the plural subject of this colon, עֵינֵמוֹ ("their eyes"), causes difficulty when translated with the colon's singular verb, יָצָא ("it goes out"). While many possible emendations have been suggested, most compelling is the emendation suggested by LXX, which translates ἀδικία ("unrighteousness") for עֵינֵמוֹ, suggesting the text be emended to עֲוֹנֵמוֹ ("their iniquity"), which fits well both grammatically and contextually. Hubert Irsigler supports this reading (Hubert Irsigler, *Psalm 73–Monolog eines Weisen: Text, Programm, Struktur*, ATSAT 20 [St. Ottilien: EOS, 1984], 18–20), as does Zenger, in an exception to his usual wariness of conjectures (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 223 n. e).

[d] This verse is a particularly complicated *crux interpretum*, and there are numerous, diverse suggestions available for its translation which cannot all be discussed here. I have followed the suggestion of Zenger (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 221, 223 n. f), who attempts to determine a translation that requires as little conjecture as possible. Zenger follows the emendation proposed in BHS for the first colon, reading עָם אֲלֵיהֶם (lit. "people to them") instead of MT's עַמּוֹ הֲלֹם (lit. "his people hence"). For the second colon, once again he follows the proposed emendation in BHS, reading וּמֵי מִלֵּיהֶם יָמֹצוּ ("and the water of their words they lap greedily"; יָמֹצוּ from מצץ, "to slurp, lap") instead of MT's וּמֵי מָלֵא יִמָּצוּ (lit. "and water in fullness[?] will be lapped"). The sense of the resulting translation is that the "ranging tongues" of the wicked produce enticing speech that their followers receive with enthusiasm. The sense of this translation fits well in the context of the psalm.

[e] For the translation "community" from Heb. דוֹר, cf. its use in Ps 24:6. See also Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 2*, 408. Zenger, among others, translates "generation," which is the word's more common meaning. But the usage of Ps 24:6 combined with the context of the present usage suggests a meaning more to do with a specific group of people and its ethos. For this reason, "community," (my translation), "company" (Goldingay), or "circle" (NRSV) are preferable.

[f] Following Hubert Irsigler's suggestion (Irsigler, *Psalm 73*, 39) that the letters at the end of the line be linked differently than they appear in MT. So, instead of צלמם תבזה ("their shadow you hate"), one would link the letters as follows, צלם מתבזה ("hated nightmare"). See also the discussion of Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 223 n. h.

2.1.3. Psalm 73: Analysis

Overview of Psalm 73's Structure and Thematic Flow

Before proceeding to consider Psalm 73 in closer detail, a brief summary of its thematic flow will serve as a helpful point of departure. The psalm begins with the speaker's announcement of received wisdom (v. 1) that God is good to those who are "pure in heart," but it quickly changes in tone. In vv. 2–3, the speaker begins to recall an experience of nearly renouncing such a worldview due the fatigue of witnessing the ongoing prosperity of the wicked. Verses 4–12 then

expand on this point, rehearsing at length the unjust successes of the wicked that the speaker had seen. In vv. 13–17, the speaker, remembers how what they had seen had pushed them to a crisis of confidence in their own commitment to piety (vv. 13–14), such that they found themselves at a cognitive impasse (vv. 15–16). However, an experience in the sanctuary of God led the speaker to a changed perspective on the prosperity of the wicked, turning their focus to the *ultimate* demise of the wicked. Verses 18–28 expand upon this changed perspective, reflecting at greater length on the ultimate demise of the wicked and God's ongoing commitment to the righteous. As a whole, then, the psalm exemplifies a strategy for grappling with overwhelming injustice in the world by focusing on the ultimate ends of the wicked ensured by God's sovereignty.

Verses 1–3

The psalm's opening verses have a critical role in framing the psalm as a reflection on a past experience of cognitive dissonance that ultimately found resolution. The "proverb" with which the psalm opens ("Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart," v. 1) has a kind of double-function in the psalm.[25] On the one hand, like the openings of other thanksgiving psalms, it functions to announce the *conclusions* arrived at by the speaker via the experience of affliction and resolution retold in the psalm.[26] On the other hand, it functions as the beginning of the discourse in vv. 1–17, which recalls how the speaker had almost been driven to totally reject the ideas in v. 1 (cf. vv. 13–14). What follows will then serve first to challenge and then to reaffirm the claims of v. 1 for audiences of the pious.

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[25] Scholars generally agree that v. 1 reflects a quoted or remembered proverb. Cf. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 17.

[26] Cf. other thanksgiving psalm openings. E.g., Ps 30:2–4; 32:1–2; 34:2–4; 41:2–4; 66:1–4; 116:1–2; 118:1–4.

Verse 2's emphatic use of the first-person pronoun וַאֲנִי ("But I...") quickly shifts the focus from the disembodied words of received wisdom (v. 1) to the speaker's own lived experience, which seems to contradict the wisdom of v. 1.[27] However, before describing what they have seen, v. 2 clarifies that what follows is a *past* state of mind that had almost caused the speaker to forsake their piety ("But I, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped," v. 2).[28] In other words, v. 2 encourages audiences to experience the speaker's review of their experiences as an ultimately *mistaken* perspective which the speaker does not hold anymore. Like other psalms of thanksgiving then, this psalm will review the speaker's experience in order to relate *how they arrived* at their present view. In Psalm 73, however, the speaker's journey is depicted as an experience of negotiating a cognitive impasse brought on by the speaker's continued experience of the welfare of the wicked. Verse 3 then introduces this past perspective when the speaker says, "For I envied the boastful, the welfare of the wicked I saw."

Verses 4–12

What follows in vv. 4–12 expands in detail upon the speaker's envious perception of the ongoing welfare of the wicked, drawing the audience into deeper identification with their past perspective. In effect, through their lengthy depiction of the successes of the wicked, these verses

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[27] The same transitional phrase, "But I…" (וַאֲנִי), will be used, notably, to begin the final verse of the psalm, which states the concluding perspective of the speaker in relation to the wisdom saying that opened the psalm: "But I—nearness to God is good for me, I have made my Lord Yhwh my refuge, to tell about all your works" (v. 28). The final verse is a genius restatement of the psalm's opening proverbial claim in terms of the speaker's own experience, and so it serves to underscore the psalm's emphasis on the exemplary nature of its speaker's pious subjectivity.

[28] As Zenger observes, the imagery of slipping feet alludes to the "typical Wisdom conception of life as a path to be trod, and the associated promise that those who follow the path of righteousness cannot fall" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 227). This imagery is used elsewhere in, e.g., Ps 15:5; 17:5; Prov 10:25, 30. The imagery reinforces the point that, despite the difficulty of the speaker's situation in witnessing the prosperity of the wicked, in the implied present of the psalm, their steps have been kept on the right path, such that they speak from the vantage of one who survived a "close call" with a wrong perspective on reality.

serve to convey the perspective that *it does not matter how one lives*.[29] What is remarkable about

this section is that, even while the speaker has clarified that this is a "mistaken" perspective, vv.

4–12 still represent it as a *compelling* one, drawing the audience into deep awareness of the

injustices that nearly drove the speaker to embrace it permanently. As such, vv. 4–12 have two

important rhetorical functions for the psalm. First, assuming a postexilic Judean audience for the

psalm, vv. 4–12 would have resonated deeply with worshippers who lived in a society

characterized by gross inequity and oppression and ruled by a foreign, gentile power.[30] These

verses would then have been powerful for fostering Judean audiences' identification with the

speaker of the psalm, which in turn would have allowed them to internalize its teaching more

deeply.[31] Second, these verses encourage close attention to the speaker's past state of mind,

which audiences might have rejected too quickly based only on vv. 2–3.[32] The lengthy, eloquent

description of the welfare of the wicked in vv. 4–12 then serves to establish the seriousness of the

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[29] Cf. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 17–18.

[30] While this point is not a controversial one, see especially Adams, *Social and Economic Life*, 129–55, for a discussion about the extremely difficult circumstances that characterized life for most ordinary members of the population throughout the Persian and Ptolemaic periods, especially as a direct result of state-mandated taxation and tribute. As Adams puts it, "Within colonial economies, even with less hostile governing authorities, those in power tend to demand as much as possible from subjects, and Judah experienced this type of situation during the Second Temple period, even as it remained a small province in a succession of larger empires" (Adams, *Social and Economic Life*, 131).

[31] Zenger argues that the psalm's speaker is constructed as a "poor" person in order to evoke the suffering Judean people in the postexilic period, and that this theme is present across the Asaphite collection in Psalms 73–83: "The 'connection to Israel' in v. 1, which was not part of the primary form of the psalm . . . receives a twofold meaning from Psalms 74–83. On the one hand this is about 'Israel' in contrast to the wicked foreign nations who have destroyed the Temple and oppress Israel, and on the other hand it is about the mass of 'pure' poor and guiltless suffering people in Israel, to whom the psalm attributes the label 'Israel.' Psalm 73 proclaims to both these bearers of the signification 'Israel' the goodness of God" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 237).

[32] Gerstenberger observes how vv. 4–12 draw particular attention to the sensory experience of the speaker in observing the welfare of the wicked (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 71). He argues that vv. 3–7 record what the speaker has *seen* (i.e., "the welfare of the wicked *I saw*," v. 3), while vv. 8–11 record what the speaker has *heard* (i.e., these verses relate the *words* and *speech acts* of the wicked).

speaker's cognitive impasse, rather than rejecting it too quickly as naive or impious.[33] The audiences' identification with the perspective of vv. 4–12 is critical for their ability to appreciate the resolution depicted in vv. 17–28 as meaningful and instructive.

Verses 13–17

The middle section of the psalm, vv. 13–17, transitions to recalling how the speaker assessed and eventually resolved the cognitive dissonance brought on by the experiences described in vv. 4–12.[34] These verses are crucial for the psalm's exemplary power, since they draw attention to the speaker's *inner* grappling with conflicting perspectives, and they model the process by which the speaker arrived at a resolution that allowed them to maintain their commitment to piety. Remarkably, Psalm 73 does not depict its speaker as calling out to Yhwh for deliverance, but rather it depicts its speaker as engaged in a kind of "self-persuasive" rhetorical exercise, negotiating between competing paradigms and ultimately finding resolution through a changed perspective on the problem.[35] A key aspect of Psalm 73's exemplary piety is then the ability to

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[33] In a recent study of prayer as a deliberately metacognitive activity, Tanya Luhrmann discusses how lengthy and emotionally intense rehearsal of previous experiences (i.e., the telling of a "story" in Luhrmann's terms) allows for a kind of immersive experience for the reader/hearer of a prayer that may not otherwise possible (Luhrmann, "Prayer as a Metacognitive Activity"). In her words, story "facilitates *imaginative immersion*—a willingness to get caught up and absorbed . . . Absorption allows us to diminish to some extent the sense of the world as we find it and to heighten a sense of the world as it could be . . . Intense imaginative immersion takes us out of ourselves by making what we imagine feel real" (Luhrmann, "Prayer as Metacognitive Activity," 313). Elsewhere, Carol Newsom relates Luhrmann's work to her analysis of Psalm 73 by stating, "Thus, the luring of the hearer into the same moral danger as the speaker is part of the therapeutic work of the psalm, an 'imaginative immersion' that works to discharge the danger by framing a narrative in which the danger is overcome" (Newsom, "If I had said…," 77 n. 25).

[34] The beginning of a new section in v. 13 is marked most clearly by the use of the particle אַךְ ("truly, indeed"), which occurs in vv. 1, 13, and 18. Cf. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 72; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 226.

[35] Rhetorician Davida H. Charney has argued that Psalm 73 reflects the rhetorical practice of "self-persuasion," a practice well-known in ancient Athens (Charney, *Persuading God*, 127–42). Charney clarifies that self-persuasion is not simply about finding relief from tension, but about developing one's ability to negotiate between competing perspectives: "Self-persuasion is a more complex process than expression. Working out the reasons for God to intervene on one's behalf rehearses and strengthens one's commitment to the community's core values and standards of behavior. The effects of self-persuasion are also more complex than relief of tension. Considering possible objections from hearers and selecting among the available arguments improves one's ability to take and judge

negotiate between various perspectives and find resolution in the right orientation of one's perspective.

Before arriving at a resolution, the speaker conveys their inner grappling with the welfare of the wicked and its implications for their own commitment to piety (vv. 13–17). It is important to understand that, while the psalm transitions from the review of the speaker's past perspective in vv. 4–14, the inner deliberation of vv. 13–17 is still part of the speaker's review of their *past* experience. After recalling how they witnessed the welfare of the wicked (vv. 4–12), the speaker then recalls how these experiences drove them to an existential crisis. The speaker recalls how, in light of the successes of the wicked, they lamented the pointlessness of their own commitment to piety ("Truly, in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence," v. 13). In addition to observing the welfare of the wicked, the speaker's own afflictions also contribute to their reaching this conclusion, since while the wicked prosper, the speaker continues to be afflicted "all day" and "every morning" (v. 14).[36]

Verses 15–17 conclude the review of the speaker's past experience by relating two attempts the speaker made at resolving their impasse (vv. 15–16) and by finally conveying the experience that brought resolution (v. 17). These verses are remarkable for their depiction of "retrospective introspection," by which the speaker recalls different ways they considered

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alternative perspectives. . . . A key aspect of self-persuasion is the ability to consider the merits of alternative perspectives, alternative explanations, alternative courses of action" (Charney, *Persuading God*, 127–28).

