

Divine Speeches in the Book of Psalms: Their Role, Placement, and Implication for the Message and Structure of Selected Psalms

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Abstract

A major change in approaching the theology of the Psalms in modern psalmic scholarship came with the hermeneutical shift from viewing the Psalms solely as a random anthology of prayers and praises to viewing the Psalms as an intentional collection or a “book” with a clear purpose and a unified message. This approach has opened new avenues to recovering a theological emphasis in which individual psalms continue to speak in their canonical context, i.e., in connection to the other psalms in the present Psalter. This essay focuses on the direct citations of divine words in the Psalms in order to explore the excellent artistry and complexity behind the message and structure of the individual psalms and of the book of Psalms as a whole. The divine speeches in our selected examples (Pss 75:2–3, 10; 81:6–16; 89:3–4; 19–37; 91:14–16; 95:8–11) not only create a sense of God’s immediate reply and presence but also appear to play a pivotal role in creating psalm groups or blocks and advancing the dialogue between the people and God in the book of Psalms. The psalm blocks share common themes, keywords, literary structure, and placement in the Psalter. The divine speeches elucidate,

advance and/or complete the message of the connected psalms and of the entire block.¹

Introduction

The Psalms assume the dynamics of vivid interactions with God. The psalmists do not perceive God as a passive recipient of worship but expect Him to respond. They often implore God to “give ear” (listen),² “hear my prayer,”³ “look,”⁴ “answer me,”⁵ “come to me,”⁶ “make haste to (help) me,”⁷ and “deliver me,”⁸ and ask questions such as “Why”⁹ and “How long.”¹⁰ God’s response is usually indirect, conveyed in the inspired words of the psalm,¹¹ or delayed, anticipated in the future through God’s intervention in granting the suppliant’s plea.¹² However, in some psalms God is portrayed as speaking in first person and his words are quoted in the psalm.¹³ Apart from the obvious effect of creating a sense of God’s immediate reply, and thus of God’s closeness and perhaps more direct involvement in people’s worship than in some other psalms, the divine speeches (direct quotations of God’s words) in the Psalms seem to have other roles as well.

¹ This article is a longer and updated version of: Dragoslava Santrac, “Divine Speeches in the Book of Psalms: Their Role, Placement and Implications for the Message and Structure of Selected Psalms,” in *Legacy of Beauty: A Festschrift in Honor of Jo Ann Davidson*, edited by A. Rahel Wells and Iriann Marie Irizarry (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, upcoming 2023), 105–131. I also draw on my research on Pss 76–150 in Martin G. Klingbeil, Dragoslava Santrac, David R. Tasker, Jacques B. Doukhan, and Richard M. Davidson, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary, vol. 6 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2022).

² Pss 5:1; 17:1; 39:12; 54:2; 55:1. Unless otherwise stated, all biblical versification is from NKJV.

³ Pss 39:12; 54:2; 84:8; 143:1.

⁴ Pss 11:2; 25:18; 80:14; 84:9; 119:132; 142:4.

⁵ Pss 27:7; 102:2; 143:1, 7.

⁶ Pss 101:2; 119:77.

⁷ Pss 38:22; 40:13; 70:1, 5; 71:12; 141:1.

⁸ Pss 6:4; 7:1; 22:20; 25:20; 31:1–2, 15.

⁹ Pss 10:1; 22:1; 42:9; 43:2; 44:23–24; 74:1, 11; 80:12; 88:14.

¹⁰ Pss 6:3; 13:1–2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 94:3.

¹¹ Pss 5:12; 10:17–18; 43:5; 54:4–7; 57:9–10; 66:16–20; 140:12–13.

¹² Pss 21:8–12; 52:5; 64:7–10; 69:35–36; 94:23; 96:13; 130:8; 138:8.

¹³ Pss 2:6, 7–9; 12:5; 46:10; 50:7–23; 60:6–8; 75:4–5; 81:6–16; 82:2–7; 91:14–16; 95:8–11; 105:11, 15; 110:1, 4; 132:11–12, 14–18.

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I address two interrelated questions: 1) Why are the divine speeches introduced in the Psalms? and 2) Does their placement in the Psalms indicate any specific purpose or intended design?

Examples of God's direct speech are found in all five books of the Psalter.¹⁴ Consideration of place precludes a discussion of each instance of divine speech in the book of Psalms. For the purpose of this essay, we will examine five examples (Pss 75:2–3, 10; 81:6–16; 89:3–4; 19–37; 91:14–16; 95:8–11) to demonstrate the important function of the divine speeches for the message and structure not only of individual psalms in which they appear but also of larger units where they play a pivotal role in connecting the surrounding psalms. In order to determine whether the divine speeches might have significant function for the structure and development of thought within the Psalter, two lines of analysis will be pursued. First will be an internal study of the selected individual psalms that include divine speeches. The second will be investigating whether these psalms are related to their surrounding psalms to create structural and thought pairs. The psalms that form pairs or blocks share several common elements (e.g., themes, keywords, literary structure, placement in the Psalter). Each psalm in the block elucidates, advances and/or completes the message of the other psalm(s), and by doing so contributes to unveiling of the message of the entire block. I shall begin with giving some general remarks about the divine speeches and the literary features, which show that certain passages function in a paired relationship with each other.¹⁵

God's Word and Human Response

To enter a theological discourse concerning direct quotation of God's words in the Psalms, caution is required from committed Bible students from the onset. Divine speeches are by no means to be viewed as "God's Word" on a greater level than the rest of the Psalms, because the Psalms are not solely human prayers directed to God, but the Word of God directed to His people on the same level as the rest of the Scriptures

¹⁴ Pss 2:6–9; 12:5; 46:10; 50:5–23; 60:6–8; 68:22 (possibly 23); 75:2–3, 10; 81:6–16; 89:3–4, 19–37; 91:14–16; 95:8–11; 110:1, 4; 132:11–18.

¹⁵ I acknowledge the contribution of Lawrence Boadt's research presented in his article "The Use of 'Panels' in the Structure of Psalms 73–78," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 533–550. Although Boadt's research does not pertain to divine speeches in the Psalms, it provided a valuable insight into the use of large blocks or panels in the construction of the Psalms and the approaches for studying possible structural interrelatedness of certain Psalms.

(Mark 12:36; Acts 4:24, 25). In other words, the Psalms are the *inspired* prayers and praises of Israel, and so in the Psalms the voice is that of God with an echo of His people's voice responding to God's revelation with praise and lament. The remarkable beauty and appeal of the Psalms as prayers and praises lies in the fact that the Psalms are concurrently the pious prayers and praises of believers and God's inspired word.¹⁶ This view, however, does not explain the mystery of the Psalms that Bonhoeffer succinctly captured: "The Holy Scripture is the Word of God to us. But prayers are the words of men. How do prayers then get into the Bible? Let us make no mistake about it, the Bible is the Word of God even in the Psalms. Then are these prayers to God also God's own words? That seems rather difficult to understand."¹⁷ Bonhoeffer points out that we can grasp the mystery of the Psalms only when we learn to pray them in the name of Jesus Christ. The Psalms thus provide the people of God with moments of intimacy with God when they can experience what the apostle Paul describes in Rom 8:26–27: "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God."¹⁸

As the Creator and Savior, God initiates and sustains the dialogue with His people. Kraus effectively captures the "dialogical principle" of the Psalms as "an answer inasmuch as it is a reaction to what Yahweh has previously said and done."¹⁹ The dialogical nature of the Psalms gives the Psalms "a unique power that is not shared by the rest of Scripture, one rooted in their special ability to have a decisive effect on

¹⁶ The history of interpretation of the Psalms ranges from the traditional Jewish and Christian historical and theological interpretations of the Psalms as God's inspired Word, to the post-enlightenment approaches to the Psalms as solely human responses to God's words and actions. For a brief survey of the history of interpretation of the book of Psalms, see Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 19–112.

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1970), 13.

¹⁸ Unless noted otherwise, all biblical quotations are from New King James Version.

¹⁹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 12.

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those who use them.”²⁰ Athanasius effectively describes the experience. When believers read the other biblical books, they “consider themselves to be other than those about whom the passage speaks, so that they only come to the imitation of the deeds they are told to the extent that they marvel at them and desire to emulate them.”²¹ However, a person reading the Psalms experiences them as “his own words . . . and not as if another were speaking, nor as if speaking about someone else. But he handles them as if he is speaking about himself . . . and he lifts them up to God as himself acting and speaking them from himself.”²² According to Emmanuel Durand, speaking *to* God employs expressive or emotional and incentive language functions as primary communication modes in which “the situation or the state of the speaker, as well as an action or attitude addressed to God as the addressee of the words all have a primary role to play.”²³ If this is true, then God’s direct speech heightens the effect of the divine-human dialogue in the Psalms and shifts the standing between the involved subjects. Nevertheless, Kraus rightly maintains that it is wrong to deduce from the “dialogical principle” that “the two partners [i.e., God and the people] are equal to each other and stand on the same level, and that a ‘dialogical principle’ could plumb the mystery of this correspondence.”²⁴ The wonder of God’s revelation and hiddenness feeds the unfathomable and surprising manner of the dialogue in the Psalms.

Locating Them in the Text

The most obvious way to recognize the divine speeches is through announcements such “says the Lord” and “the Lord said” (e.g., Pss 12:5; 68:22; 110:1). These announcements are reminiscent of the formula used by the prophets (e.g., 2 Kings 7:1; 20:1; Jer 2:5), pointing to the role of

²⁰ Harry P. Nasuti, “The Sacramental Function of the Psalms in Contemporary Scholarship and Liturgical Practice,” in Stephen Breck Reid, ed. *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue and Authority* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 78.

²¹ Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans., R. C. Gregg (New York, NY: Paulist, 1981), ch. 11, quoted in *Ibid.*, 79.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Emmanuel Durand, *Divine Speech in Human Words: Thomistic Engagements with Scripture* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 6. Durand rightly notes that in discourse about God the speaker’s unique identity remains latent and in speaking of God the dominance of the speaker’s identity is balance by the conditions of the recipients. The speaker’s identity and attitude are most prominent and pertinent in speaking to God (*Ibid.*, 5–7).

²⁴ Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 12.

divine speeches in the Psalms as poetic-prophetic expressions (e.g., Ps 110:1; cf. Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; Heb 1:13).²⁵ In other instances, the psalmist introduces the divine oracle by clearly identifying the Lord as the one speaking (e.g., Pss 2:4–9; 50:3–23; 60:6–8; 89:19; 95:7).