[36] While the wording is not exactly the same, the statement "in vain have I kept my heart pure (זִכִּיתִי לְבָבִי)," (v. 13a) seems to echo the "proverb" that opens the psalm, which also draws attention to the idea of a pure heart. "Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart (לְבָרֵי לֵבָב)," (v. 1). Further, as Zenger observes, the fact that the speaker's afflictions continue "all day" (v. 14a) and "every morning" (v. 14b) likely suggest to the speaker that their afflictions are also an act of divine punishment of the speaker (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 229). When considered alongside the depictions in vv. 4–12, this point deepens the speaker's existential crisis, as it entails that God punishes the pious while allowing the wicked to succeed in good health.

resolving (or tried resolving) their cognitive impasse.[37] First, in v. 15, the speaker recalls how

they considered professing their crisis to others in the community of the pious. However, they

opted not to take this course, since it would have involved "betraying the community of your

children" (v. 15b). Even amid this complex rehearsal of past attempts at resolution, the speaker

models fidelity to the pious community as a crucial component of exemplary piety.[38] Second, in

v. 16, the speaker recalls how they attempted to resolve their impasse by considering it carefully

(וָאֲחַשְּׁבָה) but found no resolution in doing so. Verse 16's juxtaposition with the speaker's

entering God's sanctuary in v. 17 suggests that the main reason the speaker was unable to

intellectually resolve their impasse was that they attempted to do so in solitude, apart from the

community of the pious.[39] Finally, in v. 17, the speaker recalls how they found resolution upon

entering the sanctuary of God.[40] There, the speaker was able to perceive the ultimate "end" of the

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[37] The phrase "retrospective introspection" comes from Carol Newsom, "If I had said…." In this essay, Newsom describes these verses as a "*tour de force* of introspection" (Newsom, "If I had said...," 76).

[38] In her study of Psalm 73, Newsom notes how v. 15 makes it clear that the speaker refused to voice their wayward perspectives not because the dissonance was resolved for them, but because of felt social and ethical obligations to their community (Newsom, "If I had said…," 78–79). This is important to note because it clarifies that the speaker's previous refusal to speak up about their perspectives in vv. 4–14 was motivated by a sense of obligation to the community and not by any resolution (yet) of the speaker's cognitive dissonance. While solidarity with the community of the faithful is important to the speaker, it does not on its own afford resolution of the speaker's cognitive dissonance. Something else will be needed to achieve that, as becomes clear in v. 17ff.

[39] Some commentators (e.g., Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 18) note that the speaker's attempt at "understanding" (v. 16) was abandoned simply because of exhaustion. However, the juxtaposition of this attempt at "understanding" in v. 16 with the "understanding" made possible in God's sanctuary in v. 17 suggests that the point of v. 16 is to highlight the impossibility of resolving such cognitive dissonance *apart from God's sanctuary*.

[40] There is a long and complex debate about the nature of the speaker's experience upon "coming into the sanctuary of God" in v. 17. Some scholars maintain that this verse refers to a literal act of entering the temple or sanctuary. Cf. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 17; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 72; Irsigler, *Psalm 73*, 246; Othmar Keel, *Schöne, schwierige Welt: Leben mit Klagen und Loben*, Bibelwoche 54 (Berlin: Evang. Haupt-Bibelges, 1991), 41. Other scholars contend that the experience referred to is purely metaphorical or imaginational in nature. So, Kittel, e.g., in his commentary speaks of a "contemplative self-presentation" before God. See Rudolf Kittel, *Die Psalmen*, 4th ed., KAT XIII (Leipzig: Scholl, 1922), 270. This position is more recently maintained by Diethelm Michel, "Ich aber bin immer bei dir: Von der Unsterblichkeit der Gottesbeziehung," in *Im Angesicht des Todes*, ed. Hansjakob Becker, Bernhard Einig, and Peter-Otto Ullrich, PL 3 (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1987), 637–58. In his commentary on the psalm, Zenger includes a lengthy discussion of his reasons for preferring the *non-literal* understanding of the temple event in v. 17. See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 231–32.

wicked (v. 17b), allowing for a change in the speaker's perspective and the resolution of their cognitive impasse.

On the whole, vv. 13–17 then provide an exemplary template for how the afflicted pious might order themselves internally when they observe the ongoing welfare and successes of the wicked. Instead of rejecting conflicting perspectives out of hand, vv. 1–17 model close attention to experience that conflicts with received wisdom. Beyond this, the speaker's attempts at resolution (vv. 15–16) serve to demonstrate the importance of fidelity to the community of the faithful, suggesting that solidarity with the community is vital for maintaining clear perception of one's shared commitments. Finally, the speaker's act of entering God's sanctuary in v. 17, coupled with their perception of the ultimate ends of the wicked, suggests that resolution is to be found in a perspectival shift that comes from shared presence with the community of the pious.[41] More specifically, the speaker refocuses their thoughts on the belief that, while the wicked may prosper in the present, their ultimate end is destruction (cf. vv. 18–20).

Verses 18–28

The psalm's final section, vv. 18–28, expands upon the new resolution of v. 17 concerning the ultimate fate of the wicked (vv. 18–20, 27), eventually contrasting their fate with that of the righteous, whom the psalm assures its audience will continue to receive God's protection and sustenance (vv. 23–28). This section of the psalm is voiced in the "implied present" of the psalm, the same temporality as the opening "proverb" in v. 1. After reviewing the speaker's experience of affliction and resolution, vv. 18–28, in particular, serve to elucidate the speaker's newfound

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[41] Gerstenberger writes that in v. 17, the solution to the speaker's cognitive dissonance comes about in the act of "attending a worship service" (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 72), where the speaker contemplates the ultimate ends of the wicked in the company of their fellow pious. For Gerstenberger, then, the verse suggests the importance of group solidarity in negotiating individual crises of faith: "only proper instruction in worship can give the right insight" (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 72).

conviction concerning the ultimate fate of the wicked.[42] These verses describe how God will ultimately bring the wicked to ruin, setting them on "slippery ground" (v. 18a) and "making them fall" (v. 18b). Verses 19–20 underscore how sudden and complete the ultimate destruction of the wicked will be, depicting their sudden demise as similar to one waking suddenly from a dream (v. 20). Eventually, these verses suggest, the nightmare will end for the pious as it simultaneously begins for the wicked.

In vv. 21–22, the speaker shifts again to self-presentation, but this time their self-talk is focused on self-examination and critique of their past perspective, which had nearly caused them to "slip" (v. 2). Looking to the past, at the time when their "heart was embittered" and their "spirit pierced through" (v. 21), the speaker says that they had been "brutish and ignorant," like a "beast" (v. 22). The sapiential imagery of being like a "beast" serves to characterize the past, mistaken perspective of the speaker as stubborn and intractable, further underscoring for audiences that while the earlier experiences of the speaker were real, they did not ultimately constitute wise perception.[43] The presence of this brief portrayal of the speaker's past self is significant for the psalm's ability to exemplify right piety for audiences, and it underscores the importance of self-examination and contrition as components of pious response to affliction.

By contrast, vv. 23–28 present the speaker's present state of mind as characterized by deep trust and confidence in the sovereignty of God's rulership of the world. These verses then conclude the psalm with a presentation of an exemplary pious outlook, which the speaker

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[42] Depictions of the fates of the wicked are a common motif in the Hebrew Bible, attested elsewhere in, e.g., Prov 12, 21; cf. Job 15:20–35; 20:5–29 (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 71).

[43] This sapiential imagery has resonances with Ps 32:9, which uses imagery of being like "a horse or mule" to describe the wrongly formed pious self, which fails to make appeal to God amid affliction. Similar to Psalm 73:21–22, Psalm 32 depicts its speaker as having earlier been stubborn and foolish in their wrong response to affliction, but later having a transformational experience that provided them new perspective on their situation.

describes as being the result of God's own counsel and leadership in their life (vv. 23–24). It is important to note here that the speaker's present state of mind has not been brought about by God's defeat of the wicked or any other external event of deliverance. Rather, these verses model the speaker's willingness to profess faith in God even amid their ongoing afflictions (i.e., their own afflictions, v. 14, and the ongoing successes of the wicked, vv. 4–12). In vv. 25–26, the speaker's professed *dependency* on God then models a willingness to acknowledge God's sovereignty, "though my flesh and my heart should fail" (v. 26). In other words, despite ongoing affliction, the speaker will remain committed to the life of piety, which is itself a lived acknowledgment of God's sovereignty despite the seemingly contradictory successes of the wicked.

The psalm concludes in vv. 27–28 with a final rehearsal of the two contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked, implicitly returning to the opening words of the psalm (v. 1, "Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart") and confirming their truth. The contrast is constructed this time in terms of being "near to" and "far from" God. Those who are far from God (i.e., the "unfaithful," v. 27) ultimately perish. In contrast, v. 28 uses the emphatic first-person pronoun to draw attention to the exemplary speaker, who reaffirms that "nearness to God is good for me" (v. 28a), since God has become their "refuge" (v. 28b). The speaker's final words then underscore their conviction that "God is good . . . to those who are pure in heart" (v. 1b), since the speaker's experience has led them to see how God cares for, protects, and sustains the pious even amid ongoing afflictions.

2.1.4. Psalm 73: Conclusions

In relation to other psalms considered in this study, Psalm 73 stands out for its relatively deeper focus on the *inner* discourse and experiences of its speaker. Rather than praising God for

deliverance from a life-threatening crisis, the psalm glorifies God by modeling a path by which its speaker found renewed trust in God's sovereignty despite surrounding circumstances. Deeply disoriented by the ongoing prosperity of the wicked, the speaker of Psalm 73 wrestles with the validity of their own commitment to piety, ultimately finding solace in the "sanctuary of God" (v. 17), where they perceive that the *ultimate* ends of the wicked are ensured by God's justice and sovereignty.

As a whole, then, the psalm lifts up its speaker's inner discourse as exemplary strategy for navigating and grappling with a typical challenge to the life of piety, namely the prosperity of the wicked. For postexilic audiences, impoverished and oppressed by deep inequity and ongoing exploitation, the speaker's experience would have served as a template to learn from and imitate. In addition to exemplifying a strategy for grappling with a difficult dilemma, the speaker's experience also underscores the importance of group solidarity for the life of piety. The speaker's experience in vv. 15–17 suggests that the pious self cannot be sustained apart from the community of the pious. In a world dominated by foreign power, Psalm 73 then suggests to its Judean audience that the pious ought to remain faithful to each other and that, in doing so, they will find strength for resilience amid their afflictions. More importantly, perhaps, they will remain focused on the ultimate end of things, in which God will justly deal with both the righteous and the wicked.

2.2. Psalm 116

2.2.1. Psalm 116: Introduction

While Psalm 116 shares many features with the doxological psalms considered in Ch. 3, it also has features that suggest a deliberate attempt to draw attention to the exemplary subjectivity of its speaker. On the one hand, the psalm is characterized by the language of overt praise, as in,

e.g., Psalm 30 or Psalm 118. On the other hand, its pronounced use of first-person discourse and

self-referential speech sets it apart from other doxological thanksgiving psalms. It is also set

apart by its interest in depicting the *inner* life of its speaker to a sophisticated degree, a feature it

shares with the earlier considered Psalm 73. For these reasons, I argue that Psalm 116 means to

depict its speaker as an exemplar of piety for audiences to learn from and imitate.

The psalm's structure has been variously assessed by scholars,[44] and there are several

factors complicating this discussion.[45] However, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld has argued convincingly

that the psalm should be understood as having two main halves, vv. 1–11 and vv. 12–19 (though

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[44] There are nearly as many proposals about Psalm 116's structure as there are commentators. Many commentators begin from the impression that Psalm 116 lacks structural organization and even "seems haphazard" in the arrangement of its parts (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 291). For discussion of the issues involved in determining the structure of Psalm 116, see Allen, *Psalms 101–50*, rev. ed., 153–54; see also Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 214–16.