Some divine speeches interrupt the usual pattern in the form of announcement, and the Lord is not openly mentioned as the speaker (e.g., Pss 46:10; 75:2–3, 10; 89:3–4; 91:14–16). In these cases, the audience has to deduce from the context that the words are God's words.²⁶ Some English versions add "You say/said" or "Thou hast said," which is not present in the Hebrew, in order to make it clear that the first person speaker is God (e.g., Pss 75:2, NIV; 89:3, NIV, RSV).²⁷

Booij correctly argues that the citations of the Lord's words in the Psalms are not "Fremdkörper" ("strange bodies," i.e., insertions), but represent an integral part of the psalms in which they occur and are sometimes marked by special metrical patterns, different forms of parallelism, and unique positions in the poems.²⁸

²⁵ The prophetic character of numerous psalms is demonstrated in their predictions of Christ's life. Here are some examples: Christ's deity (Ps 45:6–7 in Heb 1:8–9), sonship (Ps 2:7 in Matt 3:17; Heb 1:5), obedience (Ps 40:6–8 in Heb 10:5–7), zeal for God's temple (Ps 69:9a in John 2:17), betrayal (Ps 41:9 in Luke 22:48), Christ's betrayer will be replaced (Ps 109:8 in Acts 1:20), suffering (Ps 69:4 in John 15:25; Ps 69:9b in Rom 15:3), not one of Christ's bones will be broken (Ps 34:20 in John 19:36), death (Ps 22:1–21 in Matt 27), resurrection (Pss 2:7; 16:10 in Acts 2:25–28; 13:33–35), ascension (Ps 68:18 in Eph 4:8), priesthood (Ps 110:4 in Heb 5:6), and kingship (Pss 2:6; 89:18–19 in Acts 5:31). The hope of rebuilding Zion is vivid in many psalms (Pss 51:18; 53:6; 69:35; 126:1) and is reminiscent of certain prophetic texts (Isa 2:2–3; 51:3; 61:3; Mic 4:1–2). The glorified moments mentioned in some psalms (e.g., Pss 11:6; 87:3–6; 98:9; 99:1; 145:11–13) are rarely found in Israel's history, but they agree with prophetic predictions of the future kingdom of God. David is called a "prophet" in Acts 2:30; 4:25.

²⁶ Beth Tanner, "Psalm 75: An Answer to Where God Has Gone," *The Book of Psalms*, Nancy L. deClausse-Walford et al., eds., *NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 604, 606.

²⁷ For more information see, for example, Michael V. Fox, "Identification of Quotations in Biblical Literature," *ZAW* 92 (1980): 416–431.

²⁸ Th. Booij, *Godswoorden in de Psalmen: Hun Funktie en Achtergronden*, Th.D. Thesis (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1978), 31–33, quoted in Carl J. Bosma, "Discerning the Voices in the Psalms: A Discussion of Two Problems in Psalm Interpretation," part 2, *Calvin Theological Journal* 44 (2009): 132.

Literary Features Pointing to Paired Texts

Grouping psalms has been an early practice, as evidenced by the five-book division of the book of Psalms preserved in the MT²⁹ and the presence of the other already-existing collections.³⁰ In addition to these widely recognized collections, the following literary features can help us realize smaller groups of psalms. For our study, recognizing paired psalms is helpful because it provides the basis for studying the meaning and purpose of the divine speeches for the individual psalm in which they appear and in context alongside the other joined psalms.

Acrostics. In a Hebrew acrostic poem, the verses of each stanza begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Acrostic gives the impression of comprehensiveness and order to the poem, and implies that the subject matter of the poem is given full treatment. Acrostics are probably the most obvious literary feature that unmistakably point to connected psalms (e.g., Pss 9 and 10; 111 and 112).

Parallelism. The recurring juxtaposition of symmetrically constructed thoughts, sentences, phrases, and words can be used to tie parts of individual psalms or even whole psalms together. The parallelism of meaning registers more clearly to the English reader. Far more complex is parallelism made with grammar and syntax. Parallelism serves to stress balance and show development of thought, additional quality or contrast.³¹

Chiastic parallelism and chiasms focus attention on two ends of comparison or to the middle term, creating the effect of a mirror image. Chiastic structures are important because they suggest an intentional pattern created by the author, and thus direct us to interpret the different

²⁹ Book I (Pss 1–41), Book II (Pss 42–72), Book III (Pss 73–89), Book IV (Pss 90–106), and Book V (Pss 107–150). The five-book division of the Psalter is an early Jewish tradition that parallels the five-book division of the Pentateuch. William G. Braude, *The Midrash on the Psalms*, Yale Judaica Series 13 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:5.

³⁰ Some of these collections are: the Koharite collections (Pss 42–49, 84–85, 87–88), the Asaphite collection (73–83), the Songs of the Ascents (Pss 120–134), the Psalms of the Lord’s kingship (Pss 93, 95–99), and the Hallelujah Psalms (Pss 146–150). The psalms in a collection usually have a common superscription (e.g., “A Song of Ascents,” “A Psalm of Asaph”) or other unifying phrases and motifs (e.g., “Praise the Lord” in the Hallelujah Psalms). Psalm 72:20 bears witness to a collection of Davidic collection (perhaps Pss 51–72). In Jewish liturgy, Psalms 113–118 form a collection called “Hallel” or “Egyptian Hallel.”

³¹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985), 3–26.

sequences of the text in the light of their parallel counterparts. In the book of Psalms, examples of chiastic structures can be seen in the structures of entire psalms (e.g., Pss 86, 92, 115) or of smaller parts of psalms (e.g., Ps 141:1).

Repetition. Repetition of the same words or roots in key positions can be used effectively to tie smaller parts or entire psalms together. Refrains and the *inclusio* are common examples of neatly organized repetitions.³² Repetition of words or concepts can be used with a greater degree of flexibility and with no schematic regularity. Likewise, the repetition of a word in a psalm or several psalms does not always mean the mechanical repetition of a concept. More often, repetition points to a more complex, albeit unified context, like in the instance of emphatic repetition where each new repetition heightens the meaning or urgency of the original term (e.g., the repetition of “How long” in Ps 94:3).³³ In addition, repetition of thought concepts within an individual psalm or more seemingly unrelated psalms may indicate an intentional emphasis and deserve our special attention.

Canonical Context. The canonical context is another indicator pointing to possible purposeful grouping of psalms.³⁴ The canonical context of a Psalm refers to the literary context of the whole book of Psalms in its present form. In other words, the Psalms are not seen as a random anthology of prayers and praises but as an intentional collection with a clear purpose and a unified message, as with other biblical books.³⁵ “Looking for interaction between psalms within a context means that the contemporary reader can seek out themes and emphases or look for threads running through pairs or groups of psalms which point to topics that editors of the final form of the Psalter wished to emphasize.”³⁶ Some scholars have used this approach to reinterpret the psalms,

³² Boadt, “The Use of ‘Panels’ in the Structure of Psalms 73–78,” 536.

³³ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 64, 65, 188, 189.

³⁴ For a brief overview of canonical readings in modern psalmic scholarship see, for example, David M. Howard Jr. and Michael K. Sneed, “Reading the Psalter as a Unified Book: Recent Trends,” and the five essays in the section “Canonical Readings” in *Reading the Psalms Theologically*, David M. Howard Jr. and Andrew J. Schmutzer, eds. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023), 1–126.

³⁵ M. D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 57.

³⁶ J. A. Grant, “The Psalms and the King,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. D. Firth & P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 107.

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indicating the psalm's original meaning is thereby changed.³⁷ However, I agree with the notion that "a psalm's essential meaning does *not* change as it is considered in context with other psalms, in the final Psalter," and we should rather speak of "a psalm's meaning being progressively 'unfolded' or 'illuminated' as it is considered in its surrounding literary context (*Sitz im Text*)—its original meaning perhaps presented only in *nuce*, 'in seed form,' and revealed more fully later."³⁸

Canonical approaches can be seen as a positive tool in that they focus on the unity of the book of Psalms.³⁹ While the present shape of the book of Psalms is clearly not the work of King David, but of later (most likely postexilic) editors,⁴⁰ the belief is that the Holy Spirit inspired and guided not only the writers of the Psalms, but also the editors who collected, arranged, and preserved the Psalms. The canonical approaches gave rise to attempts to recover a theological emphasis in which the

³⁷ Beginning, perhaps, with Brevard Childs, whose landmark work *An Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979), along with Gerald H. Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985), made a breakthrough for holistic analyses of the Psalms that focus more on the final canonical form of a psalm and its place in the present canon of the Psalter. Childs maintains that the modern interpretation of the Psalter has to deal seriously with the role of the canon as the editors understood the canonical material to function for the community of faith and argues that "[t]he original cultic role of the psalms has been subsumed under a larger category of the canon," meaning that "the original setting [of the Psalms] has been subordinated to a new theological function for the future generations of worshipping Israel" (Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Fortress Press, 1979], 513–514, also 513–525).

³⁸ Howard and Sneath, *Reading the Psalms Theologically*, 31.

³⁹ Whereas canonical approaches can be used as a positive tool for the study of the psalms, a danger exists in the tendencies of certain canonical scholars to undermine the historical reliability and divine inspiration of the biblical text and study it primarily as sacred literature. However, most weaknesses are not intrinsic to the method or canonical approach, but relate to the critical tendencies and presuppositions of certain scholars.

⁴⁰ For example, Ps 72:20 suggests that David's psalms end with Book II, but is most likely the ending of an earlier collection of psalms, because the psalms of David appear in the remainder of the Psalter (Pss 86, 101, 103, 108–110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138–145). The postexilic date of the present shape of the book of Psalms can be deduced from the presence of a number of postexilic psalms. These psalms reflect the challenges of the Jewish people in postexilic times when the main pillars that represented their national and religious identity (the temple, the king, and the land) seemed to have collapsed (e.g., Pss 74, 79, 89). The pathos of these psalms concurs with the postexilic laments (Jer 51:51; Lam 1:7, 8; 2:6, 7; 3:56–64; 4:14–19; 5:1–3, 20–22; Zech 7:1–3; 8:18, 19). For more information, see, for example, Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of the Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85–94; James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 99–107; Santrac, *Psalms 76–150*, 340, 392–394.

Psalms continued to speak to the community of faith, and various theological and historical themes have been suggested as indicators of deliberate arrangement in the Psalter.⁴¹ The question arises: Do the divine speeches play any role in the deliberate arrangement of certain psalms? I will try to answer this question in the following study of the divine speeches in four selected psalms.