The complexity of Psalm 116's structure and the debate surrounding its many editorial layers only bolsters my overall approach to first-person psalmody as not primarily reflective of the unique experience of a single historical individual. Many Psalms scholars continue to build their readings on outmoded and romantic notions of authorship, presuming a single, unknown individual behind the words of any given psalm (especially first-person-singular psalms). These scholars assume that this composer's *own* experiences are reflected in the psalm, which itself is presumed to have been composed primarily for the purpose of *expressing* the composer's own real feelings and thoughts about Yhwh. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, such an account of psalmic authorship is highly problematic. Psalm 116 is a case-in-point. Psalm 116 is a first-person-singular prayer that uses the language of affective expression at various points, such that it is richly expressive of highly personal elements of human experience. Yet, the psalm was likely composed and edited by many scribal hands who all sought to craft a psalm that could effectively facilitate readers' identification with the psalm's speaker. My point here is that Psalm 116, like the others considered in this dissertation, is not the diary-entry of an ancient individual. Rather, it is the composition of professional liturgists and poets who intended it to convey the affective dimensions of religious experience. While we cannot be sure about the full range of functions these composers meant for the psalm to serve, my approach focuses on how the psalm's rhetoric reveals at least the basic contours of functionality its composers meant for it to have. In the case of Psalm 116, I am arguing that this psalm was meant to serve as a kind of spiritual exercise in which readers encountered an exemplary persona whose dispositions, attitudes, and experience with affliction is worthy of emulation by the pious.

[45] A source of much debate has been the caesura that exists in LXX and Jerome between vv. 9 and 10, which divides the psalm into two separate psalms. There is a lengthy and complicated debate among scholars about the transmission history of the psalm and the history of this caesura that cannot be adequately rehearsed here. Some scholars believe two originally separate psalms were brought together to form MT's Psalm 116 (e.g., Hubert Tita, *Gelübde als Bekenntnis: Eine Studie zu den Gelübden im Alten Testament*, OBO 181 [Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001], 105–26 [116]), while others believe that the two "halves" were shaped in parallel to each other, resulting in "halves" that can stand on their own as they do in LXX (e.g., Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 215). Following most modern Psalms scholars, this study will treat the psalm as a unity, as it is presented in MT.

Hossfeld notes that vv. 10–11 have a "transitional function" for the psalm).[46] My own analysis, which draws attention to the central importance of vv. 10–11, builds on this approach to its structure.

Since the time of Gunkel, Psalm 116 has been almost universally acknowledged as a thanksgiving psalm, especially because of its explicit depiction of a *tôdāh*-ritual scenario in vv. 12–19.[47] While the psalm's literary genre is generally agreed upon, whether it was actually intended for use in a historical setting of ritual practice is a matter of continued debate.[48] While the psalm is usually dated to the postexilic period, no further evidence of its provenance is

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[46] Hossfeld argues that the most significant structural division is between vv. 1–11 (which focuses on the speaker's past and present) and vv. 12–19 (which focus on the speaker's present and future) (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 216). Note also, however, that the psalm may be divided into two halves based on the use of the two verbs "I love" (אָהַבְתִּי, v. 1) and "I trusted" (הֶאֱמַנְתִּי, v. 10), which for some commentators mark the most important structural junctures in the psalm. E.g., Michael L. Barré notes that vv. 1–9 contain 63 words and vv. 10–19 contain 64 words, suggesting an even division of the psalm between vv. 9 and 10. See Michael L. Barré, "Psalm 116: Its Structure and Its Enigmas," *JBL* 109 (1990): 61–78.

[47] Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 215; Weiser, *Psalms*, 718–19; Allen, *Psalms 101–50*, rev. ed., 152–53; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 386; Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 291; Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 454, though Seybold specifies that it should be understood as a "Vertrauenspsalm" that draws on the thanksgiving genre; see also Thijs Booij, "Psalm 116,10–11: The Account of an Inner Crisis," *Bib* 76 (1995): 388–95 (388).

[48] Scholars are divided about the psalm's relationship to an earlier ritual context. On the one hand, there are those who argue that the psalm should be understood has having been originally composed to accompany a *tôdāh*-ritual. The most significant proponent of this position is Bernd Janowski, who has written, "Ps 116, ein typisches Danklied des einzelnen – mit Ankündigung des Danks, Bericht von der Rettung und (Aufforderung zum) Lobgelübde – hat seinen Ort im Tempelkult und ist dort vom Geretteten 'vor seinem (sc. JHWHs) ganzen Volk' (V. 14b.18b) im Rahmen einer *tôdāh*-Feier vorgetragen worden (V. 13-19)" (Janowski, "Dankbarkeit," 99). Beat Weber represents a similar view, though he qualifies it: "Ps 116 ist aber kein 'schlichter' Toda-Psalm, sondern aufgrund der Parallelität von erstem und drittem Abschnittsanfang (1a.10a) sowie von Kehrvers-artigen Elementen (4a.13b.17b sowie 14.18f) poetisch stark moduliert" (Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen II*, 247). Other scholars who follow this position include Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, 499; DeClaissé-Walford in DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 858.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that the psalm was not composed for use in ritual settings, but rather reflects the use of ritual language and imagery for poetic purposes, namely, to evoke the setting of Yhwh's temple and associated rituals. These scholars emphasize the psalm's Persian-period date and the literary function of the psalm's ritual language in vv. 12–19. In favor of this approach, Thijs Booij argues that the "announcement" of ritual actions is spread across different parts of the psalm, which suggests that the psalm would have made a poor "script" for actual ritual practice (Booij, "Psalm 116, 10–11: The Account of an Inner Crisis," 388–95). Hossfeld also supports this position, arguing that the psalm deliberately evokes the imagery of the Jerusalem temple and its rituals, generating a sense of closure in the psalm through the speaker's entrance into an ordered, sacred space (vv. 12–19) that contrasts with the chaotic space of earlier crisis (vv. 3–5) (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 215). Ultimately, I agree with this approach, since it accounts better for the possible use of this psalm in settings outside the Jerusalem temple and its rituals during the Second Temple period.

available.[49] At this point, then, the directives of Adele Berlin concerning "setting" and "scenario" are again useful.[50] Since scholars cannot determine with certainty that the psalm was used in a ritual setting, it is better to assume that, while the psalm certainly reflects a ritual *scenario*, it may or may not have been used in a ritual *setting*. In any case, the psalm's depiction of a ritual scenario would have evoked the symbolic power of the temple for Judean audiences hearing the psalm at any location. The psalm then draws on the traditional association of thanksgiving psalmody with the Jerusalem temple and its ritual practices.

2.2.2. Psalm 116: Translation

1 I love (Yhwh), for Yhwh hears my voice,[a]
   my plea for grace;[b]
2 For he inclined his ear to me,
   yes, in my days, I will call (on him).[c]
3 The ropes of death wrapped around me,
   The terrors of Sheol came over me,
   I suffered distress and sorrow.
4 By the name of Yhwh I called out:
   "Please, Yhwh, save my life!"
5 Gracious is Yhwh and just,
   And our God shows compassion.
6 A guardian of simple people is Yhwh,
   I was brought low, and he delivered me.

7 Return, O my soul, to your rest,
   For Yhwh has dealt well with you.[d]
8 For you have delivered my soul from death,
   My eye from tears, my foot from stumbling.
9 I will walk continually before Yhwh
   in the lands of the living
10 I trusted, even when I said,

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[49] Several points of evidence suggest a postexilic date for the psalm. First, the use of Aramaisms in the psalm (pronominal suffixes in vv. 7 and 12; the use of ל as a marker of the direct object in v. 16) are regarded by many scholars as linguistic evidence for the psalm's late date. See, e.g., Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 454; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 153; and Barré, "Psalm 116." The psalm's numerous reuses of earlier psalmic phrases and vocabulary also suggest its late date. See Booijs, "Psalm 116," 388.

[50] See Ch. 1, Section 3.3, "Terminology for the Study of First-Person Psalms." Cf. Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios."

"I am sorely oppressed."*e*

11 even when I said in my panic,
"Everyone is a liar."*f*

12 What shall I offer Yhwh,
For all his beneficence to me?
13 The cup of salvation I will lift up,
And by the name of Yhwh I will call out.
14 My vows to Yhwh I will fulfill,
In the presence of his whole people.

15 Precious in the sight of Yhwh,
Is the death of his faithful ones.
16 Yes, indeed, Yhwh, I am your servant,
I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;
You have loosed my bonds.

17 I will make for you a thanksgiving sacrifice,
And by the name of Yhwh I will call out.
18 My vows to Yhwh I will fulfill,
In the presence of his whole people.
19 In the courts of the house of Yhwh,
In your midst, O Jerusalem.
Hallelujah!

Notes to Translation of Psalm 116

a Scholars have long noted the problematic nature of the opening verb in this psalm. E.g., as Erhard Gerstenberger has written, "The verb *'hb*, "to love," used without a direct object, i.e., in an absolute state, does not make sense" (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 292). Several ancient witnesses reflect a tradition of translating the psalm's opening verb (אָהַבְתִּי) as if the rest of v. 1 is its object. So, e.g., LXX translates, ἠγάπησα ὅτι εἰσακούσεται ("I love that [the Lord] listens to [the sound of my prayer]"). Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and the Peshiṭta all follow this same approach. Booij describes this translation as the "most natural" (Booij, "Psalm 116," 389 n. 7), and it does resolve the oddity of the transitive verb standing alone at the head of the psalm. BHS is sympathetic with this approach, as it suggests transposing the divine name from where it occurs later in the verse to directly after the initial verb, though it notably makes this suggestion without referring to any supporting manuscript evidence.

Against this translation are scholars who propose a solution based primarily on literary evidence from elsewhere in the psalm—a much stronger approach in my view—in which Yhwh is understood as the implied object of the verb. Hossfeld takes this view, observing that the absolute use of verbs without direct objects occurs at two other points in the psalm, in v. 2b (אקרא) and in v. 10a (האמנתי) (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 214 n. a). Hossfeld argues that in all three cases, the context makes it clear that the object of these verbs is always Yhwh. While the syntax is odd, the use of other transitive verbs without direct objects elsewhere in the psalm does suggest that the construction is intentional, and that the implied object of all three is likely the same. Other scholars who take this approach include Barré, "Psalm 116"; Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 452; Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen II*, 245; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 150–51; Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 791; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 384–85.

b With Hossfeld (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 214), the translation "plea for grace" brings out the nuance of the root חנן ("to be gracious"), which occurs again at the start of v. 5 in reference to God's action.

c This is the second verb in the psalm (אֶקְרָא) that is normally transitive but occurs here without a direct object, causing difficulties for translators similar to those caused by v. 1's use of (אָהַבְתִּי). Many commentators opt for a translation that depends on emending בימי to ביום, a suggestion based on the the Peshiṭta's omission of the suffix present in MT. So, "in my days" becomes "in that/the day," which scholars take to imply that the following verb (אֶקְרָא) must refer to the time of crisis described in retrospect later in the psalm. Kraus represents this option well in his translation of v. 2, "Yes, he bent down his ear to me, 'on the day' when I cried" (Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 384). Cf. also Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 452. Against this view are translations that read with MT, taking the verb as a transitive verb lacking a direct object. This way of translating avoids a weakly supported emendation and accords with the same verbal construction occurring in vv. 1 and 10. Scholars who opt for such a translation include Hossfeld in Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 213 ("Yes, he has inclined his ear to me, and as long as I live I will call on [him]."); Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 3*, 336; DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 859; and Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 150.

d The speaker's "soul" (נפש) is referred to twice in this verse with second-person singular pronominal suffixes that appear to be Aramaisms (לִמְנוּחָיְכִי...עָלְיְכִי). On their status as Aramaisms, see *GKC* §91*l*; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 152; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 214. The use of this suffix has an important phonic effect, however, in that it adds two more -*î* sounds to a poem that, to this point, has already had ten -*î* sounds, and which will continue to feature them significantly. The next verse alone (v. 8) contains *five* words that end in -*î*, and the rest of the psalm (vv. 9–19) will contain twelve more. Almost all of the -*î* sounds in the psalm are either first-person singular pronominal suffixes or first-person independent pronouns, so the purpose of this repeated phoneme seems to be to focus the reader on the first-person voice of the psalm. (Cf. Ps 103:3–5 for another, similar case of the use of this Aramaic second-person pronominal suffix in conjunction with speech directed to the speaker's own "soul.")

e The verb that begins this verse (הֶאֱמַנְתִּי) has occasioned much scholarly debate, since, like the verb that begins the psalm, it seems to be without an object. While there are some who argue that the verb should be translated "I believe" with the following *kî*-clause taken as its object (e.g., Booij, "Psalm 116, 10–11," 391), the context makes this option uncompelling. Instead, I agree with Hossfeld and (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 218), among others, who takes the verb to be objectless (in parallel with the verb that begins v.1) and argues for a concessive interpretation of *kî* (i.e., "even" or "even though").

f Based on the parallel uses of first-person verbs with the first-person independent pronouns in vv. 10 and 11, I understand v. 11 as being subject to the *kî* of v. 10, as well, hence the repeated phrase "even when" in my translation of v. 11. On the translation of the root חפז as "panic," cf. the use of this verb in, e.g., Deut 20:3; 2 Sam 4:4; 2 Kgs 7:15; and Job 40:23.