Psalm 75:2-3, 10

Psalm 75 praises God for His deliverance through His judgments. The previous two psalms deal with the problem of the prosperity of evil. Psalm 73 deals with this as a personal dilemma, as suggested by the use of the first person singular (e.g., vv. 2, 13, 17, 22). Psalm 74 deals with evil as a national dilemma, supported by the use of the plural to denote those in whose name the psalm has been composed (e.g., vv. 1, 4, 8). The possible thematic and structural links between Pss 74 and 75 suggest that

⁴¹ Many scholars have acknowledged the psalms of the Lord's kingship and the Torah psalms as the main structural items. See, for example, several representative works: the pioneering study of Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of the Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85-94; James L. Mays, "The place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106/1 (1987): 3-12; Walter Brueggemann and Patrick D. Miller, "Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker," *JSOT* 72 (1996): 45-56; David M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93-100*, Biblical and Judaic Studies, vol. 5 (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press/Eisenbrauns, 1997). For a recent psalm commentary reflecting the presuppositions of the canonical approaches see, DeClaisse-Walford, Nancy L., Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014). Some scholars have indicated notions of spatiality as an ordering principle in telling the story (see, for example, Gert T. M. Prinsloo, "Šē 'ōl → Yē rūšālayim ← Šamayim: spatial orientation in the Egyptian Hallel [Psalms 113-118]," *OTE* 19/2 [2006]: 739-760; Jo-Mari Schäfer: "Understanding [the Lack of] Space in Psalm 46:7 in Light of Its Neighboring Psalms: A Spatial Reading of Psalm 46-48," *OTE* 23/1 [2010]: 138-160). For a more recent study of the strategic grouping of a messianic psalm and a Torah psalm, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015; for a summary, see five diagrams at the end of the book that show how Torah Ps 1 and messianic Ps 2 provide the main themes that are then developed across the whole Psalter with the groupings of other significant psalms along the way). Robertson's suggested flow from "Confrontation" (Book I) to "Communication" (Book II) to "Devastation" (Book III) to "Maturation" (Book IV) and, finally, to "Consummation" (Book V) is reminiscent of Walter Brueggemann's orientation-disorientation-new orientation flow (Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984]). For a recent study about the centrality of the Davidic covenant in the Psalter, see David M. Howard, Jr. and Andrew J. Schmutzer, eds., *Reading the Psalms Theologically* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023).

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Ps 75 furthers the conversation and brings the resolution to the problem of God's absence that is notably lacking at the end of Ps 74.

The following table illustrates some structural and thematic parallels between Pss 74 and 75.

Themes	Psalm 74	Psalm 75
Where is God?	Lamenting plea that God "has cast off" His people (is <i>far from them</i>) and exhortation to God to act (vv. 1–3a)	God's wondrous works and God's own reply confirm that <i>He is near</i> ("Your name is near") (vv. 1–3)
Boasting of the wicked	<i>The boastful confidence</i> of the wicked in their actions and speech (vv. 3b–10)	<i>The futility of the boastful confidence</i> of the wicked in their actions and speech (vv. 4–16)
God's judgment	<i>Invoking</i> God's sovereign power and judgment (vv. 11–20)	<i>Confirming</i> God's sovereign power and judgment (vv. 7–8)
Praise of God	Praise of God is a hopeful desire in <i>the future</i> (v. 21)	Praise of God is offered in <i>the present</i> and lasts <i>forever</i> (vv. 1, 9)
Deliverance	People's <i>final exhortation</i> to God to deliver (vv. 22–23)	God's <i>final confirmation</i> of deliverance to His people (v. 10)

God's speech in Ps 75:2–3 abruptly interrupts the psalm, and the lack of introduction for the divine oracle obliges the audience to deduce these are the words of God from the context, for the speaker is identified only as "I" (also in v. 10). What differentiates God's "I" (vv. 2–3, 10) and the psalmist's "I" (vv. 4, 9) are the subject's actions and authority. God's sole prerogative is to judge the world and secure the earth's pillars. The

psalmist bears witness to God's sovereign judgment and praises God.⁴² God's sudden appearance to the scene expressively reinforces God's declaration in v. 2 to speak and act according to His own timetable and not on a schedule.⁴³ The divine oracle announces God's judgment, and also initiates a series of reversals of the circumstances lamented in Ps 74, thus serving as the pivotal point of the argument about God's absence. The fact that divine judgment is proclaimed in the first person, i.e. in God's own voice, signifies that God chooses to break His own silence and subsequently silence the arrogant speech of the wicked in Ps 74. Interestingly, God does not directly answer the "Why?" in the opening verse of Ps 74. He rather addresses the perhaps more urgent question in v. 10: "O God, *how long* will the adversary reproach?" (emphasis supplied). To this question, God gives an appropriate answer: "When I chose the proper time, I will judge uprightly" (Ps 75:2). The "proper time" (Heb. *mo'ed* "appointed time, appointed meeting place") in Ps 75 matches its homonym in Ps 74 that describes the meeting places destroyed by the enemies (Ps 74:4, 8).

In Psalm 74 the sanctuary lies in ruins, symbolic of Israel's utter defeat (vv. 3-8). For Israel, the sanctuary represents more than a place of worship. It is the symbol of the stability and strength of God's people (Ps 2:6) as well as of the whole earth (Ps 93:1-2). It represents the heights or heavens and points to the heavenly sanctuary where God resides (Pss 78:68-69; 99:2, 5; 125:1). The ruined sanctuary thus signals that the survival not only of God's people but of the entire world is threatened.⁴⁴ The divine speech in Ps 75:3 fittingly responds to the concerns of Ps 74:

⁴² Psalm 75:2 could be understood as either God or a human judge or king speaking, because all of them have the responsibility of judging Israel. However, v. 3 clarifies that it is God speaking, for no mortal could manage to secure the pillars of the earth. Likewise, it is most likely God who speaks in v. 10. It does not seem that the psalmist would speak so boldly, especially since previously it is noted that only God has the prerogative to raise and lower humans (v. 7) (Beth Tanner, "Psalm 75: An Answer to Where God Has Gone," 604, 606). Introducing the divine oracle in Ps 75:2-3, the NIV adds "You say," which is not present in the Hebrew, in order to make it clear that the first person speaker is none other than God himself (Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 15-16 [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014], 282). See also, for example, Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 264; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, 258-259.

⁴³ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 104.

⁴⁴ For more information about the sanctuary as the cosmic center see, for example, Larry L. Lichtenwalter, "Kaaba & Sanctuary: Qur'anic and Biblical Cosmic Centers—Ontological and Existential Worldviews," *JATS* 31/1-2 (2020): 103-135.

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“When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm” (NIV). God’s speech juxtaposes divine judgment with the stable pillars of the earth, i.e., the creation theme (Ps 75:2–3), similarly to Ps 74:12–17. Injustice and lawlessness cause “shaking of the earth’s foundations” (1 Sam 2:8; cf. Pss 11:3; 82:5), and consequently the undoing of God’s creation. God’s judgment will restore justice in the world, and then the foundations of the earth will be stable again (Ps 82:8).

God’s sovereign judgments in Ps 75 also reverse the boastful confidence of the enemies in Ps 74. Several vivid images in Pss 74 and 75 highlight the grand reversal caused by the Lord. The “lifting up” of the enemies’ axes in Ps 74:4–5 parallels the “lifting up” of their horns in Ps 75:5 that will be brought down by the sovereign Judge (vv. 6–7). The “cutting” of the sanctuary with the enemies’ axes in Ps 74:6 is contrasted with the image of the Lord cutting off the horns of the enemies in Ps 75:10. The terrible sight of the burning sanctuary set on fire by the enemies finds its counterpart in Ps 75:8, in the horrible scene of Lord’s cup of judgement filled with red wine (“wine cup of fury,” Jer 25:15) and ready to be poured upon the wicked. The emphasis of Ps 75 on the wicked’s arrogant speech and not just their evil actions (vv. 4–5) matches the prominence that is given to the blasphemous speech of the enemies in Ps 74 (vv. 8, 10, 18, 22, 23). The speech of the wicked dominates Ps 74, and the unhindered praise of God’s people is only a hopeful desire in the future (v. 21). Psalm 74 ends with the uproar of the wicked that “increases continually” (v. 23). Psalm 75 breaks that pattern. It opens with Israel’s increasing praises of God (v. 1)⁴⁵ and God’s speech announcing the judgment of the wicked (vv. 2–3) counteracting the clamor of the enemies in Ps 74. God’s intervention reverses the perception of what can last forever. In Ps 74, God’s apparent rejection of His people and the triumph of the wicked seem to last forever (vv. 1, 10, 19), but Ps 75 brings reassurance that it is only the praise of God that will remain forever (v. 9). The final scenes in Ps 75 portraying the psalmist’s praise of God and the wicked being brought low as their horns are cut off (75:9–10) reverse the final scenes in Ps 74, depicting the enemies’ reproach of God and the tumult of those who rise up against God (74:22–23). While it is the wicked who have the last word in Ps 74, God’s final oracle in Ps 75:10 reverses that situation. God has the last word,

⁴⁵ The sense of an increasing praise in Ps 75:1 is created with the emphatic repetition of “we give praise” that culminates in God’s wondrous works, i.e., the whole creation joins Israel’s praise of God.

confirming His judgment of the wicked and deliverance of the oppressed. God's final oracle in Ps 75 also reverses the opening address of God's people in Ps 74:1; it is not God's people whom God will utterly cast off, but He will cut off the oppressors.

The following arrangement highlights the reversal between the two psalms and the climax in the form of a divine oracle:

A. Lament over the persecution of the wicked (Ps 74)	A.' Divine reversal of the circumstances in Ps 74 (75:4–10)
God is far (vv. 1–3a)	God is near (vv. 1–3)
The wicked act/speak boastfully (vv. 3b–10)	The futility of the wicked's boastful acts/speech (vv. 4–6)
Invoking God's judgment (vv. 11–20)	Confirming God's judgment (vv. 7–8)
Praise of God, an uncertainty (v.21)	Praise of God, a certainty (v.9)
Exhortation to God to deliver (vv. 22-23)	God's Confirmation of deliverance (v. 10)

B. God's response of a promised judgment (Ps 75:2–3)

The thematic and linguistic links between Pss 74 and 75 discussed here seem to indicate a larger series of related psalms. Boadt recognizes the use of “panels” in constructing Pss 73–78 together as a group.⁴⁶ He argues that Pss 73–78 follow the same “panelling” or structure, having two major contrasting panels and the same number of subpanels that serve as explanation of the major panels in the psalm. Each psalm also sets the stage for the psalms that follow. For example, Pss 73 and 74 are both related to the sanctuary and the prosperity of God's enemies. Psalms 75 and 76 continue with the cosmic victory of God over his enemies; the specific reference to the exodus at the end of Ps 77 sets the stage for Ps 78.⁴⁷ Boadt concludes that “Psalms 73 and 78 fittingly serve as bookends to this series of proclamations of God's cosmic rule over all nations, which ensures that divine justice will triumph.”⁴⁸ He observes that “[t]he movement from liturgical praise of God's maintenance of the divine order in the universe to the hope for a new exodus to rescue the nation from exile explains the progression of Psalms 73–78.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Boadt, “The Use of ‘Panels’ in the Structure of Psalms 73–78,” 534.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 541–546.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 548.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 546.

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The significance of the divine speech in Ps 75 is twofold: 1) it is the only divine oracle in the Pss 73–78 series; and 2) it confirms divine judgment in God’s own voice and initiates a series of reassurances and examples in the rest of Ps 75 and Pss 76–78 that demonstrate that God can save and maintain justice in the world and so remove any possible doubts that were raised in Pss 73 and 74. The possible parallels between Pss 73–78 certainly deserve further study. However, the discussed parallels between Pss 74 and 75 seem to be sufficient to suggest that the divine oracle in Ps 75:2–3 plays a significant role in replying to the concerns of Ps 74 regarding the prosperity of the wicked and destruction of the sanctuary. The effect of the divine speech is to emphatically announce the reversal of the people’s circumstances and highlight the certainty of divine judgment and the fact that God takes the suffering of His people with utmost seriousness.

Psalm 81:6–16

Psalm 81 calls Israel to praise God during His festivals.⁵⁰ To the solemn and even joyous atmosphere depicted in the first part of Ps 81 (vv. 1–5), God responds in the first person, and recalls the time of the Exodus and of Israel’s wandering in the desert. This psalm of Asaph emphasizes the episode in Meribah, which epitomizes Israel’s rebellion (cf. Exod 17:1–7; Num 20:13). The people are admonished not to repeat the mistakes of past generations, but to trust God and follow His path, causing God to act on their behalf and bless them.

Psalm 81 combines the elements of hymn and divine oracle. These are reflected in the psalm’s twofold literary structure:

1. A Call to Praise God at the Time of Festivals (81:1–5)
2. The Divine Oracle (81:6–16)

Although they have the common thread of the Exodus experience, the two parts of the psalm seem to fit somewhat oddly.⁵¹ First, the shift from vv. 1–5 to the divine oracle is abrupt and unclear. Verse 5 ends with

⁵⁰ The psalm’s references to the trumpets and the New Moon (v. 3) refer to the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:1). “Our solemn feast day” (Ps 81:3) is the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:33–34), also called *the* Feast (cf. 1 Kgs 8:2; Neh 8:14; John 7:37).

⁵¹ For a brief summary of some views that treat the two sections in Ps 81 (vv. 1–5b and vv. 5c–16) as two unrelated parts and an explanation as to why such a hypothesis is not necessary, see Tate, 322–323.

a difficult line (“where I heard a language I did not understand”) because the psalm changes to the first person without clearly indicating the speaker.⁵² The line is possibly “a kind of interjection on the part of a speaker who is a representative Israelite, recalling ‘his’ time of enslavement in Egypt when his taskmasters spoke an alien tongue.”⁵³ Second, the divine oracle (vv. 6–16), with its reproachful tone, clashes with the joyous sentiments in the first part of the psalm and is an unexpected response to the people’s worship of God. The divine oracle probably serves as a reminder to the people that worship includes more than praise and music. Obedience and faithfulness to God’s word are essential for the worship of the Lord (cf. Ps 95). However, when Ps 81 is read in its literary context of the book of Psalms, the purpose and placement of the divine oracle become more evident. The following parallels between Pss 80 and 81 seem to suggest that the divine oracle represents a divine reply to the people’s petitions and accusations in Ps 80, also a psalm of Asaph.⁵⁴

Both Pss 80 and 81 use “Israel” and “Joseph” to designate God’s people (Pss 80:1; 81:4, 5). They both abound in imperatives. Psalm 80 entreats God to listen to what Israel says (v. 1), followed by a series of

⁵² The LXX reads “he” (Joseph, that is, the people of Israel) instead of “I.” The NEB omits the line as a later marginal note.

⁵³ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 289. It is widely assumed today, however, that the change of speaker at v. 5c announces the divine oracle in v. 6 by the speaker who claims to be the mouthpiece of God and testifies to his inspiration (Tate, 323; Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, KCC (London: InterVarsity, 1975; repr. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 325; Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998], 268; Longman, *Psalms*, 302–303). Tate suggests that “a language I did not understand” (v. 5c) refers to God’s voice that the speaker did not understand at first or “a message previously unknown, probably in the sense of not understanding its full meaning” (Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 3, 23). However, the divine oracle in this psalm is clear. It tells about the divine deliverance from Egypt at the time of the exodus and calls the people to heed God’s voice. It would be very unusual if the poet depicted the well-known founding history of Israel as “unknown language.” Tanner argues that “a language I did not know” depicts God’s hearing the groaning of the Israelites in Egypt that motivated God to act in Exod 2:24 (Beth Tanner, “Psalm 81: God’s Side of Story,” 639). Yet it remains unclear how the people’s cries for help that God supposedly did not understand could motivate Him to act on behalf of the people. To conclude, the view that v. 5c depicts the language of Egypt and the poet’s identification with his ancestors seems to fit the context best.

⁵⁴ Psalm 81 is generally considered to be closely related to Pss 50 and 95, all three having a sermonic style or edifying purpose. For example, Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 321; James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox), 266.

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other imperatives that implore God to act on the people's behalf (vv. 2, 3, 7, 14, 19). Psalm 81 implores God's people to listen to what God says (v. 8), combining this exhortation with other imperatives that ask God's people to act according to God's will.⁵⁵ In both Psalms the relationship between God and His people is disturbed and in need of renewal.⁵⁶

Both Psalms recall Israel's history, particularly the time of the Exodus (Pss 80:8; 81:10). Psalm 80 does that from the people's perspective, stressing the fact that both the past prosperity and the present misery of the nation are the result of God's sovereign actions (vv. 5–16). Psalm 81 recounts Israel's history from God's perspective, stressing the episode in Meribah (vv. 7–9). In biblical narrative Meribah is known as the place where Israel tested God by challenging His faithfulness and power to provide for their needs (cf. Ps 95:8, 9). Psalm 81 makes an intriguing reversal and interprets the same event as the time when God tested Israel (v. 7). The people failed God's test because they challenged God by their disobedience and lack of trust (v. 11).

The event demonstrates that God's judgment is righteous and follows the people's actions. The following parallels between Pss 80 and 81 further endorse that conclusion. The depiction of God's judgment in Ps 81:12 as God's giving over (Heb. *shalakh*) of His people to their stubborn heart corresponds to the depiction of Israel's growth in Ps 80:11 as Israel's sending out (Heb. *shalakh*) her boughs to the Sea and her branches to the River. When read with Ps 80, Ps 81 seems to imply that Israel's geographical advancement was not followed by the nation's spiritual progress. On the contrary, Israel "walked in their own counsels" (Ps 81:12), away from God. The people's failure to acknowledge their own apostasy in Ps 80 can be credited to the people's "stubborn heart" (Ps 81:12), namely their vain confidence in the virtue of their own argument that God had abandoned His people for no apparent reason (Ps 80:4–18). The Hebrew word for "stubborn" (*sherirut*) depicts "self-

⁵⁵ For example, the people of God are called to "sing aloud" (v. 1), "make a joyful shout" (v. 1), "raise (a song)" (v. 2), "strike (the timbrel)" (v. 2), "blow (the trumpet)" (v. 3), "open (your mouth)" (v. 10).

⁵⁶ Although in Ps 81 God does not charge the people with any particular sin, He admonishes them to obey Him (v. 8). The term "admonish" is the translation of the *hiphil* (causative) form of the verb *'ud*. This Hebrew term "marks the address as a warning witness that calls on those to whom it is addressed to right a relationship that has gone wrong (see the use of the term in 2 Kgs 17:13, 15; Jer. 11:7–8; Neh. 9:29, 30, 34; compare the prose of Jer 7:16–29, where the crucial motifs of Psalm 81 also appear)" (Mays, *Psalms*, 266). The NIV states "I will warn you."

reliance, doing one's own will, and idolatry."⁵⁷ The term is found only in Ps 81 in the Psalms, but many times in the book of the prophet Jeremiah where it is often translated as "imagination" (KJV), pointing to the deceitful and futile nature of human self-containment (e.g., Jer 3:17; 7:24; 9:14).

The other parallels between Pss 80 and 81 further illustrate the dialogical tension between the two sides. Psalm 80 asks God how long He will be angry with His people, allowing the enemies to mock them (vv. 4, 6). Psalm 81 seemingly provides the answer: "I would *soon* (*me'at* "as a little," "shortly") subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries" (v. 14; emphasis supplied). However, a condition is attached to this promise—Israel's obedience to God (v. 13). The parable of the vineyard in Ps 80 does not relate the people's present misery to their disobedience to God (contra Isaiah 5:1–7). The people's voice in Ps 80 identifies God as the primary source of their misfortunes: "You have fed them with the bread of tears; You have made them drink tears" (v. 5; emphasis supplied). Psalm 81 portrays God as "defending" Himself by stating that He will feed them "with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock" (v. 16), that is, fulfilling His covenantal promises (cf. Deut 8:8). The diet of the finest wheat and honey in Ps 81 represents a remarkable reversal of the bread of tears in Ps 80:5.

Psalm 81 reverses numerous other things found in Ps 80. For example, Ps 80 implies that the divine Shepherd is not listening to His flock and so is implored to listen, look down, and see (vv. 1, 14). By contrast, Ps 81 states that Israel does not listen to God (v. 8, 11). Psalm 80 beseeches God to save His people. Psalm 81 is a reminder that God has always saved them in the past (vv. 6, 7), implying that this will also be the case in the future. In Ps 80, Israel's enemies prosper (vv. 6, 13), but in Ps 81, God judges Israel's enemies for their wickedness (vv. 14, 15). These reversals in Ps 81 not only provide an explanation of the people's state in Ps 80, but also defend God from their accusations and demonstrate His faithfulness and love for them.