2.2.3. Psalm 116: Analysis

Overview: The Rhetoric of Psalm 116 and Three Critical Verbs

The rhetoric of Psalm 116 contributes subtly but powerfully to its presentation of its speaker's exemplary subjectivity. As discussed earlier, Psalm 116 is marked by continuous first-person discourse throughout, including an unusual abundance of first-person verbal forms and pronominal suffixes. Relatedly, the psalm is marked by the conspicuous absence of explicit

acknowledgment or address of a listening audience (similar to Psalm 73).[51] Of course, this does

not mean the psalm was not performed in public worship before a listening audience, but it does

suggest that, when it was performed, the psalm's rhetoric figured the audience as "overhearing" a

more intimate kind of prayer-speech taking place between the speaker (i.e., the one

reciting/reading the psalm) and God. As will be argued further below, the psalm's rhetoric

throughout invites the audience to attend closely to the feelings, thoughts, and inner cognitive

activity of its speaker at various points, suggesting its intention to present its speaker as a model

for imitation in the lives of the pious.

Another feature of the psalm that facilitates its presentation of the speaker's inner

thoughts and attitudes is its use of three first-person verbs(אָהַבְתִּי, "I love," v. 1a; אֶקְרָא, "I

called," v. 2b; and הֶאֱמַנְתִּי, "I trusted," v. 10a), which stand out because of their unusual lack of

direct objects.[52] In addition to having odd syntax, two of these verbs are structurally significant

for the psalm, marking the beginning of important sections in the psalm (אָהַבְתִּי in v. 1a and

הֶאֱמַנְתִּי in v. 10a). The position of these verbs intensifies the psalm's overall focus on the

speaker's *own* thoughts and attitudes, lifting them up for the audience to learn from and imitate.

It is possible that the odd syntax of these verbs is also meant to induce a pause in the

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[51] As some commentators have argued, while the psalm does not explicitly address or acknowledge a listening audience, there are some aspects of its poetry that suggest liturgical use (i.e., use in public, led worship). For example, Erhard Gerstenberger argues that the psalm's third-person references to Yhwh (i.e., rather than continuous second-person address of Yhwh) suggest that it was composed for use in a liturgical setting (Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2*, 296; cf. also Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 386; Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., 152). The psalm's descriptions of ritual actions in vv. 12–19 may also indicate its intended use in liturgical settings. Finally, the concluding call to praise in the psalm, "Hallelujah!" (v. 19c), is plural. While this may reflect a "frozen form," its plural number does suggest a listening audience.

[52] As noted in my translation notes above (n. 40), Hossfeld and Zenger rightly observe that there are *three* such transitive verbs without objects throughout Psalm 116 (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 214 n. a), and that this suggests the odd use of these verbs is intentional and so should be preserved in translation. I agree with Hossfeld and Zenger that this is strong enough evidence to keep MT intact, even while I am wary of disagreeing with the other ancient witnesses.

reading/recitation of the psalm at the moments when they occur. Such a pause could have functioned to draw the audience even more deeply into awareness of the speaker's experience and dispositions, and it may also have fostered the internalization of these phrases ("I love," v. 1a; "I call," v. 2b; "I trust," v. 10a) as something like "mantras" for the pious to retain for themselves. The fact that these verbs all reflect ideal attitudes or dispositions of piety suggests this as well. As such, I argue that these verbs reflect a deliberate effort to draw the audience's attention to the exemplary piety of its speaker.

Verses 1–6: Self-Presentation of the Speaker's Experience

Psalm 116 begins with the first of these verbs, "I love (Yhwh), for Yhwh hears my voice" (v. 1a), such that the whole psalm is oriented by the speaker's initial (and unusual) expression of love for Yhwh.[53] As in other thanksgiving psalms, the opening (vv. 1–2 taken together) serves to declare the speaker's *present* disposition on the far side of their affliction ("I love [Yhwh]") while also summarizing their *past* experience ("for he inclined his ear to me," v. 2a). The intensely *affective* opening of Psalm 116 stands out in comparison to more doxological openings of other thanksgiving psalms,[54] again suggesting that the psalm means to foreground its speaker's inner thoughts and emotions.

Continuing the "summary" of the speaker's experience in v. 2, vv. 3–6 contain the self-presentation of the speaker's experience of affliction and resolution, which recalls how Yhwh responded to the speaker's cry for help (v. 4) and delivered them from their afflictions (vv. 5–6).

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[53] This overt, first-person expression of love for Yhwh is rare in the psalms, with a close parallel in the opening of Ps 18:1 (a thanksgiving psalm purposed toward depicting the special relationship of a royal figure to God). While the verb here is objectless, scholars agree that the context clearly implies that the "love" of v. 1a is directed at Yhwh, as are the other objectless verbs in this psalm (found in vv. 2b and 10a). See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 216–17.

[54] Cf., e.g., Ps 30:1, "I will exalt you, Yhwh"; Ps 66:1, "Shout to God, all the earth"; Ps 118:1, "Give thanks to Yhwh, for he is good"; Ps 34:2, "I will bless Yhwh at all times."

Up through v. 5, the speaker's self-presentation is comprised of highly typical psalmic language.[55] Notably, it emphasizes the act of praying as right response to affliction ("he inclined his ear to me," v. 2a; "I will call [on him]," v. 2b; "I called out," v. 4a). It also conceptualizes affliction mainly in terms of overwhelming circumstances which constrained the speaker ("the ropes of death . . . the terrors of Sheol," v. 3), which will be important for how the psalm later depicts the speaker's inner experience of the crisis. Finally, like other doxological thanksgiving psalms, v. 5 in particular draws attention to Yhwh's justice amid the afflictions of the pious ("gracious and *just* [צַדִּיק] is Yhwh," v. 5a), while celebrating that this justice is coupled with "compassion" (מְרַחֵם, v. 5b).[56] As we have seen elsewhere in this study, psalms of thanksgiving generally depict a willingness to acknowledge God's justice and sovereignty amid affliction as an essential aspect of the pious self.

The Speaker as פֶּתִי *in Verse 6*

The last verse of the speaker's self-presentation, v. 6, departs from what is typical of other doxological thanksgiving psalms, and in doing so contributes significantly to the psalm's overall depiction of its speaker and their afflictions. In v. 6, the speaker concludes the review of their experience with a declaration of the insight it has revealed to them, "A guardian of simple people

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[55] As scholars have often observed, many of the traditional phrases used by the speaker to describe their crisis seem to have been reused from earlier psalmic contexts, one of several factors that suggests a late date for the psalm's composition. Thijs Booijs notes the following parallels: v. 3aα = Ps 18:5a; v. 8a: cf. Ps 56:14aα; v. 8bβ: cf. Ps 56:14aβ; v. 9: cf. Ps 56:14b; v. 11a = Ps 31:23aα (Booij, "Psalm 116," 388). Booij argues that this list of similarities combined with linguistic evidence (which he discusses in his article) suggests a late date for the psalm. Hossfeld also argues for a late date on this basis (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 215).

[56] Cf. the similar bipolarity of Ps 30:5–6, "Indeed, his anger is for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime; Weeping stays for the evening, but in the morning, a shout of joy!" (discussed in Ch. 3).

[פְּתָאִים] is Yhwh; I was brought low, and he delivered me" (v. 6).[57] This statement contains two important self-descriptions, which through parallelism are mutually informative of each other. First, the speaker implicitly describes themselves as one of the "simple" (פְּתָאִים), i.e., one among those of whom Yhwh is "guardian" (v. 6a). Then, the speaker describes themselves as "lowly" (דַלּוֹתִי, "I was low," v. 6b). While the verb דלל is a relatively common term for describing the afflictions of the pious, the term פֶּתִי ("simple, inexperienced"), which refers to one's intellectual or cognitive abilities, is not. Its use here suggests a deliberate effort to construct the speaker's "lowliness" (v. 6b) in sapiential terms as one characterized by simple-mindedness or credulousness.

The psalm's reference to its speaker as a פֶּתִי ("simple/inexperienced") adds an important layer to its speaker's exemplarity, though its use here has mostly gone unnoticed by commentators. While the use of this term in parallel with the verb דלל may seem to connote a general state of vulnerability, in fact contributes to portraying the psalm's speaker as vulnerable in the sense that they lack wisdom and discernment and so are easily disoriented by overwhelming circumstances—i.e., one who is "simple minded." In Thijs Booijs' words, the term פֶּתִי most commonly refers elsewhere to "someone regrettably devoid of discernment and understanding," such that they are unsuspecting, overly credulous, and unaware of their need for guidance.[58] A characteristic statement about the פֶּתִי comes from Prov 14:15, which states that

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[57] This is the only description of Yhwh as a "guardian of the simple" (שֹׁמֵר פְּתָאִים) in the entire Hebrew Bible, which suggests that it is an important point for the psalm's depiction of the speaker's experience of the deity. Cf. Booij, "Psalm 116," 389.

[58] Cf., e.g., the following texts where the term has this meaning: Ps 19:8; 119:130; Prov 8:5; 9:4, 16; 19:25. Booijs also states that the term can refer to one "who by his lack of experience, his credulity and rashness may easily go astray (Ezek 45:20; Prov 7:7ff.) and run into serious problems (Prov 1:32; 7:22–27)" (Booijs, "Psalm 116," 389).

"The simple [פֶּתִי] believe everything, but the clever consider their steps."[59] As will be discussed momentarily, the psalm later depicts its speaker amid their crisis as overwhelmed by affliction and lapsing into an inability to discern between the truth or falsehood of all the various perspectives around them ("even when I said in my panic, 'Everyone is a liar,'" v. 11b).

Overall, then, the word פֶּתִי in v. 6 plays an important role in constructing the speaker's experience in terms of their inability to discern a way through overwhelming circumstances. On a general level, then, Psalm 116 shares with Psalm 73 an interest in depicting exemplary personas who are overwhelmed and disoriented by their experiences. During the postexilic period, it seems likely that both psalms would have resonated with ordinary Judean worshippers in their depiction of affliction as a matter of acute cognitive dissonance or disorientation. Judean populations during the postexilic period experienced huge amounts of inequity and oppression at the hands of both their imperial and local governments.[60] During this period, then, the life of piety was likely characterized by an acute lack of felt agency in the affairs of the world, coupled with frustration at those in power who lived in excess while the ordinary pious lived in abject poverty.[61] In such an environment, liturgical poetry that depicted the afflicted pious as experiencing cognitive dissonance (Psalm 73) or as vulnerable before complex and disorienting circumstances (Psalm 118) would likely have resonated deeply with Judean audiences.

Verses 7–9: The Centering of the Speaker's Subjectivity Through Exemplary Self-Discourse

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[59] NRSV translation.

[60] As noted in Ch. 4, see Samuel Adams, *Social and Economic Life*, 129–55, for a good discussion of the conditions of life in postexilic Judea under the imperial Persian and local Judean governments.

[61] On the poverty that characterized life for most of the Judean population during this period, see Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 1:193–195.

In vv. 7–9, the psalm turns from its review of the speaker's experience to a conveyance of insights gained through the experience. Such a turn from recalled experience to a declaration of new insight is reflected in other thanksgiving psalms (cf., e.g., Ps 30:5–6), however, in Psalm 116 the speaker does not declare the insights to an audience of the gathered pious. Rather, this section is addressed primarily to the speaker's own self, such that the whole section unfolds as a self-dialogue also involving Yhwh.

The complex voicing of vv. 7–9 has implications for how the psalm would have been experienced by a listening audience during public performance. Rhetorically, v. 7 is directly addressed to the speaker's self ("Return, O my soul...," v. 7a), with Yhwh "overhearing" what is said ("for Yhwh has dealt well with you," v. 7b). In vv. 8–9, the dynamics of address are reversed, such that Yhwh is the direct addressee ("For you have delivered...," v. 8a), while the speaker's self-as-object "overhears" this discourse ("...my soul from death, my eye from tears, my foot from stumbling," v. 8). In public recitation or reading, these verses would have presented as a kind of "internal" discourse involving the speaker's "I" (self-as-subject) addressing both the speaker's "me" (self-as-object) and Yhwh. On the whole, then, vv. 7–9 not only serve to convey the implications of the speaker's experience for themselves, but they also model a kind of internal discourse about experienced affliction which the pious may learn from and imitate in their own lives.

In addition to their rhetorical voicing, the *content* of these verses also foregrounds the speaker's awareness of and care for the inner parts of themselves in the wake of their experience of affliction. In these verses, the speaker admonishes themselves to "return . . . to your rest, for Yhwh has dealt well with you" (v. 7), modeling a kind of attainment of serenity following an experience of acute disorientation (cf. a similar attainment in Ps 73:17). First, the speaker refers

to themselves holistically, using the term נַפְשִׁי ("Return, O *my soul*, to your rest...," v. 7a). After this, in v. 8, the speaker uses a series of somatic images to refer metaphorically to various components of the speaker's moral self: "For you have delivered *my soul* from death, *my eye* from tears, *my foot* from stumbling," v. 8).[62] These images are common in sapiential literature, where they often metaphorically signify aspects of the moral self for engaging the world (i.e., the "eye" and what it "sees") or for agency (i.e., the "foot/feet," one's "steps").[63] The prayer in v. 9 therefore reads as a kind of word of comfort pronounced over the speaker's whole self, all the parts of which may now return to "rest" because Yhwh has provided a way through overwhelming circumstances.

Yet another way in which verses 7–8 foreground the speaker's subjectivity is through a remarkable phonetic cluster of -*î* sounds, which like the three first-person verbs mentioned above, seem deliberately intended to foster audience attentiveness to the speaker's own experience and subjectivity.[64] In addition to several first-person verbs and pronominal suffixes in vv. 7–8, the unusual use of Aramaicized second-person pronominal suffixes (כִי-) also contributes

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[62] There is a complex debate about the specific nature of what is represented by the various somatic terms used in ancient Hebrew literature to represent different parts of the self. It bears noting here that scholars have argued over the extent to which different somatic terms referred to different self-functions, or whether some terms referred to executive functions whereas others referred to more subordinate functions. In the case of this psalm, the cluster of "soul," "eye," and "foot" being used together suggests that this psalm sees these as different aspects of an ultimately unified self. For the most important recent overview of somatic terminology in Israelite religion, see Bernd Janowski, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Grundfragen, Kontexts*, *Themenfelder* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), esp. 138–59. For an instructive discussion of past approaches to somatic terminology for representing the self in ancient Israelite culture, see Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me*, 5–8.

[63] Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me*, 6–8.

[64] While these two verses contain the heaviest cluster of self-referential speech forms in the psalm, the rest of the psalm also contains a high number of *î*-sounds and first-person-singular forms. Before these verses, there have already been ten *î*-sounds (in vv. 1–6), and in the rest of the psalm, there will be twelve more (vv. 9–19).

to this cluster of *-î* sounds.[65] Remarkably, even while these suffixes are second-person, they still

manage to contribute to the cluster of *self-referential -î* sounds in these verses, since they refer to

the speaker's own "soul."[66] Here are vv. 7–8 with the relevant words in parentheses:

> 7 Return (שׁוּבִי), O my soul (נַפְשִׁי), to your rest (לִמְנוּחָיְכִי),
>   For (כִּי) Yhwh has dealt well with you (עָלָיְכִי).
> 8 For (כִּי) you have delivered my soul (נַפְשִׁי) from death,
>   My eye (עֵינִי) from tears, my foot (רַגְלִי) from stumbling (מִדֶּחִי).

When considered alongside the other points about vv. 7–9 discussed above, the phonetic cluster

of *-î* sounds in these verses seems to be a deliberate device for fostering the audiences' attention

to the *personal* experience of the speaker.[67] Verses 7–9 then serve both phonetically and

thematically to center the speaker's experience, and I argue that this contributes to the psalm's

overall ability to present its speaker as an exemplary pious persona for audiences to learn from.

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[65] See my note on the translation of v. 7 above for discussion of the Aramaisms in this verse. See also Ps 103:3–5, which similarly makes use of Aramaicized second-person-singular suffixes *in conjunction with* speech addressed to the speaker's own *nepeš* (i.e., נַפְשִׁי).

[66] These verses have remarkable similarities to the grammatical forms and vocabulary of self-address found in Ps 103:1–5. To my knowledge, the similarities between these two texts has not been explored in any published scholarly work on the Psalms. However, the similarities are striking. Both Ps 116:7 and Ps 103:1–5 open with self-address to the speaker's *nepeš* that consists of a feminine-singular imperative verb followed by the word *nepeš* with the first-person singular suffix (בָּרֲכִי נַפְשִׁי in Ps 103:1, 2; שׁוּבִי נַפְשִׁי in Ps 116:7). But what is most remarkable is that both texts make use of the relatively rare Aramaicized second-person-singular pronominal suffix (כִי-) to show the *nepeš*'s possession of nouns. In Psalm 103:3–5, it is used in five words: עֲוֺנֵכִי ("your iniquity," v. 3a), תַּחֲלֻאָיְכִי, ("your diseases," v. 3b), חַיָּיְכִי ("your life," v. 4a), הַמְעַטְּרֵכִי ("[Yhwh] the one who crowns you," v. 4b), and נְעוּרָיְכִי ("your youth," v. 5b). In Psalm 116:7, it is used in two words: לִמְנוּחָיְכִי ("your rest," v. 7a) and עָלָיְכִי ("[Yhwh has dealt well] with you," v. 7b). Also notable is the use of the root גמל ("to deal well with") in both texts (Ps 116:7b; Ps 103:2) to refer to Yhwh's actions toward the speaker's *nepeš*. That both texts make use of these forms in conjunction with explicit self-address suggests to me that the use of the longer, Aramaicized form of the pronominal suffix may have been an established technique for poets to emphasize the self-referential qualities of a text, especially in situations of direct self-address to one's *nepeš*.

[67] As will be discussed more in the next section, Eric Christianson has made the case that the dense concentration of suffixed *yod*s in Qoheleth 1–2 is likely a deliberate strategy meant to "intensify the presence and significance of Qoheleth's experience" for the reader (Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 40.). Christianson argues that the language of Qoheleth is purposefully self-referential to an extreme degree, such that Qoheleth's own subjectivity becomes the focal point of the text's rhetoric. I suggest that something very similar is at work in the poetry of Psalm 116. If the psalm is meant to model an exemplary subject, that subject's persona needs to be foregrounded in the psalm's rhetoric such that readers will pay close attention to it.

Verses 10–11: A Portrait of Exemplary Trust Amid an Acute Inner Crisis

Verses 10–11 are the structural and thematic core of the psalm. In these verses, several statements of "retrospective introspection" distill for audiences a critically important aspect of the speaker's exemplary disposition amid affliction.[68] These two verses revolve around a single verb, הֶאֱמַנְתִּי, "I trusted" (v. 10a), which emphasizes the speaker's continued trust in God amid their overwhelming afflictions. Following this opening verb are two recalled sayings that depict the inner turmoil the speaker had experienced amid their affliction, despite which they had resolved to maintain their "trust" in Yhwh (cf. vv. 2, 4). First, the speaker recalls how they had maintained their trust despite saying within themselves "I am sorely oppressed" (אֲנִי עָנִיתִי מְאֹד, v. 10b).[69] Then, the speaker recalls how they had kept their trust despite their "panic" (חָפְזִי), which had driven them to cynicism, saying within themselves, "Everyone is a liar" (כָּל־הָאָדָם כֹּזֵב, v. 11b). These verses then depict the speaker as maintaining their trust in God despite both overwhelming afflictions *and* the speaker's loss of trust in all others.

When one recalls that the speaker has previously characterized themselves as a פֶּתִי (v. 6), the significance of vv. 10–11 for the psalm as a whole is clarified even further. In particular, their use of the verb אמן (Hif. "to trust/believe") is striking. Elsewhere, the term פֶּתִי is used to refer to people who are extremely credulous, as in Prov 14:15, which states, "The simple [פֶּתִי] believe [Hif., יַאֲמִין] everything." Here in Psalm 116, this פֶּתִי is empowered by Yhwh's help to "trust" (הֶאֱמַנְתִּי, v. 10a) despite overwhelming affliction and panic-induced cynicism. The cynicism of v.

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[68] The phrase "retrospective introspection" comes from Newsom, "If I had said...."

[69] Hossfeld suggests that the use of the verb ענה in this context "implies a concrete pressure or oppression as well as a spiritual attitude of stooped humility" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 218). Hossfeld also argues that the use of this verb is one among several features of this psalm that suggests it reflected the interests of the pious "poor," i.e., the oppressed Judean community of the postexilic period.

11 ("Everyone is a liar") likely also reflects the vantage of one whose own credulousness has

contributed to their crisis, such that they have swung from extreme credulousness to cynicism.

Despite this, however, the gracious intervention of Yhwh allowed the speaker to find "rest" again

beyond their crisis (v. 7).

Taking the previous points together, vv. 10–11 are not only a sophisticated representation

of an internal crisis, but they also lift up the speaker's exemplary trust in Yhwh despite

overwhelming circumstances. Because of Yhwh's "compassion" (v. 5), the speaker's lack of

wisdom (i.e., their status as a פֶּתִי) did not preclude their capacity for resilience, trust in Yhwh,

and the maintenance of their pious integrity. Verses 10–11 then exemplify resilient trust in

Yhwh's ability to deliver despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It suggests that

"simple" folk can find the strength to maintain their trust in Yhwh amid affliction, despite their

inability to discern the meaning of complex events around them. Such a portrait of the pious self

would have been profoundly encouraging and empowering for impoverished and "lowly"

members of postexilic Judean communities.

Verses 12–19

The psalm's second half is marked by transition to a ritual scenario, which, as several scholars

have argued, symbolically suggests the speaker's own transition from a space of turmoil and

disorder to a space of serenity and order.[70] While this section describes ritual actions, scholars

have argued that its rhetoric (especially the opening question in v. 12) and structure suggests the

literary imitation of a ritual scenario, rather than a script for ritual accompaniment.[71]

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[70] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*,

[71] As observed by Hossfeld (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 218). See also the important comments of Hermann Spieckermann, who notes that the order of ritual elements in this psalm does not seem well-suited to accompanying an actual *tôdāh* ritual, but instead seems to indicate the poetical rendition of these elements for

At this juncture, it may be helpful to recall that, unlike traditional form-critics, I do not take the literary scenarios depicted within the poetry of a psalm to be direct indicators of its *Sitz im Leben*. Instead, following Adele Berlin's methodological directive, I begin from the presumption that the scenarios rendered in a psalm's discourse are part of its presentation of the speaking subject. In other words, the poet renders spaces that allow for dimensions of the speaker's experience to be accentuated, appreciated, or otherwise pushed to the fore of the psalm's discourse. In the case of Psalm 116, I take the ritualistic imagery of vv. 12–19 to be an intentional *poetic* evocation of Jerusalem-Temple worship.[72]

Evoking the rituals of the Jerusalem Temple has at least two important effects. First, it constructs the speaker's reordered self in relation to a center of cultural power: the speaker finds solace not just anywhere, but in the center of *Yhwh*'s cultic space, reinforcing the central role of *Yhwh* in the resolution of the speaker's crisis.[73] Second, for postexilic audiences, the evocation of the temple would have fostered a sense of shared identity in relation to the temple as the center of Judean religion.[74] The exemplary portrait of pious *selfhood* in Psalm 116 is then presented as

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literary effects. See Hermann Spieckermann, "Lieben und Glauben: Beobachtungen in Psalm 116," in *Meilenstein: Festgabe für Herbert Donner zum 16. Februar 1995*, ed. Manfred Weippert and Stefan Timm, ÄAT 30 (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1995), 266–75 (271–72).

[72] In agreement with Hossfeld (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 219). Adele Berlin's recent work has drawn attention to the tendency of psalms scholars to take spatial references literally, but that this tendency has often impeded their ability to understand further dimensions of how spatial references and imagery may be functioning in a psalm. For example, Berlin's recent study of Psalm 122 argues that the psalm does not reflect a literal experience of pilgrimage to the Second Temple at Jerusalem, but rather, it represents an "idealized reminiscence of a pilgrimage to the First Temple. He never says that he joined other Second Temple pilgrims, only that he was happy that they were going to the temple. He then launches into his reminiscence of how pilgrimages used to be in the good old days. He is not describing Second Temple Jerusalem, but Jerusalem of the united monarchy" (Berlin, "Speakers and Scenarios," 352). The result is a fuller account of the *function* of Psalm 122 for postexilic communities. Berlin argues that the psalm's depiction of an idealized pilgrimage to Jerusalem served to convey the postexilic ideology of complete restoration, contributing to the nurturing of Jewish identity during a time when it was hotly contested.

[73] Cf. Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 121–46.

[74] Cf. Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together."

essentially related to the symbolic center of the *community's* traditions. The ideal pious self is then constructed in relation to Yhwh's temple as a site of reorientation, comfort, and restoration amid overwhelming circumstances.

The ritual events are mostly depicted in vv. 12–14 and 17–19, which begin with another case of self-referential discourse, in which the speaker asks themselves, "What shall I offer Yhwh, for all his beneficence to me?" (v. 12). Hossfeld argues that act of self-questioning itself signals the "reflective" style of the psalm, which supports my understanding of the psalm as unusually interested in depicting the *inner* life and discourse of its speaker.[75] In response to the question of v. 12, the speaker describes several ritual acts for expressing their gratitude amid the gathered community.[76] As in Psalm 66, the description of these ritual acts presents the speaker not simply as faithful to the vows they previously made, but also as fundamentally oriented toward the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty at the end of an experience of affliction. The acts of lifting the cup (v. 13a), calling out by the name of Yhwh (v. 13b), fulfilling vows (v. 14a), and making a thanksgiving sacrifice (v. 17) all contribute to the psalm's depiction of the experience of affliction as *culminating* in the glorification of God.

Amid these ritual actions, the speaker reasserts their identity in relation to Yhwh and in relation to Yhwh's people. First, the speaker asserts that the deaths of "his faithful ones" (לַחֲסִידָיו, v. 15b) are precious to Yhwh. In other words, since it is in Yhwh's interest to protect his pious,

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[75] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 218.