The notion of divine faithfulness and love is reinforced in Ps 81:10: "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill (Heb. *mala'*) it." This image recalls a mother bird filling the widely opened beaks of her young with food. It also corresponds to the depiction of divine blessing in Ps 80:9: "You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled (Heb. *mala'*) the land." The source of the people's misery is not God's

⁵⁷ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 320 n. 13b.

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neglect, but the people's apostasy. Both Psalms look to God's *hand* as the agent of deliverance and prosperity (Pss 80:17; 81:14). However, their emphasis is different. Psalm 80 repeatedly stresses that God is expected to deliver His people first in order for the people to be able to respond with praises and faithfulness (Ps 80:2, 3, 7, 18, 19). Psalm 81 calls the people to return to God and walk in His ways, and He will deliver them (vv. 13, 14).

Psalm 81 must not be seen as the counterargument to Ps 80. The fact that both psalms stand together strongly argues that "[b]oth judgments are biblical, and both need to be heard"⁵⁸ in order to understand the biblical message. The covenantal relationship between God and His people is always evolving and cannot be confined to a mathematical formula. God's grace both precedes and follows the people's responses of trust and obedience. Likewise, the promise of immediate salvation for those who submit to the Lord (Ps 81:13, 14) is paired with another promise that concerns those who persist in their rebellion against God: their punishment (*'et*, "fate," "doom") will last forever (v. 15).

The literary and theological interrelatedness of Pss 80 and 81 is reflected in their matching structures.

Themes	Ps 80	Ps 81	Parallels
Exhortations	vv. 1-7	vv. 1-5	Joseph (Pss. 80:1; 81:5) Abound in imperatives: - Ps 80: <i>ha'azinah</i> "give ear," <i>hofi'ah</i> "shine forth," v. 1; <i>'orrah</i> "stir up," <i>lekah</i> "come," v. 2; <i>hashibenu</i> "restore us," <i>haer</i> "cause to shine," vv. 3, 7. - Ps 81: <i>harninu</i> "sing," <i>hari'u</i> "make a joyful shout," v. 1; <i>se'u</i> "raise," <i>tenu</i> "strike," v. 2; <i>tiq'u</i> "blow," v. 3.
Exodus	vv. 8-11	vv. 6-10	Ps 80: God caused Israel, His vine, to fill (<i>mala'</i>) the land; "deep root" (v. 9). Ps 81: God fills (<i>mala'</i>) the mouth of His people; "mouth wide" (v. 10).

⁵⁸ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 94.

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Judgment	vv. 12-16	vv. 11-12	Ps 80: The people say that God had turned against His people and implore God to return to them. Ps 81: God says that Israel had turned against Him and implores them to return to His ways.
Ways to Reconciliation	vv. 17-18	vv. 13-14	Chiasm: A Let Your hand be upon The man of Your right Hand (80:17) X B' That Israel would walk in My ways (81:13) B Then we will not turn back from you (80:18) A' My hand against their adversaries (81:14)
Deliverance	v. 19	vv. 15-16	Ps 80: God is implored to save. Ps 81: God promises salvation to the faithful, but the fate of the haters of the Lord and of the pretenders is eternal condemnation.

The theological assumption of Pss 80 and 81 is that of the Mosaic covenant (Exod 19:5; Deut 11:26–28). When Pss 80 and 81 are read together, the divine speech in Ps 81 highlights the notion of salvation by God’s grace; when the covenant is broken by disobedience, it can be renewed only by the grace of God, so that the people can enjoy its blessings anew. Most Psalms typically end with praise, promise, or in a poetic manner, imparting a sense of completeness and closure to the poem. However, Ps 80 ends with expectation of God’s intervention that will renew Israel’s good fortune and will then lead to renewed praise to God (vv. 17–19). Psalm 81 ends abruptly, with a sudden switch from the third to first person (v. 16),⁵⁹ leaving the reader with the impression that God rashly stopped in the middle of His speech (“I sated you with honey from the rock,” v. 16b). This switch could poetically imply that God decided to refrain from further speech, for it is now time for Him to act.

Robertson has pointed to the grouping of references in Book III to the tribal descendants of Jacob’s wife Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin along with Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh) that are clustered

⁵⁹ The switch from third to first person is not preserved in some English versions (e.g., NASB, NIV, NLT, RSV), but the meaning of verse 16 in Hebrew is: “He fed him (Israel) the finest wheat; I sated you with honey from the rock.”

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around Ps 80 (Joseph: Pss 77:15; 78:67; 80:1; 81:5; Ephraim: Pss 78:9, 67; 80:2), which represents the midpoint of Book III.⁶⁰ The two patriarchs, Joseph and Jacob, represent the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Robertson argues that Pss 77–83 are deliberately grouped together with the specific intent of relating the devastation as well as deliverance of both kingdoms.⁶¹ If Ps 80 is indeed the midpoint of Book III,⁶² then the connections between Ps 80 and Ps 81 render Ps 81 center of Book III along with Ps 80. The divine speech in Ps 81 is the only divine oracle in the Pss 77–83 series, and its central placement in Book III gives special prominence to the confirmation of divine judgment and promise of deliverance in God’s own voice.

Psalm 89:3–4, 19–37

Psalm 89 is a communal lament for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. It engages two themes: the sovereignty of God as the Creator, and the faithfulness of God in establishing the everlasting covenant with David. The psalm laments over the harsh reality that seems to oppose them. Ethan the Ezrahite, the psalm’s author, was most likely a temple musician (1 Chron 15:17, 19).

God’s promise to David in 2 Sam 7:10–16 is delivered in Ps 89 in the first person singular, as if God is speaking, most likely to deem it more authentic (vv. 3–4; 19–37). God’s speech is marked with key words such as mercy (*khesed* “lovingkindness,” “grace” in vv. 24, 28, 33) faithfulness (*’emunah* “firmness” in vv. 24, 33, 37), and forever (*’olam* “everlasting,” “evermore” in vv. 28, 29, 36, 37), unmistakably underlining God’s irrevocable choice of the Davidic dynasty. The creation theme strengthens the certainty of God’s covenant with David and offers the context for everlasting praise of the Lord’s covenantal faithfulness (vv. 1, 2, 5–8, 36–37). Some scholars observe that vv. 1–4 in reworked form reappear again in vv. 28–29 and 36–37 to reinforce the glorious promise that the Davidic line can indeed suffer punishment, but

⁶⁰ Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*, 131.

⁶¹ Ibid., 128–138.

⁶² Ibid., 130–131. Even further, according to the reckoning of the Jewish scribes, a careful count of letters places Ps 80 at the central point of the entire Psalter. The traditional Hebrew text raises the *ayin* of מִיֶּעֶר in Ps 80:13 to indicate that it is the middle letter in the Psalter (Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Masoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* [London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1897], 69, cited in Ibid., 131, note 10).

never outright rejection (vv. 30–34).⁶³ Certain key words and themes in Ps 89 echo the concern in the previous Psalm that the Lord has abandoned His servant. The divine speech in Ps 89 appears to serve as a divine reply to the concerns expressed in two adjacent laments, namely in Ps 88 (a psalm written by another Ezrahite⁶⁴) and Ps 89:38–52.

The structure showing the close linkage between Pss 88 and 89 with the divine oracles at the center can be outlined as follows.

Introduction: Acknowledgment of the Lord's salvation (Ps 88:1)

I Lament due to God's apparent abandonment (88:2–18)

A The psalmist's deadly affliction (88:2–5)

B God as the source of the psalmist's troubles (88:6–8)

C Reasoning with God (88:9–14)

A' The psalmist's deadly affliction (88:15)

B' God as the source of the psalmist's troubles (88:16–18)

II Acknowledgment of God's faithfulness and the Divine speeches (Ps 89:1–37)

A The psalmist's praise of the Lord for His faithfulness and love (89:1–2)

B Divine speech: God's covenantal faithfulness (89:3–4)

A' The creation's praise of the Lord for His faithfulness and love (89:5–18)

B' Divine speech: God's covenantal faithfulness (89:19–37)

I' Lament due to God's apparent abandonment (Ps 89:38–51)

A God as the source of the king's troubles (89:38–40)

B The king's deadly affliction and God as the source of his troubles (89:41–45)

C Reasoning with God (89:46–49)

A' God as the source of the king's troubles (89:50a)

B' The king's deadly affliction (89:50b–51)

⁶³ Richard J. Clifford, "Psalm 89: a Lament over Davidic Ruler's Continued Failure," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 35–47, 41.

⁶⁴ Herman the Ezrahite, a temple musician (1Chr 25:5, 6). "The Ezrahite" may be a familiar designation derived from "Zerah" in 1 Chr 2:6 (Alter, 308).

Conclusion: Acknowledgment of the Lord's praise (89:52)

The two laments (Pss 88:1–18; 89:38–52) have a similar structure. The structure of Ps 88 turns twice from describing the psalmist's affliction (A, A') to finding God's actions as the source of the affliction (B, B'). The psalmist's reasoning with God appears to put these two themes in theological perspective at the center of the psalm (C). Likewise, but in reversed order, the structure of Ps 89 turns twice from finding God as the source of the affliction (A, A') to describing the people's affliction (B, B'), and places the reasoning with God at the center (C).

The divine speeches (section II in the outline above) are placed between the two laments (sections I and I'). Section II contains a balanced structure as well: each divine speech (B, B') is introduced with praise to the Lord's faithfulness and love (A, A').

God's servants in both laments (sections I and I') face deadly afflictions. The affliction is so great that nothing the people have done seem to merit it. The suffering remains inexplicable and therefore must be due to God's sovereign and unfathomable wrath (Pss 88:6–8, 16–18; 89:38–40, 41–45, 50a). Nevertheless, the sufferers turn to God, and try to remonstrate with Him. The Psalms are a reminder to never cease speaking to God, even at death's door. The reasoning with God in both laments centers around the theme of praising God and the inability of the dead to worship God (Pss 88:9–14; 89:46–49). In other words, the reason why God should save His servants is that they may praise and worship Him. God is questioned as to why he hid Himself (Pss 88:14; 89:46), and the afflicted feel God has forgotten them (Pss 88:5; 89:50). Mortals can do nothing to escape God's wrath and the power of grave, and only God's faithfulness and love can save them (Pss 88:11; 89:48, 49).