[76] While scholars have not determined the exact historical nature of the ritual of the cup (v. 13; cf. Ps 16:5 and 23:5), most agree that it likely refers to a festal cup that symbolizes the abundance of God's blessing and protection amid life's afflictions. Cf. Kathrin Liess, *Der Weg des Lebens: Psalm 16 und das Lebens- und Todesverständnis der Individualpsalmen*, FAT 2/5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 192–93. Cf. also Bernd Janowski, who argues that the "cup" refers to a ritual act of lifting and drinking a cup before a gathered audience as a visible expression of the speaker's rescue. See Bernd Janowski, "Dankbarkeit: Ein anthropologischer Grundbegriff im Spiegel der toda-Psalmen," in *Ritual und Poesie: Formen und Orte religiöser Dichtung im Alten Orient, im Judentum und im Christentum*, ed. Erich Zenger, HBS 36 (Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 91–136 (104–105).

the pious may, like the speaker, trust that Yhwh will deliver them from their afflictions and not allow them to die.[77] In v. 16, following this assertion, the speaker asserts that "I am your servant" (repeated twice) and "the son of your handmaid."[78] The speaker then lifts themselves up as an example of how one's belonging to the community of the pious entails that they can depend on Yhwh for protection and deliverance. That is why, following these expressions, the speaker once again declares that "you have loosed my bonds" (v. 16). The speaker's own experience then exemplifies the point that Yhwh is faithful to those of the pious who continue to trust in him.

2.2.4. Psalm 116: Conclusions

Psalm 116 is framed as a song of praise given by one who was delivered by God from an experience of terrible disorientation. The speaker's experience exemplifies for audiences the wisdom of calling out to Yhwh from such situations, and it draws specific attention to Yhwh's willingness to protect the most vulnerable, "the simple" (v. 6). The psalm's use of first-person discourse, self-referential speech, and self-dialogue directs attention to its speaker's subjectivity, encouraging audience awareness of their attitudes, feelings, and states of mind throughout their experience. Further, the use of specific verbs, especially "I love" (v. 1) and "I trusted" (v. 10) serve to underscore important aspects of the speaker's mentality amid affliction, modeling for

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[77] Bernd Janowski has argued that the claim in v. 15 about the "death of his faithful ones" refers to an *argumentum ad deum* drawn from the reservoir of Israelite psalmic discourse (Janowski, "Dankbarkeit," 116). It reasons that it is not in God's interest to let afflictions cause the deaths of the pious, since for Yhwh this means the loss of witnesses to his power (Janowski, "Dankbarkeit," 116). Hossfeld insightfully adds to this basic point that the formulation in v. 15, which characterizes the deaths of the pious as "precious" (יָקָר), has roots in the preexilic royal ideal that "the blood of the poor in oppression and violence is precious to the king," as expressed in Ps 72:12–14 (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 219). This same idea occurs also in Ps 30:10, where the speaker petitions Yhwh on the basis that it would not be profitable for Yhwh allow the speaker to die ("What is the profit in my blood? In my going down to the abyss?").

[78] Erich Zenger argues that the assertion "I am . . . the son of your handmaid" (v. 16a) is meant to convey the speaker's status as belonging to the "family" of God's pious as one who was born into it. As such, the speaker asserts this identity to underscore the point that those who belong to the "family" of God's pious may "hope in the care and concern" of their God (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 375; cited by Hossfeld in *Psalms 3*, 219 n. 22).

listeners a mental strategy for maintaining one's piety amid even the most disorienting or confusing of circumstances. On the whole, then, the speaker of Psalm 116 models a commitment to *trust* (v. 10) amid affliction, so that the psalm as a whole models pious selfhood as involving the capacity to orient oneself to God even amid afflictions that leave one totally unsure of what is true (cf. v. 11). The psalm then depicts the pious self as defined by a willingness to orient to God amid such afflictions, and it assures its audiences that, as in the case of the psalm's exemplary speaker, such trust will be rewarded with Yhwh's protection and sustenance.

3. Conclusions:
Exemplarity and the Formation of the Pious Self

The preceding discussions of Psalms 73 and 116 demonstrated that these psalms are characterized by a pronounced degree of exemplarity in their rhetoric, generated by their close attention to the inner attitudes and discourse of their speakers. The preceding discussions also showed how the focus on inner experiences and discourse in these psalms has implications for how they frame their portrayal of pious selfhood. In Ch. 3, we saw how psalms that foreground doxology produce an emphasis on the sovereignty of divine agency amid affliction, while Ch. 4 demonstrated how psalms that foreground didacticism produce an emphasis on the importance of right response to affliction. In contrast, while the psalms considered in this chapter have important overlap with the conceptual worldview of the psalms in Chs. 3 and 4, they exhibit a more intense interest in the depiction of the inner life of their speakers amid affliction. This produces an emphasis on pious selfhood as constituted by its inner attitudes, dispositions, and cognitive engagements with experiences of affliction and disorientation.

In Psalms 73 and 116, the exemplary speaker is depicted in states of disorientation (or, more precisely, cognitive dissonance in Ps 73), but their speakers also model paths by which they

found serenity amid disorienting circumstances. In both of these psalms, the disorienting

circumstances themselves are not depicted as permanently resolved or defeated by God, but

rather God's help in both psalms allows for the speaker to attain a kind of changed perspective or

newfound peace *amid* those disorienting circumstances. So, Psalms 73 and 116 do not depict the

pious self in terms of its triumph over afflictions, but rather, these psalms emphasize the

resilience of the pious amid their afflictions. In both psalms, this resilience stems from belief in a

God who is sovereign through all times and experiences. Psalms 73 and 116 thus *model* the

messages they wish to convey to audiences in the first-person discourse of their speakers.

The portrayals of pious selfhood in these psalms fit well within the context of postexilic

Judaism, in which Jewish communities lived with ongoing tensions between their commitments

to piety, on the one hand, and a vast array of oppressive social and political realities beyond their

control, on the other. As Susan Niditch has demonstrated, the Persian period saw an increased

attention in Jewish literature to the realm of personal religious experience, some of which seems

to have emerged in response to the social and political upheavals of this period.[79] The lack of

representation of Jewish interests at the national and international levels seems to have

encouraged a steady increase in attention to matters of religious identity and experience at the

local and personal levels, resulting in more sophisticated representations of the self in Jewish

literature.[80] Based on my analyses above, Psalms 73 and 116 should be understood as a part of

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[79] Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, see esp. 1–3, 36–37. Cf. also the earlier work of Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), in which Gordis' understanding of the historical context of Job builds on the idea that "in the early days of the Second Temple . . . concern with the individual became paramount in religious thought" (Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 216). Gordis' observation is more of an assertion than an argument, but it aligns well with the later and more clearly articulated arguments of Niditch concerning the same period.

[80] E.g., Niditch highlights the books of Job and Qoheleth as examples of this (Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 32–52).

this growing interest in depicting the personal dimension of religious experience in relation to social and political realities beyond one's control.

The portrayals of pious selfhood in Psalms 73 and 116 also have resonances with other discourse about the pious self from the first half of the Second Temple period. For example, Susan Niditch lifts up Job and Qoheleth as examples of books that depict tension within the self in regard to religious traditions, lived experience, and especially the problem of affliction and its meaning in the lives of the pious.[81] In what follows, I will here briefly discuss only a few of the resonances between the psalms in this chapter and the book of Qoheleth, which most scholars date to the first-half of the Second Temple period.[82] While the psalms in this chapter are of course a very different kind of literature from Qoheleth, they still exhibit several striking points of resonance with this biblical book, especially when considered alongside the psalms presented in Chs. 3 and 4.

First, as discussed briefly in the introduction to this chapter, these psalms share with Qoheleth an interest in foregrounding the inner experience of their speaker via the pronounced use of first-person rhetoric.[83] As argued in the analyses above, the regular use of first-person rhetoric in these psalms (as well as corresponding uses of self-referential discourse) draws

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[81] Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 32–52.

[82] In general, scholars agree that Qoheleth should be dated sometime between the middle of the fifth century BCE and the middle of the third century BCE. C. L. Seow dates the book to sometime between the second half of the fifth century BCE to the first half of the fourth century BCE (C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 38). Michael V. Fox dates it to sometime in the Hellenistic period, during either the fourth or third century BCE (Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, JSOTSup 71 [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989], 151). Norman Whybray has argued for an even later date, in the mid-third century BCE (Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, OTG [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989], 12–14). For present purposes, it is enough to conclude that Qoheleth likely dates to the Persian period or later, the same period in which Psalms 73 and 116 were likely composed and used by Jewish communities.

[83] On the use of first-person voicing in Qoheleth, see Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 40–42. Cf. also Kyle R. Greenwood, "Debating Wisdom: The Role of Voice in Ecclesiastes," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 476–91.

attention to the vantage of the speaker as an important component of their discourse. Similarly, as Eric S. Christianson has argued, the extremely pronounced use of first-person discourse in Qoheleth serves to "intensify the presence and significance of Qoheleth's experience" for the book's audience.[84] Like the psalms considered in this chapter, Qoheleth also utilizes self-referential discourse and "self-consultation" at various points to negotiate strategies for grappling with difficult circumstances and contradictory phenomena.[85]

Second, these psalms share with Qoheleth a focus on the depiction of the pious self as having to grapple with multiple conflicting views of the world (cf. Ps 73:1–17; 116:10–11). These literatures then depict the life of piety as involving an awareness that received wisdom and lived experience are often in tension with one another to the point of existential crisis. As Niditch observes, Qoheleth depicts a sophisticated tension between several views of the world. On the one hand, the book depicts conventional wisdom about "doing the best one can within the confines of an often difficult reality" (cf., e.g., Qoh 3:13, 5:12, 5:18–20), coupled with insistence that dependence on God is the best way of living within such a reality (Qoh 3:14).[86] On the other hand, Qoheleth also famously employs the rhetoric of personal experience to contend that reality is "incomprehensibly absurd, decidedly unfair" (e.g., Qoh 1:1–11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:19, 4:7, 4:16).[87] By depicting these vantages on reality alongside one another, Qoheleth models at a basic level the inevitable confrontation of the pious self with conflicting vantages on reality.

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[84] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 40–41 (the quoted phrase is from p. 41).

[85] Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 41–43. Niditch draws attention specifically to Qoheleth's use of bodily imagery in self-referential discourse, as in Qoh 1:16, which Niditch translates woodenly, "I spoke did I with my heart" (Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 41). Occurrences of such self-discourse are also found in, e.g., Qoh 2:15, 3:17–18.

[86] Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 32.

[87] Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 33.

Similarly, Psalms 73 and 116 depict their speakers as grappling with conflicting views of reality, though of course, they do this quite differently from each other. Psalm 73, like Qoheleth, explicitly depicts its speaker as perceptive of different vantages on reality. The speaker of Ps 73 presents themselves as grappling with a view that foregrounds the prosperity of the wicked and the vanity of piety on the one hand (Ps 73:2–14), and a view that foregrounds the ultimate ends of the righteous and the wicked on the other (Ps 73:18–28). Psalm 116 does not depict the specific nature of the internal crisis of its speaker, apart from suggesting that ongoing afflictions have exhausted them to the point of cynicism (Ps 116:10–11). However, its depiction of its speaker as one of the "simple"—i.e., one who is able to perceive multiple vantages on reality but unable to discern between them (cf. the panic-induced cynicism of Ps 116:11)—foregrounds the notion that the pious are afflicted not only by external forces but also by the need to negotiate between various perspectives on reality amid the distress of ongoing afflictions. These psalms thus share with Qoheleth a concern with a particular kind of experience, namely the inevitable dilemma of grappling with one's commitment to piety amid afflictions that suggest piety is meaningless.

Second, and closely related to this first point, these psalms share with Qoheleth an underlying awareness that, despite the difficulty of making sense of the world and the afflictions of the pious within it, there is a powerful God whose sovereignty and justice offer a firm foundation for the pious amid their disorientation. As Susan Niditch puts it, "Qoheleth . . . acknowledges the challenges of human life on earth but insists on the relevance of the powerful deity who understands how it all makes sense, even if this knowledge is hidden from mere mortals."[88] Niditch cites several scholars of Qoheleth who support this understanding of the

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[88] Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 33.

book, including Michael V. Fox and Choon-Leong Seow.[89] These scholars highlight the presence of unresolved tensions within the book that are held together by the book's overall presumption of God's sovereignty.

Like Psalms 73 and 116, then, Qoheleth exhibits an interest in depicting the fact that the life of piety involves the perception of realities that seem to disprove the sovereignty of God. While these psalms depict their speakers as able to perceive such realities, they also model paths by which the pious may "return to their rest" (cf. the speaker's self-admonition in Ps 116:7). Of course, Qoheleth is perhaps not as concerned with modeling a path back to serenity, but Qoheleth shares with the psalms in this chapter a concern with depicting inner turmoil as characteristic of the life of piety, which suggests that these psalms and Qoheleth belong to a similar stream of tradition around the matter of pious selfhood.