The placement of the two divine speeches in Ps 89 at the center of the crisis, namely between the two laments where God is named as the cause of His people's misfortunes and of being aloof from their cries, renders the divine speeches as a debate about theodicy. Is God indifferent and did he cause his people's suffering? Do the wicked prosper more than those who obey God? The fact that God delivers His "defense" in person, directly and powerfully breaks His perceived silence and brings reassurance of His loyalty to His covenant with Israel. Each divine speech is introduced with praise, matching the concern for praise in the

two laments and showing that the praise of God is inexhaustible and can and should be offered in all circumstances.

The divine oracles do not seek so much to reverse or openly refute the people's charges against God in the adjacent laments, but rather offer a fresh reminder of God's loyalty and the unchanging character of His love in the context of creation that attests to God's sovereignty and goodness (Ps 89:1, 2, 8–16). Knowing that God is in control should inspire hope even when God's people go through inexplicable individual and communal suffering and spiritual crisis. When the suffering servants of God feel they bear the terrible burden of God's indignation (Pss 88:15; 89:50), the Lord promises to strengthen and exalt them with His hand (Ps 89:20–22). Although the laments give the impression that God's wrath is never ending (Pss 88:7, 16; 89:46), only God's love and faithfulness are repeatedly highlighted to endure forever (Ps 89:4, 28, 29, 33, 36, 37). Even when circumstances necessitate it, God's wrath is for a time and does not extinguish God's love and faithfulness. The acknowledgment of God's salvation in the opening of Ps 88 and the acknowledgement of God's praise in the conclusion of Ps 89 could be seen as an *inclusio* that ties all that is spoken and experienced in Pss 88 and 89 within the context of God's grace.

Further linkage between Pss 88 and 89 can be found in their both being understood as Messianic psalms.⁶⁵ Although the human component of the covenant failed, the people could rest in the assurance of the unchanging purposes of God through the Davidic King, the Messiah, who embodies all righteousness and is the salvation of Israel and of the whole world (Ps 89:28–37, 49).

The three divine speeches in Book III seem to be strategically positioned: the first one (Ps 75:2–3, 10) at the beginning of the book, the second one (Ps 81:6–16) in the center of the book, and the third speech at the end of the book (Ps 89:3–4, 19–37). Each divine oracle in Book III brings a climatic response by addressing the interests of the previous psalms in God's own words: 1) the first oracle brings assurance of God's judgment of the wicked (concerns over the prosperity of the wicked dominates Pss 73 and 74); 2) the second oracle responds to the issue of

⁶⁵ Psalm 88 is not directly quoted by Christ in the Gospels or by the apostles in connection to Christ, as some other Psalms (e.g., Pss 2, 16, 22, 110, 118). Yet the tremendous suffering that is voiced in this Psalm strongly reflects Christ's agony, particularly at the close of His earthly ministry (e.g., Matt 14:32–41). The Psalm's theme is strongly reminiscent of certain Messianic psalms (e.g., Ps 22).

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God's judgment of his own people (prominent in Pss 77–80); and 3) the third, last divine oracle focuses on God's covenant with David, responding to the concerns of the previous psalm (Ps 88) that God has forgotten the Davidic king.

According to some scholars, Book IV provides the “answer” to Ps 89 at the conclusion of Book III, which is the assurance that despite the demise of the Davidic monarchy and thus the absence of an earthly king, there is still a ruling monarch over the people of Israel—the Lord.⁶⁶ The divine speeches in Book IV (Pss 91:14–16; 95:8–11) stress this important point.

Psalm 91:14–16

Psalm 91 is a psalm of confidence.⁶⁷ The first part of the psalm depicts the Lord's sure protection and is marked by a direct address to an individual, or most likely to people in the corporative sense (vv. 1–13) (Deut 26:1). It abounds in images of divine protection and alternates between two themes: a summons to God's protection (vv. 1–2, 9) and forms of God's protection (vv. 3–8, 10–13).⁶⁸ Although the psalmist's testimony in the first part of the psalm is powerful to convince everyone of the greatness of God's refuge, one is given also the Lord's confirmation of the psalmist's witness, which is delivered in the first person, assuming God as the speaker (vv. 14–16). The Lord responds to and reassures those who have set their love upon him and acknowledge his name (v. 14). The divine response is overwhelmingly reassuring because it is outpoured with tremendous eagerness and determination. “I will deliver him . . . I will set him on high” (v. 14). “I will answer him. I will be with him . . . I will deliver him and honor him” (v. 15). “I will satisfy him, and show him” (v. 16). The fervor of God's response

⁶⁶ J. Clinton McCann Jr., “Reclaiming Divine Sovereignty in the Anthropocene: Psalms 93–100 and the Convergence of Theology and Ecology,” in *Reading the Psalms Theologically*, David M. Howard Jr. and Andrew J. Schmutzer, eds. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023), 249–251.

⁶⁷ Along with Pss 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 121, 125, and 131 (Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988], 31).

⁶⁸ This section of the psalm displays chiasmic parallelism, alternating between two themes: a summons to God's protection (A, vv. 1–2, and A', vv. 9) and forms of God's protection (B, vv. 3–8, and B', 10–13). See Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, EBC, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 696.

exceeds by far the eagerness of the psalmist's appeal. The prevalent use of intensive verbs⁶⁹ underlines the zeal and certainty of God's promises.

Like in our previous examples, the role of the divine speech in Ps 91 appears to extend to the surrounding psalms. The parallels between Ps 90, 91, and 92 seem to suggest an intentional grouping of these psalms and the divine speech responding to the major claims in all three psalms. Although the following parallels are not purely chronological, certain key themes and vocabulary cohere in the proclamation of divine protection.

Themes	Psalm 90	Psalm 91	Psalm 92
The Lord as the people's refuge and dwelling place/sanctuary	"dwelling place" (מָעוֹן) (v. 1)	"dwelling place" (מָעוֹן) (v. 9)	the Lord is on "high" (מָרוֹם) (v. 8) "the house of the Lord" (בֵּית יְהוָה) (v. 13)
The people's trials	"fear" (root ירא) (v. 11) "evil" (רָעָה) (v. 15)	"afraid" (root ירא) (v. 5) "evil" (רָעָה) (v. 10)	"the wicked" (מְרַעִים) (vv. 7, 11)
Images from the natural world	"mountains" (v. 1) "flood" (v. 5) "grass" (v. 5)	"stone" (v. 12) "lion," "cobra," "young lion," "serpent" (v. 13)	"grass" (v. 7) "wild ox" (v. 10) "palm tree," "a cedar" (v. 12) "rock" (v. 15)
Time references	"morning" (בֹּקֶר) (vv. 6, 14) "evening" (v. 6) "night" (לַיְלָה) (v. 4)	"noonday" (v. 6) "night" (לַיְלָה) (v. 5)	"morning" (בֹּקֶר) (v. 2) "night" (לַיְלָה) (v. 2)

⁶⁹ Most verbs describing the Lord's actions in vv. 14–15 are in Piel (אֶפְלֹט "I will deliver," אֶשְׁבֵּב "I will set (him) on high," v. 14; אֶסְלֶכֶּה "I will deliver," v. 15) and in v. 16 in Hiphil (אֶשְׂבִּיעַ "I will satisfy," אֶרְאֶה "I will show").

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Brevity of life	“a thousand” (אֶלֶף) (v. 4) “grass” (קָצִיר) (v. 5) “springs up” (צִוּץ) (v. 6) “dry and wither” (v. 6, NIV) “(all our) days” (יָמִים) (v. 14)	“a thousand” (אֶלֶף) (v. 7) Contrast: “long life” (יָמִים) (v. 16)	“grass” (עֵשֶׂב) (v. 7) “spring up” (צִוּץ) (v. 7) Contrast: “fresh and flourishing” (v. 16) Contrast: “old age” (v. 14)
Divine deliverance	“satisfy” (שָׂבַע) (v. 14) “mercy” (חֶסֶד) (v. 14) “sing for joy” (רָנָה) (v. 14, NIV) “be glad” (שִׂמְחָה) (v. 14) “we have seen” (root רָאָה) (v. 15) “let you work appear” (רָאָה) (v. 16) “work of (our) hands” (מַעֲשֵׂי יָדַי) (v. 17)	“satisfy” (שָׂבַע) (v. 16) “has set his love” (חֶשֶׁק) (v. 14) “your eyes shall look” (עֵינֶיךָ) “eye”; נִבְט “behold”) (v. 8) “I will show him my salvation” (רָאָה) (v. 16)	“lovingkindness” (חֶסֶד) (v. 2) “sing for joy” (רָנָה) (v. 4, NIV) “make glad” (שִׂמְחָה) (v. 4) “my eye has seen” (עֵינֶיךָ “eye”; נִבְט “behold”) (v. 11) “work of (your) hands” (מַעֲשֵׂי יָדַי) (v. 4)

When Pss 90, 91, and 92 are read together, the message of each psalms helps unfold a larger story of divine deliverance. The experience of deliverance in Ps 90 is a hopeful desire in the future (vv. 14–17). Although in Ps 91:1–13 deliverance remains in the future, this psalm advances the message of Ps 90 by providing a torrent of images and reassuring messages to strengthen one’s confidence in God’s protection

and deliverance, rightly deserving to be called “a kind of microcosm of all the refuge language of the Psalter.”⁷⁰ Psalm 92 makes a breakthrough and describes salvation as a reality experienced by the psalmist (e.g., vv. 4, 10, 11). The divine speech in Ps 91:14–16 is suitably positioned to serve as a bridge between hope in Pss 90 and 91:1–13 and actuality in Ps 92. It also connects the people’s past experience of finding refuge in God’s sanctuary in Pss 90 and 91 (e.g., Pss 90:1; 91:1–4, 9)⁷¹ with the vision of the righteous people’s future in God’s temple (Ps 92:12–15). The Lord’s word does not simply announce what will happen in the future but actively creates the promised future. Therefore, “[i]t is the ground for confidence that the last words are not spoken *by* us, but *to* us.”⁷²

In the larger context of the Psalter, the placement of Pss 90–92 after Ps 89 makes them serve as a transition between the terrible devastation of God’s people at the hands of a series of enemies and the apparent failure of the Davidic king and the people’s perpetual expectation of living out their lives in harmony with God and enjoying the covenantal blessings.⁷³ The divine speech in Ps 91 reverses the crisis in Pss 88, 89, and 90, confirming that God will deliver, answer, and show his salvation. The psalmist’s testimony in Ps 92 follows as a proof that God’s words

⁷⁰ Jerome F. D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOTSup, no. 217 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 94.

⁷¹ Pss 90 and 91 seem to allude to the sanctuary. For example, Ps 90:1 and 91:9 depict the Lord their dwelling place. The Hebrew *ma’on* “dwelling place” depicts the sanctuary in numerous texts (e.g., Deut 26:15; 2 Sam 2:29, 32; 2 Chr 30:27; 36:15; Pss 26:8; 68:5; Jer 25:30; Zech 2:13). In addition, the image of people’s iniquities being set before God and in the light of his presence (Ps 90:8) also alludes to the sanctuary, especially given the mention of Moses who is identified as the psalm’s author in the psalm superscription. There is an intriguing parallel between Moses’ intercession on behalf of Israel in Exod 32:12 and Ps 90:13 (for the parallels see, Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*, 151–151). The image of God’s wings in Ps 91:4 alludes to the protection of the mother bird (Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11), or the wings of the cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant in the sanctuary (1 Kgs 8:6, 7; Pss 61:4; 63:2, 7). The cherubim seem to be intended here, picturing the faithful ones as being shielded by God’s awesome holiness and majesty that no evil human or supernatural power can approach. Ps 92:8 depicts God as being “on high forevermore.” Hebrew *קָרוֹם* “high” often depicts the heavens where God resides or God’s heavenly sanctuary (Job 31:2; Ps 93:4; Isa 33:5; 37:23; Jer 25:30).

⁷² Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 157.

⁷³ For more details about the distinctive role of Ps 90 in the flow from Book III to Book IV, see Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*, 150–153; see also Beth Tanner, “Psalm 92: Sabbath Day Thanksgiving,” *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT, 702–704.

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are true (vv. 4, 10–11), and so people should trust God for their future and the world’s future as well.

The next group of psalms in Book IV (Pss 93–100) proclaims the Lord’s sovereign rule in the world, thus further reinforcing the reasons for trusting God’s ways in the world in Pss 90–92 and providing additional answers to the questions in Book III concerning personal and national struggles and the subsequent questions of theodicy.⁷⁴ Interestingly, Ps 93 opens with the picture of the world which is firmly “established” (Hebrew כָּן) (vv. 1–2), echoing the people’s plea to God in Ps 90:17 to “establish” (Hebrew כָּן) the work of their hands, and ends with the image of the Lord’s house (Hebrew בַּיִת, v. 5), echoing Ps 92:16, which uses the same term for the Lord’s temple.

Psalm 95:8–11

Psalm 95 belongs to a collection of psalms widely called royal psalms (Pss 93–100) because they celebrate the sovereign kingship of the Lord. Psalm 95 is a call to worship the Lord who is the great God and King above all others. The Lord deserves ceaseless praises as the Creator and Sustainer of His people Israel and of all creation.

Psalm 95 contains three exhortations followed by reasons for the exhortation:

A. First exhortation:

- a. Call to worship the Lord (95:1–2)
- b. Reasons for the exhortation (95:3–5)

B. Second exhortation:

- a. Call to worship the Lord (95:6)
- b. Reasons for the exhortation (95:7a)

⁷⁴ See, for example, Beth Tanner, “Psalm 93: God is King on High,” *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT, 706–708; McCann, “Reclaiming Divine Sovereignty in the Anthropocene: Psalms 93–100 and the Convergence of Theology and Ecology,” 246–256.

C. Third exhortation:

a. Call to obey and trust the Lord (95:7b–9)

b. Reasons for the exhortation (95:10–11)

The first two exhortations are jubilant calls for the worship of the Lord. They are reinforced by giving the true motivation for praise. Israel belongs to God for two unbreakable reasons, namely creation (vv. 2–4) and salvation/covenant (vv. 1–3, 7). The third and final exhortation in the Psalm is the strongest. The psalmist's words suddenly give way to a divine oracle that admonishes the people to understand that worship does not involve only music, songs, and prostration (vv. 1, 2, 6), but also obeying and trusting God's voice (vv. 7–10). The divine oracle reminds the people that special covenantal privileges come with covenantal responsibilities.

Psalm 95 is rightly regarded by some as a royal psalm because its themes harmonize with the spirit of the surrounding royal Psalms (Pss 93–100).⁷⁵ Following the same line of analysis as in our previous examples, we find a number of thematic and lexical parallels between Ps 95 and the previous psalm (Ps 94). They are presented in the following table.

Psalm 94	Psalm 95
Judgment is Invoked (94:1–11)	Praise is Invoked (95:1–7)
Covenant motif (vv. 1–7) Creation motif (vv. 8–11)	Creation motif (vv. 4–6) Covenant motif (vv. 1–3, 7)
The Righteous and Their Outcome (94:12–22)	The Apostate and Their Outcome (95:8–11)
Know God's ways (v. 12) Have upright heart (v. 15) God gives them rest (v. 13)	Do not know God's ways (v. 10) Go astray in their heart (v. 10) God will not give them rest (v. 11)

⁷⁵ For example, Mays, *The Lord Reigns* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 12–15; McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: the Psalms as Torah* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 41–48.

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Judgment of the wicked reinforced Repetition of “cut them off” (v. 23)	Judgment of the wicked reinforced God’s oath (v. 11)
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When Pss 94 and 95 are read in their canonical order, one finishes reading Ps 94 with the image of the Lord as the “rock of my refuge” (v. 22), and finds the same description of the Lord in the opening of Ps 95 as “the Rock of our salvation” (v. 1). Those who are causing distress and are thus recipients of divine judgment in both Psalms are the wicked among God’s people.⁷⁶ In Ps 94, they test God’s forbearance by arrogantly claiming that God does not see or pay heed to their evil actions (v. 7), foolishly ignoring the abundance of evidence demonstrating God’s sovereignty and power (vv. 8–10). Similarly, in Ps 95 the apostate people test God’s longsuffering, defiantly disregarding His mighty works that they have witnessed (v. 9). The direct speech of the wicked in Ps 94:7 is refuted by God’s direct speech in Ps 95:8-11. While the solemn warning tone of the divine oracle seems not to be completely in tune with the jubilant feelings expressed in the first part of Ps 95, it duly relates to the urgency felt in Ps 94 (e.g., vv. 1–7, 16, 21).⁷⁷

There is a wide consensus among biblical scholars that Psalm 94 severs the compact sequencing of the surrounding psalms celebrating the Lord’s kingship (Pss 93, 95–99). This psalm is typically not considered a royal psalm because it does not explicitly address the Lord’s kingship, like the surrounding Psalms.⁷⁸ However, Ps 94 engages in certain themes

⁷⁶ That Ps 94 raises voice against the corrupt leaders of Israel seems to be the case for several reasons. If the oppressor here is the foreign nation, would not the pagan tyrant oppress the entire company of Israel and not merely “the widows, the aliens and the fatherless” (Ps 94:6)? Israel’s judges were instructed specially to care for these categories of people who represented the weakest in Israel (Deut 10:18; 14:29; Ps 82:2–4). The wicked are also notably emboldened to continue in their wickedness because they think that *the Lord* does not see nor care for the things occurring on earth in v. 7 (cf. Pss 10:11; 73:11). A foreign tyrant would certainly give no importance to what the Lord sees or does not see. Therefore, the psalmist laments the arrogance and wickedness of the local oppressors.

⁷⁷ Psalm 94 opens with a sense of urgency. God is invoked personally over and over again: O LORD God, O God, O Judge, LORD, O LORD. The psalmist appeals to God’s vengeance, which is God’s just punishment of the evil ones (vv. 1–5).

⁷⁸ See the examples mentioned in Tanner, “Psalm 94: God Will Judge the World,” 709. For a different view see Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 488–490.

that are closely related to God's kingship. For example, the image of God as Judge (v. 2) is common in the royal psalms, highlighting the sovereignty of the divine King over all nations and kings (cf. Pss 96:10, 13; 97:8, 10; 98:9; 99:4). The mention of a corrupt human throne (v. 20) may also serve to contrast with the Lord's everlasting throne that is based on righteousness and justice (Pss 93:2; 97:2). In addition to this, it is possible that the thematic and lexical parallels between Pss 94 and 95 have led the editors of the Psalter to place Ps 94 next to Ps 95 in the sequence of the Psalms on the Lord's kingship.⁷⁹ The divine speech in Ps 95 not only provides the reasons for the third exhortation in the Psalm, but seems to serve as a direct divine confirmation and reinforcement of the divine judgment of the apostate among God's people announced in Ps 94.

Inclusio

The first citation of God's words in the book of Psalms, which appears in Book I (Ps 2:6–9), and the last citation, which appears in Book V (132:11–18), deliberate on the same topics of vital importance in the Psalms: God's undeniable choice of the Davidic king and of Zion in the context of the ultimate victory over the enemies. The two divine speeches form an *inclusio*, indicating that everything said in between should be read in the light of these two God's promises as poetic and theological bookends of the book of Psalms. Additionally, God's direct speeches in Pss 2 and 132 are the most comprehensive of all God's direct discourses in the Psalms.⁸⁰ The psalmist indicates the Lord has sworn to David to establish his throne forever (132:11), but God's promise to David is recorded as simple declarative statements in 2 Sam 7. However, "[i]n the OT, any promise of God is tantamount to an oath"⁸¹ because God does not lie nor retracts on his word (Gen 24:7; 26:3; Exod 13:11).

⁷⁹ Tate suggests that Ps 91:14–16 and Ps 95:8–11, being the only two divine oracles in Pss 90–100, form an *inclusio* around Pss 92–94 (Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 450).

⁸⁰ Pss 50 and 89 contain longer citations of God's direct speech than Pss 2 and 132. However, unlike Pss 2 and 132 that highlight all three essential themes (the Davidic king, Zion, and judgment), Ps 50 focuses merely on God's judgment of the wicked and Ps 89 centers on the Davidic king. For that reason, I consider God's speeches in Pss 2 and 132 to be the most comprehensive of all God's speeches in the Psalms, although they are not the lengthiest. Other divine direct discourses are shorter and focus on one theme, usually God's judgment (Pss 12:5; 46:10; 68:22; 75:2–3, 10; 81:6–16) or God's elect (Ps 91:14–16; 110:1, 4).

⁸¹ T. W. Cartledge, "שבוע," *NIDOTTE* (1997), 4:32–33.

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The words “decree” (Ps 2:7) and “swore” (132:11) introducing the two divine speeches thus signal their utmost significance for the psalmists who take these extra measures to stress the unchanging nature of these God’s words.