The psalms in this chapter thus exhibit a movement toward the portrayal of the inner experiences of pious individuals as a site of exemplarity for communities of the pious. In some ways, then, the psalms in this chapter anticipate the developments of later psalmody, especially in texts like the Hodayot at Qumran, which "flex" the exemplary affordance of thanksgiving psalmody to an extreme not seen in biblical psalms. There, the speaker's inner discourse is highly developed and sophisticated, such that it becomes an exposition of the ideal or exemplary self for members of the Yahad to internalize and imitate.[90] The psalms in this chapter (and

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[89] See Niditch's discussion of these two scholars in Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 33. She points out how Fox, for example, has written that "As I see it, Qohelet's contradictions state problems rather than resolving them, and the interpreter likewise must leave many of the observations in tension" (Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 11). Despite these tensions, according to Fox, God is still God in Qoheleth. Similarly, Seow has argued that while the book clearly exhibits contradictions, overall it also depicts a kind of consistency of worldview at the center of which is a sovereign God who perceives all (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 38–43).

[90] Cf. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 191–208. At one point, Newsom writes that even the compositions pertaining to the leader would have had exemplary functions for ordinary sectarians: "Even if they are understood as representing the perspective of a leadership class or of a single, historical leader, they would still be in many respects a model of ideal sectarian subjectivity. To be sure, a leader would have certain roles that the ordinary sectarian would not be expected to fill, but even in his distinctive situation and experiences the leader would embody

indeed, in this study as a whole) might then be considered precursors to the developments one finds in the Hodayot, not only because they share the basic posture of "thanksgiving," but also because they are the earliest exemplars of the use of first-person psalmody to instruct the pious and exemplify for them ideal models of the pious self.

In conclusion, then, the psalms in this chapter exhibit a kind of "inward turn" in the tradition of thanksgiving psalmody which corresponds well to what scholars have argued took place over the course of the Second Temple period in other spheres of Jewish spirituality.[91] These psalms thus contributed to a stream of discourse around pious selfhood that drew attention to the inner experiences and attitudes of the pious, conceptualizing affliction in the life of piety in terms of how it is cognitively processed or navigated. According to these psalms, the pious are those who, though they are able to grasp a wide range of conflicting worldviews, are also able to choose "paths" that lead back to a place of serene confidence in God's sovereignty amid overwhelming circumstances that defy their understanding. The pious self is thus constituted not

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exemplary characteristics and dispositions that the composition would offer as an ideal model of proper sectarian character. Portraits are also mirrors" (Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 197–98).

Cf. also Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me*, 143–44, in which Newsom discusses how the Hodayot of the Maskil reflect an ideal or exemplary subjectivity for the members of the Yahad to identify with. There she writes, "The more radical exploration of subjectivity occurs in the two collections of hodayot that bracket the Teacher psalms, specifically cols. 1–9 and 18–27. Although these two collections are typically referred to as Hodayot of the Community, there are good reasons for arguing that the non-Teacher hodayot are not simply compositions of 'ordinary' members of the community, but compositions associated with the Maskil, the instructor and liturgical leader of the community. Nevertheless, the Maskil is an exemplary figure who represents the highest manifestation of the subjectivity of all community members. In some roles, such as liturgical leader, he is differentiated from the rest of the community, but in the majority of the hodayot associated with him the subjectivity that is developed is a subjectivity that all of the members would identify with. Although these compositions are not presented as instructions in the way that the Maskil's teaching in the Two Spirits Teaching is, they are themselves very much instructional texts. Thus, it is likely that the modeling of selfhood and subjectivity in these compositions was one with which the membership of the community could identify" (Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me*, 144).

[91] Cf. esp. Newsom, "Toward a Genealogy of the Introspective Self." There, Newsom argues that, despite earlier scholarly conclusions that pre-exilic models of the self in ancient Israel exhibit little introspection, "It is, in fact, possible to document the emergence in this period of a variety of distinctive but related models of the self that deserve to be described as introspective selves" (Newsom, "Toward a Genealogy," 63).

by an ability to clarify the meaning of perceived events, but by an ability to find serenity in the

notion that Yhwh, who is sovereign and just, is ultimately in control.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

1. Review of the Main Arguments of this Dissertation

Over the course of the preceding chapters, this dissertation has developed and delineated a fresh

account of the religious and cultural significance of thanksgiving psalmody. For nearly a century,

the study of biblical psalms has been dominated by form criticism, especially as articulated by

Hermann Gunkel, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the "functions" of psalms

primarily in terms of their relation to specific cultic acts or occasions.[1] In the case of

thanksgiving psalms, scholars discussing their function have usually focused on how these

psalms would have facilitated the act of giving thanks to God for an experience of deliverance.

While these approaches are valid at a basic level, they attend only to what Marc Zvi Brettler has

called the "vertical" functions of psalms, leaving questions about the "horizontal" functions of

psalms (i.e., their *social* functions) mostly unexplored.[2] As Brettler has observed, however, the

"horizontal" or social functions of psalms are extremely important for understanding why psalms

(or a genre of psalms) would have been important or valuable to ancient Jewish communities,

whether they were conscious of these functions or not. So, while earlier form-critical approaches

helped us to identify the intended or deliberate uses of thanksgiving psalms in cultic settings, this

dissertation's approach has afforded a fuller description of their broader, social functions within

ancient Jewish culture.

In following the approach just described, this dissertation sought to answer several

guiding questions. Most importantly, it asked, what did thanksgiving psalms *do to* or *for* their

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[1] Gunkel, *Introduction*.

[2] Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 302. The introduction to this study (Ch. 1) discussed precedents for this study's approach in the work of Claus Westermann, Walter Brueggemann, Erhard Gerstenberger, Rainer Albertz, Judith Gärtner, and Joshua T. James.

audiences? How did thanksgiving psalms *form* or *shape* their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood? And finally, which specific ideas about pious selfhood would these psalms have conveyed to postexilic Judean audiences? In response to these questions, the main chapters of this dissertation presented several main arguments, which I will review briefly here in what follows.

First, in response to the question about what thanksgiving psalms *did to* or *for* their ancient audiences, this dissertation argued that thanksgiving psalms *formed* their ancient audiences' ideas about pious selfhood. Chapter 2 developed this argument at the level of the genre as a whole, arguing that several essential literary and rhetorical characteristics of the thanksgiving genre make it an ideal instrument for the formation of ideas about the pious self. Chapters 3–5 then developed this argument in relation to specific thanksgiving psalms that exhibit different main rhetorical strategies. These chapters demonstrated how specific thanksgiving psalms would have formed ideas about the pious self in their audiences. Considered alongside each other, Chs. 3–5 demonstrate that, while all thanksgiving psalms had formational power for their audiences, there is diversity in how different thanksgiving psalms convey ideas about the pious self.

Second, in response to the question about *how* thanksgiving psalms formed their audiences' ideas about pious selfhood, this dissertation argued that the formational power of these psalms derived mainly from the rhetorical strategies "afforded" by the genre: doxology, didacticism, and exemplarity.[3] Chapters 3–5 treated each of these rhetorical strategies in turn, arguing that different thanksgiving psalms "flex" these strategies to different degrees, such that, in all the thanksgiving psalms considered in this study, one of these strategies is foregrounded

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[3] Ch. 2 discussed how the term "affordances" is drawn from Caroline Levine, *Forms*.

much more prominently than the others.[4] These chapters also discussed how, when the rhetoric

of these psalms is considered in relation to the historical settings in which they were most

plausibly used, it becomes clear how their rhetoric would have engaged the subjectivities of

audiences and called their attention to questions of the right formation of the pious self.

In response to the question about *which* specific ideas about pious selfhood these psalms

conveyed to their audiences, Chs. 3–5 also argued that the rhetorical strategies foregrounded by

specific thanksgiving psalms have critical implications for how those psalms convey ideas about

the pious self. Chapter 3 found that doxological rhetoric produces an emphasis on the pious self

as *dependent* on God's sovereign agency, downplaying the significance of the actions of the

pious amid affliction and emphasizing the importance of God's power to deliver the pious from

their afflictions. Chapter 4 found that didactic rhetoric, by contrast, inherently draws attention to

the *agency* of the pious themselves, such that pious selfhood is construed mainly in terms of how

one acts in response to affliction and whether that response reflects faith in God's sovereignty or

not. Chapter 5 found that the rhetoric of exemplarity (in the cases of Psalms 73 and 116)

foregrounds the inner discourse of exemplary pious selves, construing pious selfhood as a matter

of being able to navigate the cognitive challenges of affliction and to maintain one's commitment

to piety amid challenging circumstances.

Finally, while making these arguments, this dissertation sought to relate its findings to

what is known about the socio-historical environment of postexilic Judea, in which the psalms

considered in this dissertation were most probably used. While the core of this dissertation's

argument does not depend on this slightly more speculative dimension of its analyses,

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[4] I.e., Ch. 3 argued that the rhetoric of doxology is foregrounded in Psalms 30, 66, and 118; Ch. 4 argued that didacticism is foregrounded in Psalms 32, 34, and 41; and Ch. 5 argued that the rhetoric of exemplarity is foregrounded in Psalms 73 and 116.

discussions of the socio-historical situations in which these psalms might have served formational functions for audiences served to establish the socio-historical plausibility of the exegetical and literary arguments contained in Chs. 3–5. Furthermore, these discussions also served to suggest that the ideas about pious selfhood conveyed by thanksgiving psalms did not develop independently of their socio-historical environment, but rather in relation to it. While this dissertation did not argue for a clearly definable relationship between the ideas about pious selfhood in these psalms and the socio-historical environment in which they were used, it often proposed that the ideas about pious selfhood in these psalms would have been particularly powerful and compelling for Judean audiences of the postexilic period. This dimension of this dissertation's argument is admittedly more speculative than the parts that are based directly on literary and rhetorical analysis of the psalms themselves. However, by including these discussions, this dissertation aimed to maintain attention to the idea that conceptual models of pious selfhood should not be understood apart from the socio-historical environs in which they are expressed and articulated.[5] Instead, ideas about the pious self ought to be understood as instruments for engagement with the vicissitudes of the world in which a religious culture exists.

2. The Contributions of this Dissertation to Biblical Scholarship

By developing and presenting the arguments just reviewed, this dissertation has contributed to scholarly discourse around the Hebrew Bible in several important ways. The contributions of this dissertation to scholarship will be discussed here from two different angles, in order of how immediately they emerge from the arguments just described above. At the outset of research, this dissertation intended to contribute primarily to scholarly discourse about the biblical book of

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[5] Cf. the discussion in the introduction about the relationship of ideas about the self to the cultural contexts in which they develop. Cf. also Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*.

Psalms, and more specifically to discourse about the thanksgiving genre of psalms. However, it has also produced important insights for more general study of ideas about pious selfhood in ancient Judaism. The following discussion then outlines the contributions of this dissertation to both of these areas of scholarly discourse in turn.

2.1. Contributions to the Study of the Thanksgiving Genre of Biblical Psalmody

The most important contribution of this dissertation is its argument about the social function of thanksgiving psalms for ancient Jewish communities. As discussed above, this dissertation moved beyond the narrow accounts of this genre provided by earlier form-criticism, instead offering a broader account of this genre as a cultural instrument for the formation of ideas about the pious self. While this dissertation acknowledged and drew upon earlier form-critical accounts of the genre, in attending to the question of "horizontal" or social functions, it opened new vistas on the cultural importance of this genre, arguing that the first-person portrayals of pious selves in thanksgiving psalms would not only have facilitated acts of worship (as earlier form critics argued), but also would have been powerful for the formation of their audiences most fundamental concepts of self and agency, especially in relation to experiences of affliction. This dissertation then draws fresh attention to the thanksgiving psalms as important witnesses to ancient Jewish discourse about the nature and meaning of pious selfhood.

In making this argument about the formational power of thanksgiving psalms, this dissertation not only follows the lead of scholars like Brettler, Newsom, and Newman, but it also participates in a broader discourse of biblical scholarship about the social and cultural functions the literature of the Hebrew Bible served for Judean communities in the Second Temple period.[6]

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[6] This discourse is represented well in two recent books by Jacob L. Wright, especially Wright, *War, Memory, and National Identity in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2020) and Wright, *Why the Bible Began: An Alternative History of Scripture and Its Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2023). Wright's

Within this broader discourse about the Hebrew Bible, this dissertation contributes insight into the ways *psalmic* literature, especially, served educational and/or formational functions for Jewish communities in the postexilic period.[7] It suggests that *first-person* psalmody, in particular, should also be appreciated by scholars for its social functions, just as scholars have done with other genres of psalmody that more explicitly deal with matters of collective cultural importance.[8] While first-person psalms were surely important for giving voice to acts of worship, they also served to shape their users' perception of the world and of themselves within it according to culturally important models of the pious self.

Beyond this first main argument, this dissertation has also provided a fresh account of the formal diversity exhibited across different thanksgiving psalms. In the past, scholarly accounts of thanksgiving psalms have often drawn (knowingly or unknowingly) on highly *classificatory* theories of genre. As a result, scholars have often perceived formal diversity as a matter of deviation from a norm or the mixing of generic elements that should ideally be kept separated (e.g., the "mixing" of didacticism and doxology in Psalm 32). This dissertation, building on poststructuralist theories of genre, approaches formal diversity differently, arguing for a more flexible approach to genre than earlier form critics practiced.

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interests are much broader than those of this dissertation, but his approach exemplifies the importance of a historical approach to the Hebrew Bible that asks about the *raison d'être* of this literature for the people who first produced and read it. More specifically, Wright has proposed that the literature of the Hebrew Bible constituted what he calls a "moveable monument" that "articulated a new model of political community, one that we will call 'peoplehood'" (*Why the Bible Began*, xvi, 12). He argues that "the Hebrew Bible represents the first attempt in world history to construct what we may properly call a 'national identity'" (*Why the Bible Began*, 12). In a broad sense, then, Wright's work parallels the interests of my own, since it concerns the power of biblical texts to articulate and shape models of identity, though in Wright's case, the focus is at the national level, rather than the personal.

   [7] Cf., e.g., Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together"; Berquist, "Psalms, Postcolonialism and the Construction of the Self."

   [8] As in, e.g., the historical psalms considered by Aubrey Buster in *Remembering the Story of Israel*. Buster argues that the historical summaries contained in historical psalmody functioned to shape collective memory and establish cultural patterns of engagement with the past (Buster, *Remembering the Story of Israel*, 29–35).

Drawing on the work of Caroline Levine, in particular, this dissertation argued that the diversity exhibited across thanksgiving psalms is a matter of the different degrees to which the "affordances" of the genre have been "flexed" by specific psalms.[9] It argued that the genre as a whole affords three main rhetorical strategies—doxology, didacticism, and exemplarity—and that these strategies are "flexed" to different degrees by different thanksgiving psalms. This dissertation then contributes a more nuanced and theoretically robust approach to the formal diversity exhibited within the thanksgiving genre than was offered by earlier form criticism, and in this way, it offers a fresh approach to longstanding dilemmas concerning whether psalms should be classified as belonging to one genre or another.

It is important to note that this fresh vantage on the formal diversity of thanksgiving psalms came about as a result of foregrounding questions about the *social* or "horizontal" functions of these psalms, rather than attending only to their cultic or "vertical" functions. When one considers only the cultic or "vertical" functions of psalms, it is certainly difficult to understand how, e.g., Psalms 30 and 34 can be considered a part of the same generic tradition.[10] However, when one asks how both of these psalms "participate" differently in the tradition of thanksgiving psalmody, and how the differences in how they "participate" afford different potentialities for their *social* functions, one arrives at much more interesting results. As it turns out, while Psalm 30 and 34 share the rhetorical vantage essential to thanksgiving psalmody (i.e., the vantage of one who has survived an experience of affliction and now shares their experience

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[9] Levine, *Forms*.

[10] As discussed in Ch. 4, Psalm 34 is thought by some scholars to not "qualify" as a thanksgiving psalm, because these scholars cannot imagine it being used in the setting in which thanksgiving psalms are supposed to have been used (i.e., a *tôdāh* ritual or a setting in which the main objective is to "give thanks" to God). Cf., e.g., Goldingay's argument that Psalm 34 cannot be considered thanksgiving since it never addresses Yhwh directly (Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1*, 477). This remark is representative of others who similarly assume that psalms with primarily didactic character cannot be considered to belong to the genre of thanksgiving.

with the gathered pious), they deploy this vantage to different rhetorical ends, such that they draw attention to different aspects of the pious self (i.e., Psalm 30 emphasizes the sovereignty of God in its doxological rhetoric, but Psalm 34 emphasizes the importance of right response to affliction in its didactic rhetoric). The formal diversity exhibited across thanksgiving psalms is thus best understood as reflecting the way this genre was used to meet the different rhetorical needs of Jewish communities through time.

2.2. Contributions to the Study of the Pious Self in Ancient Judaism

While this dissertation is configured primarily as a study of the social functions of a genre of biblical psalmody, it also makes some important contributions to scholarly discourse about ideas about the pious self in ancient Judaism. Perhaps most importantly, it adds to current scholarly discourse that emphasizes the important role that psalms and prayers seem to have played in the *formation* of ideas about the pious self, especially during the Second Temple period.[11] In particular, since this dissertation focuses on a genre of psalmody that was likely encountered mainly through public worship, it suggests that scholars who study the formation of the pious self in ancient Judaism ought to attend to *liturgical* psalmody as instruments that would have contributed powerfully to the preservation, transmission, and formation of ideas about the pious self for Judean communities in the Second Temple period.

Beyond this first point, this dissertation's argument about the rhetorical strategies exhibited by thanksgiving psalms (i.e., doxology, didacticism, exemplarity) also contributes to our understanding of the specific discursive strategies by which pious selfhood would have been formed and learned during the Second Temple period. The analyses in Ch. 3 suggest that first-

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[11] As discussed at greater length in the introduction, scholars such as Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, Judith H. Newman, and Mika S. Pajunen have modeled such an approach to psalms and prayers.

person doxological psalms ought to be appreciated as witnesses to ideas about the relationship between human and divine agency. Ch. 4 suggests that the blend of didacticism and doxology exhibited by certain psalms should be appreciated as a unique rhetorical strategy for forming audiences while also engaging them in worship. Finally, Ch. 5 suggested that the speakers of first-person psalms likely had exemplary functions for listeners/readers during the Second Temple period, suggesting that exemplarity as a literary phenomenon was not limited to named figures of Jewish tradition, but extended to anonymous personas of liturgical psalmody as well.[12]

Finally, this dissertation's analyses of these specific psalms (i.e., Psalms 30, 32, 34, 41, 66, 73, 116, and 118), in particular, has produced a general insight that the pious self in ancient Judaism was conceptualized frequently in relation to how one undergoes, processes, narrates, and/or navigates experiences of personal affliction. Chs. 3–5 delineated some of the specific ways that thanksgiving psalms modeled the relationship between the pious and their lived experiences of affliction, and while I will not rehearse the details of those arguments here, it is important to note that all the psalms considered in this study assume that experiences of affliction are profoundly revelatory and transformational events in the lives of the pious, and that pious selfhood can be defined in terms of how one understands themselves in relation to such events. While this point may be obvious from some other biblical literature (e.g., the book of Job), the fact that it also emerges from first-person psalmody suggests that the question of affliction in the lives of the pious was of central importance to discourse about the pious self during the Second Temple period. Scholarly discourse about pious selfhood in the Second Temple period should

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[12] This point should be considered alongside the work of Wright, III, "Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar" (cited in Ch. 5), which drew attention to the idea that first-person poetic personas may have had exemplary functions for readers (or listeners) in a similar way as the founding figures of major discursive traditions did for pseudepigraphical authors (e.g., Moses, considered by Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai*).

then attend to the thanksgiving psalms as corroborating witnesses to this important theme which appears in other biblical literature more traditionally associated with the negotiation of matters of personal piety.

3. Ways Forward

Having reviewed this dissertation's main arguments and discussed its contributions to biblical scholarship, this final section considers lines of inquiry this dissertation has either opened or suggested for further study. While a dissertation represents the conclusions of a program of research, it should also represent the beginnings of further exploration by the same scholar or by others. So, in the spirit of continued conversation, I offer three points of reflection on possible ways forward from here.

First, this dissertation has only considered psalms contained in the biblical book of Psalms, even while other thanksgiving psalms have been preserved both in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isa 38:10–20; Jon 2:3–10) and in extrabiblical literature (e.g., Sir 51; Pss Sol 15, 16).[13] While this dissertation has aimed to provide a fresh account of the social function of thanksgiving psalmody in the Second Temple period, further study might also consider how other extant thanksgiving psalms witness to the life of this genre through time. In my estimation, further study in this regard would not reveal problems with the findings of this dissertation so much as it would allow for more refined *diachronic* argumentation about the development of the genre during the Second Temple period, especially considering the relatively later dates of the psalms in Sirach and the Psalms of Solomon. The incorporation of these later exemplars of thanksgiving psalmody would also allow for an account of the genre that bridged analysis of the

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[13] The psalms mentioned here were identified as thanksgiving psalms as early as the work of Hermann Gunkel. See Gunkel, *Introduction*, 199.

earliest biblical psalms all the way to the latest and most sophisticated development in the genre's life during the Second Temple period, the Hodayot at Qumran. A more inclusive account of all extant thanksgiving psalmody might also allow for sharper conclusions to be reached about how this genre's diachronic evolution reflects the changing needs of Jewish communities during the Second Temple period.

Second, this dissertation has attempted to model a way of studying psalmic genres that attends simultaneously to form-critical accounts of their "vertical" or cultic functions while also generating new arguments about their "horizontal" or social functions. While this dissertation builds on the previous efforts of other scholars like Marc Zvi Brettler, Judith Newman, and Carol Newsom, to my knowledge it is among the first full-length studies of a *biblical* genre of psalmody to foreground the question of social function.[14] Drawing on the same scholarly conversation that inspired the present study, other scholars of the biblical Psalms might explore other psalmic genres from this angle, asking how a given genre might have functioned to form its users ideas about the self, social identity, or further dimensions of personhood and lived religious experience. In particular, other genres of *first-person* psalmody might be explored as having been powerful for the formation of ideas about pious selfhood and also as representational of models of pious selfhood that existed in ancient Judaism. This would allow for the findings of the present study to be situated in relation to how the pious self is construed in other, adjacent genres of ancient Jewish psalmody.

Finally, this study has included some argumentation that the ideas about pious selfhood

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[14] As discussed in Ch. 1, Marc Zvi Brettler observed in 2017 that little attention has been paid to the capacity of biblical psalms to form the identities of Jewish communities in the Second Temple period (Brettler, "Those Who Pray Together," 279). This dissertation was partly inspired by Brettler's comments, as it aimed to apply this mode of inquiry to a genre of biblical psalmody.

reflected in first-person psalms reflect (or even symbolically represent) tensions or dilemmas at the societal and/or cultural levels, such as the constrained agency of moral selves under the pressures of colonialism. In Chs. 3–5, especially, this dissertation often discussed how the construal of the pious self in terms of its response to experiences of affliction would have been particularly powerful or important for communities experiencing the ongoing affliction of colonized existence. For example, Ch. 4 argued that portraying the pious self as defined by its *response* to affliction would have had specific implications for audiences whose lives were characterized by the constraints of colonized life. Framing pious selfhood in terms of how one responds to affliction suggests that, even when life is characterized by afflictions beyond one's control, the pious may recover some agency in determining the meaning of their situation by choosing to respond to their afflictions in a way that acknowledges God's continued sovereignty.

These observations about the functions of thanksgiving psalms for colonized audiences are, on the one hand, somewhat speculative, since it cannot be proved that Psalm 32 would necessarily have had this effect for audiences. Further, for these observations to become more fully defensible arguments, they would require more robust theoretical description of how literary representations of the self that do not make explicit reference to political realities may still relate to them. Since this was not the main focus of this dissertation, such theoretical foundations were not developed here. However, further study could develop this line of inquiry with more robust theoretical foundations, drawing on postcolonial theory in particular.

On the other hand, based solely on the observations of this dissertation, it is certainly plausible that these psalms would have functioned this way for their audiences. The difficulty of colonized life in Persian-period Judea is agreed upon by historians of this period, such that we may assume this aspect of the historical situation in which these psalms would have formed ideas

about the pious self. However, while colonialism be important for understanding the environment in which these psalms were composed and used, in may not be the only force that produced the specific formulations of pious selfhood one observes in thanksgiving psalms. Other cultural, religious, and social processes might also be considered as important for giving rise to these formulations.

Having raised these concerns about the socio-historical forces that fostered the formulations of pious selfhood one finds in thanksgiving psalms, a larger question emerges from this aspect of this dissertation: can first-person psalmody be understood as symbolically representative of tensions at the political, societal, and/or cultural levels? In other words, even while a psalm may not explicitly refer to the social and political realities of colonized existence, can it still be understood as a discursive instrument through which religious communities engaged, responded to, and/or learned to live amid these realities? In its present form, the findings of this dissertation suggest that this certainly may be the case, but a fuller response to this question will have to await further study.

For the present, this study has made important advances in illuminating the formational power of thanksgiving psalms for their ancient audiences and in delineating a range of important ideas about the pious self that they would have conveyed. This study has thus expanded present scholarly understanding of the social functions of these psalms significantly. Moreover, in calling attention to these psalms as witnesses to the discourse about pious selfhood in early Second Temple Judaism, it has provided a new point of access to a crucial moment in the history of Jewish piety. On the basis of this study's findings, then, the thanksgiving genre of psalmody should be appreciated as one of ancient Israel's most important discursive traditions for negotiating, portraying, and forming the pious self.

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