Conclusion

Our study of the divine speeches in the Psalms reveals just a tiny fragment of the excellent artistry and amazing complexity behind the message and structure of the individual psalms and of the book of Psalms as a whole. The direct citations of divine words in the Psalms not only create a sense of God’s immediate reply and presence but also play a pivotal role in creating psalm pairs or groups and advancing the dialogue between the people and God.

The following points sum up the ways the divine speeches are used to advance the message of some Psalms.

Divine speech act. The Psalms are God’s inspired word to people like the rest of the Scripture. Nonetheless, the fact that the Psalms are prayers and hymns inevitably creates the impression that the human voice speaking through them is amplified while God’s voice appears to be largely muted. The use of direct speech to convey God’s words adds layers of meaning everywhere in the Scripture, but even more so in the Psalms, where it credits God with the speech act in an environment dominated by human speech. The force of direct discourse assigned to God removes the ambiguity of God’s presence and is a powerful reminder that addresses to Yahweh are meaningful because “[t]he God of Israel is not some personified natural numen, but in reality of his person he is the Lord, the king, the creator, and the judge of all being.”⁸² The Lord refers to Himself as “I” (Ps 81:10), and thus makes it possible to address Him as “You” (Ps 80:1). Alter makes an interesting point: in God’s direct speech “for all the spiritual urgency of the message, an implied element of ‘as if’ is involved: If we could actually hear God talking, making His will manifest in words of the Hebrew language, what would He sound like?”⁸³ In numerous places in the Psalms, God’s voice is portrayed as powerful, being like a thunder, breaking the cedars, dividing the flames of fire, shaking the wilderness, making the deer give birth, stripping the forest bare, and melting the earth (Pss 18:13; 29:2–9; 46:6; 68:33; 77:18; 104:7). Remarkably, however, God’s direct speeches

⁸² Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 33.

⁸³ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 141.

demonstrate that, when he addresses his people, God voice is not just captivating but intelligible and appealing for the people to be able to understand it and respond appropriately.

Statements of divine theodicy. The divine speeches in our four examples as well as in some other psalms⁸⁴ are closely tied to laments where God is charged with being the cause of the people's trials, being silent to their cries, and/or is mocked by the enemies. The occurrence of the divine oracles in these contexts shows that there is more than human voice, whether that of God's people or of the wicked, in the midst of suffering and injustice in the world. The divine oracles stress God's immanent presence among His people and signal God's special care and immediate response to the people's prayers. The artist portrays God as revealing Himself anew and addressing His people's most distressing concerns and complaints. When people put God on trial (e.g., Pss 74:1, 10, 11; 80:4–17; 88), it is God's desire to utterly vindicate His people, and not Himself, that compels God to respond. James A. Wharton rightly points out that the anticipated or received answer from God invariably comes in the form of vindication or deliverance.⁸⁵ The fact that God speaks at all reveals something about His character: the Lord is a deity who answers mere mortals. In other words, the very presence of the divine speech implies God's concern for His people and serves to vindicate them, and by extension clears the Lord of the people's accusations.

Prophetic judgment texts. The prophetic character of divine oracles is observed in their dramatic proclamation of the imminent divine judgment as God's response to the problem of evil, akin to the prophets' declarations in the Bible (e.g., Ps 75:2–3 and Isa 49:8; Ps 81:13–14 and Jer 15:19; Ps 89:3–4 and Jer 33:17). Some divine oracles are introduced with an announcement that is reminiscent of the prophets' "thus says the Lord" (Pss 12:5; 68:22). An additional argument in support of the close connection between psalmody and prophecy can be found in the fact that the Old Testament composition of hymns of praise is closely related to prophecy (e.g., Exod 15:20, 21; Judg 4:4; 5:1–31; 1 Sam 5:9).⁸⁶ Being pronounced in first person as if God is speaking directly, the divine speeches stress the imminence of God's judgment and acts of salvation.

⁸⁴ E.g., Pss 2:6, 7–9; 12:5; 46:10; 82:2–7; 91:14–16.

⁸⁵ James A. Wharton, *Job*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 165, 169.

⁸⁶ Bosma, 146.

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In addition, God's direct words in the Psalms are addressed to every child of God who wants to receive them, thus entrusting the recipients of God's words with special responsibility akin to the ministry of the prophets to whom God spoke directly (Ezek 2:2; Hosea 12:10; Amos 3:7; Heb 1:1–2).

Heralds of reconciliation. There is an important dialogical element in the Psalms, especially the psalms of lament, in which the reader encounters a dramatic interplay between human words addressed to the Lord (including a quotation of the boastful words of the adversaries) and words from the Lord to the petitioner.⁸⁷ As in the book of Job, the divine oracle breaks God's perceived silence and does not let the sufferer become or remain an opponent of God but pursues his reorientation.⁸⁸ The moment God begins to address the petitioners, they already have his answer which is that, despite appearances to the contrary, God cares enough about people to reveal himself to them and give them some indication of the order and direction of his creation.⁸⁹ In His mercy, God responds to His people's pleas and complaints until their trust is fully restored and culminates in praise. This shows that the role of divine speeches is not just to correct the people but also rebuild their relationship with God as part of the reconciliation process.

Stylistic devices. The divine oracle "constitutes an essential part of the poet's dramatic scene."⁹⁰ God's speeches proclaim in a striking manner the divine intervention as they abruptly interrupt the Psalm by either not being announced (e.g., Ps 75:2–3) or drastically changing the tone of the Psalm (e.g., Pss 81:6–16; 95:8–11). In their final canonical placement in the Psalter, the divine oracles connect adjacent and seemingly unrelated Psalms, serving as the pivotal point of the discussion and of the literary structure. As Bosma has correctly observed, "the newer canonical reading strategy in the exegesis of the Psalter alerted us to another important expression of the word of God in the Psalter, in addition to the quotations of God speaking directly (e.g. Pss. 2:7–9; 12:5) or indirectly through his official ministrants in the cult (e.g. Pss. 20:6; 28:5), namely, the 'voice' of the canon conscious editors of the

⁸⁷ Ibid., 142.

⁸⁸ See Daniel Timmer, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses, and the Problem of Coherence in the Book of Job: Sapiential Pedagogy Revisited," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71 (2009), 297–298, 303.

⁸⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 87.

⁹⁰ Booij, *Godswoorden in de Psalmen*, 31–33, quoted in Bosma, "Discerning the Voices in the Psalms," 132.

final shape of the Psalter.”⁹¹ In our examples, the reversal that the divine speeches announce for the fortunes of God’s suffering people is reflected in the literary structure, with the divine speech as the peak or turning point.

Citations of past divine announcements. The poetic interpretation in Ps 89 of God’s promise to David in 2 Sam 7:10–16 is delivered in the first person singular, as if God is speaking, most likely to deem it more authentic, urgent and personal in the time of Israel’s great crisis (vv. 3–4; 19–37). In this way, the poet confirms the validity of God’s word given to Israel in the past and points to it as the foundation of Israel’s hope at all times. By delivering the past divine announcement in the form of divine oracle, the poet also effectively conveys that God’s word is fresh and living among the current generation of God’s people (cf. Pss 2; 110). Perhaps that is the reason why the psalmist’s citation of God’s past announcement in 2 Sam 7 is not literal but represents the psalmist’s inspired interpretation of the past revelation and application in the new historical context.⁹²

Some scholars point to the use of direct quotes of divine speeches as oracles within a cultic situation.⁹³ The possible cultic situations and the use of the Psalms in Israel’s worship have been the subject of much

⁹¹ Bosma, 167.

⁹² Insightful studies of quotations in the book of Job point to their rhetorical usage extending beyond the limits of depicting the words or sentiments of the speaker. The direct quotation of the words of God, the people or the enemies serve to demonstrate that the sentiments are not that of the writer but deriving from another source. However, the direct speech is carefully used by the writer to, for example, refute his opponent’s argument by generally including a greater or lesser degree of exaggeration. In other words, a quotation is “reused” by the writer to enhance his own argument (see, for example, Robert Gordis, “Virtual Quotations in Job, Sumer and Qumran,” *Vetus Testamentum* 31, n. 4 [1981]: 410–427; Edward Ho, “In the Eyes of the Beholder: Unmarked Attributed Quotations in Job,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 4 [2009]: 703–715). In case of the psalmist’s citation of God’s past announcements, the psalmist uses God’s words and elaborate commentary in order to strengthen his own argument in an exchange with God (Pss 89 and 132).

⁹³ The cultic approach to the Psalms has focused on attempts to reconstruct from the Psalms the liturgy in which they were used. See, for example, a proposal of the enthronement festival of Yahweh in Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 1:106–192. Hans-Joachim Kraus proposed the annual celebration of the royal Zion festival (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992], 107–123). Artur Weiser suggested the covenant festival as the real original setting in life of the Psalms (Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1962], 27–52).

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reflection, research, and speculations that could not be addressed in this essay.⁹⁴ One could imagine, however, that divine oracles were recited by a worship leader or priest in the worship service in the Temple.

The questions that remain after examining the examples of direct quotations of divine speech are whether the poets intended the discussed Psalms to be harmonized the way proposed here, and whether the pairing of these Psalms was envisioned by the editors of the final canonical shape of the Psalter. While I doubt anyone can determine the answers with certainty, the inner-biblical parallels seem to strongly suggest a purposeful design behind the placement of the divine speeches in some psalms and of the placement of these psalms in the book of Psalms. In my view, the voices of the poets and the editors are intimately intertwined because they inherently resound God's voice.⁹⁵ Moreover, the existence elsewhere in the Scripture of the divine speeches responding to the human subject's situation and concerns, similar to that in the discussed Psalms, merits notice as a significant argument in favor of similar arrangement in the Psalms (e.g., the book of Job).

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⁹⁴ Many cultic reconstructions of the Psalms have been renounced by numerous scholars as highly speculative. See, for example, Helmer Ringgren, *Faith of the Psalmists* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1963), 93; Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1980), 109; Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 4; Longman, *Psalms*, 334; B. Tanner, "Psalm 93: God is King," 706.

⁹⁵ Robertson nicely points out that "from the perspective of human production 'a single and all-embracing plan' that devised the whole of the book of Psalms could hardly have been possible. The very creation and collection of the Psalter over a five-hundred-year span of history denied to any single person or a contemporaneous group the privilege of structuring the whole according to a predetermined plan. Yet by the 'singular care and providence' of the Lord's sovereign purposes, the awesome structure and substance of the Psalter is exactly what it is" (Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*, 21–22